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MOTIVATION & MEANING IN MAINE'S THRIFT CULTURE

by

Johanna Lunn

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(Human Dimensions of Climate Change)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

The production of material goods requires resource extraction, leading to the release of carbon emissions into the atmosphere. With the growing threat of climate change, the demand for virgin production is increasingly problematic. Reusing products inherently decreases the demand for material production. As a result, reuse has been shown to mitigate many of the negative impacts of climate change. This thesis focuses on the potential for waste reduction by exploring Mainer's motivations for participating in Maine's reuse markets. Eight semi-structured interviews with secondhand shoppers were conducted. Qualitative analysis revealed that four major categories represented consumer motivations to purchase secondhand goods: individualist, social, economic, and critical. This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of consumer positionality in Maine's reuse markets. These markets both respond to and inform a statewide reuse culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Anthropogenic climate change is multifaceted, multidimensional and endlessly complex. As a discipline, environmental anthropology strives to disentangle the myriad human dimensions of climate change. To do this, however, an interdisciplinary approach must be taken, harnessing the knowledge and research methods of chemists, marine scientists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, physicists, etcetera.

Anthropogenic climate change must be considered on a grand and global scale. From this point, multiple disciplines should proceed by teasing apart the intricacies of human-induced climate change, and extracting their distinct roles within the interdisciplinary scope. In this framework, anthropologists still have vast research to tackle, considering the layered and intersecting dimensions of climate change.

Human consumption is one particular dimension of anthropogenic climate change. When consumers purchase new products, they express their demand for the production of virgin materials, which inherently drives demand for the resources that are required for the generation of goods. In the process of resource extraction, carbon emissions are released into the atmosphere. On a fundamental level, humans consume because they must in order to survive -- to a certain degree. Clothing, as a consumption category, did not become commodified in the way that it is today until the Global North, and then the world, became industrialized. Compared to the preindustrial era, industrialization allowed people to consume clothing and other goods at a faster rate and with greater ease. The extent to which this ease and rate of consumption increased was, and continues to be, proportionate to market access. Geographic location, as well as

availability in a temporal sense, can expand or limit access to markets. As wealth increases, access to markets increases. Without any context, markets are not necessarily problematic. When thinking about product demand, increased access to markets can indicate a higher likelihood of consumption within those markets. The plural nature of the word *markets* is pertinent to this research.

There is not simply one clothing market, one furniture market, one market for music, and so on. Surely there are dominant markets for each category of commodity. Just as countercultures arise in response to pervasive cultural regimes, submarkets percolate into societies as alternatives to overarching economic markets. The markets for used goods represent submarkets, operating distinctly from the markets for new, mass-produced goods. Just as people are drawn to the markets of mass production on a daily basis, consumers gravitate toward the submarkets of used goods. “Used goods” is an umbrella term that can be applied to what certain people consider antiques, what others think of as vintage pieces, and to others, “used goods” means trash. The value embedded within a good is entirely dependent on the perception of the item’s beholder.

It is important to first acknowledge that reuse economies have the potential to counterbalance demand for new materials (Vaughan, Cook, and Trawick 2007). With this possibility, reuse markets may also be able to mitigate the harmful effects of carbon emissions into the atmosphere, which occurs when virgin materials are produced. It is therefore realized that the circulation of material goods may play a pivotal role in the context of easing human-induced climate change (Castellani, Sala, and Mirabella 2015). These realizations are fundamental when working toward climate change mitigation, yet they have even deeper roots. If replacing the consumption of new goods for used goods

means mitigating the effects of anthropogenic climate change -- as Castellani, Sala, and Mirabella's study points out -- it is natural to consider "reuse" on a more intimate, psychological level. This is where anthropologists may begin teasing apart the threads of anthropogenic climate change that pertain to their skill set. Here lies an opportunity to explore the motivations for participating in different types of consumer markets.

This research focuses on consumers' incentives for participating in reuse markets, or the markets for used goods, in the state of Maine. In this northeastern corner of the U.S., something beyond reuse submarkets exists. In Maine, a culture around reuse has been formed and fostered over the course of generations. This research seeks to grasp the "pull" factors that continue to bring Mainers back to the state's secondhand markets. Within the broader framework of anthropogenic climate change, this research endeavors to capture a fuller conceptualization of what it means to be a sustainable consumer, whether or not all consumer-citizens are aware of the role they play in a global economy and ever-changing ecological system. A rounded understanding of consumer positionality demands attention to details related to beliefs, perceptions and experiences, all of which collectively constitute motivations. These sets of motivations underlie participation in reuse markets, specifically as they apply to Maine. While this thesis hones in on the potential for climate change mitigation on an individualist level, true mitigation and adaptation must be undertaken on a much broader scale. Federal, state and local legislatures have the power and means to combat resource degradation and depletion -- and climate change -- through legislation. In doing so, legislators may pave pathways that give their constituents the ground for adaptive success.

## THE UNDERPINNINGS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultures in the West are oftentimes characterized as consumer cultures. In the United States, “we live in a society bewitched by consumerism and beholden to debt. We have become accustomed to the idea that more is always better” (Yarrow 2014, 142). In an environmental context, this is increasingly problematic; some even believe that consumption is “the mother of all environmental issues” (EEA 2012, 1). In recent decades, there has been a production trend toward low-quality products, particularly clothing, “thus increasing total resources consumed and desired” (Ordon 2015, 149). Furthermore, it has been estimated that the provision of food and goods in the United States is responsible for 42% of the nation’s greenhouse gas emissions (US EPA 2009). When consumers purchase new products, demand for virgin production is reinforced. Reusing goods, therefore, helps counteract the environmental impact of material production. In fact, one particular study found that the complete substitution of a new item for one that is used has positive implications for mitigating ozone depletion, ocean acidification, water resource depletion, climate change in general, and a wide host of other detriments to the climate (Castellani, Sala, and Mirabella 2015, 378). Another study found that when 100 T-shirts are reused rather than thrown away, the environmental burden of the product life cycle is decreased by 14% for global warming and 28% for ocean acidification (Farrant, Olsen, and Wangel 2010). The takeaway is that reuse can play a considerable role in reducing the maladaptive effects of manufacturing virgin material.

According to Maine's reuse hierarchy, reuse is the second most effective form of combating waste, after reduction (38 MRS §2101). Reuse and reduction are slightly ambiguous when considering what they are. For this literature review and broader thesis, reducing should be thought of as the limiting of one's consumption. In the context of waste management, reuse refers to the redistribution of previously owned material goods, in their original form, from one person to another. This could be through secondhand resale, renting, borrowing, leasing or sharing (Isenhour et al. 2017). Secondhand resale is the form of reuse that represents the central focus of this thesis. Although there can be a tendency to group together reuse and recycling, the two are separate and distinct from one another. Recycling is concerned with the recovery and reconstruction of materials that hold value after disposal. Although recycling cuts down primary production, significant energy is required to convert materials from one form to another (Isenhour et al. 2017). Reusing materials, on the other hand, involves the consumption of goods as they existed in their original form, only reshaped by time and wear. Reuse, then, involves few additional inputs as items are passed from person to person. When substituting the consumption of a new good for a used good, there are avoided impacts. These include the extraction and transport of raw materials, the energy and emissions associated with production, the product's transport from a factory to a store, and the transportation from a store to the consumer's living space. In most cases, the only environmental/market impact exerted by the secondhand consumer occurs when she transports the purchased good from a secondhand market to her living space (Castellani, Sala, and Mirabella 2015).

Global policies and frameworks are already shifting toward an emphasis on environmentally sustainable products, reflecting the finding that reuse-related economic activity is perpetually increasing (Guiot and Roux 2010). The European Union Waste Framework Directive intends to direct policies toward reducing, reusing and recycling (EU WFD 2008a), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development considers it crucial to increase resource productivity (OECD 2011). Implementation of these international directives can be observed on a national level throughout major U.S. cities, where reuse economies and cultures are supported by community swaps and repair events (US EPA 2015). Although Maine does not have any standing policies responding to its waste hierarchy, an observer can see reuse inclinations embedded within the state. Transfer stations, take-it-shops, vintage and antique stores line the Maine coast, and are scattered throughout the state's interior as well. Interestingly, Maine tends to rank lowest in per capita waste-generation rates in the United States (MDEP 2016; van Haaren, Themelis, and Goldstein 2010).

This information prompts questions seeking to make sense of the interconnections, if they exist, between the high volume of reuse establishments -- compared to the total number of establishments in Maine (Isenhour et al. 2017) -- and the state's relatively low waste-generation rates. Isenhour and her colleagues observed that culture is the foundation of a strong statewide tendency to reuse. Perhaps equally worthy of emphasis, in addition to the environmental implications of reuse, is the cultural role of economic perseverance, fostered by Maine's reuse markets, in the face of economic recession. Research has found that economic suffering in Maine has not only been reduced by the local reuse economy, but that thrifting has helped reshape Maine's

economy, leading to minimal, but meaningful, economic growth (Isenhour et al. 2017). Without cultural anchors, economic resilience would perhaps not be as powerful as it is in Maine.

When looking at the reuse phase of circular economies, one particular study found that the entire circulation of producer-consumer systems could lead to \$700 billion in global consumer goods savings (MacArthur 2013). This could lead to resilience for lower income families. Currently, certain aspects of secondhand markets are not considered when analyzing the overall economy, meaning economists are missing a vast segment of production-consumption systems (Isenhour et al. 2017). It turns out that many consumers are aware that secondhand consumption is an alternative to participation in firsthand markets, and use this knowledge to resist capitalistic structures (Guiot and Roux 2010; Pierce and Paulos 2011). In Maine, an overwhelmingly rural state, an alternative reuse culture not only exists, but thrives.

To further illuminate this point, preliminary research for the ResourcefulME! interdisciplinary study has found that many reuse organizations in Maine frame their mission around a sense of sociality, striving toward community integration and collaboration (Isenhour 2016). In fact, consumption can be as entangled with climate change as it is with social networks. There are momentous critiques on consumer culture and its implications for social structure (McKibben 2010; Schor 2004). Historically, too, consumer culture has been subjected to condemnation for placing sociality in a precarious position. Thoreau (1854) petitioned for a return to the simple life, and de Tocqueville (1851) expressed his idea that materialism in excess could threaten social networks and muddle common social goals. In certain pockets of the U.S., like coastal and rural Maine,

it is possible that alternative consumer markets foster solidarity in the areas' communities rather than deteriorate it.

As Maine demonstrates economic resilience and community strength through its alternative markets (Isenhour 2016), the underlying motivations for secondhand consumption should be sought in order to gain a robust understanding of subculture markets. Here, a subculture market may be conceptualized as a market, like one that is based on the exchange of used goods, that operates outside the realm of culturally dominant markets, which could be those that are centered on the exchange of virgin materials. The underlying motivations for secondhand consumption are imperative to unravel as the ecological benefits of material circulation have been extensively documented (Castellani, Sala, and Mirabella 2015; Farrant, Olsen, and Wangel 2010; Thomas 2010). While previous research has highlighted the environmental benefits of thrifting, there has been limited documentation on motivations behind participation (McLaren and Agyeman 2015). This information can potentially help inform the direction policymakers take when considering programs designed to extend product lifetimes and reduce waste through reuse, repair and resale. If environmental factors are the driving force behind reuse, that knowledge can be considered when framing legislation.

Right now, there is not current empirical evidence supporting a link between eco-consciousness and secondhand consumption. If environmentalism is not what primarily drives thrifting, other frameworks would likely be more effective when planning policy. This is why unveiling the motivational drivers behind secondhand consumption is necessary to deepen and broaden an accurate conceptualization of reuse economies and

reuse cultures, the latter as it applies particularly to Maine, which shows a longstanding history of material circulation (Isenhour et al. 2017). Insight into the personal reasons behind thrifting, iterated by ethnographic vignettes, enriches the picture of Maine's thrift culture. Anecdotal evidence of participation in subculture markets brings a qualitative dimension to reuse economies as a whole.

### Consumption Driven by Self-Expression & Sociality

Motivational categories centered on individuality can be broadly contextualized as "personalizing," as illustrated by Douglas Holt (1995). According to Holt, individuals personalize their outward appearance in order to differentiate themselves from other members of society. Holt also notes that the boundary between assimilation and personalizing is constantly in flux as elements of personalization become institutionalized as symbols of mainstream culture. When this happens, a marker of individuality shifts to become a marker of social conformity. Along the vein of self-expression is the idea that consumption, and its inherent demand, are involved in sending and receiving social messages (Appadurai 1986, 31). Consumers who strive to remove themselves from uniformity gravitate toward secondhand clothing as the nature of these clothes is often not reflective of current fashion trends, though it should be noted that secondhand clothing is not necessarily unfashionable. Through the clothes they wear, consumers seeking self-expression are better able to express themselves since their clothing is not representative of the mass-produced clothing that permeates the mainstream market.

A "need for uniqueness" is defined as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's social self-image" (Tian, Bearden, and

Hunter 2001). According to Cervellon, Carey, and Harms (2012), the need for uniqueness construct encompasses three different dimensions. The first and most common dimension is the creation of a personal style, which is achieved by selecting clothing that contributes to and enhances individuality. Creative choice is the second dimension, which involves actively striving to stand apart from others and acting according to a counter-conformity mindset. It is noted that consumers expressing creative choice may receive disapproval by deviating from social norms, but these individuals may welcome disapproval as they are intentionally opposing cultural norms. The third dimension that a need for uniqueness encompasses is avoidance of similarity, defined as the re-establishment of personal identity through anti-consumer motivations (Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012).

Cervellon, Carey, and Harms also advance the idea of individualist motivations driving reuse, identifying nostalgia as a precursor to the purchase of reused vintage pieces and secondhand pieces, whereby vintage is representative of a piece that first appeared in the period between the 1920s and 1980s, and secondhand signifies a used item that emerged post-1980s (Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012, 957). In the context of reused garments, nostalgia induces positive memories associated with clothing that was produced during one's lifetime. Cervellon, Carey, and Harms also note that people who have not lived during the era of vintage production may have positive associations with the clothing that represents an imagined desirable age. Nostalgia intrinsically connotes a yearning for an earlier time, meaning it "not only pertains to experiences remembered from one's own past, but that it can reach back and encompass the holistic past" (Havlena and Holak 1991; Holak and Havlena 1992).

The literature review indicates that gratification is also realized through recreational approaches to secondhand consumption (Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Bowser et al. 2015; Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012; Guiot and Roux 2010; Pierce and Paulos 2011). Within the orbit of secondhand consumption, “digging” involves the focused pursuit of hidden “gems” or treasures, following the belief that unusual items are waiting to be found. This form of reuse is associated with large thrift stores, non-digital spaces, and the salvaging of items (Bowser et al. 2015). “The chase” and “the search” (Pierce and Paulos 2011) align with digging in the sense that more work is involved when hunting for a niche item. Some secondhand consumers shop in pursuit of the unexpected, which is captured as “a continuous search of hidden treasures waiting to be found” (Bardhi and Arnould 2005, 230). This notion echoes the concept of digging, nearly verbatim, as it is described in other literature (Bowser et al. 2015). Experiential reacquirers, those for whom secondhand consumption “is strongly appreciated for its positive experiential or aesthetic qualities,” (Pierce and Paulos 2011) would likely be consumers that are inclined to chase and search for particular items. Here, the term “reacquisition” is used to explain secondhand acquisition. The essence of this reacquisition avenue is enjoyability. For these consumers, reuse is about pleasure as opposed to necessity.

Another explanation for participation in reuse markets, advanced by Guiot and Roux (2010), is based on “experiential expectations linked to the nature of the offering.” These expectations represent a distinct motivational set driving the act of reuse. They unpack “experiential expectations linked to the nature of the offering” by untethering the threads that constitute it. These threads are identified as: nostalgic pleasure; a desire for originality or “a way of getting away from uniformity”; self-expression; and self

congruence (Guiot and Roux 2010, 358). Guiot and Roux also identify certain secondhand consumers as polymorphous enthusiasts, who are secondhand consumers driven by both a need to be unique and economic motivations.

### Economic Necessity

Douglas Holt recognizes that “personalizing practices are problematic for [consumers] who have limited access to the productive nucleus of the [consumption] world” (Holt 1995, 8). Here, a political economic approach is taken by Holt as he acknowledges that not all consumers have access to consumption flexibility, and this in turn can affect the degree to which they are able to exercise individuality. Rational choice theories associated with neoclassical economics “hold that all economic choices are acts of authentic, unmediated selfhood, rational statements reflecting who we are and what we want in life” (Bigelow 2005, 1). Embedded within this perspective is an illusion of consumer choice. In some cases, consumers participate in a market not by personal autonomy, but instead their participation is defined by a lack of choice. The political economic approach, which “reminds us that analyses which place sole emphasis on the agency of consumers to affect change likely fail to recognize the influence of differential access to power and structural constraints” (Isenhour 2007). The political economic approach demands that the study of consumerism, including counterculture markets, involves consideration of a consumer’s race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, geography and nationality.

Neoclassical rational choice theories are seen as incomplete when considering the political economic approach. Rational choice theories tend to place all consumers on a horizontal plane, simplifying the positionality of individuals. When consumers are

marginalized on differential categories, like those listed above, they have unequal access to markets, compared to consumers who are not marginalized on comparative dimensions. Even if a consumer desires to reduce her carbon footprint, she may not always have access to sustainable consumption. The political economic approach is an important reminder that not all secondhand consumers enjoy the hedonistic luxury of something like the “thrill of the hunt,” as they are restricted by time constraints due to hourly labor or multiple jobs.

In the case of necessary consumption (Pierce and Paulos 2011), consumers are limited in market choice due to monetary restriction. This type of consumption is applied to participants in the reuse economy who interpret their financial situation as one that prohibits them from primary acquisition and therefore forces them to reacquire (Pierce and Paulos 2011, 2388). Furthermore, necessary consumers do not always desire to buy used goods and are sometimes even ashamed to participate in reuse markets. Containing an element of thrift, bargain hunting, as discussed by Bardhi and Arnould, falls within the category of necessary consumption. Bardhi and Arnould capture the essence of thrift as “a careful management of resources — careful consumption and saving in the present in order to consume better in the future” (Bardhi and Arnould 2005, 227). By this definition, thrift is oriented toward the future, concerned with financial mindfulness and resource management. A focus on cost bleeds into casual reacquisition: “For casual reacquirers, reacquisition is primarily seen to be a cheaper alternative to the otherwise more desirable conventional retail acquisition...[Casual reacquirers] often have difficulty or do not feel the need to explain their practices in detail or distinguish them strongly from firsthand acquisition” (Pierce and Paulos 2011, 2388). Casual consumers are explicitly illustrated

by their appeal toward new items, clearly cutting them as monetarily driven as they elect to buy secondhand pieces despite their desire to consume in more dominant retail markets.

Price sensitivity and price consciousness fall under the umbrella of frugality (Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012), which is defined as “a uni-dimensional consumer lifestyle trait characterized by the degree to which consumers are both restrained in acquiring and in resourcefully using economic goods and services to achieve longer-term goals” (Lastovicka et al. 1999). Honing in on the “long-term goals” piece of the definition, frugality reveals its direct ties to thrift as defined by Bardhi and Arnould. Thrift carries an inherent element of preparation, leaving frugal consumers to oppose impulsivity when shopping. “Restrained in acquiring,” another element of frugality, signals considerations of rational choice theories and consumer positionality. Perceptions of “rationality” will fluctuate from person to person as all consumers have varying levels of access to markets. As Pierce and Paulos illustrate, casual reacquirers are not expressing their free choice when they purchase secondhand goods, but rather their actions are a product of their socioeconomic marginalization. Lastly, frugal consumption leads to the interest in the longevity of a good. Although price-conscious consumers may not necessarily be thinking environmentally, their behavior lends itself to environmentally-friendly behavior.

### The Moral Economy & Critical Consumption

Critical consumption can be considered through the moral economy perspective. This perspective proposes that consumers do not simply weigh personal costs and benefits, but that they consider future peoples and current generations when participating

in a consumer market (Barnett et al. 2005). As Bardhi and Arnould argue, secondhand consumption can “enable consumers to negotiate and realize a diversity of moral and experiential experiences” (Bardhi and Arnould 2005, 225). Perhaps in this way, consumers enjoy the secondhand experience by knowing that their form of consumption is bound up with consciousness for other living people and people who are yet to enter this resource-limited world. Awareness of resource limitation and concern for humanity as a whole can lend itself to market resistance. This resistance sprouts from the theory of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994), which involves the continuous analysis of consumption as environmental risks are increasingly illuminated. Bauman (1995) extends this notion of reflexive modernization by predicting that individuals will deviate from consumer conformity as they gravitate toward what they perceive as ecological morality.

Guiot and Roux classify critical consumption as a domain within which consumers participate in secondhand markets. This categorization is defined by the potentiality of avoiding conventional acquisition channels while supporting ethical and ecological concerns about recycling and combining waste. Critical acquirers are sometimes even known to exhibit counter-cultural orientations. “Environmentally-friendly proneness” (Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012) has also been identified in tandem with anti-consumption norms. Research has found that there are subsets of secondhand acquirers who are environmentally motivated (Cervellon, Carey, and Harms 2012; Guiot and Roux 2010). In particular, Guiot and Roux elaborate on this point, explaining that certain consumers participate in secondhand markets along a critical dimension in order to bypass traditional retailing, reduce the depletion of natural

resources and avoid the unnecessary proliferation of products (Guiot and Roux 2010, 359). In this, consumers adhere to the moral economy perspective and speak to reflexive modernization.

### The Grand Scheme

In a world that is witnessing a trend toward increased consumption (Norris 2012), it is imperative that goods are circulated in order to help mitigate the environmental impact of consumerism. Consumer goods account for 35% of material inputs into the global economy, and consumer goods generate nearly 75% of municipal waste (MacArthur 2013). To contextualize and localize the scope of these findings, one may turn to the state of Maine, where the reuse economy between 2005 and 2015 was consistently more active than national averages (Isenhour et al. 2017). Perhaps this phenomenon is both responding to and informing Maine's waste hierarchy. Although the volume of waste generated by industries is nearly incomparable to individual waste, attention on individual consumer inclinations is noteworthy.

The direction to take from here, then, is ascertaining why people participate in a reuse economy and culture. If secondhand markets are able to grasp the motivations behind perpetuating the existence of goods, there is potential for offsetting virgin production, energy use and emissions, with the broader objective being climate change mitigation. In Maine, the secondhand economy flourishes and manifests across different platforms, including waste transfer stations, community swaps, and vintage antique shops (Isenhour et al. 2017). Because reuse culture is woven into the cultural embroidery of Maine, it offers great potential for material longevity, waste reduction, as well as energy efficiency, reduced emissions and economic savings. The circumstances that pave the

avenue toward individuals' and communities' inclinations toward reuse are the central focus of this thesis. I am interested in how Mainers' life experiences shape their approach toward the state's reuse markets and influence their participation within those markets.

## METHODS

For this thesis, I identified seven sites of reuse within the state (five coastal and two interior), representing a continuum of forms of secondhand exchange (a community transfer station, a vintage specialty store, a vintage furniture store, a thrift shop, two antique malls and a non-profit retail shop). Portland offers a substantial volume of secondhand stores, especially of the vintage variety. Many of these stores are concentrated in a relatively tight geographic area, which is why I selected this city as a major site for participant recruitment. St. George was selected as a coastal town that varies greatly from the coastal city of Portland in terms of population. Portland has about 64,000 more citizens than the town of St. George. Lastly, Brewer and Bangor were selected in order for this study to represent reuse participants in Maine's interior. While there was a level of geographic selection for this study, convenience sampling was the primary method of selection.

I interviewed eight reuse participants. My first interview, with Amy<sup>1</sup>, took place in St. George, Maine at the St. George community transfer station. Another interview took place at the Portland Gear Hub, a non-profit retail shop, with Abe. Four interviewees were recruited in downtown Portland: Rachel, David, Jack and Lena. I met Rachel at Little Ghost, a thrift shop on Congress St. I recruited both Lena and David at Portland Flea-for-All on two separate dates. I met Jack at Moody Lords, a vintage specialty store that sells vinyl records. Michelle was recruited at the School House Antique Mall in Brewer, and I met Colleen at the Central Maine Antique Mall in Bangor.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used here in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Figure 1: Participant Demographic Information

Interview Number	Pseudonym	Location	Demographic Information	Type of Reuse Organization
1	Amy	St. George	Female, white middle-aged, tight to comfortable income	Community transfer station
2	Abe	Portland	Male, white, Millennial, SES unknown	Non-profit retail shop
3	Rachel	Portland	Female, white, 27 years old/Millennial, on a tighter income, works three jobs	Thrift shop
4	David	Portland	Male, middle-aged, SES unknown	Vintage furniture store
5	Jack	Portland	Male, white, Millennial, on a tighter income	Vintage speciality store
6	Lena	Portland	Female, white, upper-middle- aged, on a tighter income, receives disability income	Vintage furniture store
7	Michelle	Brewer	Female, white, early Millennial, comfortable income	Antique mall
8	Colleen	Bangor	Female, Moroccan, upper-middle-aged, on a tighter income	Antique mall

I conducted participant observation in each location by browsing each locale's secondhand goods before recruiting consumers for interviews. With permission from the organizer/salesperson, I recruited one interviewee from each site, apart from Portland Flea-for-All, where two participants were recruited. My interviews either took place in the reuse site where I met a given participant or at a local cafe/eatery. Interviews were incentivized with \$25 Visa gift cards. I conducted eight interviews in total. My mode of selection for interviews was based on a combination of convenience sampling and an intention to achieve gender variability, age variability and, to a slight degree, ethnic variability. Participant observation offered insight, attuning me to the fact that women were slightly more represented than men in the reuse markets I visited, so I deliberately recruited Abe, David and Jack so that my findings could ensure gender variability. I recruited Rachel because she appeared to be a Millennial and younger than my other interviewees. Lastly, I approached Colleen based on the fact that she was potentially a non-white participant. Being an immigrant from Morocco, Colleen allowed my findings to be not as ethnically homogenous as they would have been otherwise.

My interviews ranged in length from five minutes to one hour. My interview questions included, but were not limited to:

- What brought you to (name of reuse site)?
- How often do you buy secondhand goods?
- Do you buy secondhand goods in other spaces, i.e., online?
- How long have you been participating in Maine's reuse economy?
- Why do you buy secondhand? What motivates you?

- Can you tell me about one of the best/worst experiences you've had participating in reuse markets?
- From your perspective, what are some of the benefits of participating in secondhand markets?
- Are there any drawbacks associated with buying secondhand?
- Are there any environmental considerations that drew you here or that have perpetuated your involvement in Maine's reuse culture?
- Do you consider your role in Maine's reuse culture part of your identity?

While these questions provided me guidance as an interviewer, I allowed my conversations to flow naturally. Oftentimes, I would return to my set of outlined questions only if there was a lull in conversation. For the most part, my interviews took anecdotal form as my questions would prompt several ideas and conversation tangents. In other words, my interviews were semi-structured. In these interviews, I aimed to explore how lived experiences inform participation in various forms of reuse.

My intention was not to produce a generalizable or representative study, but rather to explore how experience helps shape motivation and meaning in the reuse economy for a small set of Mainers. I was interested in motivation as it relates to differential experience. My interviews were recorded, with verbal consent from all participants, after providing them with a research letter signed by Dr. Cindy Isenhour and an informed consent form. Later, all interviews were transcribed by a professional who works for a transcription service. I used the transcriptions to code essential findings from my conversations with research participants. I employed inductive coding, allowing themes to emerge as I read through the transcribed interviews. I did not use coding

software; instead, I simply used colored highlighters to identify distinct motivational factors that appeared.

There were two overarching limitations of this study, tying into one another, that should be noted. First, while it has been made clear that there is a thriving reuse culture in Maine, that culture is most vibrant in the summertime. Due to this research falling within the time frame of the fall and spring semesters, there were not as many reuse sites to explore. Many flea markets, antique stores and the like are seasonal businesses that do not operate during the winter months. As of an example of this as a limitation, I intended to recruit shoppers for interviews in Cornish, a town located in western Maine. I visited this small, antique mecca over the summer and hoped to return for research. When I began looking up several of Cornish's secondhand stores online and calling them for information during the fall, I soon found that essentially the entire town is closed during the fall and winter, at least in regard to its reuse economy. Along this vein, my research was limited in its geographic variability as my participant recruitment was concentrated in coastal Maine, especially in the city of Portland, which represents Maine's most populated city.

In the future, this research as it is a piece of a larger research objective, ResourcefulME!, should be extended to explore a wider array of variability. This variability should include dimensions of geography, socioeconomics, gender and ethnicity.

## FINDINGS

Prior to conducting interviews for this thesis, I set out for one of Maine's thrift meccas known as Searsport. There I planned to simply interpret my own sensory impressions of the state's thrift culture by exploring secondhand locales and observing consumer behavior within those spaces. Within minutes of perusing the Searsport Antique Mall, I overheard a brief conversation between a customer entering the store and a salesperson. Judging by the nature of his question, the customer was a regular, inquiring, "What's new?" to which the clerk responded, "Everything's old." The shopper then reacted with an emphasized, "Yup, I'm included in that." This verbal exchange made me smile to myself as I thought about how fittingly it captured Maine's thrift culture. Being a Maine native myself, I perceived this interaction as a quintessential Maine moment in a thrift shop setting. First, these two men, characterized by a salesperson and a customer, seemed to be familiar with one another. Secondly, there was both sarcastic humor on the seller's end and self-deprecating humor on the customer's end. The notion of "everything's old" encapsulates thrifting in a larger context, beyond that of Maine.

### Individualist Motivations

The antiquity of an object is subject to various impressions, depending on the consumer. Nostalgia was a theme that emerged in three of my longer interviews, the essence of which was positively associated with aged items. It therefore acted as a driver behind secondhand consumption. After asking an interviewee, whom I recruited for an interview at the School House Antique Mall in Brewer, Maine, about the approach she

takes when antiquing, Michelle found herself discussing a kitchen island, resembling a butcher block, that she found secondhand. Michelle commented, “There are things that come with memories. So like that table in particular, I got it for my husband for Christmas. I think he had seen it but then kind of forgot about it, and then I went back... and got it. It has that kind of thing going on with it, too.” In this particular case, there is nostalgia connected to both the item itself and the process of acquiring the table once it was in the process of being sold as a secondhand item.

Michelle also held positive associations with a box containing several brush-painted Chinese scrolls that she found at the Fryeburg Flea Market. Recognizing that she did not understand the significance of the scrolls, but knowing they were left behind by an exchange student, she added, “I like the story, and the major score of those scrolls is something that I will happily share with anyone who comes to the house.” The stories behind circulated objects is an element that Michelle embraced when reminiscing about the butcher block she bought as a gift for her husband and the “seemingly authentic” scrolls she came across at the Fryeburg Flea Market. For another interviewee, Amy, nostalgia not for objects, but for the secondhand experience itself reinforced her desire to consume secondhand pieces: “I stopped [at the St. George transfer station] because I grew up going to yard sales and all that... We shopped at yard sales and always went to Goodwill, always went to the Salvation Army.”

My interview with Colleen, an immigrant from Morocco, best illuminated nostalgia’s interconnection with secondhand consumption. When thinking about a set of china she would find at a secondhand store in Maine, she was able to imagine herself back in Morocco: “It [takes] my mind [to] years ago like, wow, I picture myself right

there.” These memories that are triggered in an antique setting continue to draw Colleen back to the secondhand market. Toward the end of our interview, Colleen expressed the progression of reused goods as an analogy: “To me it’s just like you plant something in the ground, and you’ve seen it grow, and you’ll be like, oh, wow, how many years?” In this sense, secondhand items are not simply aging, but growing, and as they are growing, the stories they carry are evolving.

The power of objects is a theme that emerges here and is worth discussing. As Arjun Appadurai writes in the introduction to his book, *The Social Life of Things*, “value is embodied in the commodities that are exchanged” (Appadurai 1986, 3). With this perspective, exchanges are interpreted as not only economic, but intimately social. Thinking of commodities as capable of “embodying” value, we are also able to realize that objects are legitimately anthropomorphized, telling the stories of their histories. Appadurai continues, “meanings [of things] are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things... from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai 1986, 5). Taking this point into consideration, it is understood that the circulation of goods enriches objects’ existence, stories and significance. The social contexts surrounding goods are not the only influential factor at play. Rather, the movement of goods provides a fuller conceptualization of their larger environments. Objects, therefore, communicate nonverbally, mediating social interactions.

Serenity was a second individualist driver behind secondhand consumption that emerged from my interviews, particularly during my conversation with Colleen. I

happened to notice that during some of Colleen's reflections, there was a fusion of nostalgia and healing acting as an undercurrent of her secondhand consumption. When discussing her frequent visits to antique shops in general, she commented, "Every time I go... it makes me feel like - - it's just my mind - - and [it] grows with that stuff." By imagining the places, people and era that influenced an object, Colleen feels a sense of nostalgia, despite the fact her nostalgia is not based on her own memory. These imaginations expand her mind and offer her tranquility.

After recruiting Colleen as an interviewee at the Central Maine Antique Mall, I asked if she was shopping for anything in particular that day, to which she responded, "No, just to browse, it's to help my condition. It makes my mind not think about, you know, my problems or my sickness, or, you know, something like that because it draws my mind [away from those thoughts], it helps a lot." Although I did not get a clear idea of what Colleen's condition was, I understood that antiquing had a healing effect on her, especially in the sense that it distracted her from ruminating on her illness. Colleen also informed me that many of her secondhand purchases do not have a utilitarian value, but rather an esthetic one - - "It's happy, you're looking at something beautiful, not like looking at something broken or something that comes apart."

Serenity as a motivation inducing secondhand consumption also emerged in my interviews with Rachel and Michelle. Rachel, who is in her twenties and lives in Portland, said, "I also get just really overwhelmed in stores with new stuff. Like Forever XXI, there's so much stuff in there that I can't possibly get through there. So I like going into the thrift store where I can just go through my size and see the options that they have." During my conversation with Rachel, I learned that she works at Find, a vintage

clothing shop, and frequents Portland's thrift scene. She also let me know that she lives in downtown Portland without a car, so the secondhand stores are more accessible to her than the commercial stores that line the mall in South Portland, anyway. Later, she compared the Portland, Maine thrift culture to that of Los Angeles, California, commenting, "I just like the thrift scene in Portland a lot better. A little more mellow." Again, at this moment in the interview, Rachel implicates that serenity is a feeling she derives from thrifting, particularly in Portland.

When prompting Michelle to discuss her experience with secondhand shopping, she began recalling the process of decorating a recently purchased home, which she and her husband were in the midst of doing. Comparing the purchase of used items to that of new ones, she added, "It's just a more - - it's a fun process. Like I so enjoyed, you know, perusing these antique shops for a couple of months and finding things that you wouldn't really find in a retail shop." Further into our conversation, I asked Michelle if it was typical for her to shop in secondhand markets alone, as she was when I met her, or if her husband tends to go along with her. She informed me that it is more common for her to browse antique stores by herself, noting, "I want to take my time." Her husband, she told me, is not as interested in antique shopping as she is. In this sense, relaxation is more readily available to Michelle when entering a secondhand space as she can peruse at her own pace.

In addition to nostalgia and serenity, questing is the third reuse driver related to consumers on an individualist basis. This term can be thought of as the thrill of the hunt that many reuse participants feel when they are searching for that one perfect complement to a collection, wardrobe, set of furnishings or simply their lifestyle. In some

of my interviews, anecdotal evidence of questing emerged in subtle forms, but a particular story Rachel told me captured the essence of questing quite clearly. Upon asking her to recall her most positive thrifting experience, she confidently said, “I found a - - you know, those like Levi jackets from the 70s that have the shearling coat - - always had them on That 70s Show, I’ve always dreamed of finding one. I found one in my size... It was \$5... I’m so stoked to have it.” Finding this jacket is the epitome of questing as it was something Rachel had wanted for a long time. Making the thrill of the find even more pronounced, the jacket fit her and it was extremely cheap, according to what Rachel said about its worth. Finding items like this jacket is an aspect of secondhand vintage shopping that Rachel adores and keeps her consuming in secondhand markets as opposed to mass production retail markets.

When I met David at Portland Flea-for-All, he was holding a belt, which ended up being the central topic of our conversation. David was commenting on the superior quality of antiques, laying out the belt in his hands so we could both get a better look at it, telling me, “I’ve been looking for a belt for a while because I have a belt buckle that needed a belt, and so this belt snaps on, where all the belts that you buy today, they don’t snap on... So I found what I was looking for... It took a while, but I found it.” This anecdote, like Rachel’s, represents questing in its truest form. First of all, David knew he could not acquire the type of belt he was looking for as a new product, so that eliminated a firsthand market from his quest anyway. There was undoubtedly a satisfaction in finding this particular belt because he had to dig for it. It was not an item he could simply search for on Amazon and have delivered to his house within a couple of days. He also persevered, not giving up on finding what he was looking for, making the find all the

more rewarding. All these attributes of David's experience encapsulate the act of questing.

Michelle provided me with more evidence of questing as an underlying force behind secondhand consumption. When I asked her if there was any piece that came to mind when she thought of the most exciting piece that she ever purchased secondhand, she responded, "Yeah. This is a piece of clothing that was particularly satisfying. I was in the market for new snow pants, and [a secondhand store] had the exact pair of snow pants that I wanted... I was telemark skiing at the time a lot, and I just wanted something to be comfortable but like not bulky... and I had been keeping my eyes out, and I was planning on buying them new, and I went into a thrift store in Bridgton and they had a pair of L.L. Bean stretchy black, like fit me perfectly snow pants, brand-new for \$4." I liked how Michelle used "fit-me-perfectly" as an adjective, in a sense, to describe the pants she found. Like in Rachel's case with the 70s jacket she found, part of questing sometimes involves not just an item of a particular nature, but an item of a particular size. Questing entails finding pieces that enable a consumer to check off boxes on a mental checklist. When those desires are met, especially as a list increases in length, the quest is increasingly satiating.

The individualist motivations for participation in Maine's reuse culture - nostalgia, serenity and questing - can be better understood through Douglas Holt's (1995) framework of consuming as experience. According to his work, consumers "appreciate [the market] when they respond emotionally to its situations, people, action, and objects. The term "emotion" is used here in an intersectionist sense to describe the holistic, short-term feelings that spectators express in response to the [market]" (Holt 1995, 5). In a

sense, nostalgia and serenity are exhaustible emotions, and questing is an act limited in time. Nostalgia, especially, is a fleeting emotion, sometimes captured for only a moment. Colleen, for example, feels nostalgic when she walks around antique stores. When she exits a reuse site, her nostalgic memories fade as she distances herself from the objects that evoke the memories themselves. Holt adds that appreciation for a consumer market includes sensory stimulation, and that [consumers] are particularly responsive to situations and actions that are perceived as out-of-the-ordinary” (Holt 1995, 6). This notion is pertinent to the individualist scale I have identified. When Michelle indicated that she enjoyed perusing local antique shops, she recalled finding things she would not typically find in a retail shop, paralleling the “out-of-the-ordinary” experience Holt describes. Nostalgia, serenity and questing have all been grouped under the individualist umbrella because they refer to pleasure on a personal level. As a group, they could also be considered experiential motivations, reflecting Holt’s idea of consuming as experience.

### Social Motivations

As part of Holt’s notion of experiential consumption is the sociality that occurs within a market: “The [consumption] world provides participants with an intersubjectively shared lens through which they can make sense of situations, roles, action, and objects in the [consumption] world as well as a template that orients their actions” (Geertz 1973; Holt 1995). Integral to the consumer experience are, in many cases, the social interactions that take place within and around a market, particularly the reuse market, as I observed in my research. Like Holt says, I found that Mainers reconfigured the ways in which they fit in the world through their experiences in reuse

markets. These markets act as arenas that both encourage sociality and are socially shaped by participants.

Abe, who I met at Portland Gear Hub, was involved in a few of the outreach programs implemented by the Gear Hub itself. To me, the essence of the programs Abe described was their sociality. When I was looking for Portland Gear Hub, Google first took me to the store's affiliated bike shop, which is a separate location from the store. The store, where I intended to go and where I met Abe, is where used outdoor gear is sold. The bike shop, where I initially ended up is, "where we do our education outreach and programming, and we do after-school programs for kids, we do a youth apprenticeship. We've done mountain biking camps, a co-ed one here." Although Abe was touching on the organization's mission rather than his personal objective in the reuse economy, I still felt there was a social-basis circulating Portland Gear Hub that is worth discussing. Portland Gear Hub directly invites the local youth community to immerse itself in nature while making outdoor gear more accessible to consumers who may not otherwise be able to partake in corresponding outdoor recreation. This exemplifies not only sociality as a driver of secondhand consumption, but also Maine's reuse culture as a trigger for sociality and community cohesion. I therefore found sociality as a motivational dimension of secondhand consumption in Maine.

I again discovered the social nature of Maine's reuse culture during my interview with Rachel, who told me, "[Thrifting is] something that I do with friends." The 27-year-old conveyed to me that when she moved to Portland, she used to grab a coffee and go around to all the thrift stores, and in doing that, she met friends who are also connected with Portland's thrift scene. One anecdote I enjoyed hearing about was as follows:

“Yesterday I went to a coffee shop. My friend was there and she was like, oh, my god, you’re wearing my skirt, and then the guy that she was sitting at the table with was like, and I’m pretty sure that’s my jacket. Like I’ve seen people around town wearing my clothes.” When Rachel purchased the aforementioned skirt and jacket, she was unaware that they previously belonged to her friends. There was a social aspect that emerged after Rachel’s secondhand buy. Again in this instance, sociality was not directly motivating Rachel’s thrift purchases, but there was an indirect social implication. It was clear in Rachel’s intonation when telling this story that she enjoyed this social aspect of the local thrift culture. Although based on supposition, I would draw the conclusion that this momentary experience Rachel had at the coffee shop will reinforce her involvement in the secondhand economy.

Colleen gave me further reason to believe that sociality is playing a role as a precursor to secondhand consumption. We were in the midst of talking about antique shopping across Maine’s seasons, leading us to talk about garage sales. Colleen said to me, “Yeah, with friends it’s more interesting,” and affirmed that she enjoys going to antique stores with other people and getting a social experience when I asked about these aspects of thrifting. As I was wrapping up my interview with Colleen, she suggested the two of us going to one of the local antique stores at some point in time. I found this suggestion heartwarming, but furthermore, I felt it was a tribute to Maine’s thrift community and its broader culture. The circulation of goods brings humans together in indirect ways as purchasers oftentimes do not know the item’s previous owner and her relationship to the object. It brings humans together in tangible ways, too, as the perusing

of secondhand goods, whether it be at a yard sale, an antique mall, a transfer station or a vintage boutique, is oftentimes enjoyed in the company of friends.

### Economic Motivations

Better prices, a term interchangeable with lower prices, was a substantial motive underlying participation in Maine's reuse economies. As this theme emerged when coding my interviews, I termed it "frugality." Lena brought up the lower cost of used goods at various points during our conversation. One of these instances followed my question asking if she ever participated in online secondhand markets, and I learned Lena does shop on eBay from time to time. She indicated to me that she was in the market for a gel mattress that was not necessarily brand new, but was unused. She found one on eBay that was encased in damaged packaging, but had never before been used. For Lena, this was exactly what she was looking for, mainly because a "secondhand" mattress would be less costly than one that just came from a factory: "For this, you know, this was a special item, and I knew I could probably get it cheaper than buying a new one... It probably saved me \$100, so it was worth it." Lena admitted that going out and buying a brand new mattress would have been more time-efficient, but she was weighing the time cost against the monetary cost, concluding that it was less "costly" overall to find a secondhand mattress that was not actually used.

Frugality is a reminder of rational choice theories related to neoclassical economics, which assert that consumers act according to their personal values, ranking an array of scarce means, weighing costs and benefits, and ultimately maximizing personal utility by selecting for the highest economic benefit (Isenhour 2007). Here, economic benefits are considered in an encompassing sense, accounting for qualitative benefits,

which are not always commensurable. In Lena's case, the quantifiable price of a new mattress was more costly than the relative unquantifiable cost of time. This decision was based on Lena's set of values, which naturally vary from other people's value sets. Other consumer-citizens would perceive Lena's situation differently, and would interpret the search for a "secondhand" mattress as more costly than simply going out and easily acquiring a brand new one. This speaks to the idea that rationality is dependent on the market participant.

Frugality arose in my conversation with Lena, along with five of my seven other interviews. Amy's interview unveiled cost as a driver behind her secondhand purchases. When asking Amy why she buys used items, she responded simply and bluntly: "Because I'm cheap." She said later, speaking for herself and the population in general, "Money is what motivates people." Amy's foundation for this statement was her experience running the St. George transfer station. When I asked her if she would be willing to sit down for an interview with me, I was entirely unaware that she was actually running the operation. She was dressed in unassuming clothing and was walking around the interior of the transfer station with her mother. Although my objective was to recruit interviewees who were participants in the secondhand culture, rather than sellers, Amy offered substantive insight as she fell under both categories. She took over the operation after acquainting herself with the previous manager by frequenting the transfer station as a consumer, primarily buying secondhand items for her children.

Rachel, like Amy, was motivated by both the quality of older, used items and the lower cost that tends to go hand-in-hand with secondhand consumption. Regarding the circulation of goods in general, Rachel said, "It has become more financial for me

because it is something that I make money off of now. So I'll go to Goodwill for myself, but when I go to Goodwill, I'm also looking for things that I can sell, like resell, for a little bit more of a profit. I try not to mark things up too much because so much of what I love about thrifting is that you can find really cool stuff for a deal." Of my eight interviewees, Rachel was probably the most involved in Maine's reuse culture and economy in a multi-dimensional sense. She not only bought most of her clothes from vintage boutiques and secondhand stores, but she also resold her reused clothing. On top of both of these forms of participation, she worked at a Portland thrift shop, acquainting herself with other members of the local thrift community.

For Michelle, too, money was a notable variable constituting her motivation set. When she was telling me about her and her husband's first home in Stow, Maine, she reflected, "One of the things that I loved about that whole process of buying and setting up a house is we bought most of our stuff used. One, it's less expensive usually." She continued on to add that decorating a home with used items meant that the furnishings had a higher quality and the overall process was fun, too. Michelle returned to the concept of cost when I asked about her involvement in both online and physical secondhand markets, and if there was equal participation between the two forms. She communicated to me that she now buys more used clothes online as opposed to Goodwill, where she used to shop "almost exclusively," and building on to this point, "Initially I started, I think, going to a lot of [Goodwill's] stores later in high school and then into college mainly because I realized, oh, wow, I can actually get some decent clothes for cheap. And like when I was early in my career, I needed professional wear. I just didn't have it and I couldn't afford it." Although Michelle no longer shops for clothes

at Goodwill like she used to, she continues to buy used clothing, but more frequently on online markets, like eBay, where she feels she has more buying flexibility. At the point where Michelle is in her career, cost is no longer as important as it once was, and motivations like quality and serenity/enjoyability are more distinct. Nevertheless, frugality has historically influenced Michelle and still has lingering effects in her current motivation set.

Colleen was no exception when it came to price-consciousness and its relevance to participation in Maine's secondhand economy. She told me she buys items that look brand-new, but are actually very old, and extended this point, revealing to me, "Also I have kids and I don't have a lot of money. I don't want one day to go into debt. I want to leave them something that they can appreciate." For Colleen, she can buy used goods that display a comparable or higher quality to that of new goods for a lower cost. With these two characteristics combined, secondhand shopping offers a win-win opportunity. Colleen also brought up cost when anecdotally sharing her excitement about a china set containing 175 pieces, as well as purses she bought secondhand for what she considered a steal. I didn't prompt these stories by asking about cost; prices naturally arose in the course of conversation, leaving me no doubt that the lower cost of secondhand goods encourages Colleen to participate in Maine's reuse economy.

Lastly, Abe, indicated frugality as a clear push behind his secondhand consumption. I met Abe at Portland Gear Hub, where he gave me considerable insight into the organization's mission. Asking where Abe tends to do most of his secondhand buying, he told me, "Thrift stores, Craigslist. I don't really buy much anymore

honestly... I'm thrifty... I'm just kind of cheap." Here, Abe mirrored Amy's self-proclaimed "cheapness," which I am labeling as frugality.

### Critical Motivations

In addition to the individualist motivations - - encompassing nostalgia, serenity and questing - - the social drivers, and the economic impetus behind reuse, two critical categories were identified: quality and environmentalism. I will first focus on quality as it was a major motivational dimension of secondhand consumption across my interviews. In fact, quality was such a significant factor that it emerged in seven of my eight interviews. Here, I am referring to the higher quality of older, previously used items compared against newer, mass-produced materials. In my first interview, with Amy, I began talking about the environmental implications for secondhand consumption, to which she contributed, "I look at the new stuff and I'm like, ugh, more junky Walmart stuff - - that's not even going to last a year... Okay, that's brand-new but its' not even good." It was implicit in Amy's language that she was comparing "Walmart stuff" to equivalent products from an older time.

Rachel also revealed to me that, although she mentioned avoiding Forever XXI due to the volume of merchandise in the store, she probably would not shop there anyway, supplementing that statement with, "I used to make my own clothes, and I really like when things are well made. So I try to look for that when I'm thrifting... I try to look for things that are durable and like classic and well made." Rachel's experience with fabrics made her senses adept at detecting the quality of materials, allowing her to discern between well and poorly made clothing.

Jack, another research participant, with whom I conversed briefly, distinguished vintage vinyl records from those that are mass-produced today. I learned that Jack and his wife, a younger couple, had recently moved to Portland and were struggling a bit to get by. While we were standing in Moody Lords, Jack was flipping through the store's vinyls, admiring, "This isn't just like a pile of garbage vinyl, it's a pile of good vinyl that's selected." He continued, "It's not just piles of like people's old stuff. It's people's old stuff that's worth keeping around." This statement can be tied back to Douglas Holt's idea of "consuming as classification," and more specifically his subcategory of "classifying through objects." Consuming as classification is served to both build affiliation with other consumer-citizens and enhance personal distinction. When consumers classify through objects, they "have adopted a variety of classificatory practices that serve to demonstrate their association with these objects to self and others" (Holt 1995, 10). I am not sure if Jack ended up purchasing any of the vintage vinyl records he was touting during our conversation, but the ideas he expressed indicated where he stood, at least ideologically, on vintage vinyls as opposed to mass-produced vinyls. Simply talking about the superiority of vintage to modern, Jack distinguished himself as someone who understands value, and therefore holds a separate social position to those consumers who do not hold his same views. Although my conversation with Jack was concise, I ascertained that the quality of older, previously used items was a prominent incentive for his participation in Maine's reuse economy.

David, a shopper I met at Portland Flea-for-All, spoke highly of the quality of older items. My conversation with David, like mine with Jack, took place inside the store where I met him. I asked David what interested in him in the antiques at Portland Flea-

for-All, to which he responded, “It’s the quality, and in this day and age that we live in, everything is mass-produced, so quality just isn’t there. And if you have something that you find in an antique store or a used clothing store, you’re going to get quality that is far superior than anything that we find today.” While I was conversing with David, he was holding a seemingly high quality belt in his hand that he intended to purchase, prompting me to ask if he buys hardly anything firsthand at this point in time. He told me, “I try not to. I mean, because even if you find a piece of furniture, you find that it’s not going to last... If you buy something that’s of quality made in the 50s or the 60s, it’s going to last you a lifetime.” For David, the longevity of an item matters more than the immediate satisfaction of a new item that will serve its purpose only momentarily before it deteriorates. This sentiment was echoed in my conversation with Michelle.

The quality of reused goods was an apparent motivating force behind Michelle’s role as a consumer in the secondhand sector as well. Throughout our conversation, she referenced the butcher block table she purchased as a gift for her husband: “It was definitely used, maybe even handmade but like well made... It’s just super durable. We’ve had it for years now.” Branching off this point she made about durability, she proceeded, “This time... I’m really even more committed I think because I know we’re going to be in this house, and I want to buy things that are durable.” Here, Michelle was referring to her commitment to buying secondhand pieces that are well made for a house that she and her husband are settling into and making a home. After commenting on the fact that I received Michelle’s motivation set as largely characterized by product quality, she responded, “It really is, yeah. I mean, in the purchasing that we’re doing now, like we’re buying lifetime pieces... I obviously don’t want to break the bank, but [I’m]

helping [my husband] think about these as investment pieces, like higher quality, not going to break.” Michelle made clear that she regarded used pieces of higher quality as investments, and accordingly sought out previously owned antiques. It was also evident to me that, because she and her husband were furnishing a new home, the used items she was seeking were not intended to be additional to new items, but were actually replacing the purchase of new items.

Again, quality revealed itself as an overarching motivation behind the purchase of reused goods throughout my interview with Colleen. Recalling the pieces for sale at the Central Maine Antique Mall, where I met Colleen, she said, “You can see the stuff there sometimes. It’s very high quality, a good quality.” A few minutes later in the conversation, she states simply, “It’s just the quality,” in a way capturing her incentive for secondhand purchases on the basis of quality entirely. I asked Colleen if she had a particular used item that she considered her most treasured and she did. It was her wedding dress. Although the dress was found in Burlington, Vermont, rather than in Maine, the quality of the dress was an important element for her. She envisioned herself in the Burlington shop when she found the dress: “The lace was still intact,” she said. Of course, the dress held sentimental value in and of itself as it ended up being worn on her wedding day. On another note, the dress was as memorable as it was because it was vintage and because a delicate fabric like lace was not only a part of it, but also in favorable condition.

In a seventh instance, the notion of quality permeated an interview with a research participant. This interview was with Lena, whom I met at Portland Flea-for-All, but unlike David, I had an extensive conversation with her. Lena happened to live in the

apartment above Portland Flea-for-All. The geographic convenience of the antique store was undeniably a reason behind her decision to shop there, but there were other distinct motivations, as well, including the quality of antique products. Within a minute of the interview with Lena, she was telling me, “I find that the older products that they have are superior to newer products that I bought, in other words, the retro stuff I might buy at somewhere like Wayfair or Overstock is of lesser quality than the actual vintage things... It’s always better quality, the older things, as long as you’re talking about, you know, at least 50 years ago.” Lena’s language, at some points, reflects that of David’s verbatim, as they both speak about the superiority of older items. Interestingly, I recruited them both at Portland Flea-for-All. Lena also discusses quality and prices simultaneously as they relate to the pieces she finds at Portland Flea-for-All: “I can get - - you know, it might be a used piece, but its price is so much better and in better quality that I’m - - I’m just better off going there than I am anywhere else.” These two elements of cost and quality, especially as they are perceived as lower and higher, respectively, reinforce Lena’s inclination to shop in a secondhand market.

The final motivational factor influencing participation in Maine’s secondhand economies was a critical one that I was initially most interested in when proposing my research: environmentalism. As there is substantial current and increasing evidence that consumption of used goods shows positive implications for mitigating climate change, as discussed in the literature review, I was inclined to learn if environmental consciousness influenced consumers’ decisions. I found that environmental awareness appeared in five of my eight interviews to varying degrees and in differential forms.

The first appearance of an environmentally-focused statement was during my interview with Amy, who runs the St. George transfer station with a mindfulness about consumer waste. When asking her about how she discerns between donated items that hold potential for resale and those that are not fit to be reused, she told me, “This time of year when I have to basically get rid of the stuff, you know, I will try to make it go to its rightful spot. Like if something’s half wood and half metal, I’ll rip the wood part off and, you know - - so it’s not all just going in a landfill somewhere.” Although this statement is related to Amy’s role as a waste manager rather than consumer, it is still a point worthy of mention. If anything, it provides a sense of hope for waste management, especially in the context of Maine, where there is already a culture shaped around reuse (Isenhour et al. 2017).

Although it was not an overarching feature of my conversation with Rachel, environmental awareness did come up a couple of times. One of these instances was when I asked Rachel explicitly if environmental motivations play any part in her thrifting, and she replied, “It does blow my mind the amount of textile waste that goes on... Yeah, I mean, I try to be environmentally conscious in my thrifting.” Rachel did not elaborate on this point, so I am inclined to believe that her statement was likely made due to my question prompting it. On the other hand, she did mention textile waste, which is not something that came up in any of my other interviews, making it a niche subject that not everyone is consciously making a point to discuss, at least in the context of my research.

In my relatively brief conversation with David, environmental awareness emerged, but again, this was due to my initiation of the topic. I asked if environmental consciousness is part of what brings David to places like Portland Flea-for-All or if it is

the quality of antiques, which was unquestionably the principal driver for David's visit to the antique shop on that particular day. He told me, "I think it's a little of both. I think people nowadays are more conscious and they want to preserve the environment, and a lot of things will eventually end up in a landfill, and it's a shame because people are all about consuming. I think there's a shift, and I think that's what brings people out to places like this." Although David began his response by saying that the combination of environmental consciousness and material quality collectively gravitate him toward the reuse market, he continued by talking about the consumer population in general. It is encouraging that David perceives a shift in consumer culture towards secondhand economies, although I am not entirely positive that environmentalism drives David's personal involvement in Maine's reuse markets.

In the cases of Lena and Michelle, I was left with no doubt that environmental consciousness motivated these women to consume in Maine's secondhand markets. Lena told me about a recent experience that reaffirmed her distaste, perhaps even her disgust, for consumer culture. As she recently moved to Maine from California, she was in the market for staple items, like dining room chairs. She was not having luck finding what she was looking for at Portland Flea-for-All or other local thrift stores, so she purchased two dining room chairs from Wayfair, an online store. Before diving into the substance of the story, she said, "This is a terrible story."

As the story went, Wayfair sent her two chairs of the wrong color, but after Lena contacted the store, they simply told her to keep the chairs and that they would send her two new ones of the correct color. Again, they shipped Lena two dining room chairs of the wrong color, and again they told Lena to keep them. Lena attempted to obtain the

chairs she initially ordered from Wayfair and once again, almost unbelievably, they sent her two chairs she did not order. “So I have six chairs that I don’t want and they don’t want them back... And I just went, god, this is just gross. I mean, it’s just - - it’s just an obscene excess... And that is one place where I went, you know, we just have too much and we use too much,” Lena said to me after sharing her experience with mass market retail. This incident made Lena realize, or re-realize, she told me, that she is better off shopping at a place like Portland Flea-for-All.

Lena also told me that she is more conscious of the throw-away attitude after having a job in California that earned her an ample salary, leading her to embody the epitome of a Western consumer. Now that she is not working like she used to and is on disability, she has taken a step back to grasp consumer culture and the ripple effects of it, like her incident with Wayfair. I asked her if there were any other specific events that have made her more conscious of rampant consumerism. She told me, “Well, many years in California, because California has a real awareness of that, and having a child... Having people I’ve surrounded myself with are very conscious, and I have also become that way just the same as them and understanding where they’re - - what they’re talking about... Really, when you’re raising a child, you’re just more aware of your footprint in the world. So I just gradually became more aware or awake.” Lena also confided to me that she was homeless for a couple of months at one point. For Lena, her differential experience as a mother and someone whose socioeconomic status changed, in a rather extreme way, shaped her view of consumerism, and therefore the ways in which and the spaces within which she consumed.

Environmental motivations are oftentimes bound up with counterculture ideologies, as expressed in Lena's case. The moral economy perspective illuminates factors beyond personal costs and benefits, considering moral concerns that drive ecological consumption. "Moral selving," as captured by Barnett and his colleagues, is a perspective through which consumers are motivated to act righteously, and believe that they can shape an ethical self-image with sustainable consumption (Barnett et al. 2005). When moral selving occurs, a consumer is integrated into a global network of progressive and well-educated citizens who are striving toward social and ecological sustainability (Isenhour 2007). When Lena identified with her environmentally conscious friends -- adopting some of their perspectives and using them to inform her own decisions -- she was undergoing the process of moral selving.

Although Lena was clearly driven to consume in secondhand markets for environmental reasons, among others, Michelle was my research participant who was most forthcoming about her environmental concerns. Michelle and I were talking about the stories that objects carry, mentioning how a material's antiquity is correlated to its historical depth. I was saying how a new object, fresh from a factory, does not hold much meaning to most people, and she continued, "But it's funny because I tend to think about the origins of those kinds of items more than I do the used items... I think because I'm more concerned about the impact and it scares me a little to think about like - - I don't really know where this came from... It could have contributed to rain forest deforestation or plantation cultures, that kind of thing. Increasingly - - I don't want to be implicated in that kind of system, but sometimes I don't have a choice, so it creates this kind of like buying anxiety, I guess, that maybe I just feel released from when I buy something used.

So then I don't think about the origins at all." This statement provided an unquestionable link between Michelle's mindset, which was constituted by ideas as well as emotions, and a subsequent approach to consumption.

As a follow-up, I asked how the environmental implications of reuse arrived at the forefront of Michelle's approach to consumption, and again, she provided me with a clear answer: "I think it was just an awakening environmental consciousness that has happened after - - in the late years of my undergraduate experience, and then I worked for ten years as a conservation and education director in a nonprofit organization. I learned a lot during that time about energy and resource systems. I got a master's in environmental studies, so - - yeah, I thought a lot about issues of sustainability there." Michelle also told me about one poignant moment during her childhood when she was twelve. She grew up down the road from the Saco River, and during the month of August one year, there was a rainstorm, forcing the river to flood its banks. When this happened, all the waste from the thousands of canoeists over the course of the summer accumulated: "I remember standing on the banks, like that was the moment that I realized, like human interconnection with the environment, like it just became so apparent to me." This one defining moment of Michelle's childhood left an imprint on her that has only been deepened through her undergraduate and graduate studies, as well as her job experience. Her life experiences, including one memory in particular from her childhood, became embedded within her perceptions of the environment and her role within the world as both an environmentalist and a consumer.

## CONCLUSION

Replacing the consumption of new goods for used goods has beneficial implications for the mitigation of resource depletion and climate change as a whole. If Maine is to work towards environmental sustainability and economic prosperity, its policymakers must have a robust understanding of the state's reuse markets. Doing so could shape legislation that is best tailored to suit Maine's unique cultural fabric, much of which is stitched by its citizens and their roles within consumer markets. Integral to this understanding is the ways by which consumer-citizens are brought to reuse markets. These avenues are represented by diverse sets of motivations that reflect life experiences. Individualist motivations emerge in the form of nostalgia, serenity and questing, all of which are closely linked to the experience that secondhand markets offer their consumers. In some cases, consumers in Maine gravitate toward the state's reuse culture when they are socially motivated, seeking a stronger sense of identity within a social realm. Yet another influence for secondhand consumption in Maine is economic, concerned entirely with frugality and thriftiness, concepts that permeated the findings of this research, though it should be noted that frugality is not necessarily tied to financial limitations. Lastly, this research found that critical motivations, capturing the desire for quality and concern for the environment, drew consumer-citizens to Maine's secondhand markets.

While these findings are valuable, this research was not intended to be generalizable. Therefore, future research should expand upon this study to generate representative findings. Using this research as a foundation, studies that are statistically representative of Maine can inform the direction of environmental and economic policies.

Qualitative research enriches quantitative findings, offering anecdotal evidence through ethnographic vignettes. This is the approach that this study takes, and extending it to capture a broader array of diversity will positively nuance the research around reuse culture and economies in Maine.

Maine can look to other regions of the U.S., which are already implementing policies designed to encourage reuse (Isenhour et al. 2017). With increased awareness of the environmental benefits of reuse (Scott et al. 2009; Yan, Bae, and Xu 2015), it is promising that Maine policymakers will be inclined to shape legislation around sustainable consumption. Furthermore, in a state where reuse is already woven into the culture's fabric, it is likely that Maine can implement successful environmental and economic policies. This state has demonstrated a history of economic resilience in the face of recession, and this resiliency has been fostered, in part, by a culture formed around reuse (Isenhour et al. 2017). Weaving culture into policy objectives sets legislation up for success. Policymakers can carve policies, using the insight gained from a multi-methods research approach, incorporating the myriad values that Mainers hold when it comes to consumption.

The topic of consumption is increasingly relevant and different approaches to it are progressively urgent as the globe faces climate change. A significant driver of climate change is resource degradation and depletion. This means that reducing the demand for new products, and therefore new resources, is an adaptive approach that consumer-citizens can take. Climate change mitigation and adaptation can be undertaken on an individual level, yet this is too small of a scale when it comes to combating climate change. Additionally, federal, state and local legislatures must work to craft legislation

that aims to mitigate climate change and set its constituents up for adaptive success. The reuse sector is an area of promise in the context of climate change mitigation.

Understanding the intricacies of Maine's reuse markets and culture, like the underlying motivations compelling citizens' secondhand consumption, is necessary for effective legislation on both environmental and economic dimensions.

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APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

APPLICATION COVER PAGE

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS
Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 400 Corbett Hall

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Johanna Lunn EMAIL: johanna.lunn@maine.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR: EMAIL:
CO-INVESTIGATOR: EMAIL:
FACULTY SPONSOR: Cindy Isenhour EMAIL: cynthia.isenhour@maine.edu
(Required if PI is a student):
TITLE OF PROJECT: Maine's Culture of Thrift: On Meaning and Motivation
START DATE: 20-October-2017 10/27/2017 PI DEPARTMENT: Anthropology
FUNDING AGENCY (if any):

STATUS OF PI: FACULTY/STAFF/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE U (F,S,G,U)

- 1. If PI is a student, is this research to be performed:
for an honors thesis/senior thesis/capstone?
for a master's thesis?
for a doctoral dissertation?
for a course project?
other (specify)
2. Does this application modify a previously approved project? (Y/N). If yes, please give assigned number (if known) of previously approved project: N
3. Is an expedited review requested? Y (Y/N).

Submitting the application indicates the principal investigator's agreement to abide by the responsibilities outlined in Section I.E. of the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Faculty Sponsors are responsible for oversight of research conducted by their students. The Faculty Sponsor ensures that he/she has read the application and that the conduct of such research will be in accordance with the University of Maine's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. REMINDER: if the principal investigator is an undergraduate student, the Faculty Sponsor MUST submit the application to the IRB.

Email this cover page and complete application to UMRIC@maine.edu

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FOR IRB USE ONLY Application # 2017-10-02 Review (F/E): E
ACTION TAKEN:

- X Judged Exempt; category 2 Modifications required? Y Accepted (date) 10/27/2017
Approved as submitted. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:
Approved pending modifications. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:
Modifications accepted (date):
Not approved (see attached statement)
Judged not research with human subjects

FINAL APPROVAL TO BEGIN 10/27/2017
Date

01/2017

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Johanna L. Lunn was born and raised in Maine, where she developed a deep appreciation for the outdoors. She stayed connected to her roots by attending the University of Maine in Orono. She is majoring in Human Dimensions of Climate Change - - studying the environment through an anthropological perspective. She has received an Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity Fellowship from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Upon graduation, Johanna plans to teach English as a foreign language to a community of schoolchildren in Isla Mujeres, Mexico. In the long-term, she aspires to pursue higher education in the field of environmental anthropology.