Ethical consumption as a reflection of self-identity

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**Abstract:**
In recent years, people’s increasing awareness of ethical consumption has become increasingly important for the business environment. Although previous research has shown that consumers are influenced by their ethical concerns, ethical consumption from a consumer perspective lacks understanding. As self-identity is an important concept in explaining how consumers relate to different consumption objects, relating it to ethical consumption is a valuable addition to the existing body of research.

As the phenomenon of ethical consumption has been widely studied, but the literature is fragmented covering a wide range of topics such as sustainability and environmental concerns, the theoretical framework of the paper portrays the multifaceted and complex nature of the concepts of ethical consumption and self-identity and the complexities existing in the relationship of consumption and self-identity in general.

The present study took a qualitative approach to find out how consumers define what ethical consumption is to them in their own consumption and how self-identity was related to ethical consumption. The informants consisted of eight females between the ages of 25 – 29 living in the capital area of Finland.

The results of the study showed an even greater complexity connecting to ethical consumption when researched from a consumer perspective, but indicated clearly the presence of a plurality of identities connected to ethical consumption, portraying it as one of the behavioural modes selected or rejected by an active self.

**Keywords:** self-identity, self, selves, ethical consumption, consumer ethicality
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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years the business environment and its marketing practices have been significantly impacted by people's increasing awareness on ethical consumption (Oh and Yoon 2014:278). Already in 1992 Muncy and Vitell (1992:308) identified a “high level of ethical concern” while studying the ethical beliefs of consumers, who are now increasingly transforming themselves from “rational consumers valuing quality and price into ethical consumers whose priorities for product choice center around ‘ethical values’”. (Oh et al. 2014:278-279)

The phenomenon of ethical consumption is becoming more and more relevant in the current consumer market. This can be seen in the increased amount of consumers that buy and consume ethical products and consequently in the fast growing market of ethical products (Oh et al. 2014:285) or products sold to consumers as ethical. Ethical consumption is typically defined through different kinds of behavior, relating to ethical attitudes and values, such as objecting child labor or supporting animal rights.

As the areas of concern in ethical consumption are many, statistics presenting the overall sales numbers of consumption based on ethicality are difficult, if not impossible to find. However, to give an idea of the increase in sales in the local market (Finland), Fair Trade products were sold for 156,8 million euros in 2013, with a growth of 69,9 million euros (80%) compared to sales in 2009 (Reilukauppa 2013).

Proof exists that most people will at least occasionally behave ethically, even when it means sacrificing something, often meaning their money (Irwin 2015). Thus there is good reason for companies to seek to find ways to appeal to the ethical consumer, or even more so, any consumer. The task remains challenging however, as despite of the extensive field of study on ethical consumerism, the concept of ethical consumption itself lacks a proper definition from the consumer perspective.

As the amount of information on ethicality in relation to consumption seems to be substantive but lacking a “grand narrative” (Cherrier 2007:321), it is important to focus on individual consumers, trying to identify the different ways in which they themselves define what ethicality stands for them in their own consumption. Furthermore, finding out how their self-identity reflects to these definitions can shed light on how and why consumers place different emphasis on different ethical issues.
1.1 Research problem

The purpose of this study is to examine how consumers define ethical consumption and how self-identity is related to ethical consumption. The first aim of this study, to understand ethical consumption from a consumer perspective, stems from previous research emphasizing the firm-perspective. Already in 1992 Vitell and Muncy noted that while the literature on ethics in the marketplace was growing, the vast majority of research was focusing on the seller-side instead of the consumer. The body of research in ethical consumption has grown extensively since then, placing increasing emphasis on the consumer-side of the spectrum. However, so far in the field of academia only few studies have investigated ethical behavior as defined by consumers (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:58; Szmigin, Carrigan and McEachern 2009:224). Consequently, in the context of this study, the greatest importance is put on what one self considers being ethical consumption, rather than restricting the concept to a certain theoretical or academic frame. Furthermore, while the existing theory covers many aspects of ethical consumption, such as environmental concerns, fair trade, anti-consumption and consumer ethics with its moral dimensions (Wooliscroft et al. 2013) to the best knowledge of the author, questions of consumer defined ethicality and the role of self-identity in them, remain unanswered.

While reviewing literature on ethical consumption it becomes evident that the concept of ethical consumption itself is not clearly or distinctively defined in existing academic literature (Wooliscroft et al 2013:58). Numerous interpretations exist, and while the term differs from its counterparts, it is in many occasions used interchangeably with or as a part of other concepts such as sustainable consumption, socially conscious consumption and conscious consumption. Many articles lack a proper definition entirely. Some of the different existing definitions are presented later, but to establish an understanding of the concept and the problems often related to this, according to Crane and Matten (in Wooliscroft et al. 2013:57) ethical consumption encompasses “the conscious and deliberate choices to make certain decisions due to personal and moral beliefs”.

However, recent studies have suggested that ethical judgments made in consumption contexts are far from straightforward, revealing “the complexity and multiplicity involved in ethical consumption choices” (Heath et al. in Caruana, Carrington and Chatzidakis 2015) The reasons for this are many. A “complex mix of behaviors” is
connected to seeking ethical alternatives, titled as conscious consumer’s behavior by Szmigin et al. (2009:224), as are other factors such as social and economic forces. These factors include such things as e.g. family, convenience and price (Szmigin et al 2009:224). There are also researchers that acknowledge moral decisions as being embedded in “gendered, relational and socio-cultural” contexts (Caruana et al. 2015), thus partly arguing against the definition of Crane and Matten, as the latter seem to simplify ethical consumption to the inner processes of the individual, lacking for example the possible effects of the surrounding contexts.

Furthermore, another reason explaining the complexity of ethical judgments is information. As the consumer awareness on ethical consumption has increased, the amount of ethical information available on products, services and corporations brings to consumer’s knowledge the “broad cause-and-effect chain”, creating an increased need for the customer to choose amongst an extensive variety of options (Mick et al.; Shankar et al. in Cherrier 2007:323). While this plentitude of choice may be considered as liberating it may also burden consumers and create “moral fatigue” (Mick et al.; Shankar et al. in Cherrier 2007:323).

Even consumers prioritizing ethical modes can be torn between options. There are many different types of ethical consumption, which may be significantly conflicting with each other. A person might buy fair trade products while simultaneously acknowledging the fact that this is not perhaps the most ecological choice to make, as the products need to be shipped from other countries compared to buying regular local produce.

Furthermore, Adams and Raisborough (2010) have acknowledged that the rapid growth of ethical consumption has led to vast amounts of profiling work aiming to “identify the ethical consumer [...] via personality measures and socio-demographics” (Adams et al. 2010:257), leaving other areas to lesser attention.

“It is a fair summary of the field to argue that academic attention in business, marketing and consumer studies has focused on defining ‘the ethical consumer’ and exploring their ‘ethical awareness’ in relation to purchase behaviour” (Adams et al. 2010:257).

They argue that the research field’s tendency of concentrating on consumers self-defining themselves as ethical consumers marginalize the broader questions
concerning the ways in which “individuals regard and respond to the increasing alignment of ‘ethics’ and ‘consumption’” (Adams et al. 2010:257). The purpose of the current study therefore is not to determine the characteristics of a typical ethical consumer; rather the aim is to find out what ethicality stands for, for a regular consumer (here meaning a consumer not self-identified as an ethical consumer) in her everyday consumption. It is however possible, that during the data collection phase, some of the informants may perceive themselves on some level as being ethical consumers. It is valuable to study the regular consumer, as the consumers profiled as ethical consumers form a rather marginal group in the total consumer market. If the claims of professor Julie Irwin (2015) are true that guiding consumers through proper marketing could increase the popularity and thus profitability of ethical consumption, the current study at hand could offer valuable information because it reveals the perceptions and arguments used by regular consumers.

The second aim of this study relates to exploring the relationship between self-identity and ethical consumption. Self-identity has been identified as an important factor explaining ethical consumption. Self-identity in its most basic level can be seen as the equivalent of self-perception. The simple term “self” is seen, according to some researchers, as parallel to such concepts as “self-concept”, “actual self”, “basic self”, “real self” and “extant self”. (Sirgy 1982:288) When referring to a similar research area as that of ethical concern, Soron (2010:173) argues that identity is “[…] an implicit, if largely unacknowledged, destination for discussion of sustainable consumption”. According to Oh et al. (2014:280) the three main factors influencing ethical consumption are ethical obligation, self-identity and altruism. Similarly, Shaw and colleagues (Shaw and Shiu 2002a; Shaw and Shiu 2002b; Shaw, Shiu and Clarke 2000) identify self-identity as an important antecedent of ethical consumption.

However, looking at self-identity literature, this relationship is far from self-evident. Sökefeld (1999:424) describes the self as a “superordinate to (though not detach from) the plurality of identities”, stating that individuals can manage different identities because they can still maintain a “[…] reflexive sense of a basic distinction between the self and everything else”. Furthermore he argues that the self is not passive, rather it selects certain modes and rejects others (Sökefeld 1999:424), of which in the context of the present study, ethical consumption could be seen as being potentially one of these modes, with modes referring to different actions. Consequently, my tentative
proposition is that this active self-identity manifests itself in ethical consumption through negotiating which modes are selected, and will be explored further in the empirical study.

Furthermore, Sökefeld’s (1999) study goes to suggest that there is strong competition between the different kinds of identities each individual has (Sökefeld 1999:423). While Sökefeld’s study, which was conducted in Pakistan in an entirely different context, increases our knowledge base and underlines the importance of self-identity in general, it doesn’t answer the questions relating to ethical consumption. The data collection phase of the present study may capture not only how the self relates to ethical consumption, but also these contradicting identities in the context of ethical consumption which the informants will then communicate in a way that enables them to maintain a coherent sense of self.

Furthermore, previous studies combining the concepts of ethical consumption and self-identity have been interested more in the way in which self-identity can explain for example the attitude-behavior gap (Shaw et al. 2002:109) rather than how self-identity reflects in the way ethical consumption is perceived by individuals, which is a fundamental question. Moreover, much of ethical consumption research has been conducted through quantitative survey formats, which restricts the answers to predefined variables and may encourage informants to give answers that are socially desirable and rational rather than mirroring the consumers’ “everyday hedonistic shopping responses” (Caruana et al. 2015).

The risk of socially desirable answers is present also in the qualitative approach the current study takes, but by interviewing, getting in-depth information and a more thorough perception on the person’s thoughts is hopefully gained, as interaction with a person allows the researcher an opportunity to build rapport with the informant. The findings of this study may also provide companies the chance of addressing the potential provided by ethical consumerism as there remains an extensive amount of unexploited territory in the ethical consumer market waiting to be discovered through properly executed marketing and knowledge of how to address the consumer morals.
1.2 Pre-understanding

Having studied ethical consumption and sustainability issues as part of my marketing degree, what had caught my particular interest was the way in which people exercised ethical consumption according to their own distinct views and values. For one person, ethical consumption meant buying fair trade coffee and not consuming animal products, while for another it meant first and foremost buying clothes from companies known for their ethical standards. I myself had had several internal (and external) discussions on the consumption choices I was making based on their perceived ethicality.

After going through a large quantity of studies I realized that there were very few studies that discussed ethical consumption as defined by the people actually consuming products. This was also discovered by e.g. Wooliscroft, Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Noone (2013:58), stating that only few studies investigate “broad, consumer-defined types of ethical behavior”. Thus I wanted to study the topic as defined by consumers, thinking that this would also benefit companies the most, as consumers are the people to reach – not scholars. Furthermore, as I’ve always been intrigued by psychology and people in general I was interested to learn which self-identity related factors affect the way we see things. Therefore the subject of self-identity was included as part of the research, knowing that a connection between self-identity and consumption in general has been established (Belk 1988), but not well explored in relation to ethical consumption.

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to examine

1) How do consumers define ethical consumption?

2) How is self-identity related to ethical consumption?

By answering these questions, I hope to provide a better understanding on how regular consumers understand ethical consumption (in their own consumption) and how self-identity relates to this. The recent research on ethical consumption has raised the problem, which we now need to identity.
1.4 Delimitations

Firstly the focus in this study is on ethical consumption, leaving out in-depth introductions and discussions of concepts such as sustainability, which in general refers only to environmental aspects and more specific sub-categories of ethical consumption such as fair trade and voluntary simplicity, from the theoretical framework. These concepts are only shortly introduced to show how they are connected to the general concept of ethical consumption. It needs to be acknowledged however, that in the empirical research the defining of ethical consumption is left to the person being interviewed. Thus these concepts along other perceptions of ethical consumption may emerge.

Secondly, the concepts of identity and self-identity vary in their definitions, both between and within the concepts. The concept of self-identity in this study is presented in the context of consumption, without addressing it in-depth as an anthropological phenomenon. This decision was made, as the connection of consumption and self-identity has already been established in earlier studies (e.g. Belk 1988) and the focus of this study as such is not to go into a deeper discussion of the anthropological phenomenon of identity as such. Similarly, the concept of ethicality, here referring to the principles of morality and knowing the right from wrong, is not discussed in the literature review, as its scholarly meaning is not of particular interest or focus in the current study.

Thirdly, the objective here is not to concentrate on explaining the identity-behavior gap, as it has been widely studied in existing literature. However, the concept will shortly be introduced later on as one of the research streams of ethical consumption. Moreover, Valor and Carrero’s (2014) research on responsible consumption as a personal project, which provides a complementary explanation for the gap and to the reasons consumers often fail to act according to their ethical concerns (Valor et al. 2014:1111), will not be discussed further, as consumption as a personal project is not of particular interest in the current study.

Lastly, as the study uses a qualitative method, the results do not aim to generalize any phenomenon; rather the aim is to collect detailed information from few selected cases with the intention of gaining a deeper understanding on consumers and their
perceptions on ethical consumption. This also means that the different demographic factors might affect the findings of the study.

The sample consists of only young women, currently living in the capital area of Finland. According to Vitell (2003:40) older consumers are said to be more ethical than their younger counterparts, thus supporting the existence of the relationship between age and ethical judgements. The present study concentrates only on women, as while existing research does not offer an answer to whether or not a gender difference exist in the way ethical consumption is defined or in self-identity relating to consumer ethicality, previous research has shown the differences in gender relating to ethical decision making (Franke, Crown and Spake 1997).

Moreover, as the purpose of the study is to address the self as separate from families’ “collective identity” (Epp and Price 2008:52), the concept of family-identity (Epp et al. 2008) is outside the scope of this research and only women with no children, living in single-person households were chosen for the study. The advantage of having relatively similar informants can be seen in the fact that when the demographic factors are in many aspects the same, the comparison between informants is perhaps easier to make, as factors such as age and gender don’t have to be considered between individual informants.

### 1.5 Research approach

The present study focuses upon consumer-defined ethicality. This approach is based on the numerous notions concerning the concept of ethicality. As pointed out by Cherrier (2007:322) what is perceived as ethical by one, might not be perceived as ethical by another. Furthermore, things that may seem ethical to one person may not “mirror the general stance on an issue”. (Cherrier 2007:331) Moreover, according to Wooliscroft et al. (2013:58) ethical concepts are often researched by focusing on self-selected ethical consumers and behavior is already pre-determined by researchers to be either “good” or “bad”, without any real direct input from the regular everyday consumers. This however isn’t enough, as it limits the research on only certain types of customers and behaviors. Also Witkowski (2010:237) acknowledges the problematics of the often elitist rhetoric used in ethical consumption discourses, which he speaks of as frugality, as they “may not correspond to the meanings ordinary consumers assign to their
purchasing behavior.” However, to create a theoretical background different existing definitions and views on ethical consumption are presented, on which the results will be reflected on.

The thesis starts with a literature review (chapter 2) beginning with an introduction to ethical consumption (chapter 2.1), where I present some of the existing definitions and studies on ethical consumption, along with different ways of categorizing the concept (chapter 2.1.1). Thereafter follows an overview of different research streams and approaches in ethical consumption research in chapter 2.1.2. After this, self-identity is brought to the theoretical framework in the context of consumption (2.2). The concept of self-identity is further introduced in chapter 2.2.1, following the introduction of some of the existing literature on the plurality of selves (2.2.2). In chapter 2.3 the concepts of self-identity and ethical consumption are combined. Prior to drawing together the theoretical framework some acknowledgements on the more critical views in literature regarding the connection of self-identity and consumption, showing potential relevance also in the context of ethical consumption, are presented. Lastly, a summary of the literature review is provided in chapter 2.4.

After the literature review, the methodology (chapter 3) of the study is presented. The methodology section includes the research method chosen for this study, a presentation of the chosen sample and sampling method, the interview guide design and discussion on the quality of the data. Justifications for all the choices made are presented. Following this, results and analysis (chapter 4) are presented. The final chapter (5) of the study presents the conclusions along with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for future research.
2 ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AND SELF-IDENTITY

This chapter introduces ethical consumption and self-identity as the key concepts of the current study. In chapter 2.1 an introduction to ethical consumption is presented with definitions on the concept of ethical consumption to create an understanding of the premise of the study. Chapter 2.1.1 introduces different ways of categorizing the concept of ethical consumption. Following this, chapter 2.1.2 introduces and combines different research streams and approaches from the field of ethical consumption. In chapter 2.2 the concept of self-identity is presented in connection to consumption, with chapter 2.2.1 clarifying the concept of self-identity and chapter 2.2.2 focusing on the plurality of selves. After this, in chapter 2.3, the connection of the concepts of ethical consumption and self-identity is presented along with some of the more critical views regarding the relationship of consumption and self-identity, as they can be seen as applying also in the context of ethical consumption. Lastly, in chapter 2.4 a short summary of the literature review is presented.

2.1 Introduction to ethical consumption

The phenomenon of consumers expressing ethical concerns has existed much longer than the actual term of ethical consumption. For example in 1975, Frederick Webster (1975:188) defined the socially conscious consumer “as a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change”. Publications such as Journal of Business Ethics and Business & Professional Ethics Journal were first released in the early 1980s (Vitell and Muncy 1992). The term “ethical consumer” as such was brought to a larger audiences’ attention by Ethical Consumer –magazine in 1989 (Ethical Consumer 2015).

According to Cooper-Martin and Holbrook (1993:113) ethical consumption behavior is “decision making, purchases or other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns”. This could mean for example buying (or refusing to buy) a certain product due to concerns related to the origin, production-conditions or other factors associated to it.

Research on ethical consumption is constantly evolving and like often in marketing, it draws on theories and models from other disciplines (Newholm and Shaw 2007:264).
Newholm and Shaw argue that to gain an understanding of consumer behavior, one must acknowledge ethical consumption “as an individual and collective project relocated in the cultural ethics of consumption” (Newholm et al. 2007:267). What this seems to suggest is that while ethical consumption is something one does as an individual and on an individual level, it is influenced by and connected to other people. Moreover, ethical consumption is said to be located in our consumer culture, as well as being an inevitable consequence of it (Newholm and Shaw 2007:254) making it challenging to distinguish where one starts and the other begins. This might also make it challenging for a consumer to consciously and verbally express ones’ perceptions on ethical consumption.

Ethical consumption is said to be spread over a continuum, where a big part of the population only takes part in “few, select aspects of ethical consumerism” (McDonald et al.; Shaw and Newholm in Wooliscroft et al 2013:60), meaning that most consumers act according to their ethical values only in few areas of their consumption. It could be that the intensity of ethical consumption varies (Etzioni in Wooliscroft et al 2013:60) partly due the complexities of consumer decisions related to ethicality and the effort they take to make, e.g. the amount of information available (discussed earlier in chapter 1.1) and having to do a lot of background work to make justifiable decisions.

Moreover, this might also possibly explain why different people focus or value very different things in terms of ethical consumption as it can feel overbearing to try and act according to one’s ethical values on all areas of consumption. As an example, for one animal rights can be close to heart and thus one chooses to consume with primarily animal rights in mind, while simultaneously making choices based on other factors than ethicality in other areas of one’s consumption.

Shaw and Shiu (2002a:286) distinguish ethical consumers as being separate from green consumers by acknowledging that while ethical consumers are also concerned about environmental questions they are additionally concerned about more “wide-ranging issues” such as fair trade. This also relates to the complexity brought up before (1.1), noting that even consumers that are guided by ethical concerns can be faced with having to choose between potentially conflicting options such as fair trade and local produce. The commonality between the perceptions of Cooper-Martin et al. (1993) and Shaw et al. (2002a) on ethical consumption is the different types of ethical concerns that shape consumers’ behavior.
As our daily shopping has become increasingly marked as an opportunity to make ethical consumption decisions to “make a difference” (Adams and Raisborough 2010: 256), it has also become challenging for a regular consumer to live up to the ethical standards one perhaps wishes to fulfil. The way in which and if people negotiate the ethical decisions they make on a daily basis was studied by Adams et al. (2010). One of the findings of their study is that many consumers feel that they have a commitment to being good and thus to “making a difference through their consumption decisions”, however with factors of cost, accessibility and sometimes product quality influencing this behavior (Adams et al. 2010:270).

The actual concept of ethical consumption is divided into categories in various ways in the existing literature. To gain an understanding of the various meanings the concept is seen to entail, the following sub-chapter introduces different ways of categorizing the concept, originally presented by Oh and Yoon (2014).

2.1.1 Categorizing the concept of ethical consumption

Oh et al. (2014:280) introduce four categorizations for the concept of ethical consumption according to different researchers. First, they introduce the five behavioral realms of ethical consumption by Harrison, Newholm and Shaw (2005). Harrison et al. (2005) approach ethical consumption as behavior, and as it is of particular interest in the current study, the realms are introduced according to their original source and in more detail than the other following categorizations presented by Oh et al. (2014).

BEHAVIORAL REALMS OF ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

Ethical consumer behavior has been outlined as a complex phenomenon, which can be divided into smaller entities in many different ways. Oh et al. (2014) present a division to behavioral realms based on how the consumer relates to or tries to influence the seller or the actual product (Harrison et al. 2005:2-3). Harrison et al (2005:3) originally call it the typology of ethical consumer practices and the five types of behavior are divided to product-oriented purchasing and company-oriented purchasing, with the names referring to whether the purchasing (or non-purchasing depending on the type of behavior) is directed towards a company (e.g. Nestle, Shell) or a product or product-group such as fair trade or aerosols.
The first type of ethical purchasing is **boycotts** of products or firms (Harrison et al. 2005:3), considered to be unethical by the consumer. This could for example mean refusing to buy products that are unethical (e.g. aerosols) or buying from a company that is considered to be unethical (e.g. Nestle) by the individual. The second type of ethical purchasing is **positive buying** (Harrison et al. 2005:3), which simply means choosing to buy for example Fair trade –marked products or purchasing products from a company that is perceived as ethical such as the Body Shop with its “against animal testing” –policy.

The third type of purchasing is defined as **fully screened** (Harrison et al. 2005:3), which means buying products that are proven to maintain certain ethical standards and comparisons (Oh et al. 2014:280) or “comparative ethical ratings across whole product area” (Harrison et al. 2005:3). This takes the ethical purchasing behavior a step further, as it requires the consumer to do additional research on the background of the products. The fourth type of behavior then is **relationship purchasing**, which holds the idea that consumers themselves educate sellers about their own ethical needs (Harrison et al. 2005:3). This could for example mean asking one’s local grocery store to add fair trade products to their selection. Again, this takes the behavior further, as the consumer also wants to educate others instead of only focusing to one’s own behavior.

The fifth and last type of ethical purchasing behavior is **anti-consumerism or sustainable consumerism** (Harrison et al. 2005:3) which could be seen as representing the strongest kind of dedication to ethical consumption as it means that a consumer avoids unsustainable products, such as cars or practices sustainable consumerism such as using DIY alternatives e.g. mending clothes (Harrison et al. 2005:3). The types of purchasing behaviors presented by Harrison et al. (2005:3) are something that could be relevant in terms of the current study and possibly expected to be mentioned in their different forms or levels by the informants during the data collection –phase.

Clark and Unterberger (in Oh et al. 2014:280) present a categorization of ethical consumption where they dimensionalize the concept into **sustainable consumption**, **buying fair trade products**, **boycotts**, **selective buying** and **buying local goods**. As it can be seen, similar themes are occurring in both sources and they both approach ethical consumption as a form of behavior, which appears to be a defining factor of ethical consumption in general.
OTHER WAYS OF CATEGORIZING ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

Another way of categorizing ethical consumption has also been provided. Hong and Song (in Oh et al. 2014:280), divide the concept into ethical resource allocation, pro-environmental behavior, ethical use of energy, waste recycling and disposal and finally, voluntary simplification of consumption. Thus, their study extends from viewing ethical consumption as purchase behavior of an individual consumer into a more wide-ranging issue. Hong and Shin (in Oh et al. 2014:280) on the other hand form three dimensions, which are preventing unlawful activities, activities intended for contemporary mankind and activities for future generation. Hong and Song seem to focus more on the environmental aspect of ethical consumption, whereas Hong and Shin approach the concept through time orientation. It can very well be that some elements from all of the different categorizations presented above appear in the data collection of the current study, as the consumers themselves are given the opportunity to express what they consider to be ethical consumption. Additionally, as the research at hand takes a particular interest in how the self-identity of individuals can be seen as relating to the ways in which they understand ethical consumption, it is difficult to predict beforehand, whether or not also bigger entities such as categorizing ethical consumption as a type of activity will occur in the data.

Whereas the current chapter has introduced ways of categorizing the actual concept of ethical consumption, what now follows are the different streams and approaches of ethical consumption research.

2.1.2 Ethical consumption research

Throughout the years researchers have focused on different issues in the field of ethical consumption, reflecting the “areas of interest to society or groups within society” at a particular time (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:58). Several researchers have introduced different categorizations of the many topics studied under the concept of ethical consumption (e.g. Cherrier, 2005; Wooliscroft et al. 2013:58).

Ethical consumption research entails many different areas of focus, of which Wooliscroft et al. (2013) identify six different entities, creating a concise summary of the existing study areas. These are environmental concerns/green consumers, fair trade, voluntary simplicity/downshifting, anti-consumption, consumer ethics and
attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumption (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). Cherrier (2005) on the other hand takes another approach by presenting three different directions that researchers have taken in an effort to gain a better understanding on ethical consumption behavior which she names the “agentic, structural and dualistic approaches” (Cherrier 2005:600). Agentic approach suggests that the characteristics of individuals are what influence the “ethical-decision making process” (Cherrier 2005:600). The structural approach then refers to social obligations, with the core idea being that the reason why individuals consume is to be part of society. Finally, the dualistic approach combines these two approaches by suggesting that ethical-decision making is simultaneously affected by both the characteristics of individuals and social obligations (Cherrier 2005:600).

Next, an overview on existing research on ethical consumption and the different research streams of ethical consumption behavior are given, by combining the categorizations originally presented by Cherrier (2005) and Wooliscroft et al. (2013) along with added categories to cover an even larger spectrum.

THE ETHICAL CONSUMER

Whereas the current research is interested in how consumers not predominantly self-defined or viewed as ethical consumers define ethical consumption, much of the existing research has concentrated on identifying the ethical consumer (Adams et al. 2010:257). Harrison et al. (2005:2) state on defining the ethical consumer the following, which very well describes the multifaceted nature of the concept:

“Ethical purchasers may [...] have political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives for choosing one product over another and [...] they frequently disagree about who is right and who is wrong. The one thing they have in common is that they are concerned with the effects that a purchasing choice has, not only on themselves, but also on the external world around them”. (Harrison et al. 2005:2)

The strength of this description is that it shows the broad meaning of the concept, allowing a large quantity of people to fit in to the description of an ethical consumer, even though the level of intensity varies significantly. The different ways of categorizing the concept of ethical consumption were presented and discussed earlier in chapter 2.1.1.
The agentic approach identified and named by Cherrier (2005:600) could be seen as located under this area of research as it is characterized as an approach where researchers aim to identify who these people are in terms of “demographics, socioeconomics, psychographics, pro-social behaviors, ideologies or beliefs” (Cherrier 2005:600). The purpose of this approach is to try and determine the different causes why people consume ethically. It sees ethical consumption behavior as reflecting the consumers’ “rational and intentional individual choices” (Cherrier 2005:600).

As it can be seen, similar themes occur across both of these categorizations. As the focus in the presented theory is the connection of ethical consumers and self-identity, the subject will not be elaborated further.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN AND GREEN CONSUMERS

Wooliscroft et al. (2013:59) name Environmental concern and Green Consumers as being one of the first research areas of ethical consumerism. By referring to Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics and Bohlem (2003) they define this research stream as being focused on exploring the different components of environmental consciousness. This is done by researching people’s knowledge, attitudes and their behavior concerning environmental issues.

FAIR TRADE

Another area of interest in ethical consumption research according to Wooliscroft et al (2013:59) is Fair Trade. It can be defined according to a narrow and a broader view. De Pelsmacker, Driesen and Rayp (2005a:367) introduce two definitions for the concept. In a broader sense, it can be described as “an alternative approach to trading partnership that aims for sustainable development of excluded and/or disadvantaged producers” (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005a:367). When fair trade is understood in its broadest meaning, the concept incorporates both environmental and social issues (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005a:367).

When discussed in a narrower sense and according to its most known factor, fair trade is defined as “fair prices for the products of farmers in developing countries” (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005a:367). In marketing terms, fair trade is said to be “the most successful and high profile element of ethical consumption” (Newholm and Shaw 2007:258). The research in this area of ethical consumption is often conducted by
concentrating on a specific product category or by investigating the characteristics of consumers of Fair trade –products on a general level (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59).

Fair trade makes ethical consumption tangible for a consumer and could be seen as easy to approach. If the consumer finds the label to be enough of a proof of the ethicality of a product, the purchasing process doesn’t require any additional background work from the consumer. As according to Newholm et al. (2007:258) it represents the most successful element of ethical consumption, it could be expected that the concept will appear in the empirical part of the current study when asking the informants what they consider as ethical consumption.

**VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY**

The concepts of *Voluntary Simplicity* and *Downshifting* are also largely studied in the research field of ethical consumption (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). As also quoted by Wooliscroft et al. (2013:59), Etzioni (1998:620) defines this as “the choice out of free will [...] to limit expenditures on consumer goods and services, and to cultivate non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning”.

The research focus on this area is usually on investigating voluntary simplicity as a small group’s lifestyle choice that in principle exchanges consumption and material things for life’s non-materialistic aspects such as free time (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). The intensity of engaging in this behavior however varies. Etzioni (1998:621-626) divides voluntary simplicity into three groups, according to their intensity levels. Moving from the lowest level of intensity to the highest, these groups are labeled as downshifters, strong simplifiers and the simple living movement.

Voluntary simplicity is not of focus in the current study, but it is good to acknowledge that the concept and these different levels of intensity exist.

**ANTI-CONSUMPTION**

*Anti-consumption* is also identified as one of the frequently investigated areas of ethical consumption (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). Defined according to Lee, Fernandez and Hyman 2009:145) anti-consumption research “focuses on consumers’ reasons for avoiding a product or brand”.
The research on anti-consumption is not so much focused on pro-social movements as it is in reasons against consumption (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). The article of Lee et al. (2009), which presents on overview of the recent studies made in the field of anti-consumption research, combines the perspectives of multiple authors. A recurrent theme among authors that was found was the “difference between anti-consumption driven by personal motivations and anti-consumption driven by societal and ideological factors” (Lee et al. 2009:146).

Earlier in this paper (2.1.1), anti-consumption was mentioned as one of the five types of ethical purchasing behavior (Harrison et al. 2005:3), speculated as potentially showing the highest level of commitment in ethical consumption. Anti-consumption as such is not at focus in the current study, but it is possible that the informants will bring up aspects relating to it during the empirical part of the study.

**CONSUMER ETHICS**

*Consumer Ethics (including Moral Dimensions)*, which come closest to the current study at hand, is defined as when “the individual decision maker's perception of an ethical problem in a situation is followed by the perception of various alternatives that might be used to resolve the problem” (Vitell 2003:34). After determining one’s perceived alternatives, two ethical evaluations are used to arrive at an ethical judgement (Vitell 2003:34;40). Deontological evaluation refers to a given behavior or action with the focus in the “*inherent* [italics according to source] rightness versus wrongness”, of a behavior (Vitell 2003:34) which the individual tries to evaluate. Teleological evaluation then refers to the evaluation of the possible outcome in terms of how much good / bad may result from a certain decision that is made. (Vitell 2003:34) As it can be seen, this stream of research contrasts the ‘bad’ consumer behavior with the ‘good’ and moreover, connects this behavior to either psychological or personality characteristics. (Wooliscroft et al. 2013)

The structural approach identified and named by Cherrier could be put under this stream of research, as in a similar manner, the focus is put on the underlying “moral principles and standards that guide behavior of individuals or groups as they obtain, use, and dispose goods and services” (Muncy and Vitell in Cherrier 2005:600). According to Cherrier this approach concentrates on the social obligations connected to ethical consumption, according to which individuals consume for the purpose of being a part of society.
ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOUR GAP IN ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

*Attitude–Behavior Gap in Ethical Consumption* is a widely studied phenomenon, which “explores why the attitudes expressed towards ethical consumerism do not translate into actual behavior” (Wooliscroft et al. 2013:59). Durrschmidt and Taylor (in Soron 2010:175) have argued that people consume what they perceive as meaningful to them, thus actively constructing their identity through their consumption. However, this suggests that people would actually act according to their values, which according to studies researching the attitude-behavior gap is often not the case. Also Szmigin et al.’s study (2009:224) shows the “competing priorities and paradoxical outcomes” related to ethical consumption.

The existing research on the attitude-behavior gap in ethical consumption has focused on the influence of social desirability bias in surveys and has investigated the different ways in which people rationalize non-ethical behavior or shift blame. (Wooliscroft et al. 2013) In the current study, it could be expected that this gap will appear, but the focus of interest is on how the self can be seen as related to the way the informants perhaps will try to rationalize or explain this gap.

Another theory linking to the attitude–behavior gap is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Ethical consumers’ decision-making is studied often through TPB and it is based on the notion that attitudes and the individual’s subjective norms explain their behavioral intentions, while taking into account the influence of one’s perceived obstacles to carry out a certain behavior. These obstacles are identified as problems related to choice, availability and information. (Newholm et al. 2007:257).

A HOLISTIC VIEW ON ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

The last approach identified by Cherrier (2005:600), which she calls the dualistic approach, combines the agentic and structural approaches introduced earlier, thus arriving to the suggestion that ethical decision-making is affected simultaneously by both individual characteristics and social obligation. One example of a study in this research stream is Shaw and Shiu’s theory of planned behavior (TPB) studied in the context of ethical consumption behavior. In this they included both self-identity and ethical obligation, with the latter being a reflection of “an individual’s internalized ethical rules” (Shaw and Shiu in Cherrier 2005:600)
What can be drawn from the presented categorizations is that the field consists of numerous different research areas and areas of specific interest to researchers. The presentation of the categorizations in the current study thus aims to create an understanding of the plurality of research streams and the extent to which the concepts of ethical consumption and ethical consumption behavior are studied in the academia. Furthermore, they serve as an indication of the relevance and importance of ethical consumption research and the phenomenon in general.

As the present study also takes an interest in how self-identity relates to consumer ethicity, the concept of self-identity is introduced next.

### 2.2 Self-identity in the context of consumption

It is important to study the self in the context of ethical consumption as the link between self-identity and consumption in general has been established (Belk 1988), presenting evidence that our sense of self is closely connected to the things we possess. As Gabriel et al. (2006:79) state, “Identity is Rome, to which all discussions of modern Western consumption lead [...].”

Already in 1957 Tucker (in Sirgy 1982:287) argued that the personalities of consumers “can be defined through product use”. Moreover, Gabriel and Lang (2006:47-48) argue that people want and purchase things “not because of what things can do for us, but because of what things mean to us and what they say about us.” Similarly, Giddens (1991:81) discusses lifestyles, describing the everyday choices people make in terms of what to e.g. wear and eat as “decisions not only about how to act but who to be”. Lodziak (2002:48) states that the general view today hereby seems to suggest that the meaningfulness of consumption is based on the notion that it “speaks directly to the self”, adding that “the ideology of consumerism has it that it is primarily through consumption that we become who we are and display who we are” (Lodziak 2002:48). Alan Warde (in Soron 2010:173) expresses a similar thought, according to which self-identity is largely communicated through possessions.

### 2.2.1 The concept of self-identity

In the present study the concepts of self and self-identity are used interchangeably with one another, as is often done in existing literature. Leary and Tangney (2012:71) describe the concept of self as including both the idea of an actor and an object:
“It requires that there is an “I” that can consider an object that is “me”. The term self includes both the actor who thinks (“I am thinking”) and the object of thinking (“about me”). Moreover, the actor both is able to think and is aware of doing so” (Leary et al. 2012:71)

The self relies on the sense of knowing oneself, even when this assumption is not entirely accurate, with this feeling facilitating the use of self to “make sense and make choices, using the self as an important perceptual, motivational and self-regulatory tool” (Leary et al. 2012:71). This self-regulation could also be seen being exercised in ethical consumption, although the individual herself might not view it as regulative.

A more simplistic way of understanding self-identity is presented in other studies. According to Shaw and Shiu (2002a:287) self-identity can be defined as “the pertinent part of an individual’s self that relates to a particular behavior”. Oh et al. (2014:280) define self-identity as a “consumer’s definite and subjective belief, which is invariable feeling about one’s own uniqueness.” Sparks and Guthrie (1998:1394) perceive people’s self-identity to be “synonymous with people’s self-perceptions or their self-concept”, with the self being a somewhat enduring characteristic which people accredit to themselves. These characteristics are said to “take the form of (or incorporate) socially given linguistic categorizations” (Sparks et al. 1998:1394).

It is however argued that self-identity as well as other cognitions like attitudes and preferences are not necessarily consistent (Biddle et al. in Sparks et al. 1992:389) rather the contemporary self is described as being fragmented (Jameson in Sökefeld 1999:417). Similarly, Leary et al. (2012:79) acknowledge that the “most comprehensive social science theories of the self articulate both stability and fluidity as aspects of the self”, with the self and identity being both stable and context sensitive (Leary et al. 2012:84) and identities being “dynamically constructed in the moment” (Leary et al. 2012:70).

Leary et al. also point out, that the choices seemingly identity-congruent to the individual’s identity in one situation might not appear so in another. The self is partly seen as useful due to this flexibility (2012:70). Also conscious consumer behavior is studied through the theories of flexibility (here “the inherent ability to change, adapt and/or react to decision-making environments with little forfeiture of time, effort, cost or product performance” (Szmigin et al. 2009:226) and dissonance. Their study reveals
the “competing priorities, paradoxical outcomes, and the nature of compromises reached in real decision making processes” among conscious consumers (Szmigin et al. 2009:224). Whereas the current study focuses on any consumer not namely identified as ethical or conscious, it is worth noting that the study supports the notion that people display contradictions as well as represent more than a single identity (Szmigin 2009:225).

Similarly Sökefeld (1999:419) identifies “[...] the struggle to act and to present oneself as a consistent self in a situation of plural and contradicting identities related to intense social conflict”. According to Sökefeld (1999:420) individuals are capable of pursuing numerous, sometimes contradictory objectives at the same time. He studies the relationship of identity and self in a social setting, where plurality of identities in contradiction with each other occur (Sökefeld 1999). He argues that identities are fluid, constantly changing as they relate to each other. If we look at these arguments in connection to the current study, the contradictory objectives Sökefeld talks about could be, to give an example, being fashionable and ethical at the same time. Nevertheless, he does not discuss ethical consumption, and it is consequently of high interest to see if indications of this type of examples occur in the data collection phase of the study.

What then creates the feeling of stability of the self for the individual is explained in many different ways. Sökefeld (1999:425) puts this in a social context, referring to a particular case and situation, that “the consistency of the self rests on the ability to describe one’s actions and ideas in a more or less consistent way”. This he calls the narrative self, stating that it is through this that the individual creates a personal image relating to the identities that the self embraces. Similarly, Giddens (1991:215) argues that the narrative of self-identity needs to be “shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life [...]”. These notions are something that are of high importance in the current study, as what they seem to suggest is that a person’s ability to verbally communicate one’s thoughts about one self and one’s behavior (to one’s self and to others) is seen as the process that keeps the self intact, whether or not the actual behavior of an individual is consistent or parallel with one’s self-perception.

The attention in recent writings on identity connects to the discussions about societies with their cultural and social changes. To clarify the concept of self-identity in these discussions, the difference between identity and self-identity needs to be distinguished.
Concepts of selfhood, subjectivity and individualization often used with identity theories refer to the concept of identity as a self, “an individual psycho-history” (Wilska 2002:195), whereas socialization, identification and reflexivity treat identity as being more a social construction; “a reflection of the social collectivities that one belongs to”. (Wilska 2002:195)

To shortly introduce how identity is formed, according to Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis and Sabelis (2009:301) identity formation involves “the discursive articulation of an ongoing iteration between social and self-definition”. Moreover, they describe identity formation as

“a complex, multifaceted process which produces a socially negotiated temporary outcome of the dynamic interplay between internal strivings and external prescriptions, between self-presentation and labeling by others, between achievement and ascription and between regulation and resistance”. (Ybema et al. 2009:301)

To further examine the connection of self-identity and consumption Soron (2010:173), acknowledges that the maintenance of one’s personal identity has become largely linked to one’s consumption. Alan Durning (in Soron 2010:173) argues that consumption has become “our primary means of self-definition”. The fact that consumption seems to be so significantly related to people’s sense of self makes it interesting to examine how self-identity relates to consumer ethicality. Furthermore, connecting the significance of consumption in the sense of self and personal identity to the complexities of ethical consumption makes it evident that the topic area is in fact multi-layered and challenging to put in any theoretical frame.

The role of consumption for self-identity is more subtlety addressed by other researchers. According to Grubb and Krathwohl “[...] one’s consumption behavior may enhance one’s self-concept through products which signify a symbolic meaning” (in Oh et al. 2014:281). This means, that a person’s self-identity and consumption behavior are closely related (Oh et al. 2014:281). When something becomes a central issue to an individual’s self-identity, also one’s behavioral intentions are adjusted accordingly. This means that if ethical issues have become a significant part of a person’s self-identity, the person may also make consumption choices that are ethical. (Shaw et al. 2000)
However, what requires attention here is the wording, which shows the possibility of an impact on consumption choices, not that this would always be the case.

Charng et al. (in Sparks et al. 1992:389) argue that an individual’s self-concept is influenced by repeated behavior thus making it important for the individual. Here repetition and regularity are the defining aspects of self-concept. Put in the context of ethical consumption, this could mean that if one repeatedly purchases e.g. fair trade coffee, the behavior becomes important for the individual, which then again potentially increases the likelihood that this behavior is continued. This is of interest in the current study, as attention will be paid whether or not what the informants perceive as ethical consumption to them, is something they do on a continuous basis, thus in this way potentially acting as in reflection of their self-concept.

To conclude, as discussed in this chapter, the concept and the meaning of identity vary between and within disciplines (Sparks et al. 1992:388), connecting to consumption in various ways depending on the theory in question.

### 2.2.2 Plurality of selves

Sökefeld (1999:424) describes the self as a “superordinate to (though not detached from) the plurality of identities”, stating that individuals can manage different identities because they can still maintain a “[...] reflexive sense of a basic distinction between the self and everything else”, selecting certain modes and rejecting others (Sökefeld 1999:424), of which in the context of the current study, ethical consumption could be seen as being potentially one of these modes.

As also Sökefeld seems to suggest, people’s self-concept, a term often used parallel to self-identity, is based on a plurality of components (Sirgy 1982:287-288). The *actual self-concept* (how one perceives oneself) is accompanied by an *ideal self*, which stands for “the image of oneself as one would like to be” (Sirgy 1982:287). The other terms used for the ideal self are “desired self” and “idealized image” (Sirgy 1982:288).

In terms of the current research it is also worth noting, that this duality dimension has previously been seen as an even more wide-ranging matter. The *social self* refers to “how a person presents herself to others” (Sirgy 1982:287), as for example French and Glaschner (in Sirgy 1982:288) extended the division from actual and ideal self-concept
to perceived reference group image of self, which was never properly defined. However, it could be thought of as referring to people’s tendency to compare and reflect their own self-concept to other people surrounding them, e.g. if a person is more ethical than the reference group one compares oneself to, the person might perceive oneself as being relatively ethical, whereas in another context one would not.

Schouten (2015) talks about possible selves, which can be seen as connected to the ideal selves of Sirgy (1982). He (2015:421-422) studies the reconstruction of self, stating that people often form hypothetical selves, some of which remain unrealistic. Possible self-schemas are build based on past selves and different role models and then brought together based on e.g. personal values and social expectations. (Schouten 2015:422)

Also Leary et al. (2012:69) state that identities may be focused on “what used to be true of one” thus presenting the past identity. Consequently, an individual’s present identity reflects what is currently true of one, and future identity stands for what one wishes, feels obligated or fears of becoming. It could be seen, that this in a sense combines the thoughts of Sirgy and Schouten, as both the possible and ideal self can be seen as reflected in these identities.

Furthermore, situational self-image defined by Schenk and Holman (1980:611) as “the meaning of self that the individual wishes others to have of him/herself” entails all the perceptions, feelings and attitudes one hopes others to associate with oneself in terms of one’s character and behavior. What is particularly interesting here is that the self, whether it is the actual self or one of the other selves, chosen to be expressed is influenced by different (social) situations (Sirgy 1982:289). One way of expressing one’s self-image is through the use of certain products, which also in the context of ethical consumption is worth the acknowledgement. What speaks for the use of the concept of “situational self-image” is that:

“(1) it replaces the proliferating concepts of actual self-image, ideal self-image, and so forth; (2) it includes a behavioral component; and (3) it acknowledges that consumers have many self-concepts. Consumption of a brand may be highly congruent with self-image in one situation and not at all congruent with it in another” (Sirgy 1982:289)
Going back to the possible self-schema of Schouten, what affects the motivating power is the “perceived attainability of a possible self”, meaning that if the individual perceives the chance of attaining the possible self too low, “the motivation to actualize it is diminished” (Schouten 2015:422). The factors affecting how attainable the individual perceives the potential self are situational characteristics such as social constraints and personal resources. (Schouten 2015:422)

Individuals can either respond with inaction, active rejection or actualization to their possible selves. Inaction can result from e.g. insufficient desirability of the possible self. Rejection then can occur if the possible self is seen as e.g. unattainable or not in line with the other aspects of the individual’s self-concept. In relation to ethical consumption this could mean, that if the individual aims for perfection in one’s ethical purchasing behavior but realizes that this is not possible, the individual gives up on the ethical aspects altogether. Another reason for diminished motivation could be e.g. money, or wanting to purchase things that have some other (higher) value to the individual, e.g. choosing an item because it is desirable enough to overshadow the possible ethical issues in the mind of the individual. (Schouten 2015)

Finally, actualization and consequently the “incorporation of the possible self into a revised self-concept” will likely appear in situations where the desirability, plausibility and elaboration of a possible self are sufficient to the individual, thus increasing the motivation power. (Schouten 2015:422) This actualization then can occur through consumption of “instrumental goods” (Schouten 2015:422), which in the context of the current study would be products perceived by the individual as ethical.

The relationship of ethical consumption and self-identity in existing theory is discussed in the following chapter. What also follows is some of the more critical views concerning the relationship of consumption and self-identity as presented in earlier studies.

2.3 Connection of concepts and critical views

Studies connecting ethical consumption and self-identity are few compared to studies concentrating on the relationship between self-identity and consumption in general, but a few can be found. Referring to and reflecting from Belk (1988), Cherrier (2007:322) notes that “postmodern consumers can acquire, consume and dispose of
ethical objects/services/practices that reflect who they are and who they want to be”,
again viewing ethical consumption as a form of behavior.

Self-identity is also studied in relation to other similar phenomena discussed in this
chapter. Soron (2010) examines self-identity in relation to sustainability. While the
concept of sustainability and sustainable consumption differ from that of ethical
consumption with its focus on environmental issues, the similar nature of these
concepts could be seen as a reason to examine Soron’s notions in relation to ethical
consumption as well.

Soron’s research focus is similar to the one of the current study, as he argues that

“[… ] framing sustainable consumption in relation to the problem of self-identity enables
us to confront not only the psycho-cultural factors that maintain demand for material
goods, but also the difficulties faced by ordinary people as they try to understand and
respond ethically to large-scale social and ecological problems within an everyday
environment that is highly commodified and individualized”. (Soron 2010:172)

What makes this so interesting is the often conflicting priorities people may have in
terms of wanting to do what is right (e.g. consume ethically) and simultaneously
wanting to fit in, stand out and possess things which are not primarily appealing due to
ethicality, but other factors such as fashion-value. As Dobers and Strannegård
(2005;324) state: “sustainability must ultimately be seen as intertwined with social
processes such as fashion, identity and identity construction”. According to Soron
much of the research on consumption in affluent countries since the 1980s has
concentrated on the process of “creating and sustaining a ‘self-identity’” (Soron
2010:172).

The way in which consumers approach ethical issues, is said to be part of their "moral
self-realization” (Kozinets and Handelman in Newholm and Shaw 2007:256). This
holds the notion that ethical consumers are “obtaining a part of their identity through
their consumption” (Landeland in Newholm et al. 2007:256). In the context of
responsible consumption and identities Low and Davenport (in Valor et al. 2014:1111)
suggest that “consumers have multiple fragmented identities and cannot therefore be
expected to behave consistently as responsible consumers”. While the current study is
interested in self-identity, it is of interest to see if and how that self-identity tries to
balance between different identities, as discussed by Sökefeld (1999). The plurality of selves and fragmentation of identities was discussed in more detail in the previous chapter (2.2).

If we then reflect back on the research streams of ethical consumption presented before in chapter 2.1.2., some indications of their connection to self-identity can be found. If we look at how existing literature connects identity-discussion to the research stream on environmental concerns, Soron (2010) for example states that to endorse environmentally friendly behaviors, the promoters of sustainable consumption need to “begin developing a more carefully theorized notion of consumption’s identity value” (Soron 2010:173). This could also apply to the concept of ethical consumption, in reflection to what the marketing powers should perhaps acknowledge. On a similar note, Duane Elgin (in Soron 2010:173) talks about “identity consumption”, arguing that it works against the notion of “ecological living” and that pursuing sustainability would require one to foster an alternative identity based on a moderate lifestyle with a respect for the natural world.

When looking at literature connecting the concepts of voluntary simplicity and self, Cherrier (2007:328) states that by the reduction of their consumption and the control they practice over it, voluntary simplifiers express their values and identities. They decide to consciously “assimilate their external identity with their internally identified self” in recognizing that their life quality is dependent on their external identity (Cherrier 2007:328). Furthermore, the identified self means that the existing identities need to be decomposed into “their constituent components” in order to recombine them into a new identity (Featherstone; Melucci in Cherrier 2007:328). Whereas for some, extravagant consumption can be a form of self-expression, for voluntary simplifiers the restriction of consumption becomes an instrument for self-expression (Cherrier 2007:329).

In reflection to anti-consumption the concept of self is also visible as Lee et al. (2009:149) acknowledge that according to some scholars the two can’t be separated from each other as a “person’s ideological orientation is integral to his or her sense of self” (Lee et al. 2009:149).

Also, the Theory of Planned Behavior acknowledges the role of self-identity. The core framework of TPB was extended to include the measures of ethical obligation and self-
identity, which were found relevant in the context of ethical consumption. (Newholm et al. 2007:257). Shaw and Shiu (2002a;2002b) have further studied the roles of ethical obligation and self-identity in the prediction of intention and ethical consumer choice. Previous research has also suggested that a person’s self-identity might influence one’s behavior even independently of the attitudes one might have towards a particular behavior (Sparks and Shepherd 1992:388).

It would be an overstatement to claim, that what has now been presented are the only connections in existing literature clearly combining the concept of ethical consumption to that of self-identity. What could however be suggested, is that there is still plenty of room for additional research from various focus points concerning this connection. The literature review of the present study has offered many examples on the tight connection existing between self-identity and consumption in general. To end the theoretical part, some examples of the more critical views on this connection should be acknowledged, as they could be seen as applying to the connection of self-identity and ethical consumption as well.

Soron’s article, again concentrating on the connection of self-identity and sustainability also introduces critical observations important to take notice of, such as that of Conrad Lodziak. Lodziak (2005:48) places criticism on what he sees as the today’s predominant perspective, according to which the main means through which people “construct, maintain, reconstructs and display […] identities” is through consumption, and that the strongest motivations in terms of consumption lie in our self-identities.

Lodziak’s (2005:49) criticism is pointed particularly towards the fact that it appears to claim that people’s self-definition and construction of identity is solely dependent on one’s consumption, entirely diminishing all of the other less superficial and significantly more important factors, such as social class. What this might suggest in the context of ethical consumption, is that one’s consumption habits are not sufficient to determine the ethicality of a person, as one might have ethical and moral concerns which then don’t reflect in one’s consumption. This could also be seen as connecting back to the attitude-behavior –gap.

Taking a different angle, but in a similar vein as Lodziak (2005), Cherrier (2007:322) places criticism on the idealistic perspective on ethical consumption according to which, consumers can “question their existence and reshape their lives by exercising
their freedom to choose ethical consumption practices in the market place”, referring to the way behavior is seen to shape identity.

“Implicit in this liberal view is the idea that ethical consumers are knowledge-grounded subjects who make rational choices to maximize their interests and their quest for identity.” (Cherrier 2007:322)

Cherrier further problematizes this conception of the consumer as it portrays ethical consumers as rational choosers showing “little resemblance to ethical individuals in the real world”, rather reducing them from diverse, varied ethical persons to “utilitarian, rational individuals who use ethical consumption practices in pursuit of their identity goal” (Cherrier 2007:322). She argues that making ethical choices in a world offering numerous ethical stands contains a lot more than “getting to know yourself” (Cherrier 2007:324). The complexities of ethical decision-making were discussed in more detail in the presentation of the research problem (chapter 1.1), including lack of information and the effects of the surrounding contexts where these choices are made.

Lastly, in the context of sustainability, criticism occurs on the notion that while the issues of sustainability are researched through self-identity giving focus on how individuals create their identities through consumption, the responsibility is put on the shoulders of individuals, creating the assumption that sustainability depends on the individual efforts of consumers. This then transfers the responsibility away from the interests of economics and politics, where it really should be addressed. (Soron 2010:173) It could be argued that this criticism applies to ethical consumption as well, of which the extensive amount of research on ethical consumerism and ethical consumption behavior is an indication. While the current study similarly takes an interest in the individual, this notion is worth the final acknowledgement.

### 2.4 Summary of the literature review

The attempt in what has been presented has been to show the multifaceted nature of the concepts of ethical consumption and self-identity and their relationship as it has been portrayed in existing literature.

Both the concept of ethical consumption itself and its areas of research vary in their focus and definitions. Ethical consumption can however be in principle viewed as a type of behaviour, shaped by the different types of concerns, values, attitudes, and
motivations different individuals have. Moreover, the concerns of consumers on the possible effects derived from their purchasing choices is what unites the broad idea of ethicality in consumption as well as an existing perception of an ethical problem that is needed to give rise to this line of thought. A combination of recognition of problems and morality could thus be seen at the core of ethical consumption.

Similarly, the concept of self-identity can be described as fragmented as it varies in its definition across and within study fields. This also reflects well the essence of the concept itself. Instead of one consistent self, the literature seems to lean more on supporting the notion of multiple selves, however with a sense of stability in self that is experienced by the individual. A definition that well portrays this was presented by Shaw and Shiu (in Cherrier 2005:600) who state that self-identity is the “pertinent part of an individual self that relates to a particular behaviour”. Based on these the concept in relation to ethical consumption can be understood, as what it seems to suggest is that people don’t act according to one single self, rather the way we act is tied to different contexts and situations as well as different behaviours.

The presented theories have their value in showing the plurality and complexity of the different meanings they are given, but none of them are sufficient to answer alone the question of how ethical consumption is defined by regular consumers or how the self-identity of these consumers can be seen as reflected in the ways in which they understand this.
3 METHODS

This chapter introduces the research method that is chosen for the current study as well as further explains the execution of the empirical part. The qualitative approach is introduced in chapter 3.1. The data was collected by interviewing eight female informants during April 2015. Chapter 3.2 presents the chosen sampling method and defined criteria for the interviewees. The interview process and interview guide design are discussed in chapter 3.3.

3.1 Research method

The current study takes a qualitative approach. Where quantitative methods most often mean studying randomly selected people in greater numbers, qualitative methods allow the researcher to focus on a smaller sample that is purposefully selected in information-rich cases. (Patton 2002:227) Furthermore, one of the strengths in qualitative research is that “[...] it can use naturally occurring data to find the sequences (‘how’) in which participants’ meanings (‘what’) are deployed and thereby established the character of some phenomenon.” (Silverman 2006:44) These are also the reasons why the method is seen appropriate for the current study as it aims to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Particularly the focus on self-identity needs to be studied in a way that allows the individual to express oneself freely, but also the concept of ethical consumption and its many dimensions are seen as best discovered through a qualitative method. The chosen research method within the qualitative approach is one-on-one semi-structured interviews using an interview guide (see appendix 1 & 2).

The study adapts Giddens’ perception according to which people can verbally express their discursive consciousness and that practical consciousness is something that operates in the everyday practices and routines of people. Through reflexive observation people are able to “recall the ‘unconscious’ principles of their actions, although they cannot express them verbally”. (Giddens 1984 in Wilska 2002:198).

3.2 Sample

The interviewees were chosen purposefully by using criterion- and snowball sampling (Patton 2002). Purposeful sampling was chosen, as the intention of the study is to understand important cases, instead of generalizing the results from a sample to a
larger population (Patton 1999:1197). In this case I tried to find people, who were willing and able to discuss their behavior. Criterion sampling was used, as there were some pre-determined criteria that needed to be met (Patton 2002:238). Snowball sampling was used to gain access to informants that fill the pre-determined criteria (Patton 2002:237). The sampling strategies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  Sampling strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sampling Strategy</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Choice of Informant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion sampling</td>
<td>Cases meeting pre-determined criteria to fit the study</td>
<td>Female, age-range, location, single-person household</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow-ball sampling</td>
<td>Access to informants that meet the criteria</td>
<td>Fitting informants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age was determined as a criteria, as it serves the purpose to choose an age-frame where people more likely already have their own money to consume, giving them at least a conceptual freedom of choice in their own consumption. What then consequently should be acknowledged is that the ethical perspective of younger consumers might differ with that of other age groups (Carrigan et al. 2001:570). According to Vitell (2003:40) older consumers are said to be more ethical, thus supporting the existence of the relationship between age and ethical judgements. Furthermore, as the concept of family-identity (Epp and Price 2008) is beyond the scope of this research, the sample consists of people living on their own, as the purpose is to address the self as separate from families’ “collective identity” (Epp et al. 2008:52).

The present study concentrates only on women, because whereas existing research does not offer an answer to whether or not a gender difference exist in the way ethical consumption is defined or in self-identity relating to ethical consumption, previous research has shown the differences in gender relating to ethical decision making (Franke et al. 1997), as for example women were found more likely to consider certain hypothetical business practices as being unethical, than men. Thus, as the aim was not make a gender comparison regarding these issues, the study was this time only limited to women. The area of location for the sample was determined for resource reasons, but again the possible influence of this choice needs to be acknowledged.
The sample in this study consists of eight (8) women between the ages of 25 – 29, currently living in the capital area of Finland. Moreover, all of the interviewees live in a single-person household. An overview of the informants and interview details is given in Table 2.

### Table 2  Overview of the informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant code</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Duration of Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>45.08</td>
<td>1.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>19.08</td>
<td>6.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>21.23</td>
<td>7.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>33.32</td>
<td>7.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>41.19</td>
<td>7.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Espoo</td>
<td>42.07</td>
<td>15.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F7*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Helsinki</td>
<td>53.10</td>
<td>20.4.2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td>Espoo</td>
<td>30.40</td>
<td>21.4.2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Interviews were conducted through Skype

#### 3.3 Interviews and interview guide

The interviews were conducted both face-to-face as well as through Skype and they were all recorded using an iPhone. All of the interviews took place in Helsinki and Espoo in April of 2015. A total of eight interviews were conducted lasting between 19 to 53 minutes. Six of the interviews, which were conducted face-to-face, took place in the informants’ own home without the presence of other people. This was done to ensure maximum comfort and a relaxed environment for the informant. The two interviews that were held via Skype were done in a similar manner, so that the informants were in the comfort of their own home, without outside distraction.

An interview guide was constructed to work as a general outline for the interviews. According to Patton (2002:343:349) using an interview guide gives the interviewer the freedom to move freely within the subject areas by probing and exploring the subjects further. By using an interview guide the interviewer can make sure that the topics one wants to cover will be specified before the interview takes place, while still maintaining a rather conversational nature. The conversational nature was extremely significant to maintain, as it was important to make sure that the informants felt comfortable in the
interviewing situations, as research on the ethical concerns of consumers is known to often suffer from “a social desirability bias, leading to a substantial attitude-behavior gap” (De Pelsmacker, Janssens, Sterckx and Mielants 2005b:512). Thus maintaining a relaxed atmosphere was crucial in order to get honest answers and to get beyond the attitude-behavior gap, aiming to reveal how the self is related in how the consumer defines the meaning of ethical consumption in their own consumption.

The approach regarding the interview themes could be seen as exploratory as the topic of the present study as such has not been researched before. The questions in the interview guide used for this study can be roughly divided into three types of questions in accordance with Patton (2002). The interview started with background questions including some warm-up questions to get the informants to relax and express themselves more freely. The questions asking the informants to describe themselves as persons and as consumers were asked in an open-ended matter, as according to Patton (2002:351) this can help gaining information on how the informants categorize themselves in relation to the world surrounding them (Patton 2002:351), which was thought to give a general idea also of the informant's self-perception. Furthermore, by asking the informants questions about their consumption in general, made it possible to detect whether or not aspects of ethical consumption were mentioned before the concept was brought to the discussion by the interviewer.

These questions were followed by what Patton (2002:349-350) calls experience and behavioral questions and opinion and values questions. The questions appeared in a somewhat random order, following the natural flow of the conversation. The main structure and order however stayed the same. After asking the informants questions relating to their consumption in general e.g. what do they buy most often, the informants were asked to describe what they understand with the concept “ethical consumption”, followed by questions of what it is to them in their own consumption and if this actually shows in their actual behavior. This was done to get them talking about the potential attitude-behavior gap and use the communication of this as a way of possibly detecting how the self is involved in the process. The questions continued in the same area of topic, giving the informants opportunities to reflect on their thoughts and analyze themselves from different angles.

The core questions of the interview guide remained the same throughout the interviews, but as the process went further, some additional questions were added and
the level of probing increased due to the growing familiarity with the process and existing interviews, which indicated what needed to be discussed and probed further. Using an interview guide was seen as justified, as it was important to make sure, that all of the topic areas were covered during the interview. The fact that the interviewer was familiar with most of the informants beforehand could be seen as beneficial as this existing relationship seemed to make a difference in the level of willingness of the informants to share their thoughts more openly and accordingly in the rapport and neutrality (Patton 2002) between the informant and the interviewee.

Rapport and neutrality were also addressed, as I as the interviewer did my best to convince the informants that I was interested in what they think and feel, and that no matter what they say, I will appreciate it as it comes. Furthermore I underlined the fact that there were no right or wrong or stupid answers, instead whatever they had to say was valuable, solely for the fact that they were saying it. According to Patton (2002:365), rapport means respecting the interviewees and that the importance of the answer comes of who is saying it. Rapport between the interviewer and interviewee is built on the interviewer's ability to convey empathy and understanding without any judgment (Patton 2002:366). Neutrality then is established by convincing informants that nothing he or she says will affect how the interviewer sees the informant and without them having to think what the interviewer might think of the given answers (Patton 2002:365).

Lastly, the interview guide was originally made in English, but due to the native language of the informants being Finnish, the questions were translated for the interviews. It was essential to let the informants answer in their native language, as this was seen as helping them to express their thoughts more freely and make the interview more conversational in nature. The translations were made carefully to ensure that the meanings of the given answers were not changed in the process.

### 3.4 Analysis of the data

All of the interviews were transcribed prior to starting the analysis of the data. The transcribing was done carefully, acknowledging things such as the informants’ laughter, tone of voice or elongated pauses in speech in situations where they were seen as potentially being of importance.
The preliminary analysis of data was done by using Spiggle’s (1994) qualitative data manipulation operations. The operations chosen to be used were categorization and abstraction, along with comparison. Categorization was done in order to identify units of data, which belong to or represent some phenomenon on a more general level (Spiggle 1994:493). Certain units of data (i.e. parts from the interview transcripts) were placed in multiple categories, if they we’re seen as belonging to more than one category. Abstraction then followed the initial categorization process in order to further limit the amount of categories by identifying “more general, conceptual classes” (Spiggle 1994:493). Comparison then mostly occurred naturally during the process. Due to the nature of the topic, the answers that were given during the data collection were not very clearly constructed or easy to place under any one category.

As the aim of the study was to examine how consumers themselves define ethicality in their consumption and how self-identity is related to these definitions no pre-determined categories of ethical consumption from the literature review were used in the interviewing process. However, after conducting the interviews it was apparent that many of the aspects brought up by the informants regarding ethical consumption could also be found in the existing literature presented earlier in this study. This connection was used in part to help in the categorization and abstraction of the original data. Thus the method of analysis could be seen as a combination of inductive and deductive approaches.

3.5 Quality of research

In this chapter the criteria of trustworthiness in naturalistic research presented by Wallendorf and Belk (1989) are discussed in connection to the current study. These five criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and integrity. They don’t apply in all of their forms to the current study, as the original context where they were used differs from that of this one. The criteria will thus only be discussed as adjusted and applicable for the current study at hand.

Assessment of credibility is used to describe how well the findings and conclusions of the study represent the studied phenomenon. This can be divided into actions taken in different parts of the study process. During data collection the techniques that can be used to enhance the credibility are the prolonged engagement and persistent observation, and triangulation across sources and methods. (Wallendorf et al. 1989:72-
Of these the one fitting the current study, which was possible to take into notice, was the triangulation across sources. This was done by choosing people from different areas of life, with different types of educational backgrounds and people who were, although familiar with the interviewer, not for the most part familiar with each other.

Assessment of transferability is carried out to see to which extent the findings of the study can be conveyed to other context with other informants. This can be done in three different ways: triangulation across sites through purposive sampling, seeking limiting exceptions and emergent design. (Wallendorf et al. 1989:80-81) The assessment of transferability can only be estimated on a general level, as the different ways mentioned were not applicable as such to the current research. By looking at the results of the study, it could be argued that similar answers are likely to appear even if the study was carried out in another country. This is due to the fact, that many of the thoughts that were brought up by the informants have already been acknowledged in previous research on ethical consumption, where the studies were executed in different countries with different kinds of samples.

Establishing dependability refers to the stability of data over time. It is based on determining whether the findings of the study would be the same if the study was carried out with the same or similar informants in the same or similar setting but at a different time (Wallendorf at al. 1989:82). The techniques used to establish dependability could not be used in this context. However, when estimated on a general level, due to the nature and topic of the research the findings might change over time even if the same exact informants were used to carry out the research. This could be explained by the fact that even right after the interviews were executed, many of the informants said that the self-reflection they were asked to do during the interviews almost automatically caused them to think of the issues of ethical consumption in a new way and increased their awareness of their own behaviour, even though the effect might have been momentary.

Establishing confirmability indicates to what extent the research findings are actually determined by the subjects of the study, and not reflecting the motivations or interests of the researcher. Neutrality here is deemed to be an inappropriate term, as absolute objectivity cannot be gained. Techniques of triangulation, reflexive journals and confirmability audit can be used to establish confirmability (Wallendorf et al. 1989:83-85) As the study was carried out by only one person, these methods could not
be used as such. The supervisor of the research process however, helped to evaluate and assess the process in total as well as strive for neutrality. Furthermore, the interviews were recorded, transcribed and stored, so that they could be accessed by anyone at a later stage. The process of analysis was explained in detail to offer a thorough explanation of what was carried out during the process along with justifications for why each step was taken.

**Assessment of integrity** concentrates on the behaviour of the informants and arises from the possible conflict that might exist between the informants and the researcher. Problems may occur when informants fear or dislike the researcher or attempt to present themselves in a more appealing way. Several ways can be used to assess and improve the integrity of research, of which triangulation (across sources), construction of rapport and trust, good interview technique and safeguarding informant identity (Wallendorf et al. 1989:86) were particularly present in the current research. Knowing the informants for the most part beforehand, made it easier to establish rapport and trust and to avoid the “social desirability bias” often linked to studies dealing with ethical consumption. The emphasis was put on the fact that I as the researcher valued the informants’ opinions as they are, rather than wanting a “socially correct” answer from them. It was also communicated to the informants that the results of the study would not reveal their identity. This is also the reason why the occupations of the informants are not presented in the study, as the relatively small sample of the study might compromise the anonymity of the informants.
4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter the main findings of the empirical research are presented and analysed. The findings will be reflected on the literature review, where a connection can be found. The aim of the study was to examine how consumers define ethical consumption and how self-identity is related to ethical consumption. As the informants were asked to describe what they understand with ethical consumption in general, how they understand it in their own consumption and if this actually reflects in their actions and whether or not the informants consider themselves to be ethical consumers, the results regarding these questions will be presented separately.

The presentation of the results is done by focusing on what actually came across the strongest in the given answers and then reflecting these answers and categories to existing theories, instead of doing this the other way around. This decision was made in order to ensure that the consumer perspective and their definitions stay at the core of these results and reflect them in the best possible way. Moreover, as the emphasis of the study was on how consumers themselves understand ethical consumption, this chapter presents multiple quotes from the informants as translated from Finnish to English. As I’ve completed my studies in English, I feel confident that the interviews are translated with sufficient adequacy.

What should also be acknowledged is that although the attitude-behavior gap was not of particular interest in this study, signs of it could very clearly be seen in the interviews. These discrepancies in the informants’ speech and behavior could also be seen as reflecting the selves of the informants, and therefore some of the most illustrative and clear examples of these are brought to the reader’s attention where they naturally occurred in the interviews in order to show the discrepancies in the actual contexts they were presented in.

Furthermore, due to the nature of the study the self is discussed in all phases of the results and analysis -chapter, which leads to connections made beyond titles. This was done also because the main concepts, ethical consumption and self-identity, came across so intertwined in the interviews. By presenting the results and analysis in this manner, the structure became more easily readable, as it prevented the situation, where I would have been forced to constantly refer to things presented earlier. To further clarify the relationship of self to the context, it is also addressed on its own in the final chapter of the results and analysis –chapter.
Lastly, it needs to be mentioned that many of the answers across the interviews could have been presented under more than one category, but I have here placed them within the category where they have the most significance.

4.1 The concept of ethical consumption (general level)

This chapter describes the different elements the informants brought up while describing the meaning of ethical consumption. When the informants were asked to describe what they understood with the concept on a general level, the occurrence of repeating themes could be found. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, on a general level the answers and therefore categorizations in reflection to them appeared much clearer than later on when the personal behaviour and opinions reflecting the self more were brought to the discussion. For this reason, the sub-categories that now follow have a much clearer structure than what can be seen later on. The most mentioned elements are categorized below along with quotations to showcase examples of what was said.

4.1.1 Working conditions

Working conditions was the most mentioned element that was connected to describing ethical consumption. It also works as an umbrella term, under which other relating elements were categorized during the analysing process. Working conditions was in many cases one of the first things the informants brought up in their responses. Informant F2 was one of those.

“In my opinion it [ethical consumption] is that how the product is produced that the conditions there are good [...]” F2

Similarly, informant F4 described the importance of knowing in what kind of conditions a piece of clothing is produced.

“[...] and then that of course that one would like know something about the origin of the product and for example in what kind of condition some piece of clothing is made, now that is really quite important [...]” F4

Informant F1 described ethical consumption as a very multidimensional concept, and went further by describing what according to her could be seen as acceptable working conditions.
“To start with I maybe think that whatever product it may be, that it is produced with sustainable methods and that the working conditions... Somehow my thoughts go directly to that coffee as I’ve here mentioned it so many times. But that in a way the working conditions there would be... acceptable, with what now maybe of course mostly means that there is enough wages, enough breaks, no children working, these kind of things” F1

What can be seen in the answer provided by F1 in contrast to the two other examples is that instead of just presenting working conditions as very general concept, she already showed a deeper understanding in the subject matter and also presented the characteristics of what these “acceptable” working conditions in her opinion entailed.

What is then common in each of these three examples is that the self is still kept very distant, as it doesn’t in a sense have to be involved in the discussion at this point. This could also explain why the informants seem to express these working conditions as the responsibility of the producer or seller of the product, rather than addressing the matter by stating that ethical consumption entails choosing to consume products that have been produced under good working conditions. In this way the answers seem to shift the responsibility more to the seller side of the spectrum.

Child labour and the origin of the production country

Categorized here, as a sub-category under Working conditions, child labour and the origin of the production country were mentioned by many of the informants in different stages of the interview, often appearing hand-in-hand in their answers. Informant F5 mentioned both children’s and adults’ working conditions when describing ethical consumption as understood on a general level.

“And just then the kind of humane perspectives, that some child, or it doesn’t even have to be children, there are adults too who work in very bad working conditions” F5

Informant F3, F6 and F4 all associated both the production country and child labour as relating to the concept of ethical consumption.
“Well depending where the clothes have been manufactured, that has child labour possibly been used in it” F3

Whereas F3 expressed this in very general terms, informant F6 actually mentioned the possible effects to the purchasing behaviour, acknowledging media as a channel of information in these matters.

“If clothes in China. Meaning that too influences very much when in the media there is for example that Adidas has been producing sneakers in China using child labour, then that affects the purchasing behaviour. At least in that moment! [Slightly laughing in the end]” F6

What remains slightly unclear here is whether or not F6 was already in a sense referring also to herself, when expressing the momentary effect of the ethical concerns raised by the media. I would make the probable assumption that this already also represents what ethical consumption is to her in her own consumption. This could also explain the slight laughter following her remarks, as the comment might be seen as not a very flattering presentation of the informant herself.

Similarly F4 seemed to be referring to ethical consumption both a general level, but also associating this described behaviour with herself. She describes the importance of knowing about the origin but in the same sentence acknowledges that (she) wants to shut her eyes from these possible ethical concerns.

“[…] and then of course that one would like know something about the origin of the product and for example in what kind of condition some piece of clothing is made, now that is really quite important but honestly said too little attention is paid to that because maybe one then wants to close one’s eyes from that, what kind a child has manufactured that piece of clothing each given time […]” F4

Informant F7, who particularly in the beginning seemed to have very little knowledge of ethical issues related to consumption and was very upfront about it, also connected the production country to the general concept.

“And then that one looked a little where they’ve [products] been produced” F7
Later on in the interview when she had already been asked to reflect the concept to her own consumption, she did bring out child labour too, as one of the things she did not like, however did this not reflect in her behaviour.

It is interesting that informants F6 and F4 voluntarily were willing to express their own shortcomings (if they could be interpreted as such in this context) in addressing their ethical concerns even before they were asked to reflect their own behaviour in connection to ethical consumption, as this seems to go against the general assumption that people often want to portray the best version of themselves.

### 4.1.2 Environmental aspects

Several informants also brought up environmental aspects from a very general concept to more detailed perceptions of what it entails. Informant F1 expressed having just lately started to think about the environmental aspects, and these descriptions were rather vague.

> “But then there is another side in my opinion to ethical consumption what I’ve lately started to think about, as on behalf of nature, the kind of climatic [...]” F1

Similarly informant F8 only made a general connection between the concepts of ethical consumption and the environment, without going into any detail. However, F8, who was very unsure of the concept of ethical consumption in its meaning in general, expressed her though from the actual consumer perspective, saying that it is the consumer that should think about the environment.

> “Ethical, so I guess one should then think a little about the environment” F8

Informant F2 on the other hand clearly had a much more constructed thought about the role of environmental issues in ethical consumption and showed an understanding of the longer term effects of these aspects.

> “[...] and that it [a product] would be produced saving natural resources or by using them in moderation or that the life circle of the product would be the kind where its final location place would not burden the environment” F2

Informant F2 did also express her concern on the future of the planet. This line of thought is similar to the descriptions on ethical consumption given by Hong and Song (in Oh et al. 2014) as it shows signs of consideration of pro environmental behaviour,
waste recycling and disposal and simultaneously to that of Hong and Shin (in Oh et al. 2014) as it also takes into consideration the time orientation.

However, informant F2 also formed her thoughts through what the production of the product should be like, rather than expressing it by saying that ethical consumption contains the idea of purchasing products that fill these mentioned criteria.

Similarly to F2, F1 later on in the interview also discussed the life cycle of the product, but expressed much more strongly this from the consumer’s perspective. This could however result from the fact that we had already progressed in the interview to a phase where the informant was also talking about ethical consumption from her own point of view, instead of just discussing it on a general level. The following answer however did reflect what she understood as ethical consumption on a general level.

[...] well actually ethical consumption in my opinion doesn’t end with you buying, but that in a way also what the ending point to it is. That too in a way is ethical consumption that you’ve bought from a flea market because that, whatever thing it may be, gets a longer life cycle” F1

Relating to this, informant F5 mentioned electronics and their ending place.

“And then of course one example of that [ethical consumption] what I’ve now read a little about is for example electronics. Or that kind of waste that results from electronics which doesn’t decompose just like that to anywhere. That if everyone buys a new phone each time a new model comes out even though the old one is still working, then there’s that electronic waste like which cannot be necessarily always reused to anything. Then then, where does it go, where is it shoved to. [...]” F5

Furthermore, when informant F5, who earlier in the interview had expressed that she considered buying for a need to be ethical consumption, was asked why she thought so, she brought up a long cause-and-affect –chain, presenting the environmental aspects but also things relating to working conditions.

“Well maybe that that the world is drowning in all that stuff if everyone buys only by a whim like everything. I mean really when we are drowning in all that crap that comes from all that excessive consumption, so maybe that like in my opinion. And then, and then of course that the more people buy the more has to be produced and the more then is produced cheaply somewhere in an unethical way so that is kind of a squirrels wheel.” F5
The remarks made on environmental aspects relating to the concept of ethical consumption varied in their perspective and in their focus points. Environmental concerns were also identified as one of the research streams in ethical consumption by Wooliscroft et al. (2013). Regarding the self, as the concept of ethical consumption was described on a general level, it cannot clearly be seen in these given answers. As will be indicated later on, this could be resulting from the fact that when spoken on a general level, the informants did not have to explain themselves as much. As many of the explanations were to explain discrepancies between their thoughts and behavior, on this general level the informants did not have the deal with these discrepancies.

4.1.3 Buying local produce

Buying local produce was also seen as elements linked to ethical consumption, however the responses seemed perhaps more apprehensive than in the case of some other categories, expressing more of an uncertainty if these things really actually relate to ethical consumption. Informant F8 considered Finnish to be a better choice.

“That one would maybe make a little better choices, would buy Finnish.” F8

A very similar comment was made by informant F3, but instead of Finnish, she only referred to local. Again, as with F8, a certain uncertainty can be seen in her answer.

“[…J Thinks a little about where one buys. Is it local, that also maybe in a way is connected to that on some level […]” F3

The matter of local produce was not always presented as unproblematic as can be seen in the answer of informant F1, who appeared to have thought about the subject on a wider level. Similarly to F8 and F3 she seemed uncertain. Her answer also seems to be linking to the environmental aspect as she refers to the transportation.

“[…] and what I’ve thought about a lot is that for example if one buys Finnish that then that is in a way ethical… or is it. I don’t know. A little difficult or well maybe in that sense that it is near-produced meaning that it avoids that long transportation […]” F1

Then again informant F6 was very clear about her opinion, emphasizing that this was how she in general understood the concept. She also used the term values in this context.
“And in my opinion ethical consumption is in a way also that kind of values, that when one consumes products produced nearby, then that too is ethical consumption in my opinion” F6

Much like in the previous sub-chapter, also here the self is less visible in the informants’ speech. However, as they moved from, what could be considered as the more well-acknowledged areas of what usually is connected to ethical consumption, to less spoken areas, they also seemed to underline their statements with words such as “maybe”, “I don’t know” and “in my opinion”, thus presenting their own perspective a little more.

4.1.4 Moderate consumption / Un-impulsive consumption

Another theme that occurred in the data when the informants were asked to describe what they understand as ethical consumption on a general level was moderate consumption or un-impulsive consumption. For informant F7, the primary thing she associated with ethical consumption was not buying any un-necessities. This reflects the idea of consuming in moderation.

“Well maybe the thing that primarily comes to mind, is that one doesn’t buy any un-necessities” F7

Similarly informant F5 seemed to express the idea of moderation. She however took it further by suggesting that one does not always have to own everything, rather supporting the idea of a sharing economy, particularly in situations where the product is not needed on a daily basis.

“And maybe in general, that does there really always have to be that much stuff, like do you have to own everything, that you can for example also loan when needed. That if there isn’t that kind of daily need […]” F5

Informant F5 also brought up the concept of need, expressing her view that buying only for a need is in a way the essence of ethical consumption. This reflects the same thought as that of informant F7. F5 continued by saying that making carefully considered consumption choices instead of impulsive decisions was also a part of ethical consumption.
“Well in my opinion ethical consumption is exactly that one buys only for a need. [...] And then on the other hand in my opinion ethical consumption is also that, somehow, that there is a clear line/policy that one doesn't always go into all the momentary nonsenses, buys and then realises that one uses it for two weeks [...] F5

The same kind of thought was clearly expressed by informant F4, as she too connected making reasoned consumption choices as being part of ethical consumption. Already at this point, she also acknowledged that this was not something that she herself did. What is interesting here is that informant F4 also already expressed her own shortcomings earlier on when discussing about working conditions.

“Well maybe that sort of thing, what I have not now here sounded very much like, that one does not buy anything that pops into their mind [laughing], that one would like plan a little beforehand” F4

What can be seen in the answer of informant F4 is that it portrays both the ideal consumption and the actual consumption of the individual, which can also be seen as reflecting the ideal and actual selves. Informant F8 then also connected ethical consumption to buying what one actually needs. Whereas F7 referred to not buying unnecessities, F8 used the term excessive consumption, with the core message being the same. Informant F8 however also included the idea of avoiding things going to waste.

“ [...] and maybe to buy in such a manner that not much would go to waste, that one would buy what one needs. And in principle that there would not be like excessive consumption” F8

What can clearly be seen across all these responses is the idea of connecting the concept of ethical consumption to making reasoned consumption choices and buying things for a need. The concept of need as such was not clearly defined, but F5’s description relating to this can later be seen when ethical consumption on a personal level is discussed in chapter 4.2.1.

The moderate consumption or un-impulsive consumption and buying for a need could be related to the research stream of ethical consumption concerning downshifting, which Etzioni (1998) names as the lowest intensity level of voluntary simplicity, as they
seem to indicate that consumers themselves also associate these with the general concept of ethical consumption.

4.1.5 Cruelty free / Animal rights

Also animal rights and cruelty free products were associated with ethical consumption. The viewpoints regarding animal rights varied from to the use of animal products for food and clothing to animal testing in cosmetics, like seen in the answer of informant F6.

“Well if we talk about for example the cosmetics, then ethical consumption to me is that there isn’t for example cosmetics tested on animals [...]” F6

Here the relationship to the subject is expressed in a rather distant way, placing the words in a way that doesn’t really speak about the consumer role, but that there should not in general be cosmetics which have been tested on animals. This could partially be explained by the fact that later on as the interview evolved further, the informant was faced with the fact that even though she initially expressed not buying cosmetics tested on animals, for the most part she did not really pay attention to the matter after all.

Informant F1 on the other hand associated these animal issues primarily to clothing and food, and here too, the comment was rather vague, expressed just as something that should be acknowledged.

“And also maybe then [...] the producer’ starting point or what is it, this origin, in the sense that there can be a lot of animal products in clothing or in food. So of course there too are a lot of defects which are good to acknowledge somehow in my opinion” F1

What seemed to affect whether these thoughts translated to action on some level, was some kind of personal relationship with the animals. This can be seen in the answer of informant F4, who started by saying that if she had the money, she would rather buy organic meat. She brought herself and her own behaviour in the discussion already when asked about what she understood with ethical consumption in general.

“Because you think of the conditions of the animals and as I myself have like grown up with animals, then particularly, well organic eggs I always buy because we’ve had chickens when I was little, so I can’t somehow think about that, that they would be in some miniature cage pushing out eggs [laughs] but
then again it's contradictory because I do still eat regular chicken but not like insanely much [...]” F4

Justifying or reasoning her behaviour, which could be seen as explaining it both to herself and to me, here presents the first indication of perhaps the narrative self, aiming to maintain the consistency of the self, as described by Sökefeld (1999), when in fact there actually is a significant discrepancy appearing in the person’s behaviour.

Sökefeld’s description of the narrative self is very important here, as it comes through in so many instances during the interviews. To recap its meaning, according to Sökefeld (1999:425) “the consistency of the self rests on the ability to describe one’s action and ideas in a more or less consistent way” and it is through the narrative self that the individual creates a personal image relating to the identities that the self embraces. Also of much importance if the notion of Giddens (1991:215) that the narrative of self-identity needs to be “shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life [...]”.

Informant F4 also took the option to an extreme, in a sense representing the alternative to be something unreachable or unrealistic, instead of for example simply not choosing to consume chicken at all, which then could be considered a very reachable thing. The following also reflects her need to shift blame, which was connected to the attitude-behavior gap (Wooliscroft et al. 2013), from her own actions to other factors, again aiming to keep the self consistent with the perception the individual has of herself.

“But there is also that it has been made so difficult in Finland to buy organic chicken that like... Or that it is so insanely expensive that if I would now start to put all my money into organic chicken then with this income I wouldn’t eat much of else than chicken wings [laughs]” F4

This kind of exaggeration could also be seen as linking to the possible self-schema of Schouten (2015:422), as the “perceived attainability of a possible self” is expressed as very low, linking this to social constraints as also suggested by Schouten.

Informant F5 on the other hand was very clear to begin with, in wanting to express the discrepancies which she acknowledged also in her own thoughts and actions. However, again much like F4 she took the alternative to an extreme by bringing endangered
animals to the discussion instead of using an example closer to her own reality, this way making her own actions seem less unethical. This then, could also be seen as a way for the self to correct itself so that the person is able to maintain a certain idea of herself.

"Well then there is on the other hand for example the animals and materials coming from animals. There on the other hand I think its hypocrite, I am against fur but I still use leather shoes. Okay I on the one hand understand that leather shoes can be made also like from an animal so that no endangered animal has to be hunted from there but like these are a little like lines drawn on water like where the line goes like when is it ethical and when not. But if something, well for example killing endangered animals just for the purpose of some lady getting a fur, that that in my opinion is wrong. [...]" F5

Particularly interesting in the case of F5 was that it wasn’t until much later in the interview, that she brought up the fact that she did not eat red meat or chicken due to ethical reasons. When asked about this she replied that this was such a solid part of her, and as I would suggest therefore the self that she did not even come to think of it as she was telling what ethical consumption was in general.

Other elements that were mentioned to a lesser extent were fair trade, organic products and product quality. Now if we look at all these answers and relate them to the ways the concept of ethical consumption was categorized in the literature review, they seem to be most compatible with the categorization of Clark and Unterberger (in Oh et al. 2014:280), as they relate to topics such as sustainable consumption, selective buying and buying local goods. Indications to the other categorization could also be found, as described earlier on.

If we look at the potential occurrence of the self in these answers, it seems that when the informants brought their own behaviour to the context, the narrative self came through, aiming to maintain the consistency of the self. The ones, who approached the subject at this point on a more general level, seemed to feel less of a need to explain themselves, and thus the self was not as visible.

After asking the informants to describe ethical consumption as they in general understood the concept, they were faced with a question of what ethicality was in their own consumption. This topic will be introduced in the following chapter.
4.2 The informants as ethical consumers

It became obvious at an early stage that the answers regarding the individuals’ own consumption were not always actual presentations of how the informants really behaved. After answering what they considered as ethical consumption in their own consumption, they also had to answer, if these thoughts really translated to their actions and whether or not they perceived themselves to be ethical consumers. As the answers to these questions were very much intertwined, all of these answers will be presented and analysed in this section.

In contrast to the general level, it seems apparent, that when the informants brought themselves and therefore their selves into the discussion, the answers shattered into much more complicated structures, where everything seemed to connect with everything. This also supports the notion of the self as being fragmented (Jameson in Sökefeld 1999:417) and not necessarily consistent (Biddle et al. in Sparks et al. 1992:389). Thus, the quite clear categories that could be created based on the concept on a general level (chapter 4.1), compared to what now follows, serves as an excellent presentation of how the presence of the self makes managing of the concept of ethical consumption much more difficult to the individual. The actual presentation of these results thus serves as a reflection of these complexities. Signs of this could already be seen in chapter 4.1 when in some instances the informants’ started to reflect their own actions into what they in general understood with ethical consumption, as the occurrence of the narrative self was seen to be detected.

Moreover, my initial idea was to present the contradictions in speech and behaviour as a separate category, but the interviews turned out to be so self-reflective on such a profound level, that for the most part, the informants became and made themselves aware of their own discrepancies, which were then discussed further. Thus, this sub-chapter works as an overview of a combination of several different observations that rose from the interview data.

What now follows, are some of the key points that could be made with regards to these particular questions.

4.2.1 The concept of ethical consumption (personal level)

This chapter aims to create an understanding of the actual things the informants considered as ethical consumption for them in their own consumption. The many
relating findings and observations rising from the data are also discussed here, where seen appropriate.

For informant F2 the same principles applied in how she sees ethical consumption in her own consumption, as what she expressed it to be on a general level.

"They [same principles as on the general level] guide, I’ve started to look more and more for example in clothes that what is their production country. And then that I don’t necessarily always aim at buying the cheapest [option] and in food I favor organic- and local food" F2

What can be seen from this and many of the other remarks along the interview, is that for informant F2 the origin of the product was one very concrete thing that actually reflected in her behavior, whether it was a piece of clothing or groceries, such as meat, vegetables, dairy or buying fair trade coffee.

Organic produce was in fact brought up in seven out of the eight interviews that were conducted. It related either to what the informants understood with ethical consumption, what it was for them in their own consumption, or something they wished they could purchase more. Particularly the latter was brought up by many.

Later on, when telling if there were any products she did not use due to ethical concerns, she continued as follows.

“[…] well soy products are something that I’ve tried to avoid as I don’t use much of dairy products except for cheese, then I replaced it with soy products but then realized that those are not the best possible option for the environment either so I moved to oat-products. […] And what I too refuse from are those, this is really new, maybe within the last half a year, that I don’t buy clothing from H&M, BikBok, Cubus, these kind of places.” F2

She described these stores as selling bulk fashion, and that the reason she did not want to buy from them, was that if the production country was Cambodia, the production condition couldn’t necessarily be good for the workers. This could be seen as a form of boycotting certain types of firms due to ethical concerns. Boycotts were also acknowledged as one of the behavioral realms of ethical consumption by Harrison et al. (2005) and as a part of the concept by Clark et al. (in Oh et al. 2014). The behavior of F2 seems to refer to company-oriented purchasing (or non-purchasing in this case) also identified by Harrison et al. (2005).
What had partially affected this behavior was that she had seen a series of documentaries from these types of clothing factories, which then affected the fact that she did not want to support that kind of production anymore. Interesting in her answer is that it seems to portray ethical consumption as an evolving process, which is constantly changing as the knowledge increases.

She also named media in general as a big influence on what had affected her own thoughts and behavior. It is of interest to notice that sometimes the effects are more permanent, as in the case of most informants, they expressed the momentary effect of the media. This will be discussed further in chapter 4.2.3. Moreover, even though her attitudes reflected in her actual behavior, certain amount of flexibility could be seen as she for example stated buying fair trade coffee for her home, if she was the one buying the coffee and eating regular meat, if there was no organic option available at the store.

These kinds of examples of flexibility occurred in most of the interviews, and were also brought up in the literature review as studied in connection to conscious consumer’s behavior by Szmigin et al. (2009). They found flexibility to be closely related to the competing priorities consumers have. Both of these issues rose clearly also in the present study but they won’t be discussed separately as this connection was already found in previous research, as conscious consumer’s behavior is so close to the concept of ethical consumption behavior. However, they will be more closely looked at in the light of how the self is possibly involved in these behaviors.

Moving on to another informant, interestingly F5, who was actually doing a lot of things to act on her ethical concerns, much like F2, still seemed to emphasize more of the things that she failed to act on. These were the things she brought up when asked what ethical consumption was to her in her own consumption.

“Well I’m trying to be better at it. Or that it is a thing that I would like to acknowledge even better just in the sense that I wouldn’t necessarily do those impulse purchases just like that but that I would check like if I really need this thing or would buy... that I would go buy when I notice that I have a need that I am missing... That I don’t for example have shoes that are not broken, and then I buy them. And not that I don’t have these in three different colors I now need one more pair of this color to match this and this. So that I would make it a little more sensible or using money or consumption in general [...]” F5
Here the concept of need is also explained, as the issue was addressed from another angle in the previous chapter. F5 first brought out what she regarded as her shortcomings, but did bring out several actual things that she did to act on her ethical concerns.

"And just to those materials, like I try to think of them and then especially now in food somehow you notice that like in recent years I’ve started to think about really much, that how it’s, like just I’ve been a vegetarian for four-five years soon now and I buy a lot of seasonal and organic products. Or somehow like when you can, when you, I don’t have like a lot of money but just enough to be able to think what I buy from out there. That I would buy mainly just organically produced or small farm things, that to that kind I invest more all the time." F5

The common denominator for F2 and F5 were the organic-, and local products, which they expressed actually consuming. What was interesting when comparing the differences of their answers was that for F2 the emphasis seemed to be on clothing – related issues, whereas F5’s focus seemed to be in food and more on animals, although they did both express ethical concerns in both areas. Whereas F2 expressed boycotting H&M, F5 mentioned it as one of the stores she buys from, in the very beginning of the interview. Informant F5 however was very aware of her shortcomings on these areas and expressed them too, but perhaps more on the environmental aspect.

Another commonality then between these two was that they both seemed to think that they were able to afford to take ethical concerns into consideration in their consumption, as also F2 addressed this issue.

“[…] I feel like in the recent years like with all that I’ve read from the media and otherwise what has been newsworthy, that I’ve gotten this really strong urge that now that I’m at work and I have a regular income, that I would use that money sensibly, […] so that the consumption would be ethical”. F2

This is interesting as in many of the interviews the higher price of ethical products seemed to be one of the primary reasons people did not consume as ethically they wished to, regardless of the fact if they had a regular income or not. This again, could be seen as an indication of a matter of priority, and that to these two particular informants, who were the ones behaving most in line with their ethical concerns, ethicality seemed to be a more important part of their core identity than to the others. This then, could be seen as linking to the possible self-schema of Schouten (2015) as in
the case of these two informants the motivation power seems to have been sufficient in order for them to actualize their possible self partially through the consumption of instrumental goods, which here are the ethical consumption choices they actually make on a continuous bases.

Looking at informant F4, when she was asked to describe what ethical consumption was to her in her own consumption, she was undecided of whether or not her actions were really related to her wanting to be ethical or if her situation in some ways just made her act in a certain way.

“Well apart from those eggs [she earlier told she always bought organic eggs] then maybe just that, that I try to make more of vegetarian food at home because of the meat, because you don’t always know where it’s from and then organic is expensive. And now lately I’ve been especially trying to buy used clothes, really almost all, but that has been due to my financial situation as well. Like I would LIKE in principle to go out there and just buy every possible fancy dress from COS that they have, but maybe like this [pause] I don’t know if you can call it an ethical choice if you’re like almost sort of forced to it.” F4

Informant F4 continued by saying that regardless of what the actual reason for her buying second-hand –clothes was, she felt better after buying them used. What is interesting here is that although she otherwise named price as one of the reasons she did not consume as ethically as she perhaps wished to, in this case, money was actually what in a sense made her consume more ethically.

Similarly to F2, informant F7 appeared to be much in line with what she regarded ethical consumption to be on a general level, to be the same in her own consumption

“Well maybe I’ve given up on that kind of unnecessary purchases. That I rather invest and buy less and for example a brand and better quality than then buying everything one just happens to think about” F7

However, much like with informant F4, when asked if the motivation in these actions was ethicality or something else, F7 said that in all honestly the reasons were really not her ethical concerns, but just the fact that she wanted things to be of good quality. When probed further, she did express other things that she felt she didn’t approve of in principle, in terms of things that could be considered as ethical issues
"Well could it then be like how I maybe myself always think about it, that I don’t really like those child labor things that much or that kind of... Can I think of it like that?" F7

She continued by making further observations, actually showing a much deeper consideration of the issues than she initially gave reason to expect, addressing similar kind of concerns as for example F2.

“Yes, well maybe that is like that kind of primary thing to me or in general child labor, cheap labor, produced somewhere. Like for example there are big brands that produce in some Bangladesh or over there with small wages and then sell with expensive prices. That sort of things I don’t maybe accept.” F7

When asked if this had any effect on her behavior, if she avoided these products or how it showed, she was indecisive, but leaned more to the fact that ethical concerns were not a determining factor even with regard to these issues, but that other competing priorities drew a longer straw.

"[laughing] I don’t know really. Well maybe it shows to some extent. But if I find something really cool, then I haven’t really thought about where it is produced. Like for example I don’t know where Vans [which was discussed earlier] produces its shoes or if it uses cheap labor. In a sense it is not like the defining factor maybe in those consumption choices" F7

This could be seen as an indication of the priority-issue discussed earlier on, as in her case, the ethical issues are perhaps not fundamental enough to the individual’s self-perception so that she would act according to these concerns.

Similarly to informant F7, informant F3 described ethical consumption to her as buying for a need.

“Well it is that purchasing for a need, and then I pursue at buying from flea markets to find things and from like some tori.fi [an online flea market] or other. Furniture is usually all purchased from somewhere else [than as new from a regular store i.e. bought as used].” F3

For informant F3 buying from flea markets seemed to be an actual voluntary act due to ethical concerns, unlike for F4, even though the outcome was naturally the same. The same phenomenon was also presented the other way around, as at a later point in the interview, informant F5 named recycling her clothes as one of the things where she
feels like she’s doing good in terms of ethical consumption. Also informant F8 said that a good thing that she does in terms of ethical consumption was that she sells her clothes at the flea market. However, it appears that the motivations here were not primarily in being ethical.

For informant F6 ethical consumption in her own consumption was much the same as expressed being on a general level, however she did appear very unsure in her answer.

“Well I guess like, like [pauses] this kind of, well like the animal testing [pauses]. Like if I know that there is some brand that doesn’t use animal testing, then I rather buy that one than some other. And then the ethicality, I don’t even know if it is ethical. Well yeah, and just that that if I know that a brand has been produced in a way that good business principles have been violated, meaning using child labor or something, then that it is for me too.” F6

To clarify the given answer, the latter part of it presumably refers to the preceding sentence, just the other way around that the informant rather buys from another brand than the one that has violated these principles. This answer relates to that introduced under child labor (under 4.1.1.) where the informant acknowledged the momentary effect of hearing that Adidas has used child labor. Thus the conclusion could be drawn that this example in fact presents the gap between her speech and actual behavior, thus not actually representing what she does in terms of ethical consumption.

What is also interesting in the answer of F6 is that she expresses favoring cosmetics that are not animal tested, but not avoiding cosmetics that are animal tested. Along the interview it became apparent that the information needs to be given to her, rather than she would actively search for this information. Similar kinds of indications of convenience and certain kind of effortlessness as a competing, and in most cases winning, priority could be seen throughout the interviews, but again, these have already been studied in relation to ethical consumption, and are thus not focused on further.

As was predicted, the areas of interest in terms of ethical concerns in the actual consumption of the informants covered many different areas, between different focus points. For example F5 was particularly interested in ethical issues concerning meat production, but didn’t really pay attention to ethical issues when for example buying clothes, which then e.g. informant F2 felt was very important to her in her own consumption. Thus, perhaps the bigger discovery here is related to the underlying factors behind these answers and the potential occurrence of the self in these answers.
4.2.2 Perception of oneself as an ethical consumer

In this sub-chapter two main areas linking with each other are discussed. First of all, it is interesting to see whether or not the informants considered themselves to be ethical consumers, as their behaviour and ethical concerns varied significantly, but also their perception of themselves with regards to their actions showed much variation. These notions are linked as seen reflected on the self of the individuals. Moreover, what then came across in each of the interviews were the informants’ feelings of wanting or needing to do better in terms of ethical consumption.

Informant F1, who could be described as being one of the most informed of the interviewees with regards to the concept of ethical consumption, did not consider herself to be a particularly ethical consumer when asked, and expressed wanting to be better in this sense.

“I have to say no, because I know things where I would like to do better and I claim that [pause] I have looked into things and there has been courses and somehow that that I know but then I don’t act like [pause] one would maybe think like. So in that sense there are shortcomings and then second of all sometimes it falls simply for... what then is maybe classified and is guaranteed to be an ethical product, then its price is just too high for my budget as a student. So in an ideal situation I would see that I would be a much more ethical consumer that fits better like to my values in the future... meaning this fall ” F1

What is interesting here is that she seems to be referring both to her present and future self, that could also be seen as presenting her actual self as well as her possible or ideal self. All of these different selves were also discussed as separate from ethical consumption in the literature review. With the financial restrictions being one of the reasons she gave for not considering herself to be an ethical consumer, also a few other things were mentioned that she felt were keeping her from being what she expressed she would like to be. The most clear one appearing here is convenience or laziness.

“Well what now comes to mind from this is eating meat. And in every way it is pretty minor the meat eating, chicken and eggs I do eat. Somehow I still classify eggs and chickens on a different level, but knowing how big part of chickens are treated so there is some disconnection there in a sense in my knowing and then in my behavior. But for some reason even though I am by no means a heavy user of meat to say the least. Or well in my own opinion I still feel that meat has a place in my life. That I am maybe not in that kind of place where I knew how
to. And it can maybe also be, if we're being completely honest here. Then it can sometimes also be just pure laziness. That the change or changing those behavior patterns could require in a way so much [pause] finding out about things, planning and [pause] a certain kind of discomfort in the transition phase, if we now speak in this kind of very theoretical way but in a way even if I was to leave the meat out completely, I would have to find out a lot of how to replace it. And before I've come up with foods that I have the energy to make on a weekly basis with adequate variation so that I don't get sick of it [break] then I think that it is a little of that sort of “njah, I can't bother” if I now relieve my soul in this way [laughs]” F1

What can be seen here is the way the informant feels the need to emphasize that she in fact eats very little meat, which could again be seen as the narrative self, feeling the need to keep the self consistent with the idea the person has of herself, as she seems to struggle with having so much knowledge on ethical issues and having these concerns, but not acting according to them. She did also acknowledge this gap herself, but continued later on by emphasizing that she understood that knowing that things were either good or bad was not enough, that her thoughts should also reflect in her behavior.

If we look at this in contrast to informant F6, who did consider herself at least in the beginning of the interview as an ethical consumer, it is interesting to notice, that she seems to think there are many different levels of ethicality, where perhaps the lowest form of ethicality is having awareness of the different ethical issues.

“[…] my experience of ethicality is that the most unethical thing it that one does not even recognize ethicality as one of the factors one should evaluate when making purchase decision. […] So THAT to me is most unethical, that one does not even RECOGNIZE these things, and is not ready to have a discussion and does not want to understand them. […] But that if you like recognize and acknowledge these things and asp… have the aspiration then that in my opinion is already something […]” F6

Similarly to F1, she did however continue by acknowledging that this was not enough.

“[…] But of course it isn’t, only until then, […] until then when you practice what you preach, then then you are ethical [whispering ‘maybe’ in the end]” F6

Relating to this, she described ethicality in her consumption as follows.
“Well like if you think of the reasons why one buys something, there are many of them. And sometimes one reason for choosing a product can be that it’s been ethically produced. But sometimes it can be something totally different. [...] For me ethicality is maybe like one reason among other reasons. Sometimes it gets more weight and then sometimes less. [...] Like if I have here like one, two, three, four all the affecting reasons to my consumption decision, then the ethicality is there [...]” F6

Informant F2 also considered herself to be rather aware of ethical issues. Already when asked to describe herself as a consumer in general, she used the term “aware” of herself, saying that she opts for her consumption to be ethical. She was also one of the two informants (with F6 being the other) who perceived herself to be an ethical consumer.

However, as the interview continued and she was faced with explaining a purchase she had made, which she did not consider to be ethical, rather an impulse purchase, she told that she only considered ethical issues on certain areas of her consumption, which supports the notion that most people only take part in “few, select aspects of ethical consumption” (McDonald et al.; Shaw and Newholm in Wooliscroft et al. 2013:60), as seen in the interview data also in general. This did not however influence the fact that she considered herself as an ethical consumer also on a more general level.

When comparing the answers given by informants F1 and F2, who both shared numerous ethical concerns and expressed a deeper knowledge base than F6, what comes across is that the more in line the behavior was with the attitudes, the less the informant had to explain oneself. Whereas F1 did not consider herself to be an ethical consumer, but wanted to be more ethical, and had a lot of knowledge on several issues, she explained herself extensively, whereas F2, who felt that her behavior was pretty much (or adequately) in line with her thoughts, did not feel the need to explain herself to the same extent. This could then perhaps indicate that in case of F2 the self was able to remain consistent, whereas in the case of F1, the narrative of self-identity was needed more, in order for the self to remain consistent enough.

Similarly to informant F1 also F3 felt that she could be better, while not perceiving herself as an ethical consumer.

“Well I can’t say that I would necessarily be a very ethical consumer necessarily. Just like. Like very strongly. No, could improve.” F3
In a similar way, also F4 felt that she wasn’t a particularly ethical consumer, and that she could think a lot more about different ethical issues. She did however credit herself for the things she did.

“Well not very [ethical consumer] like I could think a lot more about everything but it is still this closing eyes a little like if one doesn’t want to watch the news when something horrible is happening in the world, then you like try to distance yourself from that thing. But you notice it in like that, still with those eggs [laughs] that because I have been in connection to those chickens so then I don’t like... It’s a lot more natural and I just sort of feel like I have to buy those organic eggs, so if I would have visited a clothing factory or something like that there would be like a concrete touching surface to it, then one could not shut one’s eyes from that issue anymore. But it is just so easy this way to distance oneself and then think that I am a good person if I do one like a more ethical choice but [pause] on the other hand you have to draw the line somewhere, guess it is good that you even try something.” F4

If we look at how the self could possibly be seen in the answer, it appears that again, ethicality is not the defining factor or a matter of priority to the individual, and therefore she seems rather content with what she currently is, her present self, despite of expressing the potential room for improvement.

Similarly to F4, informant F7 did not perceive herself as an ethical consumer, and acknowledged that it could be good to think more about these issues.

“Judging from my previous answers, no [not an ethical consumer]. Maybe it would be like sometimes good to think a little more about where the clothing is from and how they are made. But maybe at the same time it’s just that I myself maybe feel like that the market is so big and the demand is after all so huge, that even though you yourself as an individual person would make the decision to boycott for example these. Then again maybe that kind of contradiction of that [pause] what is the benefit or something.” F7

As this seemed particularly interesting, I asked her to elaborate further.

“Well how should I put it. Well in any case if I leave a shirt and don’t buy it from H&M [which she used repeatedly as an example of an unethical company], I’m going to use it as an example here, then there are still so many hundreds of others buying the same shirt that it doesn’t like, that it would take so much bigger mass movement than just my, me deciding to not buy. That is maybe a
little what it’s about… or like I just always think what is the chance of affecting that.” F7

This shows the teleological evaluation (Vitell 2003) the informant makes as she evaluates the possible outcome, which in this case is seen as her not being able to make a difference and thus does not seem to think that any additional harm will be done if she decides to buy from this particular store, or even more so, nothing good will result from her decision not to buy. It also shows the social embeddedness of the self in the society, as the self is connected to the surrounding circumstances and to other people, also relating to the notions of Newholm et al. (2007) as they described ethical consumption as an “individual and collective project”.

Informant F7’s explanation could also again be seen as shifting blame, connected to the attitude-behavior gap (Wooliscroft et al. 2013), as the individual resigns from responsibility, convincing herself and in this case the interviewer that her actions are not enough to make a difference, and for this reason, chooses not to do anything. This way the self can also maintain consistent, as she presents this as a situation that is out of her power. Alternatively, this could also indicate that the potential, more ethical self is insufficiently desirable or the “perceived attainability of a possible self” is too low, resulting in inaction with regards to the possible self as suggested by Schouten (2015).

Moreover, as discussed and pointed out earlier, the more aware of ethical issues the informants were, the more they seemed to feel the need to explain their behavior when it was not reaching the same level as their attitudes. On the contrary, the one’s that did not have such a deep understanding of the issues or had much less ethical concerns, did not feel the same kind of need to explain their behavior, even though they did nothing or very little with regards to ethical consumption.

To point out some of the common denominators in the answers that were given, throughout the interview linking to this particular subject, was that the informants expressed a clear wish of wanting to be better when it comes to consuming more ethically. The examples presented here thus present only a small portion of these notions. In most cases the areas of consumption they expressed their concerns and hopes of being better, were actually quite attainable. What then explains the lack of corresponding behavior could be found in the competing priorities the informants as well as in an insufficient desirability of a potentially more ethical self.
The possibility should also be acknowledged that the fact that each of the informants said that they should or would like to be better, could be a sign of the social desirability bias often linking to the occurrence of the attitude behavior gap (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005), or seen as a presentation of the future identity of a person, representing what one wishes or feels obligated of becoming (Leary et al. 2012:69). After coming to the realization of what the informants themselves expressed as shortcomings in this area, they could have simply felt the need to express this wish to be better. These answers could however also actually reflect the informants’ ideal self (Sirgy 1986:287), as presenting the “image of oneself as one would like to be”.

The ways the informants were able to manage their expressed discrepancies, are presented and analyzed next.

4.2.3 Managing discrepancies in the face of competing priorities

It became clear at an early stage, that most of the informants were faced with their own contradictions between and within their actions and thoughts as the interviews evolved. What became of interest to understand was how they managed these discrepancies, as it could also be seen as a form of how the self was visible in relation to the informants’ ethical consumption and how the informants were able to maintain a sense of self which was enough to meet their perception of themselves.

These issues are addressed in the following sections.

OUT OF SIGHT OUT OF MIND

A recurring theme that came across in the interview was a certain kind of willingness to block unpleasant information from oneself or what could be called as active forgetting. Some of the informants seemed to be very forgiving and easily forgetting of e.g. things they saw in the media which raised their ethical concerns. Some examples on this are presented as follows.

When faced with the fact that informant F1 did not behave according to her attitudes, she described the way she managed these discrepancies in the following way.

“I would like to say that I feel guilty but I do think that I’m just really good at classifying and maybe at explaining [...] to excuse myself and often times it is really true, but often times it does fall to, well to that financial situation that lets
say the coffee that I would maybe like to buy costs almost six euros which is half
more expensive than the one I bought today, then with that kinds of excuses it's
really easy then maybe do those choices but in all honesty I also think that I... at
a grocery store I operate with such routine [...] that I don't even stay there much
and compare. [...]” F1

I later on got in touch with her to ask her to further explain what she meant by
classifying in this context, and she replied that by this she referred to feelings, that it
would be nice to buy the six euro coffee because it would be a better choice, but that she
pretty easily just ignores it by not affording it. This serves as an example of where we
could perhaps see, that in order for her not having to question her sense of an ethical
self, it is easier to just ignore the issue entirely or convince oneself that the more ethical
choice is not realistically in her reach, again referring to the “perceived attainability of a
possible self” of Schouten (2015:422) when in fact it perhaps is only a matter of
prioritizing.

Informant F2 then, who considered herself as an ethical consumer and expressed
numerous ethical concerns, much like informant F1, had the following answer on how
the compromises she said she had to make sometimes affected how she feels.

“Well you get a bad conscience. It doesn’t haunt you for days but like a bad
conscience that you sort of blame yourself [...]” F2

This answer reflects one of the core notions that occurred in many of the answers, that
the effects of these discrepancies are momentary. This same phenomenon repeated for
example in the answers of informant F6.

“Well just like, that if they report that Adidas has been using child labor to
produce some shoes in China, then that affects my like next purchase decision if
it happens to be in the near future. But then when more time passes I forget
about it and then I buy Adidas again. Like that’s how it, like I’m not that
conscious all the time, that it would guide my purchasing behavior that
strongly. But in that moment yes.” F6

Informant F6 returned to this momentariness in another example later on, as she was
describing a time when she now thinks she consumed in an unethical way, by buying
cosmetics from L’Oreal even though she at least had known that they used animal
testing. The other competing priorities however weighted more.
“[…] And then if the product has been good, I’ve liked it, then then I have perhaps kind of more actively unknowingly forgotten about the previous and then continued again.” F6

When asked what she meant by “actively unknowingly forgetting” she made a gesture of pushing with her hand away from herself. This seems to perhaps imply that the self rejects the unwelcomed information knowingly, as it is in contradiction with her other priorities, but still wants to remain the sense of an ethical consumer.

Similarly F1 reported having bought fair trade coffee after watching a document of the subject, but judging by the wording in her answer this ethical purchasing behaviour did not however continue further along the way due other factors, which in her case were understood to be price-related.

[…] It was because I had just seen a document where they went through coffee production. It was the sort of though raising... And it wasn’t a foreign concept or area to begin with but we discussed it so much afterwards and then I happened to go to the store straight following that and I had to buy coffee, so in that situation I did sort of freeze you know because you felt so hypocritical when you had just spent the last two hours just pondering about coffee and they you go to that coffee shelve and choose something from there which could very possibly be coming from the hands of EXACTLY those children that you just watched in the film […] but actually then I did buy the most expensive, in my opinion the cleanest slate having coffee […]” F1

It appears that it is convenient for the self to forget, as if we look at this in connection to the many referrals to the informants telling how convenience and price were of importance to them, being an ethical consumer was often conflicting to this. This could also be seen as a presentation of what was seen in the literature review, that the other important factors affect the consumer decision making as well, embedding these ethical concerns in a complex equation.

This also connects to the role of media, as it was mentioned by most of the informants as a channel which raised their ethical concerns, regardless of whether these concerns translated to actual behavioural changes or not. This serves as an excellent presentation of the fact that everything seems to connect with everything, thus affecting the lack of strict structure when presenting the informants’ views in reflection to their own consumption.
Similarly informant F7 expressed the same kind of behavioral pattern, as she consumes meat on a regular basis and said feeling bad for the production animals. However, she seemed to be able to put this aside.

“[…] But like, if I consciously start to think about how the meat has gotten onto my plate, it would be left uneaten.” F7

Again, this seems to imply that the informant makes a choice, whether it is an unconscious or a conscious choice not to think about something that might force the individual to answer with actualization to its possible ethical self (Schouten 2015), which the informant seems unwilling to do, due to other competing priorities, which here is enjoying eating meat. Indications of this in other situations and forms were also presented as F7 continued on this subject later on in the interview.

“In the food it’s just that, that I can’t even think about how it has gotten in to the store or the plate that meat, as I get such like. Well for example Christmas ham is very mixed feeling every year, that do I eat it or not. […] When I do know what like happens to them. That I do believe that if it would come like close enough straight to my face in that moment of purchase, it could be left not bought.” F7

A very concrete example of not wanting to think about her own behavior was also presented by F7, as she went as far as hiding the meat from herself as she was eating it.

“[…] Or then if I have some real animal there on my bread, I think it’s nicer to put it there […] under that cheese or some vegetables. That you don’t that way like [pauses] see it there on the top. […] Although I like, like I like it but that then [pauses] I don’t want to think about it […]” F7

This shows again the competing priorities the consumer chooses between. She explained her line of thought with the following.

“Yes, maybe it is that kind of denial, yes what then comes. That you just sort of like acknowledge that this is what we’re going with and that’s it. That you don’t like [pauses] really process it that much in your head.” F7

In a very similar manner informant F4 towards the end of the interview expressed that she had come to realize how contradictory this subject was and that one doesn’t come to think that one’s own choices are not really in line. Following this, when asked how
she was then able to maintain a sense of being a certain type of person, she had the following to say.

“Probably by just not thinking about them [ethical concerns]. Like very passively I would say. Like I will think about it surely a little more for a while now, as they are brought to my attention that what kind of choices I’m making and just like if I’ve watched some documents or else then then they are on my mind, but it’s so easy to put them there in the background. [...] You have to put certain things like to a smaller section somewhere there in your conscience center that you don’t blame yourself that much.” F4

If we look at the self as a person’s self-perception, in order for the person to be able to maintain a coherent sense of an adequately ethical self, or alternatively for the possible ethical self not to intervene with the other competing priorities or demand actualization (Schouten 2015), they seem to actively look the other way and the self seems to choose to forget, whether it makes it knowingly or unknowingly. As said, this appears to connect to the competing priorities, most importantly in the context of the current study, convenience, price and the product attributes such as taste in food or fashion value in clothing and make-up.

As a final acknowledgement relating to this issue, the perspective of informant F8 is presented. She expressed never really having thought of any ethical issues, although she did connect some factors to the term and as the interview evolved, brought up many aspects relating to the topic on a general level. The way she seemed to be able to put herself “outside the equation” was her strong believe in the legal system of Finland.

“[...] I guess I just have faith in the Finnish legal system, or like, if they [products] are here and it is supposed to be legal or that the products are here legally, so then you think, whatever then, in principle.” F8

She continued later on about having read some articles on the poor working conditions of some of the workers, but said that these things didn’t have any effect on her purchasing choices and although she did express a feeling of being a bad person, she did not try and explain it better. She explained her line of thought as follows.

“[...] That product has come to the shelf which I can buy, which they have put there, so that I can buy it. It would be different if I went to like somewhere and they would tell me that these are actually not even allowed to be sold, then in that case I wouldn’t, then it would be wrong. But somehow when they are in the
store and they are allowed to be bought, then that's why I don't think that it would be wrong somehow. And then I buy it.” F8

In this case, she appears to outsource the responsibility of the individual, leading to the fact that the self is not affected by the ethical issues at all. This approach differs significantly from that of the other notions made in this chapter, as even though it might be seen as a form of shifting blame, there doesn’t appear to be a need for the self for this.

**EXPLAINING ONESELF TO A COHERENT SELF**

Building on the notions and answers that were just presented, when the informants came faced with situations, such as seeing a document raising their ethical concerns or having to reflect their own thoughts and behavior in an interviewing situation such as the one they were in, looking the other way, or actively forgetting was not an option for the self, rather they were forced to face their own discrepancies. What seemed to be the way of maintaining a sense of an ethical self or perhaps more accurately a sense of a sufficiently not unethical self, was turning to the narrative of self-identity. Examples of this narrative self (Sökefeld 1999), and the way the informants reasoned and explained their behavior have been introduced along the results and analysis chapter, but two very illustrative examples of this particular phenomenon still serves to be presented.

Informant F1’s answer concerning the possible ethical concerns that could relate to her latest grocery shopping serve as a good example of this. She had purchased a box of seedless grapes for the price of 99 cents, and expressed her concerns about the fact that they were seedless.

“[…] There you again, wakes to what must have been done to them. They’ve surely been genetically altered which is actually really contradictive [with slight surprise in her voice] as I am profoundly against it and Monsanto in my opinion is like the biggest s.h.i.t. that exists on this earth so, but I don’t know now, now that 99 cents just won all consideration here maybe. [pauses] Or I don’t know, maybe there are varieties these days [pauses]. I must say that I just don’t know enough about grapes, but I assume that something has been done to them as they don’t have seeds.” F1

What is worth noting here, is that when during her answer the informant was confronted with a discrepancy in her attitude and behavior, she immediately came up with an explanation that enabled her to maintain a certain kind of self-perception.
Informant F4 then used a different kind of tactic by either exaggerating the alternative behavior, which would have then been considered more ethical or by simply stating a given behavior was simply not possible.

What needs to be acknowledged is that I as the interviewer perhaps led the informant in this situation to realize that ethical consumption of meat could also mean not consuming meat, as she had just expressed that she would like to buy more organic meat, but said that she couldn’t because of the higher price level. The point in her answer however comes across regardless of this.

“So that one would not buy anything [laughs]. Well sure that’s.. Well yes, yes it is, but then there are things one HAS to buy, such as milk, then that is cheaper if it’s not organic and then it can be difficult to make that choice which in one’s own opinion would be the better option. And then one doesn’t like want to not buy milk for the rest of one’s life, because coffee for example is really bad without milk [laughs]. But of course if you take it all the way to like ascetics, well then you could get by with very little and could be pretty ethical over there, living in some park in a bag or something [laughs].”

F4

This same kind of exaggeration came about, when the informant earlier on talked about the consumption of chicken (4.1.5) and again occurs in the next chapter when related to the perceived reference group image of self (4.3.1). This exaggeration seems to work here as a type of defense mechanism for the self, in order for the person not having to compromise the other priorities one has, which, if speaking of ethical consumption also outside of the meat consumption concept, were associated with for example being fashionable e.g. wanting to buy certain clothes. This could again be seen as reflecting Schouten’s (2015) possible self-schema and reacting with inaction, due to insufficient desirability of a possible more ethical self or the low “perceived attainability of a possible self” which the individual in a sense creates for herself thought this exaggeration.

The answers of F4 in the instances where she used exaggeration also seem to reflect the use of humor, which in general is known as also being used as a defense mechanism or a means to react to difficult situations or questions, in a sense that for her there seem to be these vague levels of ethicality, where the utmost level is seen as cutting off consumption altogether, but which to the informant seems so far-fetched that it appears laughable.
Another tactic she leaned upon was convincing herself that something was not realistically doable or was something one had to do, as seen in the following example, when describing why she was not a vegetarian anymore, again convincing herself of the low “perceived attainability of a possible self” (Schouten 2015).

“[…] But then it went from me a little to the gutter, as I went to England to do my exchange, and there one just had to eat what was brought in front of you there in the dormitory […]” F4

To draw together these examples, in order for the individual to remain that sense of self which in many of the cases was at least partially ethical, they find the need to explain this attitude –behavior gap, because many of them seem to want to think that they would consume more ethically if they had a fair chance of doing so.

What the above seen examples represent is that for informant F1 there was a constant need to correct her own speech to connect more with her perception of self. Similarly, but using a different tactic, informant F4 seemed to take the alternatives to an extreme thus convincing herself (and me) that ethical consumption in most cases was something that was not attainable.

What also links to this are the competing priorities that were brought up by the informants, as they were often part of the explanation for these discrepancies. These competing priorities could be seen as relating to the self, as in the literature review the possible self-schemas and the ways individual’s address them were presented by Schouten (2015). As most of the informant’s expressed these competing priorities such as price level and convenience as reasons that kept them from consuming as ethically as they perhaps wished to, it could be thought that the other priorities were seen as more important to the individual than that of being an ethical consumer. What these also seem to reflect is the certain kind of negotiation that goes on between the self, the different goals and the different types and outcomes of their behavior.

Finally, I would again want to acknowledge informant F8 in this context. What was interesting in her case was that as she didn’t really have a clear connection to the concept, she didn’t really feel the need to explain herself in relation to the issue. To her having done something unethical in terms of consumption would have been eating dog meat when travelling abroad or having an endangered animal on her floor, so she did not see anything where she would have acted unethically. If we look at this in connection to the self, it seems that because she did not pay attention to these issues
they did not affect her self-perception and thus she did not feel the need to explain herself in much detail, although towards the end of the interview she did express a feeling of being a terrible consumer and should perhaps acknowledge these issues more. With regards to what was discussed earlier, this however could only be a momentary feeling or affected by the social desirability bias or a presentation of a sense of obligation to be more ethical.

4.3 Plurality of selves in ethical consumption

As we have come to see so far, the informants’ seem to express a plurality of selves or a plurality of identities which cannot really be clearly separated from the answers the informants shared with regards to ethical consumption or ethicality in consumption, after they were asked to consider these topics in reflection to their own particular attitudes and behaviour. Therefore the potential occurrence of these different selves have been discussed throughout the results and analysis -chapter.

What is important to acknowledge is that the informants’ selves that have come across in the interviews can in a sense be regarded as their social self as the term represents “how a person presents herself to others” (Sirgy 1982:287). However, the nature of the questions, the interviewing situation and the evolution of the discussions created a setting based on which I felt I was able to make further observations and acknowledgements rising from the interview data on the informants’ selves as they came through the social selves in the discussions.

In this chapter, I will take a closer look on few of the different forms of selves that most clearly came through in the interviews, and how the informants’ selves could perhaps be categorized accordingly. This will be done through few of the most illustrative examples in each category.

4.3.1 Perceived reference group image of self

As discussed earlier in the study, consumer behavior can be understood as “an individual and collective project” (Newholm et al. 2007:267), seeming to suggest that ethical consumption is also influenced and connected to other people. In the case of some of the informants, the perceived reference group image of self (French et al. in Sirgy 1982) came across quite clearly, thus showing this connection in this context.
Although the concept itself was left without a proper definition, I will refer to it according to my own understanding presented in chapter 2.2.2. For some of the informants comparing one’s own behavior to other people seemed to be affecting how ethical one considered oneself to be in terms of consumption. For informant F6, who was one of the respondents who saw herself as an ethical consumer, the reference group image of self in terms of how ethical she perceived herself to be, seemed like an important factor.

“Well, it is always that it depends who you compare yourself with. Like I know people that are far more ethical as consumers than me. And for that reason I cannot say that I am always and in every single purchase like very ethical, because I am so much influenced by other motivators, that can then blind me from that, like at ethicality’s expense.” F6

When asked if she compared herself always to more ethical people, or if she actually meant that compared to many others, she herself was an ethical consumer, she said it depended on the perspective.

“On the other hand also that. Like how one wants to see it. That I guess I am like kind of an average ethical consumer, that I am aware that it is like important to pay attention to these things, but then if there comes a lot of outside factors, could they be called as stimulus that like take effect, then I might easily, like more easily forget about it. So if there is like a scale, then I guess I would be in the middle.” F6

What is particularly interesting here is that regardless of not really knowing what an “average ethical consumer” really is, she describes herself as being one. Similarly to F6, informant F2, who also considered herself as an ethical consumer, explained how she maintained that sense of being an ethical consumer, while coming to notice that in fact many of her actions were not in line with being one.

“Well I believe that it probably comes from comparing yourself to an average Finnish consumer or some other westerner, like compared to that I feel I’m being ethical […]” F2

Whereas F2 and F6 reflected their behavior also to a much larger reference group, thus creating a sense of them being more ethical than the average consumer, informant F3 compared herself to the people around her, while asked if the fact that she expressed
wanting to choose the more ethical option, but failing to do so, created any feelings of discomfort.

“...Yes it does yes. Yes, and then my friends who are like maybe even in a more poor financial situation than me, but somehow still it feels that they are more strongly that kind of ethical consumers then you think for yourself that well I guess I could do it too, but for some reason picks the other way, so that creates that kind of a feeling that... [laughs] yeah.” F3

In her case, she felt less ethical, as the friends around her were more ethical than her and addition to that indicated that consuming ethically was possible despite of the individual’s limited financial capability.

The reference group image of self also came across by informant F5, when she explained how she maintained the perception of herself as being a vegetarian, when she still ate fish, eggs and dairy.

“ [...] and then in a way when that too is that kind of, that most people, I mean those people who eat red meat, so to them it’s already a big deal that someone, that in a way they are not at the end interested about the fish-thing necessarily, that they are just like “oh, you don’t eat meat” [acting surprised] and they are really like surprised. Or somehow are like how can you do it, so that actually it is maybe only the other vegetarians that can be like “oh, but you still eat fish”. Or little like that. And then I feel like, like I would somehow be worse than they, like a so called worse vegetarian than they. Or less ethical than they are.” F5

Here the informant’s sense of an ethical self can be seen as reflected to two different reference groups, and as can be seen the image of oneself or ones’ self-perception seems to vary according to the group one compares oneself to. This could also be seen as supporting the existence of a reference group image of self.

Another very clear indication of the existence of the reference group image of self was also brought up by informant F4, which can be seen in her following remarks.

“ [...] but then it goes just to that you think that this is now so much easier this way [not doing some ethical choice] ... LIKE OTHERS ARE DOING THIS TOO [shouts laughing] Then that is probably the worst thing of all because if like everyone thinks like that that others do this too, then that is what then really is idiotic.” F4
She expresses understanding the paradox in her answer but the influence of the reference group still seems to be a very important factor in keeping the self consistent, as she gets a sort of a validation to her behaviour through that. This comes across quite clearly in her final answer in the interview, as she expresses gaining a feeling of being more ethical than the people surrounding her.

“[…] And then often you compare yourself like really much to the group of people you hang out more with that then you think that well at least I’m doing this choice better than he/she is and then thinks that, well not that you’re better than the other person, but like at least somehow tries in that situation but then if one could, compares to some shaman living on a mountain, then you are left as a runner-up in every way.” F4

If we look particularly at the comments made by informants F4 and F5 what could be perhaps drawn from these is that in general they tend to compare themselves to less ethical consumers in their given reference groups, and this way can maintain their sense of an ethical self, in a way that is enough to meet their perception of themselves. For example when F4 describes a more ethical consumer, she takes it to the extreme, instead of describing only someone slightly more ethical than she is. What also needs to be acknowledged here is that F4 did not consider herself to be a very ethical consumer, but like with a few others of the informants, she expressed being rather aware and having different ethical concerns. This could also explain the way she describes herself in relation to others.

4.3.2 Past, present and future self

An interesting observation that rose from the interview data was the occurrence of the self in different time forms, relating to ethical consumption. These past, present and future selves were also introduced in the literature review by referring to Leary et al. (2012). What appeared to be true in the case of these informants when connecting these selves to ethical consumption was that for one their past self represented a more ethical version of oneself, while in most cases, the future self, which could also be seen also as the possible self and ideal self, was seen to be more ethical than the current, present self.

A good example of the past self as a more ethical version of the person was expressed by informant F4 in few instances.
“[...] I would like to be better at it [in ethical consumption] and I think I have been better at it sometime before and thought more of all of those, like origin an such [...].” F4

The past self was also brought up, when asked if there was something that she does not consume altogether due to ethical issues.

[...] But then if we think about the food-side then I guess there isn’t anything anymore. I was a vegetarian sometime back then for a year, but [pauses] and back then it was really because I thought that people consume too much meat ja I can very well be without it [...] F4

This continued with the notion of her going to England, where she according to her had to eat whatever was brought in front of her. Thus it seems that she needs to convince herself that the ethical consumption behavior was something that could not be carried out anymore. She also contrasted her past self with her present one.

“Well I do remember that at some point I had a very precise, that I looked that if the garment was made in those countries where all of these like factories collapse and other such things, then I started to look that they were at least made in a European country or somewhere where the work security –system is a little better, and then I remember that I left like a few really nice clothes unbought because of that. But I don’t know what happened there, some life came between or something because I haven’t been paying attention to that anymore that carefully. And actually rarely these days. Maybe I’ve been looking more now of what material it is and how it endures in usage that, I don’t buy acrylic clothes just because then you have to throw them away straight away and that is waste. So maybe it’s been going more to that direction.” F4

What can be seen here is a shift from a different kind of ethical concern to more environmental concerns, and thus the occurrence of the person’s past and present (or actual) self. It almost appears as though she in a way justifies her present self with the fact that at least at one point in her life she has lived according to some of her ethical concerns. Building on this, although she did not regard herself as an ethical consumer, she clearly seemed to be affected by these concerns. This again links to the notion of Leary et al. (2012:69), according to which people’s identities may be focused on “what used to be true of one”, thus presenting the past.
The acceptance of the present self can also be seen in the comment by F1 towards the end of the interview.

“[…] But in every way I can like look at myself in the mirror at night without like... It corresponds to what I am now and what I’m now capable of.” F1

This is an indication of the fact that regardless of the numerous ethical concerns and large knowledge base on varying issues relating to ethicity in consumption, the person was able to keep the self coherent. This could then be partly a result of the narrative self or linked to the possible self-schema not being sufficiently desirable or even more so not seen as attainable, despite of the expressed concerns.

One type of indication of the future self as a presentation of an ideal self could be seen in one of the answers of informant F3.

“I do feel, I would like to step it up a notch a little or do better in it. I believe that it will maybe come little by little. […] You become more conscious all the time.” F3

The possible or future self could perhaps actually be seen every time the informants expressed their wish to be better consumers in terms of ethicality and acting on their ethical concerns through their own consumption. These were introduced and discussed under chapter 4.2.2. Connecting these answers to Leary et al. (2012:69) a person’s future identity can stand for e.g. what one wishes or feels obligated of becoming. Again, the things that kept the informants from pursuing or expressing this more ethical self were often the competing priorities that led to the informants expressing these discrepancies in their speech and behavior in such a way that they convinced themselves that this more ethical behavior was unattainable.
5 CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of this thesis I expressed my interest in two questions. Firstly, I wanted to find out how consumers define ethical consumption, as despite of the extensive field of studies on ethical consumption, the concept and the study field itself seemed to be missing “a grand narrative”. Secondly, I wanted to find out how self-identity relates to ethical consumption, as the connection between self-identity and consumption in general is considered of much importance in the existing literature. Regarding the first research aim, it became quite clear, that trying to establish an answer to consumer defined ethical consumption was even more of a challenge than finding a comprehensive definition for the concept based on existing literature.

What became obvious already at an early stage of the interviews was that the line between the different perspectives, ethical consumption on a general level and ethical consumption as understood in reflection to one’s own consumption, was in many cases rather vague or as later detected, seen more of a presentation of what one wishes to do or thinks instead of consistent action towards a particular ethical (purchasing) behavior, actually presenting what it means to consumers in their own consumption.

Only in very few cases people actually engaged in consistent action in terms of ethical consumption, as even then, the same values that they had, only applied in certain areas of their consumption. Therefore it is much easier to offer a more structured answer to how ethical consumption is understood in general from the consumer perspective, as presented in chapter 4.1 than to be able to tell comprehensively how this really translates into action, thus presenting what ethical consumption means to consumers in their own consumption.

However, based on these notions what can be said to answer the first research aim is that ethicality is in fact a very fluid concept depending on temporality, social factors and different triggers such as media coverage, which make ethicality submerge in the consumers’ consumption choices. These show ethical consumption as being in constant change connecting partially to the increasing information and knowledge of the consumers, but simultaneously also to their changing resources and circumstances too. Therefore, the tendency of existing research to focus on very particular ethical problems might perhaps hide the fluid nature of the concept behind it.
The concrete but very singular and for the most part vague examples of what ethical consumption actually is to consumers themselves related to such things as meat consumption, favoring organic- and locally produced food products, and boycotting certain stores due to ethical concerns. These things were then linked to the factors just presented such as the different triggers. The discoveries of the present study thus relate perhaps even more to the surrounding factors affecting ethical consumption, than the particular components of the concept itself.

If we look at the categorization of the concept of ethical consumption that was presented in the literature review, what could be said is that the answers of the present study partially portray more precise issues and smaller entities than the ones presented in the theory. Issues relating to animal welfare and particularly the consumption of meat or seeing organic products as part of ethical consumption were not brought up as such in the presented literature.

Another interesting observation that rose from the data, which could possibly relate to the trigger of media coverage was that many of the informants brought up the clothing industry, even if the concerns relating to it did not transfer to actual behavior. One particular company was mentioned by many, but issues and concerns relating to the working conditions in the clothing industry also in general were expressed. The possibility exists, that catastrophes such as the collapse of Rana Plaza clothing factory and the extensive media coverage it gained in 2013 and after partially affects that clothing industry was so clearly present in the answers of the informants. This also connects to the momentary effect or temporality linked to ethicality in consumption caused for example by media coverage relating to these kind of issues, which is something that was not found in the existing theory.

On a more general note, variation between the informants with regards to their ethical awareness was quite substantial from those who did not connect much of anything with the concept to those who seemed to have a rather clear and wide-ranging idea of what it in their opinion entailed. However, the differences between the actual behaviors of the informants were in some cases relatively small, regardless of the differences in their ethical knowledge.
Moreover, the notion of Oh et al. (2014) suggesting that people would be shifting from “rational consumers valuing quality and price into ethical consumers whose priorities for product choice centre around ‘ethical values’”, cannot be supported as such, as based on the current study, ethical values for the most part seem to be a priority among other priorities such as those of quality and price. However, there were indications, at least in some cases, that the informants occasionally act according to their ethical values even when this means making a certain kind of sacrifice, such as money, as suggested by Irwin (2015). Having said this, convenience and price still seemed to be among the most important competing priorities, which were mentioned as reasons not to engage in ethical consumption.

If we then turn the focus on the second aim, looking at how self-identity reflects on consumer ethicality, the present study seems to in part support the use of the concept of a situational self-image, “the meaning of self that the individual wishes others to have of him/herself” (Schenk and Holman 1980:611) also in the context of ethical consumption. What supports this are the clear discrepancies that came across in the informants’ speech and behaviour, e.g. when they expressed that ethical consumption in their own consumption was something that later on was detected not translating into actual actions after all. These contradictions have been discussed throughout the results and analyses chapter.

Furthermore, the clear statements from the informants of wanting to be better at ethical consumption and expressing the feelings of being a bad person or a bad consumer, could be seen as forms of a situational self-image, which then covers all the other self-concepts such as the actual and ideal self (Sirgy 1982:289). Moreover, the current study can also be seen as supporting the perception that instead of one single self-identity, consumers have many self-concepts, which is also in line with the situational self-image (Sirgy 1982:289).

What further supports the use of the concept of a situational self-image is that it could clearly be seen that for the same individual the same consumption choices seemed “highly congruent with self-image in one situation and not at all congruent with it in another” (Sirgy 1982:89). The flexibility the informants showed in relation to their ethical consumption choices and the competing priorities of mostly convenience and effortlessness often leading to this flexibility, serve as an indication of this. Whereas
the original source links this to the consumption of a brand, in appears to apply also in the ethical consumption choices of some of the individuals.

Having said this, the use of the concept of a situational self-image does simplify many interesting aspects relating to the plurality of identities in connection to consumer ethicality, as the many aspects have come across during the presentation and analysis of the results. Particularly the narrative self and the reference group image of self seem to have a significant importance in the way the individuals maintained a consistent sense of self or in how they experienced themselves in relation to others.

Thus, the strongest support in the context of ethical consumption is pointed towards Sökefeld’s (1999:424) perceptions of self, as he described the self as a “superordinate to (though not detach from) the plurality of identities”, stating that individuals can manage different identities because they can still maintain a “[...] reflexive sense of a basic distinction between the self and everything else”. Whether speaking of a plurality of selves or a plurality of identities is not as such of much importance, but the idea of an active “core” self, which guides these many self-concepts or identities and chooses certain behavioral modes of which ethical consumption can be seen as one. With this I again refer to the existing findings of Sökefeld (1999) on the concept of self studied in a different context.

Furthermore, Sökefeld’s (1999) notion on identities as fluid and constantly changing is also supported by the present study in the context of ethical consumption, as it connects to the notions presented earlier in this chapter on the fluid nature of ethical consumption. This could also be seen as reflecting in the informants’ past, present and future selves, as they expressed them. Thus, the relationship between self-identity and ethical consumption is more complex than the existing research seems to suggest as it is always embedded in the person’s broader life, which cannot be separated from the other areas of an individual’s life. It could therefore be questioned whether the concept of self-identity has been given too much weight in connection to consumption, as what the present study seems to indicate, is that consumption as such is not the defining factor of the self or vise versa, rather the two are connected but in a complex and perhaps ever-changing way.

Some general notion could also be drawn from the present study as a certain kind of hopelessness could be heard in the answers and thoughts of many of the informants. The amount of ethical issues to be addressed and the pure volume of them in relation to
the number of people needing to make an actual change seemed in some cases to translate as a sense of powerlessness in the informants. Moreover, the answers also portray the irony between the ethical concerns and virtuous thoughts that often were overpowered by other competing priorities in the informants’ lives, leaving ethical consumption to this abstract concept which represents something good and important, but at the same time not important enough to act upon. A good indication of this was the fact that so many of the informants chose to look the other way or block unpleasant information from themselves as it conflicted with, one could say the more simpler and lighter aspects of their lives.

To conclude, the reflection between the current study and the literature review was done more on the micro-level, referring to very particular and precise perceptions of different researchers, as the concepts and study fields consist of quite abstract phenomena, with no grand truth to be found. For this same reason, the key concepts were not presented in the beginning of the study, as the whole literature review aims to serve as an indication that no such descriptions can be presented clearly.

5.1 Implications

This chapter introduces the implications of the study. First, the theoretical implications will be presented, followed by the managerial implications of the study. After this, the limitations as discussed and finally suggestions for future research are presented.

5.1.1 Theoretical implications

In terms of theoretical implication, the present study makes its biggest contribution in bringing the concept of self into a new context, here being consumer ethicality. Moreover, it further validates the existing findings of the competing priorities, flexibility and attitude-behaviour gap seen in ethical consumption behaviour.

In the beginning of the study, I suggested that ethical consumption could possibly be one of the modes that the active self, described by Sökefeld (1999), selects or rejects. According to what has now been presented it appears that the active self is present in this process. Some of these cases seemed to indicate, that the self is active in that it actively looks the other way and actively forgets or blocks unpleasant information in
order to avoid the potential ethical self-demanding actualization, referring to Schouten’s (2015) possible self-schema.

With regards to the concept of ethical consumption from a consumer perspective, as discussed before, the complexity and plurality of factors these definitions are embedded in, makes it challenging to establish a general, broad answer to this research question. What I did however find is a number of alternative and sometimes even conflicting issues related to ethical consumption that vary from product level to societal issues.

Moreover, it appears that ethical consumption as defined by informants in their own consumption was on a broad scale related to two different areas. Firstly, it seemed to be related to selecting alternatives ranging from making no purchase to ethical consumption, with the aim to reduce the negative outcomes of consuming. Secondly, it related to pre-purchase factors i.e. referring to what had happened during the production of a given product, whether this related to the working rights, animal issues or for example gene manipulation.

### 5.1.2 Managerial implications

The present study is of such nature, that clear managerial implications are challenging to present. However, based on some of the general acknowledgements that could be made based on the empirical study, some remarks could be made. Going back to the suggestions of Julie Irwin (2015) suggesting that guiding consumers with proper marketing could increase the popularity of ethical consumption, one of the most significant indications with regards to managerial implications that rose from the interviews was that while most of the informants expressed ethical concerns, the other competing priorities seemed to quite easily drive past them.

Thus, if a company wants to promote the ethical value of a product or a brand, the information needs to be given to the consumer, as it appears that consuming ethically needs to be made simple and effortless to the consumer. The informants for the most part were not willing to go through the effort of having to actively search information on a product’s ethicality, but some indications were found that if they clearly knew, that a product was, for example not tested on animals, there is a fair chance that the consumer would opt for this choice instead of a competing product, if the other product attributes were appealing as well. This notion could also be backed up by the fact that
most of the informants expressed wanting to be more ethical and that ethicality in consumption in general was seen as something that was important and good.

If we look at this in an actual business context, with for example two well-known competing food companies or cosmetics firms with a similar product range, clearly promoting to fulfill certain ethical standards could be seen as a valuable competitive advantage. These standards could also be communicated through the use of ethicality labels, which firms could develop together. These labels could be similar to the ones used for example for organic products. By giving more information to the consumers and by clearly communicating how the companies differ from their competitors could be a good way to stand out in the market place and make it a more effortless choice to choose the more ethical option.

I would therefore suggest that these ethical attributes of products would be made much more visible and part of marketing strategies than they currently are, thus more clearly addressing the consumer morals.

5.1.3 Limitations and further research

The present study was limited to young women only, living in the capital area of Finland. Thus, other reference groups cannot be assumed to produce the same kind of results. The same kind of research could however be executed for these other reference groups as well, thus also representing a suggestion for further research. Vitell (2003:40) has expressed the need for further study on the gender differences in ethical judgments, and as this study focuses on women, further research is needed to study whether differences between the genders in these particular questions occur.

If we look at the research questions of the present study, the first aim being to find out how consumers define ethical consumption, what could be further studied are the different triggers expressed by the informants as affecting their ethical consumption. As the role of media came across very clearly, it could be of interest to study what kind of media coverage has the biggest impact on the actual consumption behavior of the consumers.

Moreover, relating to the same research question, as family identity was outside the scope of this study, I would suggest further research on its connection to ethical
consumption. Validating the need for this research, are observations that rose from the interview data, as two of the informants clearly stated the connection of their family background's effect on their own ethical consumption.

As for the question concerning self-identity in reflection to ethical consumption, what could be studied further is how do the different identities, identified in the present study as connecting to ethical consumption, relate to each other. Some indications of these relations have already been given, but there remains room for additional research. Particularly interesting would be to study further the effects the different reference groups have on the individual's image of self, as the importance of this on a general level was so clearly indicated by the present study. Furthermore, observing consumers in actual consumption situations where different ethical issues are brought to their attention would be a valuable addition to the research on both research questions.

If we look at further research suggestions on a general level, the evolution of all separate interviews was particularly interesting, as the thoughts of the informants evolved along the way as they answered the given questions, but perhaps even more so, created their own storyline, as the discussion went deeper and deeper into the topic. Thus it could be said that this topic in fact is very challenging to cover in one set of interviews, and what could be suggested is that a separate analyses based on every individual interview could be a very fruitful method of investigating this subject area further.

Furthermore, only few existing studies concentrate on observing the actual behavior of consumers instead of consumer intentions or past behavior, and even these still put the focus on ecological concerns instead of ethical concerns as a broader concept (Caruna et al. 2015), thus portraying a need for further research in this area.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1   INTERVIEW GUIDE IN ENGLISH

How would you describe yourself as a person?

How would you describe yourself as a consumer?

What do you purchase most frequently?

What is your latest purchase? What, why, where, what did it cost?

Describe what you understand as ethical consumption (on a general level)?

Describe what you consider as ethical consumption for you in your own consumption? / How does it reflect in your own purchasing behaviour?

Do you consider yourself as an ethical consumer?

What kind of thoughts does ethical consumption rise in you?

Going back to your latest purchase, could you think of something problematic in it or perhaps something positive in this context (ethical consumption)?

Do you consider ethical consumption to be important for you as a person?

Can you think of a time when you’ve been an ethical consumer in your own opinion?

Can you think of a time when you have done poorly in terms of ethical consumption?

Is there something you would refuse to consume entirely due to ethical reasons?

Is there anything you would like to add?
APPENDIX 2  INTERVIEW GUIDE IN FINNISH

Miten kuvailisit itseäsi ihmisenä?

Miten kuvailisit itseäsi kuluttajana?

Mitä ostat useimmiten?

Mikä on viimeisin ostokesi? Mitä, miksi, missä, paljonko maksoi?

Kuvaile, mitä sinä ymmärrät eettisellä kuluttamisella (yleisellä tasolla)?

Kuvaile mitä eettinen kulutaminen on sinulle omassa kulutuksessasi?

Miten tämä näkyy käytännössä omassa kulutuksessasi?

Pidätkö itseäsi eettisenä kuluttajana?

Millaisia ajatuksia eettinen kulutaminen herättää?

Jos palataan viimeisimpään ostokesi, näkisitkö että siinä voisi olla jotain ongelmallista tai mahdollisesti jotain hyvää eettisen kuluttamisen näkökulmasta?

Onko eettinen kulutaminen sulle henkilönä tärkeää?

Tuleeko mieleen kertaa, jolloin olisit ollut omasta mielestäsi eettinen kuluttaja?

Tuleeko mieleen kertaa, jolloin olisit toiminut huonosti eettisen kulutamisen suhteen?

Onko olemassa jotain mitä et kuluttaisi ollenkaan eettisten syiden takia?

Onko mitään, mitä haluaisit lisätä aiheeseen liittyen?