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The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers: How a Faith-Based Organization and its Members Affect the Voluntary Simplicity Movement

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THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL CHANGE FOR SIMPLE LIVERS:

HOW A FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATION AND ITS MEMBERS AFFECT THE

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY MOVEMENT

by

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B.S., University of Oregon, 2005

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The Crisis of Social Change for Simple Livers:

How a Faith-Based Organization and its Members Affect the

Voluntary Simplicity Movement

Dissertation directed by Professor Leslie Irvine

ABSTRACT

This research examines how a faith-based simple living organization and its members, Simple Livers, navigate and give meaning to the idea of living a simple lifestyle within the context of their religious faith. Analyzing data from four years of participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis of organizational documents and drawing from symbolic interaction and social movement literature, especially the literature on lifestyle movements, I describe the ways Simple Livers produce and negotiate individual and organizational identities situated within systems of religion, race, class, gender and emotions. I examine the interplay of emotions with Christian and voluntary simplicity ideologies, which creates an *over-conforming moral self,* a distinctive identity that is rooted in the belief that a Simple Liver should be more moral than the general population. I also discuss participants' boundary work and describe an *intragroup boundary crisis*, a situation that occurs when groups cannot create or maintain an organizational identity because of conflicting inclusive and exclusive boundaries at the individual level.

To my family and friends for all your love and laughter.

To the Simple Livers who opened their hearts and lives with me. Thank you for pushing me into a deeper understanding about our world.

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"It Takes A Village"
-African Proverb

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY

Recent developments have made many Americans powerfully and painfully aware of the

economic, environmental, social, and personal impact of their consumption practices.

Consequently, many question the capitalist paradigm that espouses overconsumption and

depletes the Earth's resources. Many also experience the "time poverty, stress, physical

and mental illness, wasteful status competition, loss of community, disconnection from

nature, a sense of meaninglessness or alienation in life, and general unhappiness" that

accompany the push to consume more (Alexander and Ussher 2012:7). In response, some

have turned to a way of life referred to as "voluntary simplicity" an ideology based on

anti- consumptive practices while simultaneously fostering environmental awareness,

social responsibility, spirituality and personal growth.

In this dissertation, I examine a cross-section of people who have made this

decision in the context of a faith-based voluntary simplicity organization. Drawing on the

literatures on the sociology of social movements, the sociology of emotions, and on the

negotiation of boundaries, I shed light on several aspects of voluntary simplicity.

Specifically, I analyze the dynamics of individual and organizational identity,

socialization into living a simple life, the role of religion, and the influence of the social

positions of gender, race, and class. My analysis of faith-based voluntary simplicity

contributes to the understanding of how people are socialized into a social movement, the

role of emotions, religion, and ideology play in perpetuating identities focused on social

change, and the interactional activities and consequences that occur between individual

and organizational identities.

The term "voluntary simplicity" (VS) describes a movement of people who are dedicated to changing their consumption patterns. Specifically, voluntary simplifiers, or "Simple Livers,"[1] can be broadly defined as people who make intentional efforts to consume less while cultivating a more personally fulfilling, environmental and socially conscious lifestyle. These practices include limiting their consumption patterns, choosing sustainable simple living solutions, devoting more time and energy to developing a greater sense of self, and other activities that promote their ideals (Alexander and Ussher 2012; McDonald, Oates, Young and Hwang 2006; Grigsby 2004; Elgin [1981] 1993). Living simply has been advocated historically by philosophers, including Socrates; by multiple religious doctrines, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity; by groups such as the Transcendentalists, Quakers, intentional communities, and counter-culture groups of the 1960s; and by writers such as Thoreau and Emerson (Aguilar 2008; Buell 2005; Johnson 2004; Elgin 2003; Dominguez and Robin 1992; Shi 1985; Elgin [1981] 1993). While many authors and religious doctrines express voluntary simplicity as having its roots within a religious framework, some researchers argue that modern day discourses now tend to focus on ecological concerns and virtuous lifestyles (Cherrier 2007). The Pacific Northwest has been credited as the hub from which many VS practitioners emerged and gained more of a following in the 60s, but the movement has since ebbed and flowed everywhere in the United States (Princen et al. 2002).

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[1] Often the terms "voluntary simplicity" and "simple living" are used interchangeably, albeit the term "voluntary simplicity" has often been equated with social movement and "simple living" usually is associated with individuals who adhere to this lifestyle. For this paper, "simple living" (e.g., simple livers) will refer to people and "voluntary simplicity" will refer to a social movement.

Richard Gregg coined the term "voluntary simplicity" in 1936 and defined it as having a "singleness of purpose, sincerity and honesty within as well as avoidance of exterior clutter, of many possessions irrelevant to the chief purpose of Life" ([1936] 2004:4). He claims that there is no clear-cut one-way approach to simple living, a theme I discuss in Chapter Five). Public speaker and activist Duane Elgin argues that there are 10 differing forms of simplicity, including ecological simplicity, compassionate simplicity, choiceful simplicity, economic simplicity, elegant simplicity, family simplicity, frugal simplicity, political simplicity, soulful simplicity, and uncluttered simplicity (2003). Such a variety of distinct yet overlapping categories allow for the possibility of many people learning about and/or living a simple lifestyle. In fact, along with a variety of ways to engage in simple living, a spectrum of terms describes the people who attempt to consume less for a variety of reasons, including voluntary simplifiers, downshifters, Simple Livers, and green consumers, to name a few. Although there are varying names attributed to people challenging the social norms of consumption they often have similar or intersecting ideas, choices, values, and beliefs regarding consumption, the planet, politics, family, time, work, and spirituality. Many simplicity groups and leaders claim there are numerous people who align and seek out simple living practices. For example, research by Ray and Anderson (2000) argues that the "cultural creatives," or those who seek to create a new culture that focuses on ecology, social responsibility and justice, spirituality, relationships, and rejection of consumption practices, make up around 34% of the U.S. population.[2] In 2009, Carol Holst, a leader within the voluntary simplicity

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[2]Ray, Paul H. 2012. "Dr Ray Paul: The $ Billion $ Market for Transformational Entertainment" Retrieved October 5, 2013 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HlIplF8eZ0)

movement, had over 100,000 people ask her non-profit organization, Simple Living

America, how to "find the satisfaction of enough."[3] Additionally in 2013, Google's

search engine lists over half a million results on voluntary simplicity. The media have

also been central to the proliferation of VS, including movies such as *Affluenza* and

television shows like *Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska,* which focused on challenging

consumptive norms.[4] Even Oprah Winfrey featured an episode in which the "What

Would You Dare Live Without?" discussed the topic of simple living.[5] Many books also

discuss VS and the "how to" of simple living, including Elgin's 1981 publication,

Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich,

which provides one of the earlier foundations of voluntary simplicity. Others include

Your Money or Your Life by simplicity leaders Vicki Robin and Joe Dominguez; *Take

Back Your Time* by John De Graaf; Linda Breen Pierce's *Simplicity Lessons: A 12-Step

Guide to Living Simply*; and the 1997 book by Cecile Andrews, *The Circle of Simplicity*.[6]

Andrews also provided the foundation for various simplicity circle groups and Simple

Livers to meet online or face-to-face. VS groups are geared toward supporting people

with the same interests and goals of anti-consumption.

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[3] Glock, Allison. 2009. "Back to Basics: Living with 'Voluntary Simplicity.'" *O Magazine* January 2009. Retrieved April 14, 2013 (http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Meet-Followers-of-the-Simple-LivingPhilosophy/1)
[4] Hulu. 2013. "Simple Living with Wanda Urbanska" Retrieved November 23, 2013 (http://www.hulu.com/simple-living-with-wanda-urbanska?cmp=507&mkwid=Uk1COPoU&pdv=c&gclid=CJurxcDB-7oCFcY7MgodtxkAFw)
[5] Oprah.com 2008. "What Would You Dare Live Without?" Retrieved November 23, 2013 (http://www.oprah.com/showinfo/What-Would-You-Dare-to-Live-Without).
[6] For a more exhaustive account on the history and media discourse of voluntary simplicity, see Johnson 2004.

Whereas a plethora of books and a variety of media emphasizes the importance of consuming less, and other routes to live simply, the Internet serves as the main driving force of the simplicity community. In fact, simplicity books like those mentioned above have spawned websites on the topics of time, family, money, and ways to de-clutter and consume less. Websites, blogs, forums, and research centers provide resources (books, tips, programs, webinars, videos, conferences, and simplicity circles) through which people can interact. The Internet provides a social arena in which to protest and build social community and a support network (Eaton 2011; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006). Along with a range of techniques to learn about and participate in living simply, an assortment of "cultural entrepreneurs"—environmental groups, religious organizations, individuals, non-profits, and for-profit organizations—share their knowledge on the subject (Haenfler et al. 2012).

One of the largest conferences on voluntary simplicity occurred in 2001, where many VS advocates came together with 24 other simplicity, environmental, and spiritual leaders for the purpose of considering whether the "diffuse yet broad-based simplicity movement could become a powerful lever for social and cultural change" (Evans and Srull 2002). This meeting led to the creation of the Simplicity Forum, with a mission statement describing it as a "think tank of academics and authors, activist and artists, educators and entrepreneurs who seek to promote simplicity in our work and practice it in our lives. Together we are committed to achieving and honoring simple, just and sustainable ways of life."[7] The Simplicity Forum met from 2001-2006 and, like many

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[7] http://www.thesimplicityforum.org/. Accessed July 14, 2013.

other organizations, uses a website to make yearly forum information available to a broader audience.

Additionally, there has also been increasing research on the topic of simple living by social scientists (Alexander and Ussher 2012; Buell 2005; Cohen, Comrov and Hoffner 2005; Levy 2005; Johnson 2004; Craig-Lees and Hill 2002; Schor 1998). Over a century ago, Thorstein Veblen (1899) took issue with the practice of overindulgent consumption as a way to reinforce one's social prestige. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class,* he coined the term "conspicuous consumption" to shed light on the practices of a consumer-based society. More recent studies focus on VS and challenges to consumerism, including a consumer economist approach (Schor 1998; Etzioni 1998). For example, both Schor (1998) and Etzioni (1998) claim people who engage in some form of temporary reduction of consumption are "downshifting," differs from those who make ongoing lifelong changes that go beyond consumer-based tactics such as voluntary simplifiers. Other researchers approach voluntary simplicity as a way to gain better insight for marketing strategies including how consumption attitudes impact consumer behavior when making marketplace decisions (Shaw and Moraes 2009; Shaw and Newholm 2002; Iwata 1997, 1999; Shama 1981). Studies have also highlighted VS as a social movement, characterizing it under the paradigm of either a New Social Movement or, more recently, a lifestyle movement. Both paradigms argue for a more cultural approach to social movement activism, which includes people choosing to adhere to living simply while drawing on aspects of culture such as religion, books, movies, and websites to gain information and promote social change (Sandlin and Walther 2009; Haenfler et al. 2012; Cherrier and Murray 2002). Research on VS has also focused on the relevance of identity

formation, both individually and collectively (Lorenzen 2012; Kahl 2012; Sandlin and Walther 2009; Cherrier 2007; Huneke 2005; Grisgby 2004). For example, Sandlin and Walther's (2009) work engages the relationship between individual identity development and linkages to sustaining a collective identity, ultimately claiming that individualized moral codes and practices are detrimental to creating a cohesive collective identity. Grigsby's (2004) qualitative research constitutes one of the most comprehensive studies on voluntary simplicity, highlighting the relationship between social locations and voluntary simplicity participation and identity. Her work pays close attention to race, class, and gender through a feminist theoretical perspective. Whereas Grigsby's research addresses how voluntary simplicity is a cultural movement and the meaning-making process of Simple Livers, no extant research focuses specifically on the meaning-making process of *faith-based* Simple Livers.

A central underlying theme in much of the social scientific and popular literature suggests that simple-living participants identify religious and/or spiritual ideals as one reason for engaging in this movement. In other words, living simply is indeed a matter of consuming less, but the practice also reflects a spiritual approach to life, one characterized as "outwardly more simple and inwardly more rich" (Elgin [1981] 1993:25). Most major religious entities promote some form of simple-living ideals as a way to foster spiritual growth. For example, Taoism reflects simplicity ideals with the words of Lao-tzu (1988):"he who knows he has enough is rich." Buddhism's focus on impermanence and non-attachment, and Hinduism's values—exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi's endorsement of non-violence, compassion, and moderation of desire—also embrace the connection between minimalism and a spiritually enriching life. Along with

eastern traditions of simplicity, Christianity offers another spiritual tradition of simple living, specifically with practices like the "golden rule" that inform Jesus' teaching toward a compassionate simplicity. Many faith-based proponents of simple living emphasize the importance of living a frugal life while they focus on doctrine that espouses Christian beliefs and practices. According to Gregg ([1936] 2004), "living simply seems to be an important element in this effort to manifest love and human unity . . . to live in accordance with Jesus' commands" (p. 23). Research demonstrates that the role of religion can prove to be influential on an individual's attitude, including one's consumption practices (Laurendeau 2003). Concern over ecological degradation, the drive to help others in need, the lack of importance placed on material possessions, and the fostering of a sense of community are just some of the main tenets of various Christian faiths. Therefore, it makes sense that simple living and religion have crossed paths.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

This dissertation focuses on Christian Simple Livers, a group that exemplifies the intersection of simple living and religion. Scholars have defined voluntary simplicity as a cultural movement, or a diffuse or loose social movement (Penn 2010; Haenfler et al. 2012; Grigsby 2004). I argue that, because of its focus on culture and individual social change, voluntary simplicity does not align with the more traditional theoretical veins of the social movements literature. In Chapter Two, I review this literature and consider its limitations. I then discuss the relatively new literature on lifestyle movements, the paradigm that best fits the VS movement. From that starting point, I then address how the

research on the cultural spaces of emotions and boundaries can give the lifestyle

movements paradigm the analytic power to account for movements such as voluntary

simplicity.

In Chapter Three, I describe the research setting and methods. I begin with a

description of SimplePaths, the organization I studied, and its board members. I then

provide an in-depth account of my research methods, data collection, and analysis,

including the importance of auto-ethnography and reflexivity for this dissertation.

Chapters Four through Six focus on several aspects of identity formation in the context of

voluntary simplicity. In Chapter Four, I examine the processes through which Simple

Livers are socialized into a simple living lifestyle, focusing specifically on the influence

of gender and class. In particular, I critically examine the relationship between

intergenerational class and gendered family values. In Chapter Five, I address the

identity-making processes of faith-based Simple Livers, including the use of moral

repertoires—combinations of principles, practices, and feelings, including guilt, pride,

and frustration—grounded in both the Christian faith and the tenets of voluntary

simplicity. In Chapter Six, I extend my analysis of Simple Liver identity to encompass

the interactional relationship between social justice practices, race, and Christianity. In

Chapter Seven, I expand the discussion of identities to the organizational level.

Specifically, I examine how a faith-based simplicity organization attempted and

ultimately failed to articulate an organizational identity. My analysis focuses on struggles

over boundary-making decisions by board members and directors. Chapter Seven

addresses *why* the organization failed and Chapter Eight briefly discuses *how* the

organization folded providing an account of procedural decisions by the board. I

conclude, in Chapter Nine, with a discussion of theoretical concepts that expands the sociological conversation about lifestyle movements, emotions, boundaries, and the limitations of a voluntary simplicity collective identity.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I wanted to understand the complexities of faith-based simple living, including its

definition, its participants, and the challenges Simple Livers encountered. In short, I

became interested in the meaning-making process of simple living. Consequently, this

dissertation uses the symbolic interactionist perspective, which recognizes that all

interaction is a social process through which people create, maintain, and reproduce

meaning (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969). Furthermore, a main goal of the voluntary

simplicity movement is to challenge, change, and create new meanings for issues of

materialism, work, family, and the environment. The symbolic interactionist perspective

illuminates how simple living is defined, the meaning-making process of identity work

done by Simple Livers, and how a faith-based organization negotiated and interpreted

simple living discourse and ideals.

Additionally, I use a symbolic interactionist approach to address social movement

paradigms. In my analysis, I frequently engage with the social movement literature,

paying particular attention to lifestyle movement theory. I also address the role of

emotions, identities (both individual and organizational), socialization, and boundaries.

Below, I examine the literature on social movements, including resource mobilization,

political process theory, and new social movements, including the main criticisms. I then

discuss a new social movement paradigm, that of lifestyle movements, which, I argue,

aligns more appropriately with the voluntary simply movement. I also discuss literature

that addresses the cultural aspects of social movements, including collective identity, emotions, and boundaries.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARADIGMS

Generally speaking, social movements constitute collective efforts by groups of people to challenge and transform social order. A plethora of theories about social movements have circulated in the social sciences and influenced various genres or schools of thought on the topic. In particular, classic pre-1960s theories, such as collective behavior, used psychological factors, such as feelings of estrangement and dispossession, to explain why people participated in social movements (Goldberg 1991; Hoffer [1951] 2011). This perspective portrayed people who wanted social change as having some type of psychological dysfunction. Most theorists have since recognized that pathology and irrationality do not explain collective action and/or emerging social movements adequately. Consequently, explanations based on psychological drives have become problematic for explaining social action. Social movement scholars instead started to focus on the centrality of the political sphere, the availability of resources, and the cognitive rationality of social movement engagement, thus prompting resource mobilization and political process theories.

Resource Mobilization

Social movement theorists swung the pendulum from a perspective based on individual psychology to one that portrays people as rational in their reasons for participating in collective action (Olson 1965). Those who participate in resource mobilization social

movements are not seen as irrational; on the contrary, they are seen as rational actors who weigh the costs and benefits of decisions based on the agreed-upon political responses of an aggrieved group. Resource mobilization paradigms compare social movements to conventional organizations because both use resources to achieve influence, power, and/or to instigate particular changes (Goldberg 1991). To reach expected goals, movements must have an aggrieved population or group and access to tools, such as money, votes, labor, civic skills, information, and jobs. That is, a successful collective action requires a variety of resources, including, though not limited to categories of both tangible and intangible assets (Freeman (1979, 1973). Tangible assets are money, facilities, funding, and methods of communication, whereas intangible assets may include legal skills and the commitment and labor of participants. Fundamental to resource mobilization theory is the availability of multiple resources, multiple-group network connections, as well as support from outside the social movement group (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). Moreover, "the best predictor of the origins of a movement is the availability of resources to an aggrieved group increase [s] the likelihood of collective action" (Buechler 1990:10; McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1973). Successful movement mobilization relies on supporters who do not directly benefit from movement goals, or "conscience constituents," as a critical route for successful movement mobilization (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1977). In this vein, the growth of both the beneficiary (aggrieved population) and the conscience constituents may often come through "pre-existing social networks and connections within the aggrieved groups [which] are thus seen as a major resource that is often very critical in the early stages of movement mobilization" (Buechler 1990:10). Social networks linking constituents and

aggrieved groups are often connected through specific social movement organizations, and other network affiliates of said organizations. Overall, resource mobilization is rooted within a formal organizational ideological stance, one in which the organization and its pre-existing social networks are central to social movement successes (Buechler 1990; Steggenborg 1988).

Critiques of Resource Mobilization

Although resource mobilization provides some insight for understanding social movements, the paradigm has shortcomings. Many social movements cannot be analyzed using this theoretical paradigm, including those lacking an organization-centered framework or the social networks that are linked to these organizations.

Criticisms of the resource mobilization paradigm point to how its focus on formal group organization overlooks diffuse networking (Beuchler 2000). In addition, resource mobilization also oversimplifies the ideological positions of grievances as a central route for group formation. Not everyone within a movement agrees on what constitutes the problem and how to go about challenging grievances. Resource mobilization's focus on the importance of politics, the recruitment of resources, and the organizational structure of social movements also minimizes the important role that culture and the social construction dimension of meaning-making play in social movements. This becomes problematic when discussing the voluntary simplicity movement, a diffuse group that does not necessarily have formal organizations fighting for a monolithic cause. Their broadly defined grievances, which include environmental, economic, and social justice

issues as well as, job, time, and family-oriented concerns require explanatory power beyond the paradigm of resource mobilization.

Political Process Theory and Contentious Politics

Whereas resource mobilization focuses on the organization as the central force for collective action by aggrieved populations, political process theory (PPT) centers on the state and the influence of the political sphere to explain how movements emerge, present challenges, and respond to the results of such challenges (McAdam et al. 2001, McAdam 2010; Tilly 2004; Della Porta and Tarrow 2004). PPT focuses on "political opportunities." This term refers to the expanding political environment or its "openness," including the social changes that have made political changes possible; the availability of persuasive allies; how repressive the state may be regarding social change; and the extent to which a division exists among elites and their stance(s) on contentious issues (Tarrow [1994] 1998; Tilly 1978). Political opportunities became a foundational tool with which scholars could point to how shifts in power occurred from those who have it to those who are fighting for it and pushing for overall social change. PPT also did not waiver from the use of an organizational approach, including highlighting the role of organizations in existence before the emergence of the social movement (e.g., churches)—the indigenous organizational strength, later coined as "mobilizing structures" by those known as contentious politics theorists, discussed below (McAdam et al. 1996). Mobilizing structures are the preexisting organizations that offered a distinct route to recruit social networks and people connected to these organizations to fight alongside, or identify with, the aggrieved population (Caren 2007).

Critiques of Political Process Theory (and contentious politics)

Critiques of the political process theory emerged, thus spawning contentious politics, a model that keeps an emphasis on organization and resources and articulates the role that political opportunities have in providing space to form social movements, but simultaneously introduces a framing process that acknowledges the role of culture. Although contentious politics and the melding of these social movement theories have been touted as the "classical social movement agenda" (McAdam et al. 2001), debate still endures among social movement scholars about the supremacy of organized political action against the state (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Steggenborg and Taylor 2005; Snow 2004).

For example, one of the criticisms of the PPT model points to the significant importance of, and bias toward, structural-polity reasoning. Scholars disagree about defining and instantiating political opportunity (Meyer 2004; Gamson and Meyer 1996). Goodwin and Jasper (1999) argue that political opportunity is tautological and "conceptually muddled" (p. 28), including what particular turn of events determines such an opportunity, comprising but not limited to economic downturns, revolutionary uprisings, and limiting and/or expanding constitutional rights. In this case, they argue, political opportunity can be defined in a way that conveniently fits the particular social movement/collective action process. Moreover, some have challenged the underlying premise of "openness" because a variety of social movements have arisen out of state

repression and/or excluded groups, or what can be defined as "closed" spaces (see Khattra, Jasper and Goodwin 1999 for extended review).

Criticism of contentious politics and its predecessors often finds fault with the focus on structural and political foundations while ignoring the cultural and ideological elements embedded in social movements and collective action (Snow 2004). "Framing processes" allowed scholars to address this lacuna (see Goffman 1974). According to Snow and Benford (1992:137), framing is "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there.'" Frames become a way in which SMOs make claims, articulate problems, and offer actions as a way to make social movement agenda/argument understandable to greater society (Snow and Benford 1988). Yet social movement scholars have also criticized the use of framing processes. For instance, Benford (1997) articulates six shortcomings, including a lack of empirical studies; the failure to recognize frames as dynamic and socially constructed processes; framing reification and reductionism; and reflecting views of elites as opposed to a collection of a variety of people who participate in social movements.

Because the contentious politics model embraces a structural-polity agenda, it does not account for social movements that lean towards focusing on the role of culture which includes institutions and groups beyond the state, such as media, religion, families, peers, and technology. Voluntary simplicity, for example, does not bode well under this social movement model. It does not issue a challenge to the state; rather, the focus is culturally situated. Social movement theorists have attempted to theorize the cultural aspects of social action through a perspective known as new social movements.

New Social Movements

New social movement theories (NSM) question the structurally rooted social movement elements of the resource mobilization and political process paradigms. From the standpoint of NSM, no longer should social action focus only on issues of industrialization, like the redistribution of wealth from classic Marxists working-class ideals. New social movements go beyond proletarian revolutionary ideals to incorporate other lines of collective action, such as culture, ideology, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity (Buechler 2000, 1995; Melucci, 1985, 1994; 1996; Cohen 1985; Touraine 1985). New social movements incorporate cultural and symbolic goals, tactics, and strategies, as opposed to only focusing on political routes. Thus, a new social movement paradigm suggests that power does not come just from some centralized space, such as the state and polity, but in fact can emerge from the decentralized forms of power and resistance that exist within the cultural and societal sphere (Buechler 2000, 1995; see also Foucault 1981, 1977). Additionally, participants in new social movements vary in class, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and race, suggesting that other social statuses, as opposed to merely class, represent important features for mobilization. Following that line of reasoning, NSM analysis views social networks not as naturally embedded within organizations, but as temporary and loosely-organized (Buechler 1995; Melucci 1989).

Collective Identity

New social movement research emphasizes the vital role of collective identity, characterized as "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:105). Collective

identities are socially constructed, negotiated, ongoing, relational, and multi-dimensional (Snow 2001; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Melucci 1989). Polletta and Jasper (2001) extend the definition of collective identity to include, "[A]n individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity (p. 285)."

Furthermore, Taylor and Whittier (1992) suggest that collective identity, which they find in all social movements, bridges resource mobilization paradigm (with its focus on structure and organization) and new social movements (with its focus on cultural and symbolic discontent). While PPM and contentious political models may have viewed collective identity as a way "simply to fill gaps left by structuralist, state-centered, or rational choice models," Polletta and Jasper (2001:298) argue for a more relational analysis—one that incorporates collective identity as part of a movement's creation, recruitment, and decision-making tactics, and movement outcomes (see also Snow 2001).

Considerable research examines the role of collective identity and social movements, including the women's, Civil Rights, LGBT and gay movements, as well as the post-partum and the straight edge movements (Haenfler 2004; Snow and McAdam 2000: Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Taylor 1996; Nagel 1996; Gamson 1995; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Buechler 1990). Collective identity connects people with issues in hopes of creating social change on a collective level (Taylor 1996; Snow 2001). Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that collective identities are formed by establishing boundaries of differences, obtaining a group consciousness of the struggles as a way to define its

interests, and to challenge systems of domination that "calls attention to forms of political activists embedded in everyday life" (p. 118).

Boundaries

In general, collective identities entail the conceptual process of boundary making. Boundaries are both *symbolic*, with "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize," and *social*, in which "differences [are] manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources" (Lamont and Molnar 2002:168-169). *Boundary work* is the process by which groups negotiate tensions resulting from ideas of inclusion and exclusion. In particular, boundary work provides a way for groups to navigate contested boundaries and produce new or merging boundary spaces as a way to circumvent dichotomous distinctions. Although boundaries are socially constructed, in the spirit of the Thomas Theorem, they have real consequences (Thomas and Thomas 1928).

Religious Boundary Making

Durkheim's classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995) laid the foundation for religious boundaries by distinguishing between the sacred and the profane (see also Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). Later sociological works emphasize how boundaries create differences between church and sects (Weber 1985) and differences between denominations (Smith 1998; Wuthnow 1988). Boundaries are both "necessary and arbitrary" (Barker 2006:201) and they become central in creating distinct religious identities where categorization can occur endlessly. Boundaries often serve to maintain separateness between groups or among groups. Examples of boundaries that can facilitate

religious inclusivity and exclusivity include levels of strictness (Iannaccone 1994), belief systems (Kapinus, Kraus, and Flowers 2010), and national identity (Straughn and Feld 2010).

Mermis-Cava (2009) shows how an interdenominational Christian association practicing "Christian Meditation" reframes the meaning of meditation so that it crosses over to non-institutional forms of religion while remaining within traditional forms of Christianity. Mermis-Cava depicts the act of meditation as the "sail" or bridge to other religious faiths, while other interpretive frames of meditation "anchor" or reinforce denominational allegiance. Alba (2006) argues that boundary blurring occurs when "experiences and outlooks that were once distinctive to each side of the boundary are now shared to a significant extent" (p. 350). Blurring does not necessarily mean that minority positions are being subsumed into majority status; this relationship can be a "two-sided affair" (p. 350-351). For example, in the case of American Jewish life, boundary blurring challenges old paradigms of assimilation by embracing new forms that encompass hyphenated or hybrid identities (Alba 2006). Yukich's (2010) study of a New York Catholic Worker group simultaneously draw exclusive boundaries with out-groups such as mainstream America, other groups who serve the poor, and the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church on an abstract level, while reinforcing inclusive ideologies with concrete practices such as sharing food, living spaces, and a more inclusive form of mass.

Cutler's (2010) research on a secular Jewish community group, Shalom, provides yet another example of how an organization attempts to manage both inclusive and exclusive boundaries simultaneously. Cutler (2010) asks the question "Is it possible for an inclusive secular Jewish organization to be both inclusive and secular?" (p. 5). In the

case of Shalom, exclusive boundaries of Jewish religiosity took precedence, albeit implicitly, over an inclusive ethnic Jewish identity. In particular, Shalom's "desire to be included in the Jewish community at large proved stronger than the desire to be inclusive of a Jewish identity completely divorced from religious Judaism" (2010:25). Cutler's (2010) research exemplifies the ongoing "messiness" that religious groups often encounter when trying to negotiate conflicting boundaries. Boundary work thus facilitates, both implicitly and explicitly, *successful* negotiations between or within groups.

As I go on to argue, recognizing the important cultural aspects of both collective identity and boundary work sheds essential analytic light on the voluntary simplicity movement, and specifically, on the activities of faith-based Simple Livers. In particular, I address questions of what happens when boundary negotiations break down, when agreements (either implicitly or explicitly) among a group are not met regarding the role of inclusive or exclusive markers. I also investigate how such a breakdown affects a group's identity and survival. I also examine how boundaries expedite the failure or demise of a group. Additionally, I discuss the role of collective identity including its strength and relationship to individual identities within the VS movement.

Critiques of New Social Movements

Whereas new social movements theory has demonstrated that cultural directions, including collective identity and symbolic action such as boundary work, provide a useful conceptualization for social movements overall, many scholars debate the "newness" of new social movements. Some claim that postindustrial movements engage in the same tactics as "old" movements, and they consequently see a false dichotomy embedded in

the premise of "new" social movements (Buechler 1995; Calhoun 1993; Tucker 1991). In this sense, new social movements theory "inherently overstates the differences and obscures the commonalties between past and present movements" (Buechler 2000:449). Buechler (2000) further problematizes the political versus cultural argument that stems from the either/or premise of classifications of social movements. Consequently, he suggests considering all movements inherently cultural *and* inherently political in nature.

Additionally, scholars have countered the claim that new social movements are loosely structured, as opposed to other early social movement counterparts, or that identity was not a factor in gaining traction in movements from the past (Carroll and Ratner 1995; Calhoun 1993). While debate continues about the role that new social movements have within the tapestry of social movement research, the perspective has brought to light the centrality of culture and identity. Moreover, it has opened up the possibility of addressing the role between private/individual social action and larger collective movement action, largely omitted from social movement theory. The conceptual model of *lifestyle movements* provides the foundation for this discussion, and for the analysis of the voluntary simplicity movement, in general, and of faith-based Simple Livers, in particular.

Lifestyle Movements

Recently, Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012) provided a new direction within social movement research by addressing the divide between individual lifestyle choices and the political engagement that occurs with collective movements proposed by the contentious politics model. They argue that not all movements operate under the guise of

collective/group social action or fall under the organizationally centered rubric. Nor do they all focus grievances toward polity or authoritarian constructions. Moreover, Haenfler et al. discuss three main characteristics of a lifestyle movement, including, " lifestyle choice as a tactic of social change, the central role of personal identity work, and the diffuse structure of lifestyle movements" (2012:2).

This perspective examines participants' commitment to enacting social change through a person's daily choices and decisions, consequently reflecting a particular identity. Individual choices and values intersect such that "identities motivate adherents to action" (Haenfler et al. 2012:9). Accordingly, participation in a lifestyle movement fosters a meaningful and often moral identity. Additionally, the targets of lifestyle movements tend to be culturally situated, although not separate from larger political goals and engagement. Often, lifestyle movements (LMs) tend to have loose structures, based on informal social networks and connections to a variety of organizations, non-profits, social movement organizations (SMOs), and cultural entrepreneurs (Haenfler et al. 2012). For example, in contrast to movements theorized under resource mobilization and political process models,

- LMs promote individual (vs. collective) action; participation occurs primarily at the individual level, with the subjective understanding that others are taking similar action, collectively adding up to social change.
- LMs engage in private (vs. public), and ongoing (vs. episodic) action; adherents interweave action into daily life.
- LM adherents subjectively understand their individual, private actions as efforts toward social change (vs. exclusively self-help, religious exploration, or personal transformation).
- LM adherents engage in identity work, focusing particularly on cultivating a morally coherent, personally meaningful identity in the context of a collective identity. Personal identity is a site of social change. Haenfler et al. (2012:5)

   In addition to these primary characteristics, LMs also tend to have diffuse (vs. centrally organized) structures, and yet have a degree of coherence and continuity that distinguishes them with from fads or trends. They also tend to target cultural practices and codes, as opposed to formal/political institutions (Haenfler et al. 2012). Examples of groups that fall within the framework of lifestyle movements include (but are not limited to) Promise Keepers, Straight Edge, Virginity Pledgers, Locavores, the slow food movement, green living, veganism/vegetarianism, and Quiverfull (Haenfler et al. 2012).

   Although fairly new, the conceptual framework of lifestyle movements can provide insight into the voluntary simplicity movement. Throughout this dissertation, I rely on the lifestyle movement perspective to provide a more nuanced understanding of VS and of faith-based Simple Livers. I also contribute to the lifestyle movement perspective by incorporating an analysis of the role of emotions in social change. I turn now to that literature.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

The development of the sociology of emotions since the late 1970s, beginning with the work of Arlie Russell Hochschild, Thomas Scheff, and Theodore Kemper, has revealed the role emotions play in social life. Although research topics and theoretical directions within the sociology of emotions offer a plethora of information on the emotionality of individuals, groups, and organizations, the literature groups loosely around the themes of emotional cultures, emotion work, and social exchange processes.

The concept of "emotional culture" captures the social context in which emotionally meaningful interactions take place, and in doing so, conveys the degree of expressiveness allowed or control required for a given situation. Just as culture, in general, refers to shared meanings, Gordon (1989) defines "emotional cultures" as "patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, by which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about their attitudes towards emotions" (p. 115). Emotional cultures include both impulsive meanings, those considered spontaneous and unregulated by institutional norms and standards, and those that observe and uphold norms and standards. Emotional cultures also include the norms that shape and govern what those within a particular setting can feel and express, which Hochschild (1979) called the "feeling rules" and "expression rules." Each emotional culture has its own beliefs, rules, and emotional norms; thus, emotional experiences can fluctuate and change. Consequently, scholars have examined the contours of the American emotional culture, analyzing its combination of "the romantic longing for emotional authenticity" on one hand, and "the modern requirement of rational control and the cultivation of feeling" on the other (Gonzalez 2013:3; see Cancian 1987; Irvine 1997, 1999; Stearns 1989a, b, 1994; Stearns and Stearns 1986). In addition, many groups, institutions, and subcultures have their own emotional cultures that incorporate particular emotion norms, rules, vocabularies, and strategies. To illustrate, Lois's (2001) research provides a gendered analysis of rescue workers' emotional culture of "edgework" including the differing emotion management techniques used by both male and female rescue workers throughout the rescue process. Bolton's (2005) research examines the workplace as emotional culture, focusing on the role of emotion in achieving organizational objectives

and in the subjective experiences of workers (see also Fineman 2003). Contributors to Barbalet's (2002) edited volume survey emotion in a wide range of settings and situations.

Under the theme of "emotion work," research has examined how people actively manage their emotions in private and public context. Hochschild (2003, 1979, 1975) refers to emotion work (or emotion management) as "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling," often in accordance with institutional and societal norms (1979:561). In particular, people do emotion work by evoking or suppressing emotions within specific contexts, in accordance with "feeling rules." Hochschild differentiates two types of emotion management: emotion *work*, which occurs within the private sphere including home, family, and friends; and emotional *labor,* which is performed in the public sphere in accordance with institutional or occupational guidelines (2003). Hochschild's own study of emotional labor among flight attendants set the stage for ongoing research on emotion work and emotion labor. Although a comprehensive review of this literature is beyond the scope of this dissertation, research on emotion work includes studies of nail salon workers (Kang 2003), self-help organizations (Irvine 1999; Francis 1997), Evangelical Christians (Wilkins 2008), the household division of labor, including the links between family emotion work and the workplace (Erickson 2005; Erickson and Wharton 1995). Research on emotional *labor* examines how race affects the emotional labor of academic professors (Harlow 2003), worker negotiations with workplace emotions such as burnout and feelings of inauthenticity (Sloan 2007; Erickson and Ritter 2001), and the gendered and emotion work relations within the field

of law (Pierce 1995;for an extensive review of emotion labor and the workforce, see Wharton 2009).

Another theme within the sociology of emotions includes social exchange processes. In its most basic form, social exchange theory claims that individuals will enter into and maintain ongoing relationships as long as they remain reciprocal.[8] A driving force behind social exchange is "self-interest and interdependence" (Lawler and Thye 1999:217). Individuals in a relationship will seek out maximum benefits for their efforts. Therefore, if there is a lack of reciprocity then the relationship will end. In addition, people have emotional responses within social exchanges. For example, if these emotions are generally positive ("feeling good"), they foster affective attachments to the particular relationship/group. Conversely, negative emotions ("feeling bad") produce a lack of affective attachment (Lawler and Thye 2006). Research in this area includes exchange processes in relation to power and status (Kemper 1990; 1987; 1978), emotions and the self (Heise 1990; Smith-Lovin 1990), and how emotions foster group solidarity (Collins 1990; Durkheim 1995).

Moral Emotions and Social Change

In this dissertation, I build on the fundamental work in the sociology of emotions but also contribute to the literature in two important ways. Although the research on emotion work, emotional cultures, and social exchange has revealed essential aspects of social life, none of these perspectives offers a way to examine the centrality of emotions in people's lives within the context of social movements. Following Jasper, who offers a

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[8] For an exhaustive account of exchange theories, see Lawler and Thye 1999.

comprehensive account of emotions and social movement interaction, I argue for a more

robust account of "what emotions are frequently combined in political action"

(2011:299). I have found a direct route to this through the analysis of *moral emotions*.

Minimal extant social scientific research examines what Turner and Stets (2007)

call "moral emotions" in everyday lives.[9] Moral emotions convey evaluative components

of what is considered right or wrong, provide motivational energy, and can be self and/or

other-critical. They provide the motivation for people to "do the right thing" (Tangney,

Stuewig, and Mashek 2007). For example, Shott (1979) claims that empathy can motivate

people to participate in altruistic behavior. McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, and Larson

(2001) posit gratitude as a "moral reinforcer" that motivates prosocial behavior. These

examples also suggest a connection between moral emotions and *other* people's interests.

That is, moral emotions are both "self-critical" and "other-critical" (Turner and Stets

2007). Moral emotions include but are not limited to shame, guilt, empathy, sympathy,

gratitude, happiness and anger (Wilkins 2008; Turner and Stets 2007; Tangney and

Dearing 2002; McCullough et al. 2001; Rozin et al. 1999).

Guilt, considered a *prototypical* moral emotion, emerges when one has transgressed

cultural standards (Turner and Stets 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Eisenberg 2000;

Tangney 1991; Carroll 1985; Izard 1977). In its most basic form, guilt exists as a feeling

of regret that one has in response to some type of wrongdoing, real or imagined, that

requires a reparative response.

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[9] Although the term "moral emotions" implies existence of non-moral emotions, this distinction does not appear in the literature. Scholars have categorized emotions in various ways (e.g. primary, secondary) yet; it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop a definitive typology of moral and/or non-moral emotions. I rely on Turner and Stets's (2007) term "moral emotions" to be consistent with the literature.

Minimal sociological research focuses specifically on the emotion of pride. Cooley (1922) discusses pride as one of three components of the looking-glass self. Specifically, he states that people develop a sense of pride based on the imagined judgments of others. Therefore, pride is central to social monitoring of the self. Other scholars have defined pride as a positive emotion that results from a feeling of competence and achievement (Kemper 1978) or as the emotion of recognition (Bloch 2002). Shott (1979) provides an additional theoretical insight regarding how pride facilitates social control by emotionally rewarding people for normative and moral conduct. Jasper points out that within social movement literature, SMOs often transform shame to pride to mobilize support, as in the gay and lesbian movements (Jasper 2011; Gould 2001).

Like guilt, pride also constitutes a *moral* emotion. Yet, just as guilt is moral because it emerges as a response to the violation of cultural norms, pride may be considered a moral emotion because it results from behaving in ways that *align* with cultural norms. Because moral emotions are based on the evaluative context of norms— actions viewed as good or bad (Turner and Stets 2007)—then pride, a feeling that results from performing a good action, constitutes a moral emotion. Therefore, pride represents a moral emotion that may emerge from individual actions that align with accepted social values.

In addition to guilt and pride, anger – or more specifically, frustration with others—is also a moral emotion. Frustration is related to the emotion of anger. In particular, "many varieties of 'almost anger' and many nuances of the anger experience" exist (Ellsworth and Scherer 2003:575), including frustration. Therefore, frustration and

anger-like emotions are related by degree (or level) and intensity. Anger includes a feeling of being wronged, because a sense of *fairness* has been breached. Therefore, anger is also a *moral emotion*. Whereas guilt is viewed as a "self-critical" moral emotion in which a person has guilty feelings because of his or her *own* transgressions, anger is an "other-critical" moral emotion that stems from a feeling that *someone else* has perpetuated some form of injustice (Turner and Stets 2007).

In many situations, guilt, pride, and frustration are moral emotions that are evaluative in nature, provide motivational energy, and encompass self or other-critical tendencies. Guilt, which is directed at the self, is based on what is considered right or wrong. This in turn motivates a sense of responsibility. Pride, also a self-critical emotion, motivates through its alignment with cultural norms. Frustration, an other-critical emotion, with its emphasis on injustice, provides motivational energy.

In this dissertation, I will examine the role emotions play in decision-making and social action within the confines of lifestyle movements. In particular, I will address how *moral* emotions, especially guilt, pride, and frustration, are central to Simple Liver's motivation and the cultivation of a selfhood geared toward social change.

CHAPTER 3

SETTING AND METHODS

This dissertation draws on four years of ethnographic study of the group known as

SimplePaths. I engaged in participant observation at seminars and board meetings. I

analyzed numerous organizational documents. And I interviewed 44 people, including

participants, board members, and those loosely affiliated with the organization. In this

chapter, I provide a brief historical overview of SimplePaths and its board members. I

then discuss the foundational logic of engaging with a qualitative methodological

approach that dovetails with a symbolic interactionist analytic paradigm. After describing

how I entered the field, I then provide an outline of my research methods, which include

the collection and analysis if data from interviews, participant observation, and text. I

describe how I became interested the topic of simple living including the role that both

auto-ethnography and reflexivity played in this study. I conclude by discussing the

methodical issues of ethics and validity.

Entering the Field

My own interest in living simply comes not from a particular event, but from a slow

awareness of my reliance on material goods as a key to promote inner happiness. I grew

up during the era of the 80s, characterized as the "me" generation and symbolized by an

ideological push toward excess. The cultural milieu profoundly shaped my

consciousness. Yet, as time went on, this ideology left me uneasy.

I started to challenge and question cultural norms that espouse a consumptive ideology. I began making conscious decisions about how I wanted to live my life, which entailed focusing on consuming less. For example, I downsized my possessions, shopped locally for food and other necessities, became vegetarian, recycled and reused household items, used energy efficient products in my home, and used walking as a main form of transportation. While on a personal quest of challenging my own levels of consumptive practices, I wanted to find out what others were doing and if living simply extended beyond the liberal/progressive-minded area in which I lived. The idea of focusing on voluntary simplicity as a research interest intrigued me.

Such an opportunity came up in spring of 2007, when another graduate student gave me information pertaining to a voluntary simplicity presentation at a local church. At this presentation, I met and spoke with the director of a nationwide faith-based simple living organization. I learned that SimplePaths is one the oldest religiously based simple living organizations in the country, with a thriving Internet website and a physical location in the western United States. The organization afforded me the opportunity to meet and interview simple livers from all over the United States. I attended board meetings, board retreats, conference calls, and denominational conferences, taking detailed field notes. In what follows, I provide some background about the organization and its structure.

Background on SimplePaths and Board Members

SimplePaths has a physical location in the western United States, but its main method of outreach is through its website, which includes various educational resources, books, and

catalogs. When I started the research process, SimplePaths had more than 2,000 active members.[10] SimplePaths had been in existence for over 35 years, promoting a simple-living perspective geared toward a Christian audience. In the early 2000s, board members of SimplePaths decided it was time to revitalize the organization and reach a larger audience. Within the past five years, this organization has expanded its outreach program to include giving simple-living presentations at faith-based groups and churches around the country.

All SimplePaths board members had some affiliation with mainline Protestant denominations. [11] Historically, as the organization grew, board members forged relationships with the members of national denominations and their programs. For example, national denominational groups such as the Presbyterian Church USA (PC(USA)) and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) had representatives on SimplePaths' board. When I started this research, both of these denominational groups (along with a few others who were not tied to the board) provided small grants to SimplePaths, ranging from $500 to $15,000. In fact, during the last few years, the ELCA and (PC)USA provided the major funds to keep the organization alive. A central funding stream for SimplePaths has historically come from faith-based groups and denominations. The relationship between SimplePaths and denominations are based on the similar goal of spreading the message of simple living to faith-based people. Working for a national denominational group was not a requirement to be on the board, but it was often recognized as an asset. Many members also held prominent positions within their

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[10] According to SimplePaths documentation, active members are defined as those individuals who pay annual membership dues.
[11] Unless otherwise specified, for clarity purposes when referring to "the board" I am including co-directors, board members, and board chair.

respective local churches; for example, four were pastors. With the exception of one, all board members were linked in some capacity to religious denominations on a professional level and all held a Christian belief system on an individual level. [12]

Although no overt rule requires that board members have an affiliation with or hold Christian beliefs, both the organizational ideology and board members' social networks limit other options. Board members came from all over the United States, often the Midwest, and one board member resided in Canada. Along with conference calls, SimplePaths would organize face-to-face board meetings, or "retreats," to discuss upcoming plans, ideas, goals, and budgetary issues. Most board members attended these retreats, and while some paid out of their own pockets to participate, many had their expenses paid by their denomination-specific profession.

The first face-to-face board retreat that brought together both the newly hired co-directors and board members was held during the fall of 2008. I went to all three face-to-face retreats over the duration of data collection. Although these retreats are geared toward addressing organizational topics, all the board members expressed how importance for building relationships and a sense of solidarity with one another. Many expressed how retreats in the past really did not provide enough time for "fun" activities and spending time with one another beyond just talking business. For the first retreat, the co-directors were mindful of this request and did incorporate some recreational events, such as a renewable energy tour and time for people to explore the surrounding area. In the beginning of the retreat, the board's excitement was palpable. As a participant researcher, I too was excited to be studying an organization in the process of reinventing

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[12] One of the members on a personal level was a Universalist Unitarian (UU), and while a UU theological stance is pluralist in nature, its roots are based in Christianity.

itself. Everyone was enthusiastic about the new possible directions SimplePaths could take. This dissertation, specifically Chapter seven, focuses on the ensuing dialogues and practices by board members occurring over a three-year period during annual board retreats (9/08, 8/09, and 8/10) and 23 (February 2009-March 2011) conference calls. Appendix A provides a chart listing the board members' names, position, time spent on the board, their denominational affiliation, and their occupation.

DATA COLLECTION

This research draws on three types of data: interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis. The primary data come from unstructured, in-depth interviews with forty-four people who described themselves as Simple Livers. Both textual analysis of the organization's public website, internal emails and meeting minutes, and participant observation of board meetings and motivational presentations provided methodological support for this research.

Interviews and Sampling

Interviews ranged from one to two hours**.** I interviewed a total of 44 Simple Livers including12 men and 32 women with ages ranging between 22 and 83 years old. Twelve were either past or present board members and directors of the organization. Thirty-two were loosely affiliated with the organization, either as past or present dues-paying members or as attendees at presentations. The diversity of connections to the organization generated rich data for this research. Whenever possible, I did face-to-face interviews, but I interviewed some people who were not geographically accessible by phone. I

recorded and transcribed all interviews. I have changed all the names used here to pseudonyms. I used two types of interview guides: one for those directly involved with SimplePaths and/or claim themselves as Simple Livers, and another for those who attended a SimplePaths presentation. These interviews provided thematically relevant information for analysis (Kvale 1996). I also did multiple interviews with the same people. For example, I did an additional 20 follow-up interviews with both current co-directors over the course of four years, often after conference calls and presentations to get their feedback and insight on the ensuing topics, agendas, events, and decisions.

Because one of the main goals for this project was to find out what living simply means for those who engage in it, it was important to have enough flexibility within interviews to allow for a range of topics to emerge. The conversations with interviewees were loosely organized and semi-structured to allow for a more active interview approach (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). Allowing for flexibility provided a route for Simple Livers to lay claim to what they deemed important to their lives. I started conversations by asking participants about their affiliation with SimplePaths, which often led them to discuss their own experiences with simple living. Some themes that have emerged during our conversations included what simple living means to them, the practices that characterize it, their emotions, how simple living is connected to their religious beliefs, and family influences. For example, originally, I had not considered family background when discussing how and when participants embraced living simply but themes of family influence quickly emerged during the interviews.

At presentations, along with taking field notes, I talked with audience members, increasing rapport that would benefit the interview process. Most initial conversations

focused on my educational background, research topic, and general information about the larger conference or church group with which the SimplePaths presentations were connected. These initial face-to-face meetings were central in creating a more relaxed interview process that I did either on-site or via phone interviews.

I used purposeful or criterion-based sampling for interviews because I needed to hear from specific individuals who participated in simple living and/or the SimplePaths organization (Maxwell 2005). In short, criterion-based sampling allowed me to establish whether people identified themselves as Simple Livers. Director recommendations and/or simple living presentations/workshops provided the means to locate the sampling population. In addition to director gatekeepers, I also interviewed individuals who attended a SimplePaths presentation/workshop.

All respondents filled out a basic demographic information questionnaire including their date of birth, race/ethnicity, current religious affiliation, marital status, number of children, educational level, yearly (individual) income, occupation, and political affiliation. The Simple Livers in this study tend to hold mid-level, white-collar jobs, such as teachers, account managers, pastors, musicologists, social workers, program assistants, as well as nine retirees, three nuns, and one full-time homemaker. All but one in my sample had some form of a college education, and the majority of Simple Livers hold either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. To be clear, while all Simple Livers have or had professions that required some form of college/educational background, their professions were not high-paying ones. Although yearly incomes ranged from zero to $120,000 dollars, the majority of individual incomes fell between $40,000-$55,000 dollars. All participants claim a Christian and/or spiritual affiliation including but not

limited to Lutheran, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, or Unitarian Universalist.

It is important to note that denominational affiliation and theological positions are vast

and varied within American Christianity. That is, although most Simple Livers are

mainline Protestants, many of the Simple Livers in this study defined themselves as

politically progressive and claimed to embrace a social justice and environmentalist

paradigm. They also identified with the progressive values of what is called the "religious

left," which embraces social activism and promotes a "system-blaming" ideology as

opposed to the "individual-blaming" ideology embraced by the Christian Right (Hall

1997: 31-32). Appendix B provides a demographic chart listing gender, race, educational

level, and denominational and political affiliation.

Participant Observation

Participant observation included attending yearly board-meeting retreats lasting three to

four days (9/08, 8/09, and 8/10), taping all conference calls between February 2009-

March 2011 (total 23), traveling and attending motivational presentations by organization

directors. In particular, I attended seven motivational SimplePaths presentations, local

and nationally. I also attended denominational conferences on larger issues, such as

poverty and hunger, at which SimplePaths had been invited to participate. Attending

presentations allowed me to assess not only their content, but also the number of people

in attendance, the types of questions and concerns that came up, and the interactions

between the directors of the organization and the participants. I would go with the

directors and we would talk about organizational events and happenings and their

thoughts and feelings on the subject. During the presentations, I would often engage with

participants before and after these events, which sometimes led to later interviews.

During board retreats, I volunteered to drive members to and from locations, help with various errands or activities, and spent leisure time together such as sightseeing and eating out. I got to know each board member on a more personal level and would have many informal conversations with everyone.

I took detailed field notes during these conferences, meetings, retreats, and conference calls. My note taking also includes any analytic ideas, hunches, feelings, and impressions I have regarding the particular event, which helped in building possible analytical directions (Lofland et al. 2006).

Organizational Document Analysis

I also analyzed public and internal textual sources of the organization, including newsletters, emails, pamphlets, books, board meeting minutes, and reports. A central public textual source was the SimplePaths website. Analysis of the use of language and images create meanings provided insight into how the discourse of simple living emerged for this organization (Sturken and Cartwright 2001). For example, SimplePaths board members spent some time discussing whether the word "Christian" should be part of their mission statement that was located on the website home page. I documented the various website transitions the organization had made throughout the last four years including what materials were offered and other changes such as style layout, choice of language, and points of interest. I did this by using an Internet add-on, *Scrapbook*, which allowed me to save or freeze webpages in their entirety, accumulate and document the ongoing changes on the website. Additionally, as stated above, the organization commissioned me to do a website analysis of other Internet organizations focusing on

simple living and provide a written report on what makes SimplePaths different from these groups. This report provided me with the opportunity to look more closely at other organizations and their style layouts, choice of language, and points of interest; further assisting me with the website analysis of this organization. Recognizing the importance of the Internet as a research site provided yet another venue for a complex understanding of voluntary simplicity.

In addition, as an honorary board member, I had access and permission to over 200 internal emails from board members, the topics of which ranged from general replies to board meeting minutes. Additionally, I collected emails sent to SimplePaths members (which I had also signed up for and paid the membership rate of $25) on topics ranging from monthly insights and tips about simple living to requesting donations. I incorporated two routes of textual coding: one focused on timeline of events and the second focused on categorizing themes such as "theology." Textual documentation fortified the data from participant observation and interviews.

Data Analysis

I used a grounded theoretical approach to analyze data (Charmaz 1983; Glaser and Strauss 1967). I started analytical induction during the early stages of data collection, coding field notes, observations from group presentations, web-based material, organizational documents and material, and conference calls for emerging processes and themes. I began writing analytical memos during the early stages of data collection, coding my notes to flesh out emerging processes and themes. This technique allowed me to further advance and think through analytical hunches and ideas. To refine the analytic

categories further, I examined and reexamined each interview transcript and coded field notes to identify additional categories and themes. Moreover, I wrote summaries of the codes from each interview. When coding interviews, observations, and textual documentation collectively, I became cognizant of "sensitizing concepts" which led to the development of organizing and producing analytical directions (Lofland et al. 2006; Blumer 1969). Additionally, reflexivity and my own biographical accounts also proved helpful both in crosschecking and framing analysis (as discussed below).

BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

Religious ideals and simple living often merge and this process is also apparent in my own life. I am a religious person and, for me, strong social justice principles are just one of the more intriguing aspects of the church. In fact, one of my first proactive decisions in changing my lifestyle habits included being introduced to CSA (community-supported agriculture) through a social justice program at a local church. While at this time I do not participate in a particular religious social justice group, I am intrigued by the influence these groups can have on individuals. My own biographical connections to voluntary simplicity and religion proved helpful in gaining entrée, building relationships, and crosschecking data through an auto-ethnographic lens.

Auto-Ethnography: Binding and Blinding

Because my interests in voluntary simplicity drew me to this research, I consequently had the status of an "active" member of the research setting (Adler and Adler 1987). Active-member-researchers (AMRs) "often share something in common with the people they study" (Adler and Adler 1987:50). Therefore, for this research project, I embraced my own personal and subjective experiences. Incorporating auto-ethnographic tenets of a researcher's experiences provides creative routes to reveal social processes (Irvine 2004; Ellis 1991), and my own experiences suggested a similar union. Specifically, advantages of auto-ethnography include commonly shared emotions among "insiders" that differ from outsiders (Hayano 1979). Similar to Irvine's work (2004), I incorporated an auto-ethnographic approach of my "insider" status as trying to live simply as one route to crosscheck emerging themes, specifically regarding emotionality. For example, Chapter Five provides insight into the role certain emotions have in creating a moral selfhood. Along with interviews and participant observation analysis, I would also reflect on my own emotional state when making my own simple living decisions and choices, thus providing a route to "bind" to my research. By this, I mean my own feelings were similar to what Simple Livers discussed; consequently, these corresponding emotions contributed a degree of semblance with the experiences of Simple Livers. Therefore, these emotions became a methodological process to connect or bind experiences that reached beyond interviews and participant observation; the binding process facilitated a connective experience between the researched and me as researcher, a way to relate emotionally to Simple Livers' lived experiences. For example, while taking cloth bags to the grocery store, washing plastic sandwich bags for continual usage, or making sandwiches for the

homeless through a local church, I would make sure to stay cognizant and address which emotions would come up for me while doing these and other activities. In this case, my emotional state more often than not matched what Simple Livers revealed in this study. This practice became a way for me to "bind" myself to the research process; a way to connect and confirm Simple Livers' emotional experiences based on my own subjective experiences.

While this methodological technique can prove to be very beneficial and enhance the recollection of details (Ellis 1997) it can also lead to "observations which can easily be overlooked, including the many taken-for-granted assumptions about social behavior and the *blindness* to common, everyday activities" (Hayano 1979:102; Italics mine). In particular, auto-ethnographic practices can be both beneficial to the research process while simultaneously problematic because the degree of comfort with one's own practices can lead to a lack of analytical reflection. Additionally, blindness can also produce assumptions including how researchers can believe their own behavior and views are the same as those they are researching.

In this case, blindness is twofold. First, it can produce assumptions about respondents' social practices, consequently blinding a researcher to phenomena that are in plain sight. Second, it can produce an assumption that respondents think and feel the same as the researcher (me), which might not be the case. That is, analogous to the "false consensus effect," through which we overestimate the degree to which others share our beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral choices, (Ross, Green, and House 1977), my own biased reasons for choosing to live simply led me to believe that others were doing it for the

same reasons. For example, because of my own decision to live a simpler life over the years, my political reasons for making these choices became part of who I am.

Specifically, my lifestyle choices are part of my "politicalization of the self and daily life" (Taylor and Whittier 1992:117); I do not come from a neutral position. I make these choices based on pro-environmental and anti-capitalism-driven paradigms with a larger goal of "changing the system." Yet, because the reasons for my choices are so ingrained in my sense of self I did not think to question Simple Livers whether they politicized living simply. This does not mean these Simple Livers are not trying to make larger systemic changes, nor does it mean that they did not produce narratives that support political-minded agendas; on the contrary, their conversations with me indicate otherwise, and their ideas appear throughout the chapters. As a researcher, however, I did not ask the question of political motivation *outright*. I assumed that people sought to live simply for the same reasons I held, possibly overestimating the reasons and social processes for their decisions to live a simple lifestyle. Looking back, I was shocked that I did not just directly ask how they connect their everyday decisions to the realm of politics.

Consequently, I took this opportunity, which initially seemed like a classic methodological mistake, and used it as a way to analyze the data. It is just as important to address what is *not* said of a topic whether as a researcher or by Simple Livers themselves. My initial blindness to asking overt political questions became a route to contextualize Simple Livers and their actions further. In particular, the lack of prompting a political conversation with these Simple Livers may in fact reflect the larger underlying critiques by social movement theorists when discussing loose-based movements;

individual lifestyle changes may not suffice to produce change, and there needs to be more consciously politically driven challenges to the state and/or laws. Consequently, the blinders of my own behavior may in fact exemplify Simple Livers, more generally: those who prioritize individual behavior over challenges to the state as the route for social change. Although this may prove to solidify the definition of a lifestyle movement articulated by Haenfler et al. (2012) it also complicated the interconnecting relationship between individual Simple Livers and larger politically structured institutions in trying to foster larger social change, a topic I discuss in the Conclusion. By using my methodological oversight to address theoretical directions of lifestyle movements, I engaged in a "commitment to [the] analytic agenda" of addressing a broader social phenomenon (Anderson 2006:387).

Reflective Research

Although an auto-ethnographic approach was useful, I made certain to incorporate a reflective stance, one that embraces an "awareness of reciprocal influence between ethnographers and their settings and informants" such that I recognized my role in producing and reproducing the social world (Anderson 2006: 382). Entering the field, I immediately became aware of reactivity and the researcher's influence on the setting. For example, because SimplePaths was going through an identity crisis and the board members constantly debated which direction the organization should take. I felt it important not to participate in the everyday decision-making process in hopes of lessening my impact. That is "I listened carefully and participated lightly" (Lichertman 2005:10). Yet, it became clear to me that I still became part of the research and that I could not avoid influencing and being part of co-creating this social world. For example,

my interview questions with the directors and board members often became a flag and were deemed important questions for the organization.

Additionally, during my four years of research, one of the directors approached me and asked if I would do a comprehensive report on what other national faith-based simple living organizations existed and examined the defining differences of these groups. The board felt that this report would help them determine the organizational niche of SimplePaths and would also prove beneficial for my own research. Although I agreed that this report would benefit my research, I hesitated to do it for fear of tainting the research. Yet, I realized that the board members might have not even come up with the proposal for this report in the first place had I not been involved in this project. Even with my pseudo-status as an honorary (quiet) board member and my own steps to maintain a "fly on the wall" persona, all the board members were very aware that I was a researcher. This status led the board to take advantage of an opportunity they might not have pursued if I were not there.

I did the report and I took steps, including seeking clarification from co-directors, to ensure that I did what the board expected of me. In the end, I remain unclear about what influence, if any, my report had on the board members and the ensuing directions the board took with SimplePaths. Nor am I clear who on the board actually read it. In fact, the report was only mentioned during the second retreat, as a "jumping off point" for discussion, and never referred to again. Additionally, I wondered what influence, if any, my presence as a researcher had on the endurance of the organization. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, SimplePaths folded after 35 years of business. I noted two important reflective components that occurred during the research process that specifically pertain

to the writing of this chapter: the first being the impact of my physical presence and the second involving my own feeling towards the organization. I will first address the latter. Over the course of four years, I often left presentations, meetings, and conference calls feeling frustrated. Moreover, I felt bad for being frustrated with the group. I wanted this group to succeed and I genuinely liked the people on the board, so for a while I could not understand my frustration. I wondered if my feelings reflected my own fear of ineptness with doing qualitative work. Maybe I felt this way because I wasn't doing a *good* job with the research? Or maybe I really did not like these people. Moreover, while there is always room for improvement in doing research, I realized that my frustration with the group stemmed from more than just personality idiosyncrasies of group members. Therefore, I kept going back, writing and thinking, about why I felt so frustrated. In this sense, I learned "how we use those feelings to understand the people we study" and consequently used these emotions to drive my own research questions and analysis (Kleinman 1996:4). I began to recognize that my emotional response of frustration centered on an important analytic feature of SimplePaths– the lack of a clear organizational direction. I was frustrated with the sporadic and convoluted niche options the board members took regarding the organization. In addition, while it was not up to me to decide the organizational niche, it was important not to dismiss the ongoing feeling of frustration. Thus, my own emotions became a route to address a theoretical direction of this study. In the end, this methodological tool, of reflexivity, is what spurred the direction for Chapter Seven on boundary crisis and irreconcilable group decisions.

Moreover, it is important to note the degree of specialness a researcher may inadvertently produce among the studied population and in this case among an

organization. My research project started around the time SimplePaths began a new phase including new niche directions, new directors, and a new physical location. All the board members were excited about what the future had in store for SimplePaths. It was no secret the board members were also very excited that SimplePaths, specifically, and simple living, in general, were the focus of my dissertation. Many discussed the importance of getting the word out about simple living and how my research would add to the larger discourse of VS. My presence as a researcher added to the excitement of new possibilities for the organization and VS overall. As stated above, often the co-directors would express the importance of my research questions. On one particular occasion Sherry had pulled out her own notebook and wrote down questions I asked her during a follow-up interview. She often made comments such as, "Oh, that is good question and I need to follow-up" or "Your questions help me to think about what is important" and then scribbled something down on her notebook. The first time she did this I was immediately taken aback. It became very clear that I, as a researcher, influenced the organization in some way. Over the course of four years, I became part of the business-as-usual setting while still seen as a researcher with an agenda. Directors and board members would introduce me to others as a researcher doing a study on their organization. I often got the sense they felt some semblance of pride, legitimacy, and a feeling of specialness, by having a researcher alongside them during public events.

Consequently, although I did not know the extent to which the report influenced anyone, or the degree to which my interview questions became flags, or whether my presence affected board members in some way, I knew that I was part of this setting and the co-construction of this social world. Therefore, ongoing reflective practices, including

writing extensive notes on this process, became an important component of this research project. Employing a reflective practice also offered another route to crosscheck analytical processes (Karp 1996).

A WORD ON ETHICS AND VALIDITY

The issue of confidentiality posed a main concern in this study. Although I took all preventative measures to ensure confidentiality of individual interviewees (e.g., pseudonyms and limited access to data), concealing the identity of the actual organization was more difficult and "identified as particularly problematic" (Wiles et al. 2006). In short, few national faith-based simple living organizations exist. One way I alleviated concerns of confidentiality included stripping away identifying markers that could potentially reveal the actual organization. Due to the original agreement with the first board director I had contact with, it was my duty from an ethical standpoint to maintain organizational anonymity. Yet, it was not a central concern for board members; having this research form part of the larger social discourse of voluntary simplicity proved relevant for this organization. Consequently, the members of the organization were more than happy to have me do this research and I was forthright about what I could do to preserve anonymity in light of the limited pool of existing faith-based simple living organizations.

This research constitutes a case study of one religious-based organization. The study cannot claim to have external generalizability because no known "universe" of simple living organizations from which one could draw a random sample and apply generalizations (Maxwell 2005). Although qualitative research is not often conducive to a

goal of generalizability, I do claim to obtain *internal* generalizability within the setting

and the participants (Maxwell 2005; Denzin 1983). I was involved with this organization

for four years and invested more than one hundred hours in interviews and time in the

field. Long-term involvement, interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis

provided a rich, or thick, descriptive picture of faith-based Simple Livers, consequently,

increasing the credibility of information while lowering possible validity concerns

(Maxwell 2005).

CHAPTER 4

SOCIALIZATION INTO SIMPLE LIVING

When I began my research for this dissertation, I was particularly interested in developing insight regarding how Simple Livers are introduced to the idea of living a simple life. Generally speaking, lifestyle movements like VS rely heavily on the Internet as a way to disseminate information (Sandlin and Callahan 2009). Additionally, most research on Simple Livers uses the Internet as a source of data or at least as a starting point (Sandlin and Walther 2009; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006). Even simplicity circles, a mainstay of the VS movement in which people gather in small groups to discuss and share simplicity experiences and practices, are promoted on the Web.[13]

I recruited the participants for this research at a one-time simplicity presentation at a local church. This led me to believe that socialization into a simple lifestyle can occur either through Internet resources or, in this case, through faith communities. However, my conversations with participants revealed that the socialization process into VS is much more complex.

In this chapter, I discuss *how* participants are socialized into a simple living lifestyle. In my analysis, I draw loosely from the life course perspective, which posits that "the life course of individuals is embedded in and shaped by the historical times and places they experience in their lifetime" (Elder 1998:3, 1999, 1994). For Simple Livers, socialization primarily occurs through gender (especially the role of women), time (historical), and place (farm life). Additionally, Simple Livers' experiences of the

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[13] See for example: http://simplicity.meetup.com/ retrieved on September 3 2013

socialization process provide a specific social class narrative. The name of the movement itself—"voluntary"—reflects the notion that living simply is a choice made by those who can *afford* to live a more lavish lifestyle. Choosing to buy green products and organic foods or reducing workloads to spend more time with family is easier for individuals who achieve a certain degree of financial stability and class status. Yet, it is important to investigate how class may indicate more than an economic standing (Grigsby 2004). Class and gender are not stand-alone social categories. Class is part of a Simple Liver's biographical tapestry, embedded in micro and macro interactions, including the socialization process.

The goal of this chapter is not merely to confirm the demographics found throughout the literature on Simple Livers (that is, that they are mostly white middle-class women), but rather to address how these social symbols interact with each other and how people learn a simple lifestyle. The geographic and historic markers of the Simple Livers in my sample produced a noteworthy relationship between intergenerational class and gendered family values.

GENDER AND FAMILY SOCIALIZATION

Many Simple Livers I spoke with repeatedly talked about the relationship between simple living and family. In particular, our conversations reflected the role mothers play in passing simple living values on to their children and the influence they have (or hope they have) over other family members' lifestyles. Most simple living research focuses on single Simple Livers (Sandlin and Walther 2009; Grigsby 2004). In contrast, the interview respondents in this study are mostly married women, almost all of whom have

children. When I asked Neil, one of the past directors of SimplePaths, which group the

organization targets, his answer reflected what most simple living research demonstrates,

"Our primary demographic has been, for the last 15 years, I would guess, middle- to

upper-income, well-educated white women, because they're the ones who make most of

the purchasing decisions. They're the ones who are more open to this. They're the ones

who do two-thirds of the work at Christmastime." Neil's comments support the existing

research on gender, which locates women at the forefront of most household decisions,

including during holiday seasons (Fischer and Arnold 1990). Additionally, women are

more often than not the primary caregivers to children in the family (Hays 1996). My

analysis suggests that women, as partners and mothers, are central to ongoing simple

living socialization processes.

Values to Children

While I cannot say with certainty who the primary caregivers are in these simple living

families, it was the women who most often discussed the importance of passing simple

living practices and values on to their children thus acting as agents of socialization.

Female Simple Livers talked about the need to teach these values to their children. I

talked to Erin, a 30-year-old mother raising a 4-year-old and an 18-month old while

working two part-time jobs, one as a speech therapist for stroke victims and another as a

coordinator at her church. I first met her at simple living workshop during a clergy

spousal retreat. She along with nine other people discussed the question, "What can I do

to live a simpler life?" She talked about simplicity circles as a way for "normal" people to

learn about different practices and tactics to reduce waste. The group went on to discuss

examples of practices they could implement including Erin's example of air-drying

clothes versus using the dryer. Later during my interview, we discussed her goals as

Simple Liver, she replied:

> My goal would be to pass these things on to my children. These
>
> are not lessons that were taught to me. I was not encouraged to
>
> be wasteful, but I was also never told that I shouldn't be
>
> wasteful. When I was in the grocery store today with my four-
>
> year-old, she wanted to put the bananas that we were getting into
>
> one of those little plastic bags. I said to her, "We don't need that.
>
> We can put that in our cart and just carry it like this." And she
>
> was like, "But I want a bag!" "That's making extra garbage, and
>
> we don't need to do that." So hopefully in small ways I'm
>
> passing this on.

Erin acknowledged the role she has as a parent in promoting and perpetuating simple

living values and practices. Similarly, when I spoke with Joan, a married 51-year-old

woman with two grown children, about how long she has been engaging in her own

simplicity practices, she brought up how she influenced her children, especially her

daughter. Joan told me that, during dinnertime, she would often focus on family bonding

practices, including discussions of current events related to topics such as sustainability,

as a way to nurture critical thinking skills. She believed these activities were instrumental

in building a foundation of simple living values, which her daughter maintained when she

later went to college and obtained a degree in sustainability. Joan laughed, "I kind of

created a monster with her! But [my children] want to dig more for information and not

just blindly nod their heads when they hear or see something." My conversation with Joan not only reveals her role in promoting these values, but also shows that the values were internalized and later practiced by her daughter outside of the home, reflecting her mother's teachings. Discussions of simple living values also provide family members with a way to connect with each other; simple living is something families can talk about and do together, as was the case with Joan's family.

Even when children are grown, family conversations about simple living values continue to take place. Patty, a blonde woman in her early fifties, discussed how all three of her sons' choices and decisions were influenced by her passion for locally grown, environmentally friendly food. Patty explained, "All of them shop farmers' markets, they've listened to me so often, they tease me all the time. 'We were just gonna go buy some pork chops [at a grocery store], but we thought, oh my God, what if you found out? So we went to the [farmer's] market instead.'" She later added, "They all belong to CSAs, community supported agriculture. I'm very proud of that." She added jokingly, "Even the real redneck right-wing one [son] up in Milwaukee." These women promote simple living values and practices in the home in hopes that their children will also find ways to challenge consumption norms in their adult life.

Gender norms, which associate women with the private sphere of the home and childrearing, create a particular route through which simple living ideals are learned and consequently nurtured. Female Simple Livers use the home as a place to encourage a form of resistance against mainstream consumption and environmental norms. Their goal is to socialize children to behave according to values that challenge mainstream ideals.

However, that does not mean men are excluded from these practices. For example, when speaking about his now-adult children, Ben described how proud he is of his kids, "I think one of the most rewarding things [was] in Boston when I went shopping with my son to the grocery store and he grabbed these cloth bags to go put the groceries in. I thought, 'Wow, I'm impressed! I don't always do that.' And it made me try to be more conscious to do it." Simple living socialization is not unidirectional, but is a cyclical form of socialization among family members, as Ben demonstrates when he says that his son reminds him to be "more conscious to do it"—that is, take cloth bags to the store. Ben also talked about how his daughter embraces simple living practices and acknowledged that she "was doing those things because of what she learned growing up."

Trent, one of 12 men interviewed, discussed how he and his wife were trying to instill simple living values in their children. For example, when talking with his kids about their decision not to purchase "bigger, better" household items, he rationalized, "We don't have a big fancy house, number one. It's a pretty modest house. We don't have big screen TVs, we don't have flat-screen TVs. They're all older TVs. Our kids are after us all the time to get a big-screen TV. We're the old ones that don't have a big-screen TV." He went on to describe how he explained this decision to his children. "Number one, we're not the only ones," he said. "And number two, we just choose not to do that, not to spend our money that way. We tell them they watch too much TV anyway. We try to limit it, but it's hard."

In sum, although men do have influence within the family structure, the data overwhelmingly demonstrate that women are at the forefront of teaching simple living practices within the home. Women act as agents of socialization by passing these

principles on to their children. Consequently, while these women may in fact maintain gendered domestic norms of child rearing within the *private* sphere, they are also using their role as mothers to challenge the mainstream economic consumptive norms of the *public* sphere. In addition to encouraging their children to adopt simple living values and practices, women also aim to influence others within their family networks.

Familial Circles of Influences

Female Simple Livers also shared stories about how they try to expand their influence beyond their children to include other family members, such as husbands and in-laws. Often, these practices are conscious and deliberate, and at times, covert in nature. Additionally, some of their stories reflect intra-generational influences that go beyond mother-child relations. For example, Elsa's story depicts a dynamic relationship of familial social networks among her daughters. She said, "I guess it's interesting that my daughter has had an impact on her sisters as well. That they now, you know, recycle, even though they may not have the curbside recycling, they collect their stuff and…and you know, do it. They take their bags to the stores." Elsa's statement reflects the impact of family relations on simple living practices. Elsa's daughters are actively perpetuating these values within the immediate family circle. Additionally, Elsa discussed how these practices extend beyond immediate family:

> Our middle daughter Stephanie, is getting married this summer,
> and I met her husband, and I said, 'don't you recycle?'... And um
> you know kind of preached to him about that. And interestingly,
> he was here at Christmas time and he was helping put the dishes
> in the dishwasher, and my old feelings of you're wasting too

much water. It was like just put 'em in the sink and I'll take care

of 'em.

Elsa wanted to say something to her son-in-law about his use of water, but he was a

"newer member…someone coming into the family. How do you say you're using too

much water?" She went on to say that she will probably broach the topic "at some point

in time." "When I get to know him better," she said, "I will probably say I grew up

where it's a sin to waste water, so you have to just kind of use it sparingly around me."

For Elsa, simple living was not just an important facet of daily life. It was also a way to

bring others into the fold of the family by way of suggesting existing family simple living

habits, as a way to show her commitment to her son-in-law as the "newer member" of the

family. Just as it was important to pass simple living values along to her children, Elsa's

story reflects her conscious decision to convince others to adopt, or at least be aware of,

simple living practices.

   Often, husbands are the first family members that female Simple Livers try to convince.

Incorporating simple living practices is a point of negotiation among married couples,

typically initiated and sustained by women, sometimes in a covert fashion (Huneke

2005). As Martha noted in our conversation, her married daughter is "working on her

[own] husband." Erin also discussed the ways she worked to incorporate simple living

practices into her household and get her husband involved. She had just been to a large

Lutheran event, which had given her some new practical simple living ideas. Her story

reveals the negotiating tactics she employed to get him, and by default, the rest of the

family, to lessen their meat consumption:

> When I came back from *Global Mission*, he was like, 'Does it
>
> really make a difference?' So there's been a little bit of
>
> encouragement, but he's been very open to learning it. I think
>
> we're getting there. We're trying as a family to do this together.
>
> The neat thing, to begin with was, *that* [meatless dinners] *was*
>
> *probably my biggest sell*.

Erin emphasized that she had to sell her husband on the idea of not having meat for dinner every night. Erin wanted to incorporate simple living tactics in their everyday family life, but she had to find a way to get her husband to agree to this. She told him, "'If I make two meatless dinners a week, you're probably not even gonna notice it. I think he had this idea that I was gonna start serving tofu for dinner every night." To create change in her household, Erin had to contend with her husband's stigmatized view of vegetarianism, which challenges the norm of consuming meat and contradicts Midwestern rural farm life ideals. She explained, "I just kind of started doing it without really making a big deal out of it, I did that for two weeks, I said, 'this is what it would be like.' And he hadn't even noticed that it had happened. And I said, 'See?' Once he realized that, he's been very supportive." Erin's covert adoption of simple living practices later influenced her husband's choices and decisions, not only concerning food, but also shopping and driving. Her husband not only accepted limited meat consumption, but also suggested that they adopt a "no shopping for Lent" rule. They agreed not to buy anything except for groceries during the 40-day Lenten season. When they did begin shopping again, he adopted new consumption practices, such as shopping at second-hand clothing stores. Erin told me, "He was great with the children's clothes. He was very supportive of

that and he loves to go to those stores now." They also have agreements about a number of other daily practices, including the act of driving. Erin said, "Before it was, 'I'll go in my car and you go in your car, and that way if one of the kids freaks out, we can divide and conquer.' Now it's 'We'll all go together in one car, there's no reason to take two.'" While driving only one car reduces the family's environmental impact, this practice also reflects the value that Simple Livers spend time with family. Ultimately, Erin was successful in her negotiations.

In addition to influencing her husband, Erin, like the other women in this study, influenced other family members. For example, she described how her family bought socially conscious gifts for her parents that were "directly fair trade [or] things that would be used." After describing the gifts (such as bean soup mixes whose proceeds benefit low-income women and other fair-wage products) she explained the reaction of her in-laws. "People didn't say, 'We don't like it'," she recalled. "But I didn't ever sense that they were as excited about it as I was…Not one way or the other, not good or bad, just, 'Oh, thanks.' But I still felt like we were sharing what was important to us… and maybe it took. We'll see next Christmas how it goes." Erin's effort to expand the gift-giving paradigm to reflect her own family values is an example of her attempts at expanding the socialization process of simple living tactics. Erin's attempts to share simple living ideals reflect simple living goals including both the goal that others embrace these ideals and being an example to others, in this case, immediate family members.

Many women also discussed how they learned simple living values from their own mothers (Pierce 2000). Reflecting on the influence of her mother's activities, such as serving on social justice committees, Martha noted, *"I used to tell people that I think I*

started doing this because that's what my mother did. [She] was the role model, to participate in committees, to participate in the activities that the church provided. And then I decided I liked doing it, too, I'm not doing it just because my mother did it, I'm learning a lot by doing this." Martha attributed her own church and simple living activities to successful socialization on her mother's part. During another interview, Elsa also shared that when she was growing up, her mom encouraged values of not being wasteful. "Yeah, I'd say my mom kind of instilled [it] in all of us," she explained. "Re-use your Ziploc bags. Don't just use them once and throw them away, that you can turn 'em inside out and wash 'em and use 'em again." Elsa is another example of how a mother influenced a child, who in turn, influenced her own daughter (who earned a degree in sustainability); this illustrates the intergenerational nature of simple living socialization processes.

The women in this study challenge consumption and environmental mainstream behavior through the enactment of gendered norms, such as motherhood, by teaching simple living norms and values to their children and, at times, covertly adopting and negotiating simple living practices in their households. Based on women's traditional roles in the private sphere, Simple Livers' socialization practices often center on the immediate family; therefore, the consequences of these actions often influence other family members. In addition to the importance of maternal influence and family practices, many Simple Livers cited the intricate relationship between class and geography as being central to the formation of their simple living ideals.

SPACE, PLACE, AND CLASS

Research shows that most Simple Livers are middle- or upper-class (Grigsby 2004). Simple Livers tend to hold mid-level, white-collar jobs, such as teachers, account managers, pastors, social workers, IT technicians, and program assistants. All but one in my sample had some form of a college education, and the majority of Simple Livers hold either a Bachelors or a Masters degree. Overall, Simple Livers rarely talked about class status in terms of their current income (Grigsby 2004). One exception occurred during my visit at Isaac and Brian's home. Gathered in the living room, sitting on big, overstuffed, slightly worn chairs, we chatted about the relationship between income and living a simple life. Both grew up in a very rural, working-class area, and both have jobs in the service industry that do not pay well. As a result, they often struggle to live simply. Isaac protested:

> If we had more money, we could have our solar panels, build a house that's completely off the grid and we wouldn't be dependent on anything else. Just even like what I said, buying bananas. When you're buying organic, you're paying more money. So even the food, if you try to live more green or more simply…you know that the organic land that those bananas were grown on…didn't use synthetic fertilizers…so you know that the land is somewhat good there [and] you try to support that, but it's costing you more money. Within our budget, a lot of those decisions are very hard to make each week.

In this case, Isaac reiterates that having a lower income makes simple living decisions difficult. This conversation with Isaac emphasized the point about economic class positions; namely, how expensive it is to maintain a simple living lifestyle. Yet, for the most part, class status, defined as income, is not something Simple Livers speak about except through off-the-cuff statements such as "living simply can be expensive." Therefore, economic privilege held by middle-class status maintains a degree of invisibility and is consequently ignored by those within the simple living movement. However, class is situated and discussed by reference to historical markers such as periods of deprivation, including the Depression era.

Era as Space

I was surprised to discover that many of my participants wanted to reflect on the periods in which they grew up when talking about simple living. For example, many Simple Livers described how growing up, being a child of the Depression, or being children of the children of the Depression, provided them with an understanding of how to live simply now. Some have vivid memories of the hardships they or their immediate families experienced during the Depression. These discussions of the hardship of the Depression, or perceived notions of hardship, reflect a specific class identity, one that fused a simplistic lifestyle based on economic necessity with a particular value system. This value system either served as a catalyst for those who lived through these periods to continue living simply, or it was passed down to another generation. For example, I sat with Michelle, an 81 year-old widow, in her modest home decorated with floral print

furniture and a butterfly motif. We chatted about her upbringing, and she described how family practices introduced her to a more simplistic lifestyle:

> I was aware of having to go without material things because I'm
> a child of the Depression. I recall very vividly the kinds of things
> that we had to do without, and yet because of my parents'
> attitude about making do—"use it over, use it up, wear it out"—
> it [living simply] was not a strange concept to me.

Although some of the study participants did not formally recognize the term "simple living" while growing up, they nevertheless suggested that experiences such as the Depression shaped their families' core values either directly or indirectly. Simple living became a way of life long before it existed as a concept. Many respondents maintained that historic economic crises shaped their *long-term* value system. Michelle, for example, went on to talk about the values of her parents. "They were frugal because they were children of the Depression," she recalled. "Maybe when I was really young there might have been a little bit of necessity there, but as I got older, they had plenty to live on; they just chose to live that way [simply]." She went to discuss how she lives a simple life, including eating healthfully, cutting back on store bought Christmas gifts, avoiding a lot of paper products, disconnecting electrical plugs, and cutting back on buying material for her favorite pastime, sewing. Michelle connects her parents' belief system and the hardships of the Depression to her *own* simple living values.

Others, such as Martha and Ben, a married couple, also brought up the Depression as a period in which their respective families had to make do with very little. As Martha noted about her parents:

> My parents grew up in the Depression, and they still lived that a
> whole lot. You don't buy stuff that you don't need. We lived in a
> little town, you don't go to town all the time. The whole idea, I
> would say I grew up with it [living simply].

While Martha's life was not directly affected by the Depression, she described how her parents' economic experiences during the also Depression influenced her family life. Her husband Ben, 15 years her senior, on the other hand, actually lived through this era. "I think I grew up with it," he told me. "I was a Depression baby. I can remember the cans of bent nails my father saved because you could straighten them out and use them again. And I don't do that. Intentionally. [laughter] And I probably should." Ben wove together a narrative of the past and present, in which he felt he should reuse bent nails not because of economic necessity but because of his present day ideals of simple living.

Of course, not all simple living families experienced the Depression era in the same way. Research by Elder (1999) demonstrates that not all families suffered similar degrees of economic hardship during the Depression Era. Consequently, even though families during the Depression suffered economic losses, working class families suffered more than a 35% loss of income. Consistent with Elder's (1999) research, which demonstrates a variation of economic effects on families during the Depression, Erin's story reflects how her parents, and many in that generation, do not recognize the importance of living simply based on historically rooted time periods. Erin articulates that trying to get others to understand the importance of living simply can be hard to explain to other generations including those who have had some form of experience and/or connection to the era. That is, her grandparents lived through the Depression but

their children (her parents) did not believe in living simply. When discussing her own

simple living practices, she talked about how her own parents and others of that

generation just do not "get it:"

> Lately, it's come down to a generation gap for us. Maybe this is
>
> just an excuse on our part, but I feel like my parents' generation,
>
> those are the people that frustrate me the most…that generation,
>
> in my experience, very much feels more of an entitlement. 'This
>
> is my money and I'm gonna do what I want with it.'…And it's
>
> just that generation, because remember, I work in a nursing
>
> home, so I will talk about this stuff with the 70-, 80-, 90-year-old
>
> crowd, and they live simply because they have to. *The*
>
> *Depression-era generation is just fabulous in all the things they*
>
> *know.* They think we're so ridiculously wasteful, they can't even
>
> stand it. It's just my mom, that 50-, 60-year-old generation that I
>
> struggle to talk to about it.

Neither Erin nor her parents lived through the Depression, yet she draws on this

economic hardship narrative to position her own choices. In this sense, Erin

acknowledges the relative class standings of three generations: that of her parents, who

have the financial means but do not focus on living simply; that of the Depression

generation, who *had* to live simply; and her own generation's consumerism. Even though

Erin articulates how the "differences in birth year expose individuals to different

historical worlds" including constraints and options, she draws on a class-based collective

memory that is not her own and ties it to her practices (Elder 1994:5). Consequently, the

class markers of an era of extreme hardship and conservation due to necessity are reframed as desirable, or as Erin claims, a "fabulous" collective memory.[14]

In addition to the Depression, other historical events served as a way to talk about class and the intergenerational dissemination of simplicity values. For example, Anna stated:

> Well, part of it is my upbringing. I mean when I was growing up
> in the '70s, and we had the energy crisis back then [and] I think
> it was when the first Earth Day started back then too. So during
> that energy crunch, my generation was partly raised on
> conserving and recycling. My parents were very much like that.
> They had a compost pile, and we had our own garden. And we
> were always into that.

Anna connects her decision to live simply to the 70's energy crisis and the necessity to conserve, along with the reinforcement of her parents' belief system. Again, this emphasizes how Simple Livers link practices historically adopted out of economic necessity with contemporary conservation values and practices, such as composting and recycling. Simple Livers and their families engage in what Elder (1998, 1994) calls, "linked lives," in which families live interdependently based on both social and historical influences. Their narratives illustrate the intergenerational familial interactions that encourage them to embrace living a simple life. For example, if grandparents lived during the Depression, their values of "having to make do with what you have," influenced their

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[14] I rely on Olick and Robbins' definition of collective memory, which includes "the varieties of forms through which we are shaped by the past, conscious and unconscious, public and private" (1998:112).

children's lives and imparted values of living simply. In particular, Simple Livers' use of

historical time periods provide the connective and socializing aspect of living simply

such that, "each generation is bound to fateful decisions and events in the other's life

course" (Elder 1985:40). In addition, Simple Livers fuse history (space), collective

memory, and values as a way to talk about class. While some Simple Livers focused on

the "linked lives" of the Depression or the energy crisis of the 1970's, others

concentrated on other times, such as the 1950's, and how childhoods spent on the farm

influence their current practices.

Rural Farm Life as Place

Research shows that most Simple Livers live in urban areas (Alexander and Ussher

2012). In contrast, the Simple Livers I interviewed grew up and worked in rural

farmlands and, consequently, expressed a strong sense of regionalism. Often, they would

bridge the gap between space (history) and place (geography), claiming a poor or

working class status situated in rural farm life. To this end, they viewed farm life as "just

the way life is." Or, as Bernice explained, "I won't say all, but many farmers are quite

aware of the things that it takes for simpler living, and many of them have been doing it,

again, without attaching that label to it, but just simply because that's what farmers have

done for years and years." Elaine echoed a similar mindset:

> Well, I grew up in the 50s. And grew up on a farm where you
>
> know we grew most of our vegetables, and we you know we had
>
> peaches. And we had the eggs. And we had one cow and we got
>
> the milk. And my dad loved horses. So even though we had a
>
> couple tractors, we still farmed with horses. *You know you*

definitely couldn't define it as simple living at that time. That

was just who we were, and what everyone did at that time.

In this case, place, specifically farm life, becomes a way to arrange "patterns of interaction that constitute network formation and collective action" (Pogorelc 2011:417). Farm life was a place where families socialized each other into living simply. Yet, neither farm life, nor eras such as the Depression, was labeled as "voluntary simplicity" or "simple living" because these terms connote *choice*. This was not the case for many Simple Livers who grew up under these circumstances. That is, rural farm life is hard work and leaves little time or money for leisure and consumption practices.

As stated above, some Simple Livers used both history (space) and geography (place) as a way to talk indirectly about class. For instance, Elsa stated that her mother "grew up during the '30s and knew the hardships of that time and just said don't ever throw something away that you could use again." She went on to describe how her mother never threw old clothing out, but used it for quilts or made it into aprons. She attributed her awareness of waste to her upbringing on a farm. She stated, "I grew up on a farm in Kansas, and you had to take your tin cans to the dump and that kind of thing."

Whereas Elsa's narrative focused on the 1930's and her parents' lifestyle that was later passed down to her, Patty reflected on small-town rural life in the 1950's. Specifically, Patty talked about how her dad "was a great gardener" and how her mom "did a lot of canning and processing of foods for the winter, as did my grandmother. That was just the lifestyle in the '40s and '50s that I remember. And it wasn't really an issue, because that was just how you did it. It was a small town, and everything was pretty

transparent." As she tells this story, Patty does not directly address issues of class

hardship because that is "just how you did it."

Janet's story offers a stronger awareness of the intersection of class and (place)

geography:

> I think my husband and I both grew up very similarly. We both
>
> grew up in families that were probably kind of lower middle-
>
> class families. Not a lot of extra money to do extra things. We
>
> weren't poor, but there were times when money was tight. We
>
> both grew up in families that had big gardens. We grew food at
>
> home. That helped stretch the budget dollars. *My parents both*
>
> *grew up on farms, so they were used to that, too. We didn't waste*
>
> *things.* We didn't throw things away when we were done with
>
> them, which is a difficult thing, *because I still live with that*
>
> *mindset,* like, 'This is still good, you can't get rid of it.'

Janet articulates how farm life and a lower economic means within her family taught her

practices that still influence her choices *today*, again reflective of "linked lives" (Elder

1998,1994). Many Simple Livers describe the hardships of other times and places and

embrace the value systems that arose from these circumstances.

The consideration of geography (place) and history (space) provides a better

understanding of how people were socialized into living simply. These narratives also

intersect to provide Simple Livers with a way to talk about class status, and they

demonstrate that past poverty and hardship anchor simple living norms to particular

geographic locations. Together, farm life and historical periods of hardship form a useful

framework for Simple Livers to talk about a *contemporary* relationship with class.

However, contemporary narratives of simple living and class are reframed in a way that rejects a "poor or wanting" class status.

"Not" Deprivation

Farm life and historical periods as markers of class are a "nod" to hardship realities. They serve as a useful backdrop for explaining a more contemporary relationship between simple living and class. Alongside narratives that communicate the limitations of both place (geography) and space (history), Simple Livers express a degree of agency regarding their decisions, including refashioning past experiences to fit current lifestyle decisions. They "construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder 1998:4).

Contemporary narratives of class by Simple Livers are romanticized in such a way that adherents of modern simple living consider it a *rejection* of deprivation. In fact, they view simple living as an enhancement of identity and surroundings (as discussed in Chapter Five) rather than a means of coping with economic hardship. One of the primary goals of a lifestyle movement such as voluntary simplicity is to help others understand that said lifestyle has *more* value than a mainstream lifestyle offers, such as obtaining more "stuff" or focusing on attaining a particular economic status. Simple Livers are not trying to be "poor" or to mimic poverty; rather, they see living simply as a way to enrich their lives (Elgin [1981] 1993). Many Simple Livers emphasize the need to challenge the stereotypes that depict them as people who are deprived of possessions (Andrews and Urbanska 2009). For example, when I interviewed Frank, he stated that:

> Voluntary simplicity is important because it's not like we glorify
>
> poverty. Voluntary simplicity is people who choose to have a
>
> lifestyle that doesn't indulge in all these things that are just not
>
> meaningful. But it doesn't mean poorer is always better. It
>
> doesn't mean that I don't want to have indoor plumbing and that
>
> I want to be unhappy.

Simple Livers acknowledge the realities of poverty, and they do not dismiss the very real hardships experienced by the poor. On the contrary, they use markers of class as a way to distinguish actual hardships from living a simple lifestyle. In this case, Frank rejects the idea that simple living is a "poor" practice. He states that poverty connotes unhappiness, but that *choosing* to consume less leads to happiness and meaning in one's life. Michelle articulated the same message:

> I don't know whether some people are a little turned off by the
>
> idea that they should be more cognizant of living a simpler life
>
> and being more aware of the things we need to do to conserve
>
> our environment. People are slow to accept change, in anything,
>
> I think. *I don't know whether they feel that they have to deprive*
>
> *themselves in order to live this way. You don't. You don't*
>
> *deprive yourself. You change your way of living your life, which*
>
> *doesn't mean that you are being deprived in any way, I don't*
>
> *think.*

Michelle describes the need to distinguish between choosing to live simply and actual economic deprivation. Her statement shows how adamant she believes that the perception of simple living as deprivation needs to change. It also demonstrates that she has

encountered this misperception repeatedly when talking to others about simple living. Her statement is useful in illustrating how those outside the movement perceive simple living. When discussing their lifestyle choices, Simple Livers must fend off negative connotations of poverty—of being deprived—while simultaneously reinforcing the positive attributes of living with less. During informal conversations, Simple Livers talked about the difference between poverty and choosing to live simply. As Ben stated, "To live simply doesn't mean you have to go live in a cave. You're still gonna drive a car. You're still gonna turn on the lights at home. But it's consciously making some decisions about it."

Ben articulates how modern-day Simple Livers have a choice in what they do, reflecting a middle-class status, as opposed to those who actually live in poverty and lack such choices (Etzioni 1998). Because Simple Livers feel they are battling a perception of scarcity, it becomes important to reframe the lifestyle romantically, as "fulfilling." Or, as Elaine said, "I do buy probably a quarter of my clothes at consignment stores or second-hand stores, and *totally enjoy it*…you know, *it's fun*. It's not a deprivation-type thing." Simple Livers often talked about simple living as fulfilling, fun, enjoyable, and satisfying, which allows them to create a romantic class narrative while simultaneously distancing themselves from a hardship narrative.

In sum, Simple Livers address class indirectly through stories about farm life and the hardships of particular historical eras. Specifically, place and space become a way for Simple Livers to situate their own experiences of poverty and/or necessity and rural living within a narrative that rejects a *negative* view of poverty. Present-day simple living narratives, however, insist that living simply has no connection to poverty, but is instead

a chosen means of achieving personal fulfillment and happiness. These stories are important in promoting simple living as way of life to friends and family.

***

In this chapter, I have argued that the unique positionality of these Simple Livers, which encompass gendered and classed features, produces a specific form of socialization. I claimed that socialization into simple living happens primarily in the home, as women, through the gendered work such as childcare, influence the behavior of their families. This produces both inter- and intra-family simple living participation. Additionally, this chapter provides a more nuanced understanding of class in relation to simple living, including a discussion of not only socioeconomic status, but also how place and space situate and structure Simple Livers' lives. The chapter also discussed how Simple Livers' values originate in (mostly) women's practices of farm life and cultural memories of hardship. These cultural origins exist in stark contrast to contemporary simple living discourses, which reject deprivation and include a more romanticized understanding of simple living as personal fulfillment, a more alluring reason to engage in this form of social action. Consequently, this chapter has emphasized both the structural (gender/family and farm life) and temporal (historical) dimensions of socialization. Overall, this chapter has contributed to the existing literature on social movements through exploration of the manner in which people are socialized and participate in a movement and by incorporation of Elder's work concerning the influence of social and historical periods on socialization.

McAdam and Paulsen's (1993) work on recruitment practices argues that "strong

subjective identification with a particular identity, reinforced by organizational or individual ties" to a movement will encourage recruitment and participant activism (p. 658). Although I do not contest their point, I would like to add to the conversation by addressing an earlier step in the process. McAdam and Paulsen (1993) argue that before one becomes "the object of a recruiting appeal," one must be aware that a particular social issue exists (p. 647). However, this argument pays little attention to *how* people become aware of social issues and the role life history and agency play before movement recruitment occurs. Individual decisions do not form in a vacuum. I have suggested that life history shapes a person's perception and informs their decision to participate in a movement.

Simple Livers become attracted or attached to a social issue or cause *before they even know it exists* through the structural and time dimensions of socialization. Living a simple life becomes part of their value system long before it becomes a lifestyle movement decision. Life history and agency provide both the foundation and the tools Simple Livers use to create a more meaningful simple life. The next chapter extends this through an examination of the formation of a Simple Liver identity.

CHAPTER 5

"DOING" VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY:

EMOTION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MORAL IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, I analyzed how socialization shapes individual awareness of and preferences for the practices known as "simple living." I focused on how relational structures attract people to simple living and predispose them to engage in those practices. In this chapter, I move beyond the decision to participate and investigate what shapes involvement. Specifically, I investigate how emotions and ideology influence the construction of the moral identity of Simple Livers.

The importance of emotions in simple living became clear to me during a conversation early in my research. I met Pastor Bob at the Methodist church after the morning service had included a talk by the national coordinator of SimplePaths. The speaker's 15-minute presentation focused on "Five Simple Ways to Live a Just Life" and emphasized how such a lifestyle connected to the teachings of Jesus. Before Pastor Bob introduced me to the speaker, he apologized for his own failure to practice the basic tenets of simple living, such as having recycling bins or a community church garden. He went on to explain that he felt bad, but added that, as a busy part-time pastor, he could only do so much. I left wondering why Pastor Bob felt it necessary to apologize for what he perceived as his failures and to justify his lack of action regarding simple living choices. As I proceeded with my research, I heard many Simple Livers describe feeling guilty when they did something that they believe violated the principles of living a simple lifestyle. I became interested in understanding the impact of guilt on their lifestyle, and

throughout our conversations, I heard them voice feelings of pride and frustration, in addition to guilt, when talking about their daily lives. Intrigued, I began to analyze the role emotions play in constructing identity and promoting social action among Simple Livers.

Many scholars have examined how emotions influence social movements (see Jasper 2011). They have investigated how emotions foster solidarity (Summers-Effler 2005; Nepstad 2004), promote participation and mobilization (Zackariasson 2009; Benski 2005; Wettergren 2005) or demobilization and non-participation (Norgaard 2006; Kleres 2005), and provide a route for protests (Yang 2005). They have also studied the interactional processes of emotion management among activists and social movement groups (Reger 2004; Hercus 1999; Groves 1995). Research also examines the role of what are considered *moral emotions* on social activists (Herzog and Golden 2009). For example, Nepstad and Smith (2001) illustrate how moral outrage was the motivating factor for Central American protestors. Moral emotions, often imbued with negative and positive evaluations, include but are not limited to shame, guilt, empathy, sympathy, happiness, and anger (Wilkins 2008; Turner and Stets 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Moral emotions help the individual determine what is right or wrong, provide motivational energy, and can be self and/or other-critical (Turner and Stets 2007); all of which can facilitate a meaningful and moral identity focused on social change.

Similarly, scholars have also analyzed the relationship between identity work and social action (Snow and Anderson 2001; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Anderson, Snow, and Cress 1994). The term "identity work" refers to "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent

with and supportive of the self- concept" (Snow and Anderson 1987:1348). Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock define it as "anything people do, individually or collectively, to give meaning to themselves or others," including creating and drawing on emotions and cultural codes to signal their identity (1996:115). As Snow and Anderson (1987) point out, identity work can include "(a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props; (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (c) selective association with other individuals and groups; and (d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identities" (p.1348). The concept highlights how people use various resources, such as their possessions, accessories, physical appearance, and friends, to portray and to see themselves in a positive light. Although scholars have examined the relationship between identity work and social-movement-related identities (e.g: Snow and Anderson 2001), I found no extant work that explores the role of emotion in diffuse movements.

In this chapter, I contribute to several literatures by portraying moral emotions as part of what I have called the "moral repertoire" of faith-based VS. Along with morally infused principles and practices, drawn largely from Christianity and Voluntary Simplicity, moral emotions help Simple Livers build a distinctive moral identity, one based on and recursively informed by their simple living decisions. In what follows, I examine the defining features of moral repertoires, moving systematically from practices, to principles of Christianity, to emotions. Although I discuss these separately, the distinction is analytical rather than empirical. In lived experience, the features of the moral repertoire overlap, interact, and inform one another. A decision to take—or refrain from taking—a particular action might be based on Christian ideals, informed by VS

ideology, *and* motivated by emotion. For clarity, I examine the component features of the moral repertoire individually before concluding this chapter by discussing its emergent character and its influence on moral identity.

"Doing" Moral Ideology through Simple Living Practices

A Simple Liver identity is based in part on embracing the ideology and engaging in the practice of voluntary simplicity. On an interpersonal level, a simple living ideology incorporates tangible and intangible practices. It embraces an individualistic approach to social change, and is an ongoing process, the goal of which is never actually attained. The interpersonal ideology of simple living encompasses many principles and practices that faith-based Simple Livers incorporate into their daily lives, delivering the ongoing expression and maintenance of a moral identity.

The interaction of tangible and intangible practices became obvious when I asked respondents what simple living means to them. I received a wide range of responses. Simple Livers decide which practices to incorporate into their daily lives. Simple living can mean recycling, spending quality time with one's family, or finding solace in "the little things," such as choosing whether to be a vegan, a vegetarian, or meat-eater, or a locavore, consuming less or consuming consciously, driving a fuel-efficient car, or not driving at all. Simple Livers also embrace intangible mental and emotional practices. I sat down with Tonya and her husband Gregory at their kitchen table one morning. We talked about their family background, raising kids, and how they were introduced to SimplePaths and simple living. Over coffee, they explained that they had recently made some major life changes, moving from their hometown to a new state for Gregory's job

in waste management. While we talked, their kids, both teenagers, each made a quick appearance and grabbed a snack before heading off to their friends' houses. Tonya commented that it is difficult to challenge her kids' over-consumptive practices when their friends have all the new technological equipment and gadgets. She told me that she and Gregory had recently decided to allow their kids to have cell phones because they were tired of them borrowing friends' phones to call for a ride home.

Later in the conversation, we talked about simple living, in particular Tonya's volunteer work at SimplePaths, a faith-based simple living organization. Tonya, a stay-at-home mom, started volunteering for SimplePaths after her pastor introduced her to the group. She helped in small ways like sticking labels in books, helping with shelving things, and putting out mailers. She enjoyed her volunteer work, additionally she also argued that there is more to living a simple lifestyle than tangible practices like recycling, "I also think it's about simplifying your life in other terms, taking things in, like projects, you have to simplify and kind of come to your own terms with how to deal with a project. So it's a simplicity in attitude as well."

Tangible and intangible practices vary from person to person. The list of choices is expansive; however, what is important is not *which* practices make the cut, but that each simple liver adopts his or her own set of practices as a means of developing a Simple Liver identity (Alexander and Ussher 2012). Or as Tonya suggested later in our conversation, "I think that's kind of the nice thing about simple living, that people can interpret it on their own means and do it in different ways. I mean, if everyone lived the same way, it'd be a commune, another simplistic commune. I think that it's neat that everyone can take in the principles but express them in their own way."

As Tonya pointed out, choosing from a variety of practices allows a Simple Liver to express his or her individuality. In this way, Tonya is participating in a type of "individual associational declaration" in which she chooses how to align her practices with a broader VS ideology (Hunt and Bedford 1994). This enables her to claim that her personal choices reflect an identity that differs from those who *do not* engage in a simple living lifestyle. Thus, simple living practices become an expression of the self. In another example, Karen, a 22-year-old student at a local Christian college, described her simple living practices, which includes eating only organic food, taking naturopathic medicine, practicing cleansing techniques, minimizing the use of technology, consuming less, recycling, and maintaining a calming and uncluttered general mindset. During our conversation, Karen discussed how her personal simple living interests might differ from those chosen by others:

> I think for me, VS is really organic living, food, and health,
>
> that's my platform. That may not be someone else's platform.
>
> On the flip side, I like clothes, I like shoes, and someone may be
>
> completely against that. That's kind of the nice thing about VS,
>
> you can be simple in different ways.

When I sat down to talk with Janet, a mother of a toddler, she discussed her shopping practices for her family and her simple living choices:

> I'm not a coffee drinker, but my husband is, and when I go buy
>
> coffee for him, I go to [grocery store], because they have fair
>
> trade coffee. That's a choice that I make, because I know that
>
> somewhere, somebody has put a lot of time and effort into
>
> growing this, and I don't think it's right for them to have some

big conglomerate make a lot of money off the coffee and they

are making pennies off it. They're trying to raise this [coffee] to

support their family, and I want to make sure that they're getting

their fair share of the money from that.

Janet's decision to buy fair trade coffee is based on her commitment to her husband and simple living, and her connection to another family's financial wellbeing. This suggests that individuals choose what they consider important simple living practices—what they prioritize as having value and what contributes to their moral standards. For example, during my conversation with Gregory and Tonya at the kitchen table, I looked out the sliding glass door to the back deck and noticed that they had a hot tub. As our conversation shifted to the specific practices they engaged in, Gregory brought up the conundrum in buying a house that came with a hot tub and offered a justification for keeping it:

I mean, the hot tub, for instance. If it wouldn't have been here, I wouldn't have it. Now even that it's here, it's 10 years old, and I've spent resources, money and energy, to keep the thing running, and every time I do, I'm like, do I really need that stupid thing? How much is it worth to me? How much is that relaxation or time alone or prayer time or whatever I do in there, it's been good for our family, because [our kids] will get in there and we'll chat. So there are some values there other than the cost and the impact on the environment that that thing has, for instance.

For Gregory and Tonya, quality time spent in the hot tub with their kids outweighs the time, money, and resources to keep it running.

Often, Simple Livers may prioritize practices (or lack of practices) based on structural constraints. Later in my conversation with Janet, she raised the dilemma of having to negotiate both living simply and having a child. For her, not driving is a very pragmatic way for her to live out her principles:

> I used to walk all the time. I walked every day pretty much
>
> through the winter, even when it was way below zero. I wish I
>
> could now. I suppose I really could if I worked it out, but I have
>
> to take my daughter to day care, so unfortunately now I drive,
>
> because either I have to take her or I have to pick her up after
>
> work. I really wouldn't have time to walk or bike or whatever, to
>
> take her there and get to work.

For Janet, time became the structural factor that limits her simple living options. Other structural constraints that came up for Simple Livers include the lack of resources available to make environmental safe decisions, such as recycling options or eco-friendly building materials and products. Many Simple Livers claim the inability to access such resources hindered their ability to create a more sustaining lifestyle.[15] Furthermore, not having the financial capability to sustain or invest in simple living practices also proved to be problematic. Yet, most of the Simple Livers that I interviewed had a stable middle class income therefore, not proving economic limitations.

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[15] see Alexander and Ussher 2012 p. 17 for a list of major obstacles that prevent living a simple lifestyle.

The faith-based Simple Livers in this study all claimed that living simply was both a process *and* a goal. When I asked what the goal of simple living is, all participants expressed the importance of adopting more simple living practices. Therefore, the goal of simple living included not only continued participation, but also the incorporation of even more practices. This constitutes a form of identity maintenance; —a true Simple Liver continuously strives to "do more." Because there is always more work to do, this goal is never accomplished. As Erin, a youthful and energetic wife and mother explained:

> A big challenge for me personally is I love to shop. I don't buy a lot, but I love to shop. I've been really convinced in the last few years, months, what a waste of time that is. Even if I'm not actually contributing to that consumerism, I'm using my time at something that benefits nobody… and I'm not using my time volunteering somewhere that could be benefiting somebody, or even taking care of my house or whatever. So many things that I could be doing that would be better stewardship of my time. So I've been challenging myself to make changes there. But it's an ongoing thing, and the more you think about it, the more convinced you are that you could be doing a lot better.

Erin struggled with managing her consumptive choices within a simple living paradigm. She curtailed her urge to shop, but she still felt she could do more. In this sense, challenging herself helped her maintain her identity as a Simple Liver. None of the Simple Livers I spoke to felt they had reached their goal. Therefore, simple living practices consist not only of present-day actions, but also of *possible* future actions. Although they will never reach their goal, Simple Livers feel they are doing something,

which they believe sets them apart from mainstream society. Thus, voluntary simplicity is really a process of striving to be *better* moral people;—in other words, people who embrace the underlying moral principles of VS.

"Doing" Moral Ideology though Christianity

In addition to the practices of VS, the Simple Livers I interviewed also embrace Christianity, in particular mainstream Protestant Christianity. Their belief systems act as a sorting mechanism, carrying additional connotations of appropriateness and compliance with what they understand as "God's will" for how to live their lives. For them, living simply is not only a matter of consuming less, but also a spiritual approach to life, one that is "outwardly more simple and inwardly more rich" (Elgin [1981] 1993:25). For example, Karen articulated the relationship between religion and simple living:

> I think it's just basically ingrained into my behavior. Because it's
> just every decision that I make is not so much—I'm not so much
> the rule follower, but I'm more love of humanity, and I think I
> got that from my Christian background and my religion. So
> every choice that I make has that in it. What can I do to aid this
> person, to help society? I think that comes from my religion, and
> that affects every choice that I do.

She attributed her love of humanity to her Christian faith. She pointed out that a religious approach of helping others drove her choices. Like Karen, other Simple Livers often discussed how ideals of simplicity align with Christianity. George, a gregarious pastor with an infectious laugh, offered his view of the connection between Christianity and a simple lifestyle:

Jesus wouldn't have understood the term of "voluntary

simplicity." For him, I don't think simplicity was voluntary. He

came out of a very, very poor background, out of a class that was

working hard every day just to get by every day. But all of his

teachings were not about acquiring money or status or stuff. He

taught to live at peace with everybody and all of creation. He

taught people to live justly, to practice a kind of hospitality that

was just almost unimaginable to some of the people of his era.

All of that while he wouldn't have understood the term

"voluntary simplicity," the lifestyle that he espoused and that he

taught his followers to live was indeed a simple lifestyle.

Religion, in this case Christianity, not only offers a route for learning values and adhering

to particular moral standards but also becomes a cultural tool that individuals use to

cultivate a moral identity (Swidler 2001). In particular, Christian Simple Livers claim it is

their calling to be stewards of the earth, to fight for social justice, and be an example to

others. They embrace particular theological ideals as a strategy to legitimize, practice,

and convey a moral identity focused on social change.

Responsible stewardship

Faith-based Simple Livers embrace the idea of stewardship when discussing the need to

live simply. Taking care of the Earth is a "calling," a sense of duty bestowed upon them

by their faith values. In their view, stewardship goes hand in hand with a caring Christian

belief system that connects people, God, and the Earth. Christians are caretakers for God

and they see it as their responsibility to look after the Earth. Mona, a married woman in

her forties, said it best, "I just think the idea that life is a gift and that it's our responsibility to care for it, to care for others, is as simple as I can put it. We were called to be good stewards of those things and be responsible." Mona embraced the notion that it is her responsibility to be a caretaker. She believes simple living is a Christian mandate, which lends a sense of legitimacy to her simple living identity. Christian values and morals of stewardship are present in everyday simple living choices and decisions. For example, Joseph, a 56-year-old teacher, shared:

> One of the Christian beliefs is that people are stewards of this Earth. I was raised Lutheran, and one of the things I took from that is a strong belief that we are, as the people who most affect it, we are the stewards of this environment. And as stewards, it is our responsibility to make sure that what we do doesn't permanently damage the earth, doesn't kill us off, and makes a life that is acceptable, at an acceptable level for all people, whether that means we consume less garbage, we throw out fewer things, we store fewer things, we clean up after our messes.

Joseph emphasized the importance of making responsible decisions. He and several other participants suggested that making responsible environmental decisions is a Christian *duty*. For this reason, many of the participants made a point of educating themselves about issues such as fair-trade practices and environmental sustainability.

The recognition that responsible behavior is a religious duty encourages Simple Livers to aspire to become better people in the *moral* sense. Simple Livers continually endeavor to live up to extraordinarily high, self-imposed moral standards. Living

according to these standards is a calling consistent with the Christian faith. When Simple Livers embrace this calling, they strive to become an embodiment of Christ-like simple living. In this way, they advance both their own sense of self and the larger goals of simple living.

Jesus as example

Many respondents describe Jesus Christ as the embodiment of simplicity and talk about the spiritual importance of trying to live up to that standard. They portray Jesus as the *original* Simple Liver because he lived a simply in both body and spirit.

Simple Livers explain who *they* are by looking to Jesus for the encouragement needed to embrace simple living practices. When talking about her decision to live a simpler life, including reducing her workload, Joan, a single woman in her late forties, said, "You know, if rest is good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for you and me." Emphasizing Jesus' acceptance of a particular behavior allowed Joan to own her identity as a Simple Liver. Imitating Christ provides Simple Livers with a marker they can use to gauge their own success as they adopt simple living practices and identities, as Mona shared, "I always think of ourselves as being, like, the hands and feet of Jesus. We are it. We are telling the story and showing his message in who we are. I don't think Jesus would want to have all these resources wasted…. we need to tell the stories and act as Jesus would." Mona has internalized Christ as part of her identity such that she is "showing his [Jesus'] message in *who we are,*" referring to faith–based Simple Livers. Ruth, a middle-aged woman, also articulated how Simple Livers are the example to others:

In voluntary simplicity, *you become the example* for the other people around you, and you can't force people to adopt your example. But you can show them that it can work, it can work for others, it can work for them, and it gives them alternatives without necessarily locking them in. And that's OK. It's one of those things, maybe they will begin to see that that's a possibility.

The embodiment of Christ-like behavior, or as Mona stated, acting "as Jesus would," is often based on the ideal of giving of one's self and being an example to others. Additionally, *being an example* is part of the identity process, which includes the goal of sharing information with those unfamiliar with simple living practices to promote the cause. Simple Livers know that to create larger societal change, a critical mass of people must participate in simple living actions. Volunteer work is one way Simple Livers try to serve as examples or share the message of simple living. For example, Michelle, an 80-year-old widow stays active in her community with volunteer teaching and helping out in her local church. She explained that, for her, volunteering is crucial to simple living because it "is an opportunity to not only give myself but to encourage others within my congregation to be aware of what's needing to be done and how we can do it [simple living]." Simple Livers also recognize that actions can speak louder than words. As Anna put it, "Well, because you have to act [out] you know, your values. You have to include action, or else it's not really worth very much. And then I'm hoping by setting an example too, that, not just talk, but in actions, I think would influence people more than just talking." Leading by example is a way to promote simple living, but it is also a way

for Simple Livers to perform or act out their identity—an identity that draws on Christ-like values and behavior.

Jesus for social justice

Christians have often been instrumental in advocating against social inequalities. Many progressive Christians adhere to doctrinal tenets that promote helping, human rights, and environmental justice. Many of the Simple Livers in this study discussed the importance of Christian theological principles such as helping your neighbor and treating people fairly. Caring about the problems of others in the global community reinforces an identity geared toward actions of selflessness. Citing Jesus' command to "do unto others," many Simple Livers argued that social justice is central to their faith. They point out that Jesus taught social justice principles, especially the belief that all people are equal and should receive fair and just treatment. As Erin put it:

> And believing that Christ has created us all equally, that we are a global family, then I can't treat somebody else—intentionally be harmful to somebody else. [It is] realizing how my choices and my things have been harmful to other people and what Christ is inviting me to do is make right with my global brothers and sisters, and how can I do that?

Erin argues that consumption decisions affect everyone, that we are all connected as a "global family." Consequently, Jesus' promotion of social justice principles provides the basis for Simple Livers' belief in the importance of connecting with others. Janet summed it up best in saying that, "the principles of being a Christian

and the Gospels talk about how we need to care for people around us, especially people who don't have." She later went on and stated, "We're all connected, the people around the world. A lot of people don't understand that decisions we make here do affect somebody somewhere else, but they do. Just because we can't see it doesn't mean that there isn't an impact there."

"Doing" Moral Emotions

In addition to the ideology of VS and Christianity, the moral repertoire of Simple Livers uses of emotions, especially the moral emotions of guilt, pride, and frustration, as strategic markers of progress toward an elusive moral goal. In this section, I examine how guilt motivates Simple Livers to (re)align their behavior with a self-imposed moral standard, pride reinforces "good" behavior and a positive self-image, and frustration indicates the boundaries of being a "good" person.

Responsible guilt

Simple Livers recognize that taking responsibility for their decisions brings with it a sense of burden and ownership of that burden; therefore, not taking action produces feelings of guilt. Simple Livers experience what is the environmental discourse calls "green guilt" (Walder 2010; Kornblum 2008). For many, failure to live in accordance with environmental principles results in a guilty reaction.

Simple Livers describe constantly learning about destructive consumption practices. As they come to recognize the impact their actions have on others, they begin to feel a need to "do the right thing," or learned responsibility. I interviewed Steve, a married 49-year-

old lawyer with 4 children. We sat down at a conference room at his firm and we discussed some of the reasons why he participates in simple living. He told me a story about shopping for apples that came from other countries, one of his first revelatory simple living experiences. Steve became aware that his individual choices had a larger impact on the environment:

> So I started noticing some of them [apples] came from Chile. First I didn't think much about it. Then I did run across some articles recently about how it uses up more energy to deliver some of these food products. Not only is it bad for the environment, it just uses up so much energy. So I just kind of became more aware of that.

For Steve, acquiring this knowledge led him to think about his individual participation in the larger agricultural system. As Simple Livers learn about destructive consumption practices and come to recognize the impact their actions have on others, they begin to feel a sense of responsibility to "do the right thing." Once this sense of responsibility develops, Simple Livers often feel guilty about behaving in ways that contradict their values. Going back to my conversation with Joseph, he said, "I do some things more extravagant. But I'm the kind who will feel guilty for it then." He went on to add that his guilt originated not only in a form of "buyer's remorse," but also in a feeling of responsibility for the implications of his extravagance. As he explained, "I have this tension with myself. If I'm getting it at a lower price, like Wal-Mart prices, that means the person producing it is not making very much money. And I feel guilty." Joseph recognized his role as a consumer adds to the problem of low wages. Guilt provides a

signal that he is going against a principle he claims is central to his identity. He went on to explain the conundrum no matter what price he pays, "But if I'm spending a higher price, I still don't know that the person who is making it is getting any more money. How do I figure out where I can get stuff where I can feel like the person making the product is getting a fair wage? That's awfully hard to do in this economy, really hard to do." Joseph struggles with his consumption choices and recognizes the complexity involved in making socially conscious decisions. For Simple Livers, a sense of learned responsibility leads to guilty feelings that they must address in some way.

As their sense of responsibility and empathic concern for others develops, guilt also emerges. Scholars have long recognized that taking the role of the other and having the reflexive ability to put oneself in another's position can promote change within the self (Bonds 2009; Shott 1979; Mead 1934). Taking the role of the "generalized other" refers to internalizing the collective attitude of the community or social group. Thus, Simple Livers internalize the attitude of the wronged group, which often leads to altruistic behavior (Shott 1979). For example, on one of my interview excursions I went to a very rural part of a Midwest state. As I drove on the dirt road to the neighborhood, dogs wandered the area and broken-down cars filled the front yards. I parked in front of an old, farm-style home and knocked on the door. Isaac, a 28-year-old Latino/Caucasian man who worked as a customer service representative for a large communications company, greeted me. His partner Brian, a 23-year-old also worked in customer service, and dabbled in photography and art design for fun. The inside of their house represented Brian's artistic abilities with painted walls, original art, and a cozy living room décor. Not something I had expected based on the surrounding neighborhood. Isaac had made

Indian food for dinner, including homemade naan with flax seeds. As we sat down to eat in the living room we chatted about simple living including their first incident learning about the lifestyle. In Isaac's case, he talked about farm animal slaughter practices. One day, Brian showed him a graphic PETA video depicting slaughtering of cows for meat. Isaac discussed his reaction, "I bawled. I just cried. I was in such shock that I didn't know what to do. And thinking about it [now] makes me well up. It was too traumatic." He went on, "It was from that moment on I immediately stopped eating meat." This video became the first step that Isaac took to change his individual actions and relate it to a moral belief system, "I have to do this. I can't go back now. If I go back, then I'm contradicting a personal moral that I have about the value of life." Clearly for Isaac, the "wronged" group is animals that suffer from cruel practices. He internalized the generalized other value system that we should not harm innocent creatures, which brought forth an immediate empathetic approach to his daily eating habits. Therefore, for Simple Livers, learned responsibility fuels a feeling of guilt that needs to be addressed in some way.

Researchers have established that guilt is moral emotion (Turner and Stets 2007; Tangney and Dearing 2002; Eisenberg 2000; Izard 1977). Some describe it as a *prototypical* moral emotion that emerges when a person violates his or her own moral standards or goals (Turner and Stets 2007). An example appeared in my conversation with Karen, when the discussion of her simple living goal of engaging in a healthier lifestyle, including eating organic foods, brought up her daily struggles in living simply. Karen talked about how she had to navigate college life, including the lack of available nutritional food on campus, general peer pressure and decisions regarding her social life,

such as whether to go with her friends to fast food restaurants, even though eating at these places violates her principles. As she explained:

> I put a lot of pressure on myself to try to attain a lifestyle, and
> then when you give up on that lifestyle, you feel bad. And part of
> it's because when you work so hard to live a healthy lifestyle, for
> example, with internal health, when you work so hard to build up
> your internal health and then you eat a Whopper, a Big Mac, you
> just kind of can feel yourself sittin' back and you don't get the
> pleasure out of it that other people do. I think to myself, "Why
> am I doing this?" It's just unnecessary. So it's [eating fast food]
> a little bit of guilt.

This statement illustrates what Karen and other Simple Livers experience when they briefly fail to adhere to their convictions. Karen is not alone in this struggle; all the Simple Liver respondents I spoke to wrestle emotionally with their choices and often feel guilty when they choose to do something that is at odds with their ideals.

For Simple Livers, one way to address guilt is to incorporate even more simple living practices into their daily lives while simultaneously recognizing one can always do more. Overwhelmingly, Simple Livers report feeling they are "not doing enough." They feel guilty when they fail to live up to their *own* simple living standards, which shift continually. Thus, a Simple Liver may aspire to an unusually high level of morality but feel guilty for not adhering to this moral code. For example, some Simple Livers who, by their own admission, subscribe to unconventionally high moral standards (such as "putting the Christ back into Christmas" by not buying gifts for family members) still see themselves as falling short of their ideals. Even though a family may agree not to

exchange gifts or choose to donate their gift-giving monies to a charity, they may still feel they are not doing enough. Although these Simple Livers are challenging mainstream norms of consumption, they often believe there are other contexts—beyond Christmas—in which they are not doing enough. For example, one of the most moving interviews I had was with Jim, a professor at a Catholic university. We spent the afternoon, in one of his classrooms, discussing his views on simple living. In addition to individual practices that include recycling, minimal consumption, and incorporating simple living ideals in his teaching curriculum, Jim also donates much of his time to a half dozen organizations in hopes of contributing to changes at local, state, and national levels. Yet, Jim feels he truly has not done enough and has not fully embraced living a simple lifestyle. "I've got too much stuff, too many commitments, relationships," he said. "It's difficult to try to keep up with all of it." For Jim, living an uncluttered life is important. He feels his overwhelming commitments prevent him from living as simply as he would like. He became teary–eyed when discussing his views of not living up to an ideal simple lifestyle. "If I were more successful at simple living," he said, "I would have been able to find other people to do those things instead of committing myself to them. So again, I'm saying that voluntary simplicity is a goal and aim, a dream, but on the whole I haven't achieved it very effectively."

As our conversation progressed, Jim talked about a friend, a Catholic nun, who was a role model to him. He talked about what she sacrificed in living a simple lifestyle, and tears rose in his eyes when he told her story:

> One of the models I have is a sister who was killed down in the
> Amazon a few years back, a couple years back. These people
> have given their lives to protect people and their cultures from

the exploitation of the capitalist system, the unfettered market.

It's always a question of how much you thought would change in

a lifetime.

He goes on to state that for him, "—there are so few real successes that I can look back on. That's disappointing." Jim did not feel that he did enough in his own life in comparison to his friend. Furthermore, his attempts to "do enough" have placed him in a double bind—he tries to incorporate his simple living values by volunteering, but feels that to truly live a simple life he needs to live a life with fewer social commitments. This conversation provides yet another example of the relationship between Simple Livers commitment and emotional investment to challenging the normative paradigm of consumerism. Overall, Jim is disappointed with his simple living practices and felt that he has not been very successful.

Talk of "not doing enough" encourages individuals to feel dissatisfied with their practices. Because of this, they are unable to rid themselves fully of the guilty feelings. Consequently, guilt becomes a useful motivator for ongoing simple living commitment. Learned responsibility and the belief that they are "not doing enough" encourage Simple Livers do more in order to assuage their guilt.

Evangelizing pride

Simple Livers claim to feel good about themselves because of the good works they do. The pride they feel appeared in their demeanor, their voice, and in our conversations. They are proud of their choices and the influence they have on others. The sense of pride is reflected in how they discuss feeling good about their practices. Yet faith-based Simple

Livers must not come across as too proud or boastful when describing their own practices to others, as pride is inconsistent with the Christian value of humility. They also recognize that others might see them as boastful when describing their own practices. In addition to sounding boastful, describing one's practices in an enthusiastic manner may be perceived as a condemnation of others' behaviors, which may actively dissuade people from adopting simple living principles and practices. Proud Simple Livers also run the risk of coming off as too moralistic; they may appear overly pious and judgmental of others' behaviors.

Consequently Simple Livers must strike a balance between feeling proud of their lifestyle (experiencing pride as a positive emotion) and not coming across as too boastful when they talk about simple living (pride as a negative emotion). To avoid appearing boastful, Simple Livers lead by example. Similar to the act of evangelism, leading by example provides Simple Livers with a way to spread the message of voluntary simplicity. That is, while Christian evangelism often focuses on preaching as one way to spread their message, Simple Livers lead by example as a way to "preach" their message; this helps to avoid being viewed as self-righteous. Additionally, this reinforces Simple Livers' image of themselves as morally good people. Later in my conversation with Karen, she explained how her conscious food choices set an example for her parents, "the next time they [her parents] go for a Big Mac, they might not get it, they might get a salad. It's little influences like that that really make me feel good, because I'm like, 'I'm helping you improve your health.'" Simple Livers feel good about the ongoing decisions they make in their own lives and the positive effects these decisions may have on other people.

Simple Livers frequently discuss how simple living is not "simple" at all. A lot of time, money, and energy go into creating a simple lifestyle. However, Simple Livers express pride in these investments. Douglas expressed what many Simple Livers feel, "I feel good that [I am doing] something small, it's a small step, and it's a tough process." Overall, the Simple Livers with whom I spoke took great pride in their lifestyle, including their effect on other people—both people they are close to and the general population. They felt their small actions contributed to the betterment of society. Richard, a pastor, articulated the sense of pride he felt:

> Simplicity is one part of an incredibly complex web of things
> that whatever we do as an individual has greater and greater
> impact on the rest of the world. So when I participate in those
> things, where I know I'm not contributing, at least in a small
> part, to the wasting of the world, that makes me feel good. It
> makes me feel like I'm participating in something larger than
> myself.

Frustration with others

Often, Simple Livers are frustrated by other people's failure to act. Hochschild (2003) argues that frustration stems from "wanting something but not being able to get at it because it is not there" (240-241). Frustration, outrage, disgust, and anger-like emotions are related by degree (or level) of intensity. There are "many varieties of 'almost anger' and many nuances of the anger experience," and frustration is one that appeared frequently in the interviews (Ellsworth and Scherer 2003:575). Simple Livers maintain that although everyone should participate in simple living actions, many Americans do

not. For example, Tina talked about her simple living practices in comparison to others. "I don't mean to sound judgmental," she said, "but sometimes I think if everybody did what I'm doing, it just might make a difference." Tina and other Simple Livers often find the lack of participation by others including family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and the general population, frustrating. They discuss the need to help others and the importance of recognizing how the actions of a few affect many in a global society. When they use the term "others," they are usually referring to people who live in developing nations. Simple Livers get frustrated with people they believe contribute to problems like consumerism and environmental damage; in other words, most Americans.

Anger, and thus frustration, also includes a feeling of being wronged because a sense of *fairness* has been breached. Many Simple Livers express their frustration with people who do not recognize the importance of living simply. Joseph, for example, said, "it's frustrating to see those same things [over consumption and depleting of earth's resources] being ignored by the general society. It's like a bunch of—it's like they're treating the earth like rental property where everybody goes in and messes up and it's somebody else's problem." Joseph is frustrated not with a particular person but with the broader culture. Many Simple Livers discussed their frustration with American consumption patterns and lifestyles or as Shannon stated, "Americans live like pigs."

Simple Livers also get frustrated with people they interact with on a regular basis. For instance, Martha complained that the women in charge of hospitality at her church were not committed to serving fair trade coffee. She, "got really frustrated," she told me, because "they had Equal Exchange coffee, but they didn't put out very much material to explain it to people." Consequently, other people in the congregation "didn't really know

why and what these women were serving." The frustration Simple Livers report stems from their beliefs about how God wants people to live—in a world in which the principles of social justice are emphasized. As Shannon explained, "well, it's frustrating, because I have a sense of the way God wants us to live. You read the Bible, and Jesus tells us who is our brother and who is our neighbor, and the whole world is our neighbor, and "whatever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me."

Although Simple Livers maintain that people must make the decision to act on simple living principles in their own time, they also experience a sense of frustration with those who choose not to live simply. This stems from their negative judgment of others' inaction. Simple Livers feel angry that others do not share their selflessness. Within a Christian framework of social justice, frustration becomes a tool Simple Livers use to create and maintain a commitment to the moral boundaries of simple living.

This sense of frustration illuminates the boundaries that separate living simply from conventional lifestyle practices. It is not enough that Simple Livers have their own moral repertoire of practices. In fact, having such a wide spectrum of individualized practices could be problematic; the variation could actually blur the boundaries of *who* is considered a Simple Liver. Frustration facilitates a strong sense of what it means to be a Simple Liver. For example, Martha and Ben talked about what they do in comparison to their neighbors and questions why their neighbors do not do these same practices. Martha shared, "we only have a little garden, but we garden. The neighbors on both sides don't. 'Why don't you garden? You can grow your own tomatoes, lettuce.' *We* give stuff away to the neighbors all the time. *They* don't grow anything." Her tone of frustration along with her comments provides a clear delineation between whom she would consider a

person who lives simply and one who does not. She goes on to talk about her own family, "it drives me crazy when the relatives come and their kids are throwing pop cans in the trash. It's so easy to recycle. How difficult is that?" Martha and Ben describe their frustration with what *others* are not doing while simultaneously revealing how *they* keep trying to do the right thing in their simple lifestyle. Frustration with what others are *not* doing becomes the emotional boundary marker that distinguishes a moral lifestyle.

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In conclusion, I show how Simple Livers fuse emotions and ideologies (Christianity and VS) to perpetuate a particular selfhood, one that focuses on becoming a better person and creating larger social change. Although Simple Livers adhere to an unusually strict moral code, they believe that they are not doing, and cannot possibly do, enough. Consequently, they micromanage their daily choices; they try to shrink their carbon footprint, eat only locally grown food, spend quality time with their families, conserve resources, and find ways to recycle everything. As Simple Livers educate themselves about their living practices, they inevitably discover further instances of exploitation, waste, and misuse and attempt to adjust their lifestyles to minimize their contributions to social oppression and environmental degradation. Thus, there is always more to do. Although they feel guilty about not doing enough, Simple Livers also feel proud of leading by example and living according to Jesus' teachings. Simple Livers believe that Jesus taught social justice principles; therefore, feelings of frustration are appropriate when others do not adhere to such practices. In particular, Simple Livers are frustrated with the people with whom they have a personal relationship who do not focus on living a simple lifestyle. They are also

frustrated with larger society and the refusal of most Americans to take the steps necessary to live more simply. In this sense, Simple Livers are continually trying to live lives that are *more* moral, constantly raising the bar for morally upstanding behavior. The internalization of this moral repertoire results in over-conformity to an idealized moral standard, which, by Simple Livers' own accounts, is never fully attainable.

Simple Livers use both ideologies and emotions to create and maintain a particular sense of self—a self that is different, but "too good" (Stets 2010). Simple Livers' engagement in moral repertoires reflects a highly moral standard that I refer to as an *over-conforming moral self*. Religion, simple living ideology, and emotional responses interact to construct a moral self that exceeds the moral claims of the general populace.

Similar to Wilkins' (2008) research on evangelicals' use of happiness as a symbolic tool used to create a moral boundary, the emotions of guilt, pride, and frustration provide Simple Livers with the symbolic tools needed to align cultural and ideological expectations, in this case, the alignment of simple living practices with religious morals. Whereas other research examines how people see emotions considered negative as dangerous (Irvine 1997) or threatening (Wilkins 2008), I argue that Simple Livers use negative emotions such as guilt and frustration to monitor their actions and *confirm* an identity focused on social change. In this way, Simple Livers employ what Jasper (2011) calls a "moral battery," in which positive and negative emotions play off each other in a way that assists in perpetuating an identity focused on social change.

Additionally, these emotional responses arise from and occur within the ideological boundaries of VS and Christianity. These combined ideologies nurture specific emotional norms such as guilt (both ''green guilt'' and religious guilt), pride that

has been ''humbled'' so as not to scare off potential VS converts, and emotional responses of frustration stemming from the social justice paradigm embedded in both VS and Christian ideology. Put another way, the ideologies embraced by Simple Livers dovetail with their emotions; together, they work as markers of identity. This interplay of ideology and emotions creates an alternative selfhood premised on being *more* moral and focused on promoting social change (Srivastava 2005). In this way, the narratives of Simple Livers reveal the interaction between ideologies and emotions that constructs an inner sense of self from the outwardly imposed goals of larger social change. As Fields, Copp, and Kleinman state, "An ideology is not 'effective' unless people have strong feelings about the ideas embedded in it'' (2007:168). This certainly holds true for faith-based Simple Livers who are passionate about VS and Christianity. Simple Livers actively participate in the formation of their identities, selectively appropriating these cultural tools to construct and maintain an over-conforming moral self.

CHAPTER 6

"DOING" VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY: RELIGION, RACE, AND SOCIAL

JUSTICE

The last chapter addressed the processes upon which faith-based Simple Liver moral

identity is predicated. In addition, Simple Livers also become "carriers," both inside and

outside the home, of a particular culture through ideas and undertakings (not just by

emotions and ideologies) (Hall and Neitz 1993). Having discussed the role of

volunteering as central to Simple Livers' identity, this chapter extends the construction of

a moral identity to areas that encompass social justice and other activities that constitute

"doing" simple living. Specifically, I explore how religiously directed social justice

practices have consequential effects that both help and hinder efforts at simple living.

This chapter addresses two main characteristics of the role religion plays in

simple living. First, I address how the combination of religion and social justice produces

racialized discourses. Second, I focus on the interactional processes through which

simple living is disseminated among congregational members, pastors, and religious

institutions.

THE WHITENESS OF SIMPLE LIVING

Voluntary simplicity is largely a white movement. Just as whiteness is invisible in other

predominantly white arenas of social life, it is invisible among Simple Livers. They do

not discuss their white privilege in relation to simple living, but rather downplay it,

consequently maintaining its invisibility (Grigsby 2004). Remarkably, existing research

lacks a complex discussion of the interplay of race, whiteness, and VS. Although some studies only address race as a demographic category (Schor 1998; Shama 1981), others provide no information about race (Alexander and Ussher 2012; Huneke 2005). Grigsby's (2004) research is a notable exception. She argues that matrixes of power, including gender, class, and race, shape the voluntary simplicity movement. Hence, white positionality influences the meanings that Simple Livers impose on others. While this holds true of the sample described in this dissertation, Christianity provides the backdrop of this process. For faith-based Simple Livers, people of color are coded as "Other" through discussions of class and country, such that religion and whiteness weave together, creating a particular racialization of VS.

The "Othering" of Simple Living

As with class, Simple Livers generally do not talk about race, especially whiteness. Attitudes and beliefs about race (in this case, people of color) are seldom discussed but often embedded in actions that encourage Simple Livers to learn about and help "Others," especially through volunteer work. Most of the Simple Livers in this study have Mainline Protestant affiliations. Mainline Protestants are mostly white (Pew Forum 2010). Furthermore, the Simple Livers I interviewed come from predominantly white, rural areas, resulting in a distinctly racialized norm, both geographically and religiously.

As I stated in Chapter Five, many Simple Livers pride themselves on volunteerism. Often, their volunteer work includes mission trips to other countries as well as helping those in need in the United States. Although whiteness remains invisible, Simple Livers will code race, referring to people of color as "others in need." Consistent

with the treatment of race in society at large, discussions of race (e.g., in the media)

Simple Livers often do not address race explicitly, but use class narratives as a proxy.

Simple Livers, whose narratives indirectly address a particular "Other," acknowledge that

people in other countries are often impoverished because of American consumption

practices. As Isaac summarized, "I think that we, at least our culture here in America,

we're consuming the entire globe. We're stretching—our reach goes beyond just where

we live. We're needing to go to other places and get oil or bauxite or bananas or

whatever, to have our standard of living, and that's obviously hurting people elsewhere."

In fact, many Simple Livers claimed that learning about other countries helped

them solidify their understanding of the problems of consumerism and environmental

destruction. For example, Martha stated, "At the Methodist church we have a Christian

mission in the summer, and I've been going to that for years and years and years. There's

always a mission study about a country. And I think we at least [learn about simple

living] ideas from that."

In addition to denominational education within the United States, many Christian

churches offer mission programs that make it possible for church members to visit other

countries, usually with specific goals in mind (e.g., establishing a local church or doing

relief work). Many Simple Livers describe how their mission trips also helped them see

firsthand the sufferings endured by others due to consumptive waste via Industrial nations

such as America. For example, during an ELCA Hunger gathering—a Lutheran

conference that provides strategies on developmental education, relief, and advocacy to

world hunger programs—I sat with Sherry, and we talked about her experiences between

simple living and hardship. She stated, "I don't think I had a clear understanding of

poverty in the world until I took a group of teenagers to Juárez, Mexico, to build a house." For Sherry, this trip became central to her understanding of the degree of poverty that exists in other parts of the world. She said, "We built two houses with 22 kids and five adults. We really learned what it was like to live in poverty and what most people, 80% of the world, live like."

Mission trips represent a learning tool for Simple Livers, and the experiences the trips provide follow class and racial lines. Simple Livers do not go to Europe to learn these things; they are going to "Third World" countries. Sherry stated that shortly after she returned from her trip, she started crying while taking a bath, "because my bathroom was as big as the house that these people were living in. I think that was the first reality for me that other people live on so much less than I do." Sherry did not explicitly discuss race, but she did not have to, because our cultural narrative about race implies that the United States is white and people of color populate Third World Countries.

At first glance, these conversations with Simple Livers might reflect an understanding of class problems on a national/global level; however, these discussions go beyond economic discourse. Sherry's story represents an example of "Othering." When she refers to the other "80% of the world," she means poor people of color, people unlike her family and community. Her story constitutes a white privilege narrative of "helping" those in need. Sherry's own status as a white, middle-class, Christian woman is central to her ability to "Other" while remaining racially invisible herself. She does not acknowledge the financial stability that made it possible for her to take this trip. She focuses instead on the hardships *others* endure, rather than discussing her own personal state of privilege. Sherry's narrative reinforces a whiteness paradigm in which "[W]e see

'others' everywhere but we never see ourselves" (Rothenberg 2000:5). When she does allude to her own positions of privilege—of needing to "learn" about poverty and the revelation that her standard of living differs from 80% of the world's population—she discusses it in a way that draws attention to the poverty of others rather than her own relative affluence and never connects it to race.

Ben and Martha talked about their mission trips to Chile in the '70s, Central America in the '90s, and most recently, to Mexico. Martha described how these trips helped them become "aware of the situation in other countries. And [how] because of where *we* are in the U.S. and where *they* are, we've all got to pull together. If things are gonna be fair for all of humanity." Like Sherry's story, this statement reflects how mission trips teach about people of color and their economic plight while allowing the visitor to minimize the role that whiteness plays in perpetuating these consumption-based divisions.

Mainline Protestant denominations often have national programs, such as *Global Mission*, that, along with evangelism and establishing Christian churches worldwide, focus on "multiple strategies—relief, development, education, and advocacy—to address the root causes of hunger and poverty."[16] These programs also include simplicity education that explores the impact of consumption practices on other countries. Therefore, in addition to establishing a denominational presence across the globe, these programs to educate Christians about the relationship between consumption patterns in the United States and the effects these behaviors have on peripheral countries, often by way of missions activities.

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[16] ELCA.org retrieved November 1, 2013.

An interlocking relationship connects whiteness, religion, privilege, class, and simple living. Churches provide a variety of opportunities for their members to help others, whether within their local area or internationally, through education, money, or missions. Churches play an essential role in providing social services and resources to those in need. However, Simple Livers frame global consumptive inequalities in a way that maintains a privileged VS narrative which "reproduces the existing dominant cultural hierarchy that elevates Western (white) middle-class people….and reasserts their right to guide the future of the world by claiming that Simple Livers are ideally situated to understand what choices everyone in the world should make" (Grigsby 2004:124). Simple Livers often oppose consumerist practices that perpetuate racist, gendered, and classist inequalities. Although they see themselves as fighting for these injustices, they are reproducing a binary relationship between Otherness and whiteness. Simple Livers and their churches often remain locked in their own "web of privilege," such that they reinforce the very structures of privilege and oppression that voluntary simplicity attempts to challenge (Piatelli 2009:156). Consequently, Simple Livers' experiences are also "raced" and "classed" within the structure of church dynamics (Choo and Ferree 2010).

APPROPRIATE SOCIAL JUSTICE

Over time, I began to realize that Simple Livers would talk about the church as a problematic institution within which to "live out" simple living ideals. On one hand, the church constitutes a place for Simple Livers to put their social justice values into practice by participating in volunteer work. On the other hand, however, Simple Livers also

lamented the lack of support for voluntary simplicity within their churches, both on a congregational and pulpit level.

Almost all of the Simple Livers I spoke with discuss the important role of social justice in their faiths. Social justice confers "matters of justice at the societal level rather than the personal level," and it can incorporate distributive, compensatory, retributive, procedural, and restorative justice, as well as acts of hospitality and kindness (Palmer and Burgess 2012:4). Many Simple Livers spoke of their churches' engagement in various kinds of volunteer work, reflecting a cultural norm of volunteerism within church settings (Wuthnow 1999;1991). Many who volunteer through the church engage in social justice work, including working with the homeless, domestic violence victims, impoverished children, disabled veterans, and promoting environmental and animal rights. I heard countless stories about the kinds of volunteer work done by Simple Livers, and almost all occurred through their local churches. For example, Janet discussed the role of her church in the local community:

> The United Methodist Church as a whole, one of the things that I like about it is, there is an importance placed on social justice. We have people that go to the soup kitchen every month. Every month we raise money for a certain charity. It changes every month. It's a local charity. It might be the food bank one month, Big Brothers, Big Sisters.

Janet emphasizes the importance of social justice for Methodists, the opportunities the church provides for people to participate in it, and the variety of charitable causes the church supports, suggesting it is an open, dynamic, and engaging institution. I met Patty,

a married 65-year-old woman, at a local indoor farmer's market that she helped create. It was early spring, so other than shelves stocked with national organic brand foods, the stands were sparse, save some homemade jams, butters, locally farmed meats, and homemade crafts. While a dozen or so people milled about the floor below us, Patty and I sat at a table on the second floor and talked. She told me about her ties to the community, her national advocacy for farm animal rights, and the social justice work she does with her local church, including making monetary donations to and volunteering at local missions and youth groups. She proudly described an upcoming project:

> One of the things I'm gonna work on this week are called
> Starting Over boxes. We make just boxes for women coming out
> of the sexual abuse hiding place, going into an apartment on their
> own. It has everything in there that they need to start over, a few
> pots and pans, some dishes, kitchenware, bathroom ware, a few
> cleaning products, things that you would need to start up your
> own apartment for you and your kids. Those are the kinds of
> things we work on.

While there are many opportunities for churchgoers to volunteer their time and money, often, as in the case with Patty's project, the target of the charity is a disadvantaged minority group (such as women leaving domestic violence situations). Churches are frequently at the forefront of providing resources and services to those in need. Churches have a built-in labor pool with access to a variety of resources, including time and money. Consequently, many Simple Livers need not look any further than their local church for opportunities to *live out* their beliefs. Yet, Simple Livers also talked about the

lack of support for *other* aspects of simple living, including social issues such as environmentalism, anti-consumption, and fair trade practices.

Congregational Apathy

Simple Livers noted a lack of support and/or involvement from fellow parishioners, a lack of pragmatic action within church walls, and concern over congregational perceptions of the political implications of simple living. They passionately described a variety of endeavors churches instigated for the community and the ways they themselves took part in these projects. While the intent of these projects corresponds to volunteering and social justice values that faith-based Simple Livers adhere to, it seemed that other projects with a focus of environmental and/or anti-consumer practices had less support.

For example, I first met Jenn, one of the newly appointed board members of SimplePaths, on our way to a face-to-face board meeting. She works for (PC)USA as a national program assistant, and her job responsibilities include promoting church programs that address topics such as "putting into practice our values with the purchases and the things that we buy." This includes becoming educated about the origins of products and the conditions in which products are made and learning how to make responsible, environmentally beneficial purchasing decisions. Nonetheless, Jenn remarked that topics such as anti-consumerism are difficult to address with church bodies:

> It's [changing consumption practices] the hardest thing for them
> [churches] to implement, or for them to help people understand
> that our lifestyle here in the U.S. affects people in other parts of
> the world. And there're ways we can do that better. We can

consume less. We can consume more responsibly. That kind of

stuff.

Part of Jenn's job duties includes trying to convince churches to make pragmatic choices grounded in the philosophy of "creation care." She said, "okay your church serves coffee. Great. How about we serve Fair Trade Coffee because we know the profits are going to the farmers." She argued that churches should do this because "we know the earth is providing, and we should—you know, care for it." Yet, she told me how problematic it could be to promote such ideals. When I asked Douglas, a former pastor for the United Church of Christ, whether he shares his simple living choices with parishioners, either through sermons or by providing resources, he responded, "I tried. I tried to even get recycling going in the church, which was not especially—didn't catch on a whole lot." He stated the reasons it did not catch on, "it was an uphill battle. I just feel like our culture tends to just motivate people towards consuming and building up bigger houses, bigger places to live in so you can have more things. And that's what I think we're all up against." Douglas described our society, including local church members, as mired in a paradigm in which lifestyle decisions and the consequences of consumption and waste remain conceptually divorced.

Some churches, however, do have social justice committees that focus on a broad spectrum of injustices, including those addressed through simple living. Unfortunately, as Martha described, many people who do participate in programs that include aspects of simple living might not have any influence on people because "a lot of people just go every Sunday and listen for that hour and go home and you don't know whether it has any effect on their life or not." Social justice committees are one location within a

religious institution from which Simple Livers try to encourage simple living practices,

though their messages often fall flat. Joseph discussed the social justice committee at his

local Unitarian Universalist church and explained his belief that most church members

are unlikely to engage in any type of activism:

> Because the membership on the committees overlap, so it's the
>
> old 80-20 rules. 80% of the members aren't doing too much, and
>
> the other 20% are out there overlapping and doing multiple
>
> things. And that's basically what it is. So while the church
>
> committees are active, the church membership is something else.
>
> They're at a different place. Part of the effort is to get them
>
> engaged in some of these issues.

The stories of these Simple Livers show that it would be overly simplistic to claim

that churches provide opportunities for simple living activists to spread their message. As

Joseph said, most churchgoers are not activists. Typically, the same small group of

people serve on multiple committees, which means that they spread their time and energy

over multiple projects. This may negatively affect their ability to achieve their goals.

Joseph described how the social justice committee at his church tried to convince others

in the congregation to adopt simple living practices by bringing in speakers from groups

such as SimplePaths:

> I was in charge of the July forums, and rather than having church
>
> services, we have speakers come in for educational things that
>
> we want members to know about, or just people in general. And
>
> Neil [director of SimplePaths] came in at that time and talked to

people about voluntary simplicity. There was a great deal of

interest with it, and the thing about it is, it went nowhere. Not

because it wasn't an effective talk, but more because it's like I

told you, it's like they are focused on one thing and they really

believe it, but they don't know exactly how to get there.

The work of Joseph's social justice committee failed to facilitate change. Although those who were interested did not take the steps necessary to learn and become more actively engaged in simple living, a lack of ongoing support from the social justice committee and the larger church congregation ultimately led to a dead end. Joseph speaks to a problem that frequently occurs in churches: although the church may support the presentation of simple living information on a one-time basis, there is typically little support, on a congregational level, for implementing actual simple living practices within the church setting. For example, George, a Methodist pastor, also discussed the need for church members to think "bigger:"

I was glad to see at the church they recycle pretty much most of

their paper, and for regular church functions, they already served

fair-trade coffee. [Yet] when they [groups at the church] serve

fair-trade coffee, they serve it in disposable plastic cups. So

there's work to be done. They look at what they think are

pragmatic issues. Their kitchen has not been modernized in a

long time. It does not have any dishwasher in it. So to talk about

the idea of using real cups means somebody would have to wash

them. But when we use disposable plastic cups, they've got to go

in the landfill and will be there for who knows how long. It's

really all about the choices we're making. Are we just making

the choices that are convenient for us in this moment, or are we

making the bigger choices?

George's comments exemplify how Simple Livers must continually make choices that

reflect their values in the face of mundane obstacles (like recruiting someone to wash the

dishes if disposables are not used). Convincing an entire congregation (or at least

multiple people) to commit to making sustainable choices can be a daunting task, even

when it comes to small tasks like dishwashing. George also describes the hypocrisy and

shortsightedness (such as serving fair trade coffee in plastic cups) many Simple Livers

see in churches that are not fully committed to living simply. He asserts the need for

education to engage people from the congregation.

I found my conversation with George particularly enlightening because he also

provided a snapshot of the complicated relationship between congregation members and

the clergy. For example, he described the practical ways he tried to incorporate simple

living tactics into his sermons:

I tend to try and make my preaching at least at one point every

Sunday a little bit pragmatic. Something you can get hold of. So

we do come back to some of the simple choices, that recycling is

not just a way that we can raise money for the Boy Scouts. Yeah,

that's a benefit in there, too, but the choice to recycle is a

broader one than just—it would be so easy just to toss that stack

of newspapers in the trash can and be done with it. So we talk

about recycling. We talk about fair-trade products and how that

impacts people. And I've been pretty clear about that.

George emphasizes the importance of trying to discuss simple living choices as pragmatic

options. He teaches that practices such as buying fair trade products not only promote

positive environmental changes but to also have direct and tangible effects on real people

by providing them with a living wage. Such conversations may inspire his congregants to

learn more about the topic. Yet, while George believes that preaching about green tactics

is an effective way to encourage change, he also discusses the need to tread lightly when

the conversation moves beyond making simple, practical changes because of his concerns

about mixing politics with religion:

> We try to steer clear of the politics involved in it. In the United
>
> Methodist Church, we clergy don't stand in the pulpit and tell
>
> people what to believe. We have people of both parties in most
>
> of our congregations. We try not to divide things along those
>
> lines. But if I were to preach a series on voluntary simplicity and
>
> use the great models like Francis of Assisi and those who really
>
> took on voluntary simplicity and talked about the implications of
>
> how living that way in this day and age would play out, I'm
>
> afraid it would be perceived as criticizing one political system or
>
> another. You have to find creative ways of doing it so that it
>
> doesn't sound like you're preaching Al Gore.

Although George may include simple living tactics in his sermon, he limits the kinds of

conversations he will engage in with his congregation. More importantly, if he discusses

simple living outside of a pragmatic framework, people view it as political. George feels

that congregants will interpret these types of simple living conversations as political in

nature, such that even talking about Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order

who famously led a life of asceticism, poses problems within the congregation. Sam, a

Lutheran pastor, also highlighted the importance of not appearing "too political," as these

types of discussions may alienate or anger members of the congregation. Consequently,

while Simple Livers, on an individual level, use theologically-based language to

encourage others to think about their lifestyle choices (as I discussed in Chapter Five),

such conversations are considered problematic on a congregational level if they originate

from the pulpit. Therefore, while Simple Livers, especially those on social justice

committees, encourage their congregations to consider making changes consistent with

both voluntary simplicity and church values, congregations frequently fail to implement

such changes, pragmatic or otherwise.

Pulpit Apathy

In the absence of true congregational support for simple living, the clergy may fail to take

the steps necessary to implement and sustain simple living practices within church walls.

When churches do adopt simple living practices, they are often "acceptable" forms of

simplicity that fail to challenge the practice of consumption itself. For example, I had the

opportunity to meet some pastors' wives at a yearly get-together that provided them with

time to bond both socially and professionally. At this event, it became clear that while

many of these women personally focused on leading a simple lifestyle, the churches their

husbands served did not emphasize simple living on either a pragmatic nor ideological

level. For example, Mona proudly described how her husband, a Lutheran pastor,

promotes progressive topics with his congregation:

> He's very much a political kind of person. He's really interested
>
> in advocacy. He wants people to become advocates. So he kind
>
> of has that mindset, which has made our church a little bit
>
> more—I don't know if you want to say liberal, just open to
>
> different things...We're kind of looking on the cutting edges of
>
> things. It's an interesting congregation.

Yet when I asked if the congregation had any discussions or classes on living simply,

Mona replied, "Not that I'm aware. We used to have an adult forum class, just kind of

topical things, and I think it probably came up there. But I'm not that aware of anything."

Intriguingly, although her church has addressed politically charged topics (such as GLBT

rights), simple living is not even on the radar. While churches often overlook this issue, I

found it particularly interesting in this case because both Mona and her husband identify

themselves as Simple Livers. Indeed, according to Mona, he is "more committed" than

she is. Erin also told me that her husband, one of two pastors at her local church, does not

promote simple living in their congregation from the pulpit. Erin talked about the lack of

support from other clergy in the same church. As she explained, "the other pastor, it

wouldn't be his thing at all. It's hard to do things when everybody's not on the same

bandwagon together…it's just not at the forefront of everything else they're doing, I

guess is the best way to say it." She went on to discuss how simple living practices have

been implemented, and added, "that bazaar [fair trade] was probably the only thing… But

we are a very, very affluent church, and I wish we would grow into some of this stuff,

and maybe we will." In this instance, a parishioner was able to organize a one-time fair trade bazaar; consequently, social change took the form of an "appropriate" alternative to mainstream consumerism as the church provided consumption-based fair-trade options. I heard from many Simple Livers that churches often host fair-trade bazaars as a way to get people interested in simple living. In this case, buying fair-trade products constitutes an "acceptable" simplicity tactic because although it challenges the *way* people consume, it does not challenge the actual *act* of consuming. Consequently, churches (and the congregation) may feel they are participating in change without actually critiquing larger systemic problems. So, although this tactic may be a good first step, something more is necessary if a church intends to adopt a simple living ethos.

It is important to note that churches do not have a monopoly on this particular tactic. Consumers in any setting can choose among many fair-trade products available on the market. For some church members, purchasing fair-trade products may initiate them into learning about and understanding the problems associated with consumption.

Elsa pointed out that simple living does have a presence in some churches. "Lutherans have some programs in place," she explained. "I know they have some awareness issues with Free Trade Coffee," she said, and added, "I know my sister's congregation, they only do Fair Trade Coffee and they have a Fair Trade day when you can go and buy things that you know you're supporting women in other countries or that sort of thing." Again, when simple living is addressed, the practices adopted are pragmatic, as is the case with Free Trade Coffee and Fair-Trade bazaars, but often fail to challenge the actual behavior of consuming. Yet, when Elsa later discussed her own church, she noted the lack of pastoral support:

My husband's ministry, that's [simple living] just not an interest

that he has. It's not an issue for him. For some people it's—it is

more social justice. He's more into you know healing and the

Holy Spirit, and those sorts of things, rather than social justice.

Elsa articulates how simple living is an issue that exists outside of church dogma, one

that is located within a paradigm of social justice. The term social justice has political

connotations, and for reasons already discussed, clergy are often wary of wading into

political waters with their congregation.

The disappointment of simple living apathy does not belong only at the

congregational level or the pastoral level. Churches have symbiotic relationships with

their members. Both clergy and church members who push for more dialogue and

pragmatic action often become frustrated with the disinterest of the congregation and the

church itself. Clergy have a multitude of reasons for avoiding the topic, including the

need to maintain an appropriate political balance in their teachings and time constraints

(recall, for instance, my discussion with Pastor Bob in Chapter Five). Many Simple

Livers express that on an interactional level—both congregationally and pastorally—the

church at times fails to promote a message of simple living despite paying lip service to

the values that underlie voluntary simplicity. Or, as Joseph reflected, "It's like any other

organization—that is, all talk and no action."

The organizational structure of the church leaves many Simple Livers wishing for

more support. Jim, a Catholic university professor, described himself as "very religious,

but I'm wishing that the Church would help out with voluntary simplicity and other

issues here." Jim is speaking about the role he believes the Catholic Church, as an

institution should have regarding simple living education. He went on to discuss the lack of institutional support:

> American Catholic education is fairly individualized. It's hard to say what percentage of people like me throughout the country are trying to make a difference, and the same thing is true of global or international—another way of asking the question is, is the church putting its resources into voluntary simplicity, a movement away from exploitation of our natural assets? I don't think that they put much money, I think they're much more into church structures and things like that. I [also] think [for] the clergy, it's not a major value. I think they've got other values. I think the abortion issue has distracted the church from other Christian values. So again, --I feel marginalized, I guess, within the church.

To be clear, there is support that spans denominations both locally and nationally, though it is often disjointed and underfunded. For example, both PC(USA) and ELCA have a variety of national denominationally-centered programs focused on voluntary simplicity. However, it is still difficult to gain institutional support. As George stated:

> But I think that's gonna be their challenge, with all of the denominations at this point. Because I think all of the mainline denominations, every year they're asked to cut their budgets in different areas, and unfortunately, voluntary simplicity doesn't really fit under any of the major banners of what the mainline denominations do. It's not necessarily mission work. I think it

fits in a number of places, but in terms of the major categories

that they operate with, it's not an obvious fit.

In this sense, simple living, as a category, lacks a home within denominational paradigmatic structures, even among the more "progressive" mainline churches. "Doing" simple living often takes place within church social justice committees, yet social justice outreach occurs through well-worn denominational and congregational paths of acceptability—such as local volunteer work, missions abroad, and other programs that help the needy. Consequently, short of a few acceptable options, such as buying fair-trade coffee and hosting fair-trade bazaars, it can be very difficult to convince a congregation to adopt simple living practices in house.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

For Simple Livers, race and religion generate both progress and obstruction. My analysis revealed that although some advancements challenge mainstream paradigms, some of these very same interlocking systems also obstruct action. Although privilege "ebbs and flows, depending on a host of variables," the lack of reflexivity of the self, status, whiteness, and the role of Christianity in perpetuating normative routes of simple living ultimately becomes problematic in challenging larger systemic issues in a consumption-based society (Rothenberg 2000:10). In particular, class and religious affiliations perpetuate simple living as a white space, which fails to challenge larger oppressive discourses of privilege and consumption. Simultaneously, churches enable Simple Livers to act on their ideals and engage in a multitude of volunteer opportunities that reflect both church denominational values and simple living values. When speaking of their congregations, Simple Livers articulated problems that exist within the church, including

a lack of engagement among parishioners when it comes to simple living tactics and perceptions. Churches provide a place in which Simple Livers can reach out to other Christians; however, political discussions and actions that truly challenge the status quo are generally not supported. Additionally, clergy must tread lightly when discussing the tenets of simple living to avoid sounding too political. When churches do offer simple living events, they tend to reinforce a consumptive economic ethos and thus fail to challenge larger systemic problems.

In sum, faith-based Simple Livers experience an ongoing push and pull within the interactional and institutional practices of churches. As the previous chapter demonstrates, Christian discourse helps to shape and influence their moral repertoires. This chapter shows, however, that there are limits to how much organized religion encourages simple living agendas and consequently the extent to which Simple Livers can "do" their identity. The interactional level limits the extension of a Simple Liver identity by way of apathetic engagement and limited options within social justice groups as well as general congregational and pulpit apathy. Additionally, VS social movement ramifications also exist by way of a lack of religious institutional support including finding a "home" for simple living discourse within denominational parameters.

Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) critique the prevailing political process model that privileges politics and the role of the state in producing change. They argue that "society is composed of multiple and often contradictory institutions" arguing that society is a multi-institutional system (2008:82). Furthermore, these institutions often overlap and intersect to "reproduce power relations in society" (2008:82). Simple Livers looked to the church to gather support and spread the news on how to challenge capitalistic

consumptive norms. Unfortunately, they received limited support. Consequently, both capitalistic and religious institutions worked together to reinforce a consumptive societal ethos (Friedland and Alford 1991).

Although religious entities constitute part of the larger simple living discourse, so too do other cultural entrepreneurs and organizations. These organizations experience the same problems as churches; namely, they cannot be all things to all people. In the next chapter, I analyze the problems encountered by a national organization as it attempted to structure its own organizational identity focused on faith-based simple living.

CHAPTER 7

ORGANIZING VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY: THE CHALLENGES OF

ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Chapter Six examined how religion both helps and hinders the efforts of faith-based

Simple Livers. Churches provide opportunities to help those in need, yet they often fail to

go beyond the traditional avenues of outreach and challenge mainstream consumption

practices. Different groups of people have different expectations of their churches, and

faced with competing options, many pastors put religion before other issues. Although

some Simple Livers find this disappointing, it solidifies the identity of the church and

ensures its continued existence.

In this chapter, I analyze a similar dilemma—with a different outcome—within

SimplePaths. Just as individual Simple Livers constructed identities informed by faith

and simple living practices, so, too, did this organization. And just as members held

competing expectations about what their churches should be and do, so did the

stakeholders of SimplePaths.

Organizational identity consists of that which is central, enduring, and distinctive

about an organization's character and what distinguishes one organization from another

(Albert and Whetten 1985). Consistent with notions of individual identity, it includes

ideas about how organization members believe others see the organization (Dutton and

Dukerich 1991) and the public's perception of a given organization (Berg 1985). Like all

organizations, SimplePaths used rhetorical and symbolic means to present a particular

identity to its audience and to itself. The use of the past tense is relevant here, for during

the course of the research, SimplePaths ceased to exist. The board members' efforts to

transform its organizational identity so destabilized the organization's character that it could not adapt and survive. Those in charge of revising the organization's identity could not agree on what the organization stood for and where it should go. Consequently, I had the opportunity to observe not only identity work in progress, but also the results of an unsuccessful attempt to construct a compelling organizational image and mission. Although people can—and do—identify themselves as Simple Livers without the guidance of an organization, SimplePaths provided many with a gateway to simple living through presentations at churches and its print and online resources. Organizational identity, and organizational survival, depends largely on individual identification with an organization. Thus, identity work at the individual level influences, over time, identity work at the organizational level.

In this chapter, I examine several issues related to the link between personal identity and organizational identity. I focus on three key areas to analyze how the identities of individuals influence the identity of an organization. First, I show how the identities of the organization's founders and board members influenced the niche the organization was understood to fill. Second, I show how the identities of the target audience influenced the definition of membership. Third, I show how the identities of both these groups, or at least the *perception* of those identities, influenced the board members' efforts to create a mission statement. In what follows, I describe the organization's efforts to establish its mission statement and definition of membership. I then analyze these efforts as a form of "boundary work," thus contributing to the sociological discussion of identity work, especially as it occurs within organizations.

"IF WE ARE NOT A BOOKSTORE, THEN WHAT ARE WE?"

The clarification and expansion of its niche as an organization was centrally important to

SimplePaths. In the past, the group promoted voluntary simplicity through the sale of

faith-based and secular books and resources (mostly through a third-party vendor). Soon

after hiring the new co-directors, the board members decided they "no longer wanted to

be a bookstore." They had often commented on the hypocrisy embedded in a simple-

living organization that promotes simple living by selling products. They wanted to

streamline the organization. The board unanimously decided that Neil, the former

director, had flooded (inadvertently or not) the organization with resources, including an

extensive book selection, and because many of the books/resources were not selling, it

was important to revamp the organizational resources and direction.[17] In September of

2008, the majority of board members came together for a three-day retreat to discuss the

direction of SimplePaths, including its mission, niche, and resources for membership.[18]

I was invited, and I offered to help with some of the logistical duties. I

appreciated the opportunity to participate and get to know everyone at the organization. I

met Pamela and Amy, two of the board members, when I picked them up at Sam's house,

which was located in a midsized suburban area north of the state capital, as part of my

carpooling duties. It was late September and the beginning of fall, which made for a

lovely drive to the co-director's second home, located in a quaint ski resort area. Our trip,

which also had a scheduled stop at a local church for a brief overview of the retreat

itinerary and a renewable energy tour, provided the space and time for board members to

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[17] To be clear, this did not mean that SimplePaths would stop selling books. The board decided to reduce the number of books being offered.

[18] Due to either work or funding restrictions, three board members were unable to come to the retreat but did participate in a conference call with the other board members.

get to know one another, for many had not met before. I learned that Pamela, a forthright woman in her early 30's, was a pastor who managed many pastoral projects such as youth and young adults groups and community outreach. Amy, 28, was a social worker who worked for families involved in the juvenile court system. She was married with two children of her own and expecting a third. She developed an interest in living simply after watching the movie *Affluenza* in college, and found SimplePaths while researching the topic and discussions with Frank, a professor at her college. Soon afterwards, she was asked to be on the board as a college representative, which later turned into an administrator position. Even though we were stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic for three hours, the conversation in the car was easygoing, and everyone chatted about jobs and family. Both of these women (along with Pamela's husband, who came along for fun) discussed how excited they were about getting to know the co-directors better, as well as discussing the future of SimplePaths.

In preparation for this retreat, Sam and Sherry had reserved rooms for all board members, including myself, at a large hotel nestled in a ski town with a beautiful view of the mountain landscape and a reservoir. I shared a room with Laura, an energetic 32-year-old woman who was frequently on the phone with her husband talking about her young child or on the computer managing her Lutheran pastoral duties. She served a small-town congregation of 150 people. We joked about how this board retreat was a mini-vacation for her even with her ongoing workload.

After settling into our rooms, we met the others and headed to Sam and Sherry's house, a converted fire station, to have a late dinner and get reacquainted with one another. Our brief conversations addressed the health of the organization, finances, and

new organizational directions. We arrived at the house tired but excited about the

upcoming events. The house was cluttered, from both an ongoing remodel as well as the

family's many side projects, which included knitting and gardening. Everyone pitched in

and, working at a large island in the kitchen, we prepared a variety of vegetables and

made soup for dinner. We chatted, laughed, and talked about cooking, families, hobbies,

and our jobs. We sat randomly around the rustic kitchen and dining room area and, while

eating, began to talk about SimplePaths. During these informal conversations, George,

the board chair posed a question for everyone to consider: "If we are no longer a

bookstore, then what are we?"[19] This question challenged board members to think about

changing SimplePaths' identity, an example that captures "important features of

organizational identity as a negotiated, interactive, reflexive concept that, at its essence,

amounts to an organizational work-in-progress" (Gioia et al. 2000 p 76).

    Although everyone was tired from a full day of travel, the mood was upbeat and

hopeful for what lay ahead for SimplePaths. After ending the evening with warm chai, we

all headed back to our respective hotel rooms to retire for the night so we could get an

early start with the upcoming meetings. George's question set in motion the agenda for

the next morning as well as the next three years of planning, agendas, and ideas.

    At nine in the morning, we gathered in a large meeting room located in a local

Lutheran Church not far from the hotel. The room was sparsely furnished, with a

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[19] Over the course of four years, there were two board chairs. During the first year of this research project, George decided to leave the organization after being the chair for four years. He wanted to focus more on his personal and pastoral duties. The board decided that Frank was the most logical choice to be the next chair—in part because his long-standing involvement with the organization could help offer historical insight. Frank held this position until the official closure of the organization.

rectangular table in the middle and a kitchen area off to one side. Everyone filtered in, grabbing a cup of coffee or tea while exchanging morning greetings.

Soon after everyone arrived, we took our seats at the table to start the day's meeting. After a brief faith-driven story and a prayer, George officially started the meeting. He asked, "SimplePaths has an opportunity to be something completely different than it has been—so what do we want SimplePaths to be?" This question led to an immediate dialogue about the organization's mission statement, as well as conversations about the organization's niche and membership. The board decided to revamp its direction and to expand its message of faith-based simple living. To do this, they first took on the task of addressing the organization's mission statement, paying particular attention to inclusive and exclusive language.

MISSION: LANGUAGE OF THE FAITHFUL

One of the first orders of business for the board was addressing the organization's mission statement. A review of the mission statement proved useful in deciding the identity and goal of the organization and their target audience. This initial conversation demonstrated how the personal identities of the board members affected their perceptions of the organization's target audience, starting with the mission statement and the role of language. In particular, the board grappled with the symbolic and structural importance of four key terms. First the board struggled between what differences may (or may not) exist between the terms "religion" and "spirituality," which led them to articulate the differences between "people of faith" and "Christianity." For this organization, these

terms represented subtle yet defining inclusive and exclusive differences regarding what type of audience to target and the subsequent direction of resources.

Inclusive Spirituality versus Exclusive Religiosity

When the board approached the topic of changing the mission statement during the first retreat, the conversation began with a discussion of defining and distinguishing the terms "spirituality" and "religion." This conversation was foundational and set the tone for SimplePaths' identity as one that would be religiously inclusive or exclusive. Linda, a 32-year-old Lutheran pastor who was pregnant with her first child, articulated the struggles in trying to define SimplePaths' stance regarding these differences:

> The organization [SimplePaths] has primarily been rooted in the
>
> Christian tradition. But I guess I'm not convinced that this is a
>
> core distinction. I feel kind of conflicted. I wish it would just
>
> totally be Christian and try to market ourselves much more
>
> clearly to that kind of audience, *or* we should use words that are
>
> more general, like "spirituality."

Her statement demonstrates that SimplePaths had a history as a Christian organization, which limited its audience. Linda went on to acknowledge that "spirituality," as a broader, more inclusive term, could expand the organization's potential audience. During these conversations at the retreat, and in subsequent one-on-one interviews, board members expressed diverse definitions of "spiritual." Some board members defined spirituality as "unclear," "loosey-goosey," and "maybe just as dangerous as extreme

fundamentalism," whereas another board member felt that spirituality was a form of expression of her religion.

Although—or because—the definition of "spiritual" varied among board members, they did agree that the word represented a broad or open category, incorporating a spectrum of views, mostly involving "New Age" and other non-conventional forms of religiosity. Because board members' identities were rooted within an organized Christian belief system, they did not have an affinity for "spiritual" as a core defining term for SimplePaths. They decided that using the word "spiritual" could weaken the religious stance of the organization, because it signified *too* much inclusivity. And, while the board did not want to dismiss inclusive ideals, they did not want to dilute the organization's Christian base either, as this had historically been its niche. The board recognized organized religion as key to recruiting potential members. They perceived future members coming from organized religion, or as Jenn emphatically claimed, "I just think that 95% of the people that find us are coming through organized Christian religion." George also agreed, "While I have an affinity for the folks who live beyond the church walls, I think, as an organization, SimplePaths' infrastructure really exists for the church structures." He also brought up a marketing problem that might arise if the organization were to expand beyond a Christian audience. "We really don't have the means of getting resources into non-church folks' hands. How are we gonna build that infrastructure? [We] just need be realistic about who our audience, who our target, is." George's comments underscore the point that, as a board, they did not have access to a non-church audience from their own religious positionality; they had access to organized religious groups. Consequently, the board opted to maintain and strengthen its ties to

organized religion and to focus its energy on potential Christian memberships. They felt

that if they incorporated the word "spiritual" in the mission statement, they would give up

one of the benefits of affiliation with organized religion: a built-in audience.

People of Faith

Even though the board adhered to Christianity as its main marketing demographic, board

members still wrestled with what *type* of Christian organization SimplePaths would be.

The type of organization reflects board members' religious views, which in turn courts a

specific type of audience. To this end, the board struggled between "Christian" and

"people of faith" allocating specific ideologies to each: the former as negatively *exclusive*

and the latter as positively *inclusive* yet maintaining constrained resource directions

which included marketing mostly Christian (Jesus) specific materials.

All the members sat around the cafeteria-style table and discussed key attributes

of the organization while, Sam the co-director, wrote them out on a big easel for all to

see. This brainstorming session led to members describing the identity of SimplePaths

including articulating what type of Christianity they are *not*. For example, George

brought up a correlation between the term "Christian" with fundamentalist symbolism

because, as he stated, "unfortunately, I'm almost at the point of seeing the word

'Christian' as the evangelicals. When somebody says the word 'Christian' in our society,

too many times it means a conservative Christianity." Sam agreed, adding, "It's like

saying, 'We're a Christian nation' and everybody who does that [Christianity] is

fundamentalist or evangelical." During a personal interview, Pamela also emphasized the

need for the organization to separate itself from conservative Christianity because "there's a lot of negative religions. I mean, I'm not a big fan of the Religious Right."

In the end, all board members agreed that fundamentalism had co-opted the word "Christian" —and in their eyes, it consequently had a negative connotation. Board members' *progressive* religious identities reflect negative perceptions of the Religious Right, which influenced the direction of the language used in the mission statement, and consequently the overall identity of the organization. By not incorporating "Christian," the board was "policing" the organizational boundaries (Schwalbe and Mason Schrock 1996: Lichterman 2008).

Even though the members maintained Christianity as the group's central religious boundary, they still discussed the importance of being simultaneously inclusive in hopes of attracting a larger potential membership base. Linda expressed the need to embrace this balance:

> If we do have a niche in terms of organized religion, and a lot of
>
> our strength around the table is from congregation-based,
>
> organized communities, I wonder if there's a way we can still
>
> have that as our mission and our primary audience, but present
>
> ourselves and our materials and our networking in a way that
>
> would appeal to folks who aren't necessarily there.

To accomplish this task of balancing between Christianity and opening up to larger potential audiences who "aren't necessarily there," the board focused on "people of faith" in the mission statement. Board members felt that "people of faith" encapsulated a more hospitable or open faith; it became synonymous with "spiritual" without having to

address other forms of religious ideals directly. As Linda explained, "the phrase 'people of faith' is broader then Christian." The board wanted to reach not only a Christian audience but also others who may not adhere to organized religion. Jenn stated during a personal interview that she hopes "to appeal to folks who maybe do not identify themselves as Christians, or church-goers in the kind of religious sense of things." She went on to state that while she knew the organization was aligned with Christian ideals, she hoped "that we have a posture of appealing to people who are passionate about simple living or involved in the simple-living movement. But, you know, identifying themselves in a number of places."

By incorporating the term "people of faith," SimplePaths catered to organized Christianity while simultaneously tried to appeal to ideas of religious inclusivity. The board was in essence participating in a type of distinction-muting logic, one that embraced inclusivity (Ghaziani 2011). Consequently, "people of faith" contributed to both the organization's identity and potential audience of being open and hospitable (Lichterman 2007). Or as the board minutes reveal, "We want to define our audience as a Christian audience, but to be hospitable." This perspective aligns with board members' progressive Christian stance.

Even though SimplePaths constructed "people of faith" as a welcoming signifier of their progressive organization that does not discriminate against other faiths, its roots, and more specifically its income streams, remained Christ-centered. SimplePaths tried to sustain an inclusive, albeit constrained, mentality; yet, its Christ-based resources simultaneously limit these inclusive ideals. In particular, the SimplePaths' signature publication focuses on the relationship among simple living, Christmas, and Jesus. In an

effort to articulate the tension the board had in balancing both inclusive and exclusive boundaries, Frank mentioned to me that "if you try to be everything to everyone, you're nothing to no one," and the organization will not be successful. Frank reiterated during the first retreat meeting that SimplePaths should not be too inclusive with its material, "if everyone is going to be something that's all inclusive of Jews, Christians, Buddhists, etc., who's going to sponsor those workshops? Who's going to buy that material? My answer is nobody."

The board's determination in defining SimplePaths as a progressive and hospitable Christian organization is significantly challenged by its own funding streams. The board meeting minutes reflect the ongoing question of negotiating these boundaries, "can we use congregational systems as our base, but still present our materials and mission in a way that doesn't turn off those who are turned off by organized church?" So, even though board members would never turn away people who adhere to other religious faiths, they recognize that SimplePaths' materials are really only for a certain audience. Thus, while "people of faith" potentially invites other faith-based traditions, SimplePaths' Christ-based resources and income streams limited the possibilities of increasing the numbers of potential members from other religious fields.

NICHE: RESOURCES AND PRESENTATIONS

In tandem with (re)creating the mission statement, over the next three years the board consistently focused on the organization's niche direction. All the members recognized that a niche reflects the choices of materials, including what the website and presentations offer to the public. During a meeting, Frank pointed out, "don't we need to know what

makes us somewhat distinctive so that—I mean, if we just folded up tomorrow, would it matter? Is there something that we offer that's somewhat distinctive?" Specifically, the niche reflects the income streams and vice versa. All of which add to a particular identity, one that is distinct from other organizational identities. Overall, the board recognized the need to decide what makes them distinct from other organizations, what they can claim as their own social space, and how to capitalize on this difference (Scheitle 2007). The concern for the board thus became finding a distinct niche, one that would not attempt to be everything to everyone. Therefore, creating a niche is a necessary strategy to set and maintain boundaries. The board set about making decisions regarding SimplePaths' niche, including maintaining its Christian roots connecting to the Christmas tradition and celebrations, and what role, if any, environmentalism would play in building SimplePaths' niche and overall identity.

Exclusive Celebrations and Inclusively Green

In deciding the niche direction of SimplePaths and the ensuing income streams, the board focused on three main resources: Christmas, celebrations (in particular weddings) and environmentalism, all of which incorporated specific religious tenets reflecting both inclusive and exclusive directions. The board maintained an ideological stance by claiming Christmas and weddings as markers of Christianity. SimplePaths has a long-standing publication focusing on simplicity and Christmas, *Simply Christmas*, and the board recognized the significance of this resource and its foundational contribution in building the existing organizational identity. This publication, which at one time generated an approximate 60,000-readership base, had been the main income stream as

well as the defining feature of organizational identity.[20] The publication was available to

individuals (via the Internet), churches, or denominational program-specific groups. For

example, specific Lutheran synods would purchase bulk quantities for church

distribution.[21]

Historically, this publication would be tailored for each specific denomination

(that bought it in bulk), with one page designated for a specific message by some type of

denominational leader.[22] For example, in 1996, the archbishop of Atlanta provided

constituents with a Catholic Christmas message along with a recommendation to draw on

the *Simply Christmas* publication as a way to "look more deeply into the mystery of the

Incarnation"; other denominational messages would come from educational ministry

coordinators, various pastors, or spokespeople from youth and family life ministries. In

this sense, denominational leaders were helping to promote *Simply Christmas* while

simultaneously reinforcing tenets of Christianity. The board recognized the significance

of this publication as a viable asset, historically and presently, to the organization. As

Frank reiterated, "I guess I believe that's where it [SimplePaths] started and with its

major being Christmas and its major product every year being *Simply Christmas*, it's

foolish to abandon that because that's its core."

Resounding confirmation by other board members kept the publication *Simply

Christmas* at the forefront of what the organization could offer its constituents, but they

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[20] This number represents 2007 financial records. 2009 and 2010 sales reflect 10,000-20,000 per year respectively.

[21] Synods are similar to clusters of churches located in particular geographic regions.

[22] Over the past few years, SimplePaths decided to make *Simply Christmas* ecumenical as a way to cut down on production costs, except for the United Church of Canada (UCCC), who donated the print layout for SimplePaths and therefore was able to absorb the costs for the denomination specific message.

also recognized they needed to build on and advance the original niche. To this end, conversations rallied around building a niche that focused on "celebrations."

The theme of celebrations became the focal point for resource decisions. For the board, celebrations, and in particular, Christmas and weddings, were viewed as distinctly Christian in nature or as Frank stated, "Christmas and weddings are things Christians do." One board member, Kurt, a tall man in his thirties with marketing experience, discussed from a potential member's point of view how they could use SimplePaths as a point of entry. He said, "'we're planning a wedding, and wow, this is overwhelming. I'm searching for something that makes weddings simpler. Wow, I found this thing, and not only did it really help us with our wedding planning, but I discovered this whole world of simple living I didn't know about.'" Kurt articulated that SimplePaths' message of simplicity is a bridge between faith-based people and life events. SimplePaths' materials on celebrations and Christianity interlink because, as Jenn pointed out, those who are part of the ministry should help "keep the consumer culture in check in our lives and congregations, particularly around Christmas and weddings and those celebrations which have theological, historical, Biblical roots and traditions that basically get co-opted by American consumer culture and corporations." Jenn's comments express the Christian connection among Christmas, celebrations, and weddings while simultaneously acknowledging the secular "take over" of these life events. Her comments also reflect that those who participate in the church (e.g. ministry) are the target members SimplePaths wants to cater to. Thus, an important goal for the board included emphasizing the connections between Christianity and celebrations. In particular, board members considered many life events Christian in nature, a belief stemming from *their*

identity as Christians. The board's decision to focus on celebrations was general in scope while simultaneously providing guidelines with which to work.

Inclusively Green

While the theme of celebrations became one route to expand the organizational niche of Christianity, the board also wrestled with what, if any, role environmentalism or "green practices" would have regarding SimplePaths' overall niche and how it related to Christianity and SimplePaths' identity. On one hand, board members acknowledged the importance of environmentalism and often discussed its connections to simplicity. On the other, they also felt that green had been "done" and was not an exclusive enough as a niche. Discussing the use of eco-footprint presentations, George asserted concern about taking an environmental track, saying, "if we're just gonna be green or just be about sustainability, there are lots of options for that. We might as well quit. And it's not that we don't care about that, but what's our niche?"

George and the board wrestled with how sustainable presentations would be unique to SimplePaths. More often than not, the board felt that incorporating resources on topics of sustainability, environmentalism, and "green" meant bringing an overused message to an already saturated market. Or as board members collectively shared, "if we just have lectures about sustainability, etc., books on that, then what makes us different— there's a ton of that stuff out there. Green is popular, sustainable, organic, all of that. So then what are *we*?" The focus kept going back to consumerism. Pamela further advanced the position of SimplePaths' need to take on "the consumeristic aspect" as opposed to being "green," she argued. "I love talking about green things," she said, "but when it

comes down to basically what simple living is about, it's the consumeristic aspect. It is about simplifying Christmas as well as other times where we buy stuff constantly and trying to be good stewards."

Although the board recognized the interconnected relationship between environmentalism and consumerism, the goal of honing in on a specific niche perpetuated a division between the two perspectives. In trying to determine SimplePaths' niche, environmentalism was reinforced as a separate category from simplicity. Environmentalism became symbolic of inclusivity because the board felt that everyone knows about the general issue (of environmentalism) and partakes to some degree. Consequently, members of the board worried that if SimplePaths focused on an environmental discourse, its niche would not be unique. Although, the board felt that going green had "been done," board members often contradicted one another. Consequently, their narratives became "storied," such that attempts to produce order with complicated issues became marred with competing and contradictory narratives (Bartkowski 2007).

Even though they construed environmentalism as overworked and already covered by other organizations, in the end, they still opted to incorporate themes of environmentalism within the organization's resources and presentations. I attributed this to board members' attempts to live out simple living practices in their own lives; their identities align with both anti-consumptive and environmental-friendly belief systems. One way they navigated through these contradictions included keeping the focus faith centered. To eliminate their perception of an "overdone" saturation of environmentalist discourse, board members felt the organization needed to embrace and connect to faith as

a way to reach potential members.

Sam emphasized how the role of the environment (being green) could help reach people and get potential members to connect faith and simple living, thus resolving some of the concerns about SimplePaths becoming just another environmental group. In particular, SimplePaths developed a new "green" publication, emphasizing the relationship between environmentalism and faith—and paying noteworthy attention to both an ecumenical and interfaith perspective. When thinking about how SimplePaths could become progressive and cutting-edge in its own right, Sam expressed the need for more dialog about the environment between world religions such as Buddhism, Islam, as well as First Nations as a way to share perspectives.

Specifically, the green publication, *Green Earth*, became a platform to incorporate a progressive form of Christianity that embraces other religious faiths. For example, the introduction (written by Sam) focused on the "Tree of Life" and how it is "a powerful symbol that connects the earth's various faith traditions around caring for God's creation and reconnecting with the whole earth as a living icon of the face of God." Sam also wrote on the importance between a shared community and the planet, "This has never been as clear as [when] the world community confronts the challenge of global climate change," he said. "Mature religious practice and worship, whether it is within Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, or Judaism, makes the connection between the divine presence and the stewardship of creation."

Even more to the point, the meat of this mini publication includes a list of both Christian and interfaith prayer quotes embracing connections to the earth, including such voices as Thich Nhat Hanh (a Buddhist Monk), Arthur Waskow (a Jewish Renewal

movement rabbi), and Fazlun Khalid (an Islamic environmentalist). The publication became an outlet that embraced an interfaith perspective. As Frank stated during a conference call, "*Green Earth* highlights the interfaith component and this could set it apart from *Simply Christmas* [which can] set it apart from other Earth Day resources." *Green Earth* became a tool to bring in an interfaith perspective symbolizing faith inclusivity. The board capitalized on its own narrative that claims environmentalism has been "done"—to a new frame that reinforces SimplePaths as progressive or hospitable by going beyond Christianity, it became a tool to bring in an interfaith perspective symbolizing faith inclusivity. For the organization, environmentalism became a springboard to branch out or bridge with an interfaith paradigm (Lichterman 2005).

It is important to briefly point out that funding for SimplePaths, including operating costs and funding of publications, derived from denominations often by way of board member affiliations. Notably, all grants that SimplePaths applied for through these denominations were approved (albeit for smaller amounts each year) except for one.[23] The ELCA denied funding the *Green Earth* publication on the basis that it did not differ from other green material even with a focus on diverse religious paradigms.[24] Therefore, while the board symbolically agreed on *Green Earth*, a lack of monetary support from organizational backers did not emerge which, in the end stifled the production of the

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[23] It is important to note that during the last remaining years of SimplePaths both PC(USA) and the ELCA own denominational funded programs had been reduced, and denominationally affiliated board members stated this was due to larger economic funding cut constraints. It is beyond the scope of this research to surmise the "truth" of these denominational cuts but to flag the "failing economy" discourse that was used during board meetings and conference calls.

[24] In the case of *Green Earth* both the failing economy discourse and the decision that the publication did not offer something different within the environmental discourse was the reasons for rejecting the proposal.

available publications thereby limiting potential sales. The publication did get off the

ground with a very limited printing of hard copies, by way of personal monetary support

from another board member. Later, when the publication made its debut, it was a "hit,"

according to both co-directors. All the hard copies sold and the organization received

donations from downloadable website sales "from people who are not already in our

database." As Sherry pointed out, "there is opportunity to make them into new members."

Although the board could not articulate the exact reasons for the publication sales,

potential members seemed attracted to the topics of environmentalism and/or interfaith

paradigms.

Denominational Positionality and Theological Hybridity

One of the distinct qualities of this national organization was the in-person presentations

SimplePaths offered to interested groups. In 2005, the board decided to facilitate more

face-to-face connections with members and potential members by providing

presentations by the director (or directors) to interested groups. These presentations were

both locally and nationally based, including presentations to congregations and faith-

based groups (such as clergy spousal groups). SimplePaths promoted presentations on its

website, publications, and word of mouth through various faith-based social networks.

When groups became interested, they would contact the directors and arrange dates and

financial costs to transport and house speakers (if necessary), along with providing a

small stipend. Many speaking engagements by the co-directors focused heavily on

weaving together simplicity, environmentalism, and multiple theological paradigms.

Quite often, these presentations were given to various church denominations that have

some affinity to simple-living ideals or environmentalism. Or as one of the directors

shared, " it's like we are preaching to the choir." While the directors provided some variety to their simple-living presentations, they focused most of their attention on three themes: simple living, eco-footprint, and spiritual simplicity; all three presentations incorporated elements of faith-based simple living. These presentations were religious in nature, and most of the people attending were affiliated with some form of Christian belief system. For example, a group of Catholic nuns invited the local community to a SimplePaths presentation, and while a few people from the local area did come, the audience consisted mostly of nuns. Some presentations took place at Methodist and Lutheran churches and/or conferences in which people affiliated with these particular denominations attended. Overall, these presentations were geared toward shedding light on the relationship between simple living, environmentalism, and faith.

Presentations offered an opportunity in which the directors could present varying theological paradigms while simultaneously emphasize denominational "positionality" as a way to connect with their audience. Both co-directors were Lutherans. In fact, many presentations took place in Lutheran or Methodist church buildings partly due to the social networks available to directors (and other board members). Consequently, the director's own religious positionality often influenced interactions with audience members and presentations. One way to break the ice and find a way to connect to the audience was to drop denominational names so the audience could relate to the speakers and their message. For example, during one of her presentations to a Lutheran group, Sherry exclaimed, "Martin Luther, in his explanation of the first commandment: 'You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. What you think about all the time, that is your God.'" Sherry's reference to Martin Luther provided the

audience with a sense of religious familiarity.

During another presentation to a group of Lutherans, both co-directors incorporated songs well known by Lutheran congregations. This provided a sense of camaraderie between SimplePaths and the group. During one board meeting, Sherry discussed her recent trip to a "stewardship"-themed conference, and said, "because it was a stewardship presentation, it was different than the world hunger stuff that we're usually involved with, and when I go to Lutheran churches, I use a lot of Lutheran stuff. When we were doing the stewardship stuff, I totally changed."

The co-directors were always gracious and allowed me to accompany them to as many presentations as I wanted and could arrange to attend. One such trip flew us to a Midwest state to do a simple-living presentation at a convent. I was surprised to learn that such a trip was planned; I had no idea what SimplePaths could actually teach nuns who literally take a vow of poverty (which the nuns view as a state of simplicity). We arrived in the early evening at the nunnery, a non-descript, rectangular, red brick building located (somewhat ironically) behind the local Walmart. Most of the women were in their late sixties and older. After preparing us a light meal of crackers, bread, lunchmeats, cheeses, and fruit, a handful of sisters joined us at the kitchen table to chat and get acquainted. During our conversation, some of the nuns proclaimed progressive ideological stances on many issues, including maintaining an anti-consumerist approach to life and liberal politics. At that point, Sam "dropped" the name Richard Rohr, a progressive-minded Franciscan priest, to which a couple of the nun's heads nodded in approval and recognition. This confirmed to the nuns that Sam (and by default SimplePaths) was also religiously progressive-minded and was familiar with Catholic teachings. While various

groups like the nuns could have ascertained SimplePaths' philosophical stance through the website and available resources, name-dropping reinforced progressive religious views that aligned with their Catholic religious belief system.

People often seek common ground to forge connections with others and, in this case, the specific denominational language reinforced religious exclusivity in a way that reassured the audience and connected them with the speaker and the upcoming subject matter. Speaking engagements provided an opportunity in which the SimplePaths directors and the audience could connect through religious affiliation. The directors were Lutheran, which afforded them connections to Protestant-based groups including Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian denominations. The directors would capitalize on these connections by way of "insider" denominational conversations and name-dropping.

In addition to reinforcing denomination connections, the directors often incorporated in their presentations opportunities to *expand* audience members' religious boundaries by mixing religious traditions and theologies. The co-director's own affinity toward broadening and weaving together theological paradigms set in motion new religious direction for SimplePaths as an organization. One such occasion took place at a spousal clergy event that both Sam and Sherry were the keynote speakers. Every year, Lutheran clergy spouses (women) from a collection of Lutheran synods come together as a way to bond and build relationships with each other. The theme for the 2009 conference focused on simplicity and around fifty women spent time together sharing meals, sightseeing the surrounding area, and participating in a variety of workshops and talks including Lutheran mission trips to Africa, yoga, and simplicity workshops. Along with

the keynote address both Sam and Sherry provided two workshops—one on eco-footprint and the other connecting spirituality and simplicity. In particular, the "Spiritual Simplicity" presentation incorporated the Benedictine tradition of *Lectio Divina*, a prayer practice associated with Catholics and not readily a part of Protestant church life. Sam acknowledged the differing approaches of these Christian faiths but felt it important to bring this form of prayer practice to Protestants to connect emotionally with simplicity and environmentalism. As he explained, "Protestants tend to be intellectual, so this is a good practice for us, how does it affect us emotionally."

To start, Sam started his PowerPoint presentation with a quote by Richard Rohr from his book, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* (2008). The works of Richard Rohr heavily influenced Sam's religious perspective, yet he did not focus on Richard Rohr or contemplative prayer at the Catholic convent presentation. He made a conscious decision to use it specifically for his Protestant audience. He felt it was unnecessary to focus a presentation on contemplative prayer tactics to a Catholic community—they already know this process, but groups such as that at the Protestant spousal clergy retreat did not. Sam incorporated this practice in many of his presentations to a variety of Protestant audiences.

In addition to expanding Protestant boundaries by incorporating Catholic traditions, a hybrid of environmental theological discourses became a central feature of Sam's presentations. Three types of Christian eco-theological discourse models emerged during the late eighties that still have relevance today, including "Christian stewardship," "eco-justice," and "creation spirituality" (Kearns 1996). SimplePaths draws from all three distinctly different theologies. Christian stewardship encompasses a view that God calls

humans to be stewards of the earth, and humans should take care to protect the earth and God's creations. The goal is for an individual change of heart (to take care of earth) and for the church to become "creation awareness centers" (Kearns 1996:60). Sam and Sherry have both conveyed that stewardship seems to be the most prominent theological paradigm expressed by faith-based Simple Livers they know.

Eco-justice pertains to religious perspectives focused on social justice concerns specifically regarding environmental issues. The goal is to correct structural or institutional inequalities, such as poverty and racism, with a more sociocentric perspective. Creation spirituality has a panentheist point of view in which God is both transcendent over and eminent concerning creation. Drawing from a variety of spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Judaism, and Native American ideologies, it also dismisses dualistic thinking and promotes a new worldview encompassing goals of reconnection to the universe as a whole.

Based on the co-director's attraction to panentheism, a goal for the "Spiritual Simplicity" presentation was to challenge dualist thinking. As Sam's presentation progressed he discussed the importance of contemplative spirituality, which as his slide stated, "often leads to God breaking through our usual dualistic way of perceiving the world including [topics] of Us vs. Them, Good vs. Evil, and Matter vs. Spirit." His goal focused on trying to get people to understand that "God is contained in creation" and to push forth non-dualistic thinking regarding "earthcare" and spirituality that falls along the creation spirituality continuum. Although some audience members told me they appreciated Sam connecting faith including non-dualistic thinking to simple-living ideals, others also discussed how they did not really understand some of the points he made. For

example, after the clergy spousal retreat I interviewed Erin and asked her what she thought about the simplicity spiritual presentation. She recognized the importance of the *Lectio Divina* as a practice, and since she came home from the retreat, she has "tried to do that [*Lectio Divina*] twice, so I've been trying to kind of grow into some spiritual practices." Yet, when talking about how the *Lectio Divina* connects to simplicity she argued, "this wasn't clear to me in his presentation—I'm guessing he was saying that simplicity can be a spiritual practice, but I'm not sure that's what he meant." Maxine, who also participated in the clergy spousal retreat, reiterated some problems she and her friends face in trying to understand Sam's spiritual presentation. In her words, she "didn't really understand where they were going with the presentation." She later went on to say that she "got more out of" the carbon footprint presentation because it was "more tangible." In talking to others at the presentation, she found that they, too, "understood exactly where they were going with that part of the little program."

For most people, the eco-footprint presentation seemed the "easiest" to connect with, because most people had already heard or at least knew the relationship basics between consuming and environmental concerns. Expanding ecumenical faith practices and multiple eco-theological perspectives both intrigued and perplexed audience members. At the very least, audience members had polysemic experiences of these presentations (Munson 2007).

Although Sam and Sherry attempted to signal a particular goal of SimplePaths, one in which focused on incorporating simple living, ecumenical, and interfaith ideologies as a way to communicate who they are as an organization, audience feedback

did not reflect back such a salient organizational identity (Gioia et al. 2000; Dutton and Dukurich 1991; Albert and Whetten 1985).

MEMBERSHIP: INCLUSIVE RESOURCES

Targeting an audience and gaining membership were of utmost concern to the board. Both the mission statement and niche reflected the ongoing decisions about to whom the organization catered. Based on board members' own progressive religious identities, the focus of people of faith and niche resources—encompassing both ecumenical and inter-faith—were the target audience. Along with denominational grants and resource material, membership fees served as the third central income stream. From the first face-to-face meetings, I witnessed the board struggling with how to define membership and capitalize on that definition. In trying to keep in line with a progressive religious ideology of community (not excluding people) and not perpetuating market-based consumption, which goes against a voluntary simplicity paradigm, the board was consistently fraught with defining the role of membership. The board first flagged problems with membership when they realized different numbers represented different categories. For example, the database that spanned the past twelve years had 5,000 people who at some point ordered *Simply Christmas* or some other product, but more recent numbers between 857 and 1,285 were based on annual membership and/or donor status. Therefore, it was unclear whether the organization defined membership on one-time orders, yearly membership dues, and/or sporadic donations. Consequently, the board undertook the task of defining membership to articulate the organization's income stream further.

For example, Frank reiterated the relationship between income and members

stating, "*Simply Christmas* needs to be marketed, and we need to give attention to

membership. If we're inviting people once again to become members, or to renew, we

got to have more clarity about what that means." The question became what, if anything,

separated a member from anyone else who is interested in simple living. In particular, for

those people who signed up as members they would receive a copy of the signature

publication, *Simply Christmas* (a $4 value), copying privileges (to reproduce small

portions of publication), and downloadable resources from the website as they became

available. [25] Yet the website, available to anyone, offered all of these same resources.

Short of a free publication, why would anyone then pay yearly dues to become a

member? Although the board recognized they could not make everything free to potential

and existing members, they still had to decipher the relationship between membership

and income. During a board meeting, Liz underscored a main problem in determining the

relationship between membership and income when she said "we had talked about the

downloadable things only being available to members rather than just open on the site."

Board members discussed the option of the website offering products to members-only.

After some consideration, the board concluded that making certain resources available

only to members would run counter to both potential members' and the board's definition

of simple living ideals and a sense of openness. As Jenn put it, "I think we ask people to

become members because they get the values that we set out of what [SimplePaths']

mission is" She then articulated that, if there is access for members only, "then it feels

exclusive. If you have to be a member to access stuff, and you have to get through the

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[25] Membership options and rates varied such as single, family, lifetime membership, and other categories.

firewall to get to it, it feels very apart, and we want it to feel very personal and connected." Therefore, the board found it important to maintain an ideology parallel to simple living and progressive religious ideas of fostering connection and inclusivity so that anyone can access SimplePaths resources. In the end, they opted to not tier resources based on membership.

Although two main funding products (*Simply Christmas* and a CD promoting Christianity and simplicity) always required payment, other resources on the website were free or requested a donation for downloading material. For example, the website requested 5 dollars or a donation for the *Green Earth* publication, while other materials such as Lenten resources and a how-to-start simple living circles document could be downloaded for free. While many organizations that do not offer any "goodies" to be a member, SimplePaths also did not provide clear monetary income stream options to either members and/or a general simple living audience. Consequently, limited new original resources and the (lack of) financial responsibility tied to such resources coupled with a philosophical stance of inclusivity of membership did not produce an increase in membership and in the end did not prove to be a viable income stream.

NEGOTIATING ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Organizational identity is a collective understanding of an organization's main tenets and features; it is how it distinguishes itself from other organizations (Albert and Whetten 1985; Gioia et al. 2000; Hatch and Schultz 1997). Similar to group identities, the use of boundaries is fundamental in producing organizational identities (Hatch and Schultz 1997). In addressing its mission, niche, and audience, board members wrestled with

SimplePaths' identity and boundary creation as they engaged in decision-making processes. Scott (2004) argues that conceptions of organizational boundaries, including distinctive roles, membership criteria, identities, and activities, have "become more open and flexible," such that "boundaries are more permeable and less fixed" (p. 10). SimplePaths, however, could not establish a clear organizational identity because of the influence of board members' individual identities, including their perceptions of target audience identities. The board members' individual identities reflect religious ideologies comprised of both *progressive* (inclusive boundaries) and *institutionalized* (exclusive boundaries) forms of Christianity, as well as allegiances to simple living practices, also perceived by board members as inclusive in nature. Board members acted on what Gecas (2000) calls "value identities," in which political, and cultural ideological values are an important source of identity; this, in turn, influenced the organizational identity of SimplePaths. Unfortunately, in this situation, board members' identities and their subsequent boundary decisions produced a muddled organizational identity.

The decisions the board members made about SimplePaths' organizational identity reflect ongoing boundary work. I argue that the organization participated in what I term an *intragroup boundary crisis*, in which board members could not create or maintain an organization's identity because of conflicting inclusive and exclusive boundaries at the individual level. For example, from 2008 to 2011, the board consistently discussed the need to "define its goals" and "re-define its priorities." These conversations played out through the development of the mission statement, the establishment of the organization's niche (resources and presentations), and the definition of what constituted membership. During retreats and conference calls, board members

negotiated SimplePaths' niche through the mission statement ("Christian" or "people of faith"). Because board members participated in institutionalized religion, namely Christianity, (many of them worked for churches), they believed their target audience would do so, too. Board members mapped their own progressive religious identities onto the mission statement by preserving language such as "people of faith" to promote a specific type of Christian VS organization, one that is open and progressive.

Presentations (Christian, ecumenical, and/or interfaith) and the resources offered (anti-consumerist and/or green) represent the expression of the organization's niche. Here, too, board members' identities influenced the direction. Most notably, board members' commitments to anti-consumptive and environmental practices, along with their own religious affiliations, influenced their decision to use ecumenical and/or interfaith discourses to address the use of green environmental resources. In addition, the co-directors' affinity for contemplative prayer and multiple theological belief systems, including panentheism, framed the organization's presentations and practices. The co-directors' own religious positionality and denominational name-dropping provided audiences with a connection to the organization.

Finally, membership decisions drew on perceptions of a target audience that adheres to a simple living lifestyle, is anti-consumptive, and is Christian. The groups' decisions about how to define membership in turn influenced decisions regarding which resources would be available on the website. Most of the web resources are Christianity based, specifically focusing on Christmas and other life events. These resources assumed a Christian audience, but the new publication, *Green Earth,* prompted potential members to connect environmentalism to interfaith paradigms. Thus, the board's attempt to

simultaneously maintain a Christian identity and promote an interfaith simple living ideology, focused on being inclusive and communally centered created confusing membership categories.

Failed Boundary Work

In trying to define membership as available to anyone, SimplePaths lacked clear and minimal monetary income streams for members to purchase. Thus, SimplePaths, in trying to articulate its niche through its mission statement, presentations, publications, and audience, were forced to address the organization's boundaries and subsequently the consequences of failed boundary work. Moreover, ongoing diminishing funding resulted from the organization's intragroup boundary conflict. Although boundaries are often "actively constructed and reconstructed in the face of both changing social conditions and shifting public receptiveness" (Beisel 1992), these factors proved insurmountable for SimplePaths. Throughout their negotiations, Christian discourse and resources remained a strong influence. The organization attempted to expand and even capitalize on these boundaries. It was not enough to claim a progressive Christian positionality of "people of faith" because SimplePaths' signature moneymaker focused on exclusively Christian ideals of Christmas and Jesus. Whereas other online activist organizations are able to create or strengthen an identity and expand membership based on ambiguously defined boundaries, SimplePaths' identity faltered (Eaton 2011). For example, their presentations attempted to integrate a discursive strategy that used both exclusive and inclusive theological tactics. The use of denominational name-dropping created a sense of comfort and collectiveness, or an exclusive, denominational "we" factor for audience members.

Simultaneously, presentations became a space in which they expanded Christian boundaries by incorporating Catholic rituals in presentations made to Protestant audiences. The directors tried to challenge traditional ways of thinking, addressing simple living through ecumenical faith connections. The presentations also provided a concrete example of how SimplePaths embraced a hybrid of eco-theological discourses, including Christian stewardship, eco-justice, and creation spirituality, which further advanced inclusive paradigms. Yet at times, these strategies exceeded audience members' general understanding of the matter.

Current boundary research suggests two theoretical tools, or *mechanisms,* of boundary usage; the first is *successful* boundary negotiation, and the second demonstrating categorization exists based on the conceptual notions of *difference*. Regarding the latter, Ghaziani's (2011) research on an LGBT organization documents a new way that activists approach the role of boundaries, which includes shifting from an "oppositional" approach of marking difference between groups to building bridges by way of focusing on sameness and inclusion. With this approach, group boundaries shift from "us *versus* them…to us *and* them [emphasis original] (Ghaziani 2011: 117). Ghaziani (2011) further argues that although an identity "still requires a sense of group-ness, it is now less dependent on differences and motivated instead by perceived commonalities" and that LGBT group strategies include shifting their emphasis from "one *of* gay" to an organization focused on "*for* gay" [emphasis original] (p. 117). The mechanism of *sameness* is the tool utilized for linking (or bridging) boundaries. Although SimplePaths attempted to capitalize on the sameness of "faith" by bridging ecumenical and interfaith communities, they were unable—because of their intragroup boundary

crisis—to utilize the tool of sameness and still produce a clearly marked identity. Future research may ask what factors hinder the role of sameness in bridge building. Additionally, most scholarly research on boundaries addresses *successful* group and identity boundary negotiations. In the literature, boundary mechanisms are largely described as offering people the means to successfully create symbolic and/or socially negotiated spaces (Gamson 1997; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Even Ghaziani's (2011) research on a student-led LGBT organization, which constructed its identity through muted self-naming (Pride Alliance) as a route to build bridges and combat "in-fighting" among LGBT communities, was in the end a successful action. Ghaziani's (2011) research provides insightful theoretical contributions that boundary research should expand and develop. Nevertheless, it is not enough to simply classify boundaries as successful demarcations of difference because not all boundary work is successful. SimplePaths' board members attempt at merging both inclusive and exclusive boundaries failed in producing a cohesive organization.

SimplePaths was one of the nation's largest faith-based organizations. The organization's failed boundary work highlights a question about the ramifications of organizational failure for the collective identity of a movement. Lifestyle movements such as VS rely on cultural entrepreneurs such as websites and organizations that "spread the word" about social change, which help to produce a collective identity. When an organization such as SimplePaths no longer serves as a cultural entrepreneur within the VS movement, it problematizes the notion of a stable VS collective identity. Because of the emphasis on personal action as way to produce social change within lifestyle movements, collective identity provides the structure and foundation for movements such

as VS (Haenfler 2004). The loss of a leading cultural entrepreneur will consequently have

an impact on the larger collective identity of VS.

CHAPTER 8

HOW THE ORGANIZATION FOLDED

In Chapter Seven, I described the ways in which an intragroup boundary crisis within SimplePaths created a muddled organizational identity that ultimately led to the failure of the organization. In this section, I address *how* the organization folded. The struggle to create inclusive and exclusive boundaries resulted in a disjointed organizational identity; the consequences of this process, coupled with previous organizational decisions and events, created the "perfect storm" in which SimplePaths could no longer function.

Simply put, the organization ran out of money. While I was involved, Simple Paths was unable to generate enough income from denominational grants, facilitate new income streams, or capitalize on new or existing membership dues—this, despite a third-party assessment which stated that SimplePaths was "better positioned to survive than in the past" and could "realistically expect to bring in $100,000 a year and operate within that budget." I will briefly discuss the reason SimplePaths ran out of money, including the loss of denominational grants, which in the end provided most of their funding.

By the time I became involved with SimplePaths, they had been losing income for years. As I noted in Chapter Three, although the organization is non-denominational, the board members themselves are generally affiliated with larger denominational groups. SimplePaths generated denominational support through a combination of *Simply Christmas* purchases and operational grants. For example, (PC) USA, in particular the Presbyterian Hunger Program, which has historically had a board representative, purchased *Simply Christmas* (in bulk) and provided various operational grants for over 30 years. The Lutheran Church also provided a great deal of support, purchasing

publications and providing operational grants. Prior to my involvement, SimplePaths also had a strong relationship, both monetarily and symbolically, with the United Methodist Church, in particular its Hunger Program (in fact, the founder of SimplePaths was a Methodist). [26] Yet, in 2004, the United Methodist Church stopped purchasing large quantities of *Simply Christmas* due to denominational restructuring of grant monies, changing leadership, and a lack of interest in the publication. [27]

Other denominations also provided grants, though these were smaller and less frequent. The American Baptists, for example, provided a $2000 grant annually. However, it was the loss of the United Methodist income stream that really hurt SimplePaths. The organization was never able to rebuild its relationship with the United Methodist Hunger Program. Consequently, it lost a large chunk of revenue. This loss is what initially spurred board members to become more involved (e.g. become a "working board"), rethink its identity, and attempt to generate income from other sources.

In an effort to revitalize the organization, SimplePaths recruited three new board members and hired new directors, hoping these fresh faces would generate new ideas. Everyone, including the director Neil, thought it would be a good idea to get new people involved with the organization. In 2007, the board hired Sam and Sherry. The new board spent most of its first year (2008) trying to make sense of the organization's financial situation.[28] It soon became clear that they needed to focus on strengthening three primary

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[26] SimplePaths received monies by way of the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR).

[27] Ranging from 25,000 to 28,000 publications each year.

[28] Due to the confidential access to SimplePaths' financial records it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide the specifics of their financial problems.

sources of revenue: denominational grants, new product income streams, and membership fees and purchases.

Simply Christmas generated one of SimplePaths' main product income streams. It also represented the core of the organization. Traditionally, the organization had offered denomination-specific versions of this publication, but as a way to simultaneously cut costs and recoup revenue, the new board produced an ecumenical version that could be offered anywhere.[29] This allowed for a streamlined, cost-effective printing process and enabled them to sell the product to any denomination. Yet, although the decision to streamline saved money, SimplePaths was unable to significantly boost sales of the publication.[30] Except for the United Church of Canada's bulk order of 4000 copies, the organization was unable to secure any new bulk purchases and had to rely on peddling the product via the Internet—both on their own website and with a third-party book distributor—and face-to-face.[31] While face-to-face presentations did provide an opportunity for the organization to increase sales and membership, these presentations, which often promoted diverse denominational and theological paradigms, left audience members perplexed.

SimplePaths did make a profit selling simple living books by outside authors, but this did not provide a substantial flow of income. Furthermore, the goal of the organization was not to be a bookstore, but, in part, to produce and sell its own original

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[29] United Church of Canada offered an in-kind donation of providing both design and layout of *Simply Christmas*. In exchange for absorbing those costs, an agreement was made in which the United Church of Canada created their own denominational version.
[30] SimplePaths printed 25,000 in 2009 and 10,000 in 2010.
[31] SimplePaths did not renew their contract with this distributor in 2010 as a way to save costs. As a result, SimplePaths may have lost some marketing and exposure from the book distributor's 2000 person email list.

publications and resources. Yet, as I stated in Chapter Seven, the only major publication

produced in the course of this study, *Green Earth*, did not receive any denominational

support. This hindered its production and, consequently, sales. The board also decided to

allow anyone to download *Green Earth* from its website in exchange for a $5.00

donation. They received only $250.00 from downloadable sales. And, while SimplePaths

made a concerted effort to get people to renew their membership, their ideological

position of being inclusive for member products limited the options of building a new

income stream via the website.

　　　(PC) USA and the ELCA kept the organization afloat while the new board and co-

directors attempted to (re) create SimplePaths' organizational identity and direction. Over

the course of this study, (PC) USA and the ELCA provided several grants to

SimplePaths, ranging from $500 to $15,000 depending on the needs of the organization.

These grants paid for the non-profit consultant, operational costs, outside research, and,

in the end, provided the funds necessary to close the organization.

　　　Ironically, through its attempts to clarify and expand the organization's niche, the

board created a muddled identity. Unfortunately, the lack of a cohesive organizational

vision led to the loss of funding streams from the two denominational groups that were

keeping SimplePaths alive. The board members all agreed on an overall loss of funding

for churches, noting that most churches needed to cut back on denominational programs

and grants. It is beyond the scope of this research to ascertain the reasons or "truth"

behind these denominational cuts. It should be noted, however, that both denominational

backers decided to end funds to SimplePaths as opposed to other organizations they

supported. Not all requests for funding from outside organization were denied.

In this case, the grantors cut their ties because they decided SimplePaths was no longer a viable organization. This reflects directly on the board's decisions and choices. This is not to say that SimplePaths' board members representing (PC) USA and ELCA determined the fate of SimplePaths—this is hardly the case. Rather, the supportive denominations had a crisis of confidence regarding the future of SimplePaths and withdrew support. Financial instability is the reason SimplePaths folded, but that instability grew out of the organization's intragroup boundary crisis—the board members' inability to create or maintain the organization's identity due to conflicting inclusive and exclusive boundaries at the individual level. Consequently, the larger denominational groups were unable to articulate SimplePaths' worth as an organization and an investment. Funding stopped and SimplePaths closed its doors.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

In previous chapters, I described how Simple Livers were socialized into the principles

and practices of living simply and how emotions and ideologies construct a particular

identity. I also examined the role of religion in the construction of both individual and

institutional identities. Woven throughout this dissertation is a discussion of the complex

functions of race, class, and gender in the VS movement. In this chapter, I discuss the

empirical and theoretical relevance of these issues for social movements scholars, in

particular, and the field of sociology, in general.

Voluntary simplicity challenges the "American way of life" economically,

spiritually, environmentally, and socially. Thus, the sociological analysis of the

motivations of Simple Livers, the construction of both their personal and organizational

identities, and the degree to which organizational, institutional, and cultural forces

intersect with VS provides a distinct view of the process of social change during a

specific time in history.

It is also important to understand why the popularity of VS has ebbed and flowed

over the years and what, if any, social change has occurred due to its existence. This, of

course, begs the question of how to measure social change. VS proponents operate

largely through cultural spaces and less though conventional or political means. As I

discussed in Chapter Six, Armstrong and Bernstein (2008) position social movements

within a "multi-institutional" political frame, suggesting that to define politics and

political power solely under the rubric of the state is too narrow. Instead, we should

"define *all collective challenges* to constituted authority as political" (p. 84) [emphasis

mine]. Lifestyle movements expand the notion of what counts as a social movement as

well as the parameters of participation, cultural and political spaces, goals, and strategies.

With this analysis of VS, I have added to the collective sociological conversations about

lifestyle movements, and social change.

EMPERICAL AND THEORETICAL ADVANCEMENTS

Religion

This dissertation makes both empirical and theoretical contributions to the study of social

movement research, sociology of religion, sociology of emotions, and social psychology.

It provides empirical research on faith-based Simple Livers, a group on which little

sociological research exists. To my knowledge, this is the first ethnography that focuses

specifically on *faith-based* Simple Livers. Considering the underlying connection

between religion (or spirituality) and voluntary simplicity, this research adds important

data to this area of study.

Historically, religion has played a significant role in many different social

movements (McAdam 2010; Bearman,and Brückner 2001; Higginbotham 1993; Epstein

1981). This study investigates how self-proclaimed progressive Christians navigate

simple living, religion, family, and social life in their daily lives. It provides empirical

insight into the role that Christianity plays in Simple Livers' lives on an individual,

organizational, congregational, and institutional level. I found that along with providing a

foundation for the personal identities of Simple Livers, Christianity is a source of

contention on an organizational, congregational, and institutional level. By examining how religiosity both encourages and curtails social action, this research demonstrates the powerful role of institutions in shaping the discourse and actions of social movement actors, consequently advancing the understanding of the interactional processes of power and culture.

Socialization

One of the major empirical contributions of this study is my analysis of the interplay of gender, class, history, and agency in socialization practices that lead directly to individual investment in social change. Specifically, I address the role of historical accounts and human agency in shaping individual and collective social action. While a plethora of research examines social movement recruitment, this study, especially Chapter Four, describes the processes through which people become aware of, or socialized into, a social issue before the recruitment process begins. The consideration of how Simple Livers are influenced by social and historical periods provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between socialization and social movements, and thus contributes to social movement literature overall.

Identities and Emotions

One theoretical contribution focuses on identities and emotion. Recent discussions that expand the social movement community to incorporate lifestyle movements may help researchers shed light on the ways different social movement paradigms affect the development of identities (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Identities are particularly

important to the diffuse structure of lifestyle movements because identity constitute the actual ''site'' of social change (Haenfler et al. 2012:5). Although some research has offered insight into the role of emotions and identity, broadly speaking, within lifestyle movements (see Schwalbe 1996), scant research addresses the interconnectedness of emotions and identity formation in the ''middle space'' occupied by lifestyle movement participants—a space in which personal identity constitutes both the site and motivator of social change (Haenfler et al. 2012). My study of Simple Liver identity analyzes how religion, simple living ideology, and emotional responses interact to construct a moral self that exceeds the moral claims of the general populace, thus creating what I term an *over-conforming moral self.* This concept advances our understanding of the relationship among emotions, ideology, and identities.

Additionally, my empirical data on the role of ideologies within lifestyle movements provides researchers with a more complex understanding of the cultural aspects of social movement research. For example, Simple Livers draw upon both religion and VS ideologies to shape their identities and participate in what Zald (2000) calls an ''ideologically structured action,'' a process in which behavior is "guided and shaped by ideological concerns—belief systems defending and attacking current social relations and the social system" (p. 3–4). Previous research has established that ideology affects social movement organizations, but limited research exists on the role of emotions in the construction of social movement identities, especially in more diffuse movements (Dalton 1994; Zald 2000). By addressing the intersection of emotions and ideologies and asking how they perpetuate an identity, this dissertation advances the social movement scholarship that considers identity the site of social change. Consequently, this discussion

contributes to the study of social psychology, social movements, and sociology of emotions.

Boundaries

In addition to being one of the first studies to address exclusively faith-based Simple Livers, this dissertation also breaks ground by investigating a national faith-based simple living *organization*. Accordingly, it provides an account of one of the ways that the idea of simple living is promoted and disseminated throughout the United States at an organizational level. This information contributes to the understanding of the cultural, institutional, and interpersonal dynamics of organizations embedded within the lifestyle movement frame.

As I argued in Chapter Seven, the decisions board members made about SimplePaths' identity created a muddled organizational identity. A second theoretical contribution to the sociological literature is the concept of an *intragroup boundary crisis,* in which those in charge of formulating or maintaining a particular group identity fail to construct clear group boundaries due to conflicting inclusive and exclusive boundaries at the individual level. This concept offers social scientists a more nuanced theoretical frame for discussions of boundary use.[32]

My analysis revealed that boundary work can actually advance the *breakdown* of an organization. In Chapter Seven, I discussed how a process of attempting boundary

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[32] Note that Queer theory offers important contributions in *challenging the act of creating* categorization by addressing, among other things, the role of power, intersectionality, and conceptualization (See Gamson 1995)—whereas I am discussing *mechanisms* (or tools) of sameness and failures of boundary work. For example, Cohen (1997) argues, "What I and others are calling for is the destabilization, and not the destruction or abandonment, of identity categories" (p. 459).

sameness by way of distinction muting-logic (the use of the label "people of faith" instead of "Christian") lent itself to the demise of the organization because of conflicting personal boundaries. Unlike Ghaziani's (2011) research, I showed that boundary work can fail because of boundary mechanisms of sameness. Shifting the conceptual mechanism and premise of boundary work to include the implications of failed boundary construction would benefit a variety of social science research areas, including the management of individual, organizational, group, and collective identities.

The loss of a VS organization impacts people allied with the movement and their own individual experiences. In particular, the ramifications of the loss of such organizations, it is likely the demise of SimplePaths did create more difficulties for those who claim to be Simple Livers. Considering SimplePaths was perhaps the only national faith-based VS organization, the loss of this group may affect the discourse of VS as a whole. In particular, those who rely on faith as a way to promote, create, and reinforce a simple living identity may struggle to find support. The loss of this organization could push faith-based Simple Livers to rely on other faith organizations, such as their churches, for ongoing encouragement. However, the data from this study suggest that congregations and pastors were not always supportive of promoting and fostering VS ideals. Consequently, we must ask not only where these populations might turn for support, but also if the failure of SimplePaths may result in the exclusion of faith from the VS discourse.

Furthermore, the importance of collective identity as an "anchor" of loose-based movements raises the question of how failed boundary negotiations might affect a struggling or tenuous collective identity (Haenfler et al. 2012). For example, the demise

of SimplePaths stemmed, in part, from failed boundaries. SimplePaths is no longer part of the larger collective identity of VS. Considering it was the only national, faith-based VS organization not tied to a specific denomination, it is also a loss to the larger collective identity of Simple Livers and the VS movement.

This raises the larger question of the role of collective identity in lifestyle movements. Most social movement research claims some relationship between social movements and collective identity; but what does this mean for lifestyle movements that lack a cohesive collective identity? In what follows, I will address issues regarding collective identity and voluntary simplicity and, more broadly, the role of collective identity in lifestyle movements.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND LIFESTYLE MOVEMENTS: PROBLEMS AND PROMISES

When I originally formulated this dissertation, I set aside a chapter to discuss a Simple Living collective identity. Analyzing the data did not support the notion that such an identity exists. I saw evidence of VS as a *personal* identity, but not a collective one (at least not in a strong form). I began to wonder whether collective identities exist within other groups that fall within the category of lifestyle movements.

Lifestyle movements "consciously and actively promote a lifestyle, or way of life, as their primary means to foster social change" (Healfler et al. 2012). As stated in the introduction, Simple Livers fall under the lifestyle movement rubric. The lifestyle movement paradigm claims that social action is individualized, private, culturally driven, and focused on identity work, including personal efforts to create social change (Haenfler

et al. 2012). When discussing the implications of what counts as a successful outcome of social change, Haenfler et al. (2012) argue "success means personal, moral integrity, often regardless of collective impact, i.e., collective success;" consequently, the central focus is on individual moral identity work (pg. 9). This leads to questions about the purpose of collective identity and its relationship to personal identity within lifestyle movements. For Haenfler (2004), individual and collective identity has a reciprocal relationship:

> In an individualistic culture, many people live out their values as individuals connected by a collective identity. Individuals bonded by a collective identity experience a *community* of *meaning* that makes the personal political and gives new politicized meaning to everyday actions. It creates an oppositional consciousness and a framework for understanding social problems that leads to a politicization of everyday life (Whittier 1997). Adherents committed to the collective identity live out a set of core values and/or behaviors, but then they are able to fit the collective identity to their individual preferences. They tailor the identity to match their interests, biographical availability, and values. (P. 796)

The distinction between collective identity and individual identity poses problems in the context of Simple Livers, especially when taking into account the lifestyle movement paradigm. I suggest that voluntary simplicity participants lack a cohesive collective identity due to the fluctuation of VS cultural spaces and entrepreneurs. In addition, their practices, goals, and ideology are too broad in scope, which leads to the

lack of an unspecified adversary.

Collective identity bridges individual behavior with larger social goals and participation. Staggenborg (2011) defines collective identity as a "sense of shared experiences and values that connects individuals to movements and gives participants a sense of 'collective agency' or feeling that they can effect change through collective action" (p. 22). Similarly, Taylor and Whittier (1992) argue that collective identity includes the "shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (p.105). Interestingly, though, when addressing a VS collective identity, the experiences, common interests, and solidarity are tenuous at best. Recent work by Haenfler et al. (2012) acknowledges that "collective identity may be relatively weak (i.e., individuals do not strongly identify with the identity or follow through with its proscribed duties); even the 'name' of the movement may be contested (as in voluntary simplicity) or virtually non-existent" (p. 8). This idea rang especially true early in my research. When I asked one of my respondents if he considered himself a "VS'er" (voluntary simplifier) He informed me the correct term was "Simple Liver." Although this choice of label seemed common within the group that I studied, this does not always hold for other VS groups. I began to wonder about the strength of the collective identity of Simple Livers, if even the name of the movement differed depending on whom you talk to.

Grigsby (2004) argues that Simple Livers' collective identity is focused on "glossing over some differences among themselves, most significantly differences between the experiences of women and men and the impacts of the differences in their experiences on the identity work they need to do to achieve a collective voluntary

simplicity identity" (p. 59). Consistent with this research, she highlights how VS, both on

a practical and experiential level, can differ among people. She goes on to state that

simplicity circles represent the "primary sites of collective identity" and the participants

of such circles "join in a *limited* collective identity based on several very basic common

ideas and practices and the broadly defined goal of linking personal practice to values"

(Grigsby 2004:89 [emphasis mine]). Consequently, one could argue that Simple Liver

collective identity is both broad and limited.

Perhaps VS ideology is too diffuse to support a solid collective identity. The reach

of this ideology is vast, incorporating economic, social, spiritual, and ecological

spectrums. Depending on who you talk to within the VS movement, some would argue

the economy and/or capitalism is the problem, others claim focusing on the environment

is key, some would argue there needs to be more focus on values of family and

relationships, others suggest religious/spiritual ideals need to be strengthened as way to

challenge societal norms of consuming. Alternatively, as many Simple Livers allude, all

of the above intertwine. An expansive ideology produces a vast array of practices.

I do not claim that the process of collectivizing a VS identity cannot occur; on the

contrary, Simple Livers are doing exactly this, but on a personal level. My own research

reflects the broadness of ideas and practices that Simple Livers can incorporate into a VS

ideology. Nevertheless, if experiences and practices differ, for example, between genders

and religious and secular groups, it may be hard to articulate what shared definitions can

be a part of a VS collective identity. Furthermore, a shared ideological belief (no matter

how limited or how broadly defined) does not necessarily transform into a collective

identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001). For example, vegans who share the ideological stance

that animals are sentient beings and should be treated as such do not necessarily share a

vegan collective identity. There has to be a larger collective goal, but not *too* broad a goal.

Speaking to the difficulty of defining collective identity, Haenfler et al. (2012)

argue that:

> While teasing apart collective identity and personal identity is
>
> difficult in any social movement, the distinction between a
>
> participant's identification with a group (i.e., collective identity)
>
> and one's perceived character traits (i.e., personal identity)
>
> (Polletta and Jasper, 2001) becomes especially muddy as LMs
>
> encourage participants to continually integrate movement goals
>
> into multiple aspects of daily life, the same daily activities that
>
> contribute to a morally coherent sense of self. (P. 8-9)

This is where the conundrum lies, especially when addressing voluntary simplicity. If one

cannot readily distinguish collective identity from personal identity, what are the

ramifications for the movement?

Alongside the issue of nebulous goals is the problem of determining who is to

blame for the social problem the movement addresses. This is also vague. As Cohen,

Comrov, and Hoffner (2005) argue:

> Another notable feature of voluntary simplicity in its current
>
> forms is the absence of vilification. In other words, social
>
> movements normally manifest a need to draw boundaries around
>
> their campaigns, and simplifiers are not seeking, at least
>
> presently, to articulate a social critique that assigns responsibility
>
> for the purported problems of consumerism. (P. 67)

For a collective identity to thrive, it is important to be able to articulate boundaries of "us" versus "them" to such a degree that goals and ideologies mesh, including ways to challenge the problems at hand. Who are the people that are fighting for change, and who are the ones to blame (or at least are complacent about the problem)? It is not enough to claim that American consumerism is the problem—you need to articulate who should change it, and where and how these problems should be addressed. Bounded parameters are what define a collective identity. This ambiguity is problematic for VS as a movement.

Collective identity is central to larger social change. Creating an identity focused on a sense of "we-ness" including collective voices articulating social grievances are central to social change. How can VS'ers challenge larger systemic issues that go beyond individual choices if they are working alone and/or have a weak or non-existent collective identity? While Simple Livers do strive to "be the change," they still have the "subjective understanding that others are taking similar action, collectively adding up to social change" (Haenfler et al. 2012). The movie *No Impact Man*, in which a man and his family decide to downsize, consume less, and go green for one year, articulates the conundrum between individual action and collective action in relation to VS. After spending a year without electricity, purchasing only local and seasonal food and basic needs, limiting waste, riding public transportation, and spending more time with his family, the man was asked what was the most important thing a person can do to help challenge our consumptive way of life. His response? Join a group of like-minded people as a way to build community (i.e. collective identity) and challenge larger social systems. He argues that people should band together and claim a collective identity geared towards

social change.

Alexander and Ussher (2012) argue that the simplicity movement "will almost certainly need to expand, organize, radicalize, and politicize, if a steady-state or degrowth economy is ever to emerge through democratic processes." (p. 6). Although Simple Livers do not need a collective identity to vote their conscience (because they can do this with individual product purchasing or "voting with your dollars"), a stronger VS collective identity could demand a like-minded political party/constituent on the platform. This begs the question of whether a definition of social movements that fails to go beyond a culture-centered agenda is adequate.

This brings the discussion back to the issue of how to define a successful social movement and what counts as social change. VS falls under the paradigm of a lifestyle movement because the focus is on the self as a source of social change. However, VS adherents who seek social change must be wary of participating in such practices as a form of navel-gazing. Living simply can "'become an end in itself, a searching for personal purity and salvation' to the forgetting of the larger cause of the movement" (Buell 2005:655). What if the practices Simple Livers engage in are just a tool they use to feel good about their own choices and decisions, as opposed to challenging larger systemic issues? Some in the VS movement do push for larger social change through their involvement in *other* movements (e.g. environmental justice, human rights), but do these actions simply reflect the construction process of a specific identity? In particular, alternative consumption practices are just one way VS adherents integrate movement ideals into their construction of a "good" self.

While those in the VS movement might be redirecting their consumptive behavior

to companies that care about environmental, organic, and fair trade practices and guidelines, they are still consuming. Simultaneously, if more VS'ers are investing in better social, ethical, and sustainable practices, then there is a possibility of producing a larger cultural awareness of such problems. However, these movements rely on a privileged class to enact their practices. The actions of "good consumption" are often quite expensive to adopt. How much of this movement is really about challenging paradigms of inequality, such as capitalism? How much of it is a way for privileged, progressive liberals to alleviate any guilt they might feel about reinforcing a capitalist agenda or not participating in movements that might require more commitment and action? Voluntary simplicity adherents must walk the line between personal growth and larger social change.

The difficult task of articulating the difference between personal identity and collective identity within the voluntary simplicity movement may indicate the bigger question of how to translate personal lifestyle changes into larger systemic changes and paradigm shifts on a societal level. Until such time, social scientists and activists should not assume that a collective identity exits within all social movements, especially those that fall under the lifestyle paradigm. If we can transform the personal to the political such that it has pertinence beyond the self, and do this without losing sight of the significance of individual transformative identity work, then maybe voluntary simplicity will bring about a new system of thought that affects all aspects of our world.

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APPENDIX A
SimplePaths' Board Member Demographics

NAME	POSITION AND TIME ON BOARD	DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION	OCCUPATION
Neil	Director 1995-2007	Lutheran	N/A
Sherry	Co-director 2008-2011	Lutheran	N/A
Sam	Co-director 2008-2011	Lutheran	Pastor
George	Board Chair 2005-2009	Methodist	Pastor
Frank	Board Chair 2009-2011 (board member since 2007)	Methodist	Professor of Religion/Minister
Cindy	Board Member 2008-2011	ELCA	Denominational Educational Program Assistant
Amy	Board Member/secretary 2001-2009	Methodist	Social Worker
Linda	Board Member 2004-2010	Lutheran	Pastor
Pamela	Board Member 2006-2009	Methodist	Associate Pastor
Kurt	Board Member 2007-2011	Emerging Church	Marketer
Rick	Board Member	Christian Reform Church	Director of Evangelical non-profit organization
Laura	Board Member 2003-2010	Lutheran	Pastor
Jenn	Board Member 2007-2011	((PC)USA)Presbyterian	Denominational Educational Program Assistant
Liz	Board Member 2009-2011	United Church of Canada	Denominational Educational Program Coordinator
Gloria	Board Member 2009	Cooperative Baptist Fellowship	Teacher
Janet	Board Member 2010-2011	Lutheran	Comptroller
Heather	Board Member 2010-2011	Methodist	Architect

APPENDIX B
Simple Liver Demographics

	Religious Affiliation	Race	Political Affiliation	Educational Level
Men (N=12)	Methodist=3 Lutheran=2 Catholic=1 Unitarian Universalist=2 Christian=1 Christian (non-denominational)=1 Undecided=1 None/spiritual=1	White=11 Latino/Caucasian=1	Democrat=7 Green Party=4 Independent-1	Bachelors=1 Masters=6 J.D.=1 PhD=2 Some college**=2
Women (N=32*)	Presbyterian=3 Lutheran=14 Methodist=4 Unitarian Universalist=1 Catholic=5 United Church of Christ=2 Christian=1 Christian (non-denomination)=1	White=31	Democrat=18 Independent=9 Republican=4	Bachelors=14 Masters=11 PhD=1 Associate Degree=1 Some college**=3 High school=1

*1 respondent did not fill out demographic sheet.
** "Some college" refers to 1 to 3 years of college coursework without degree.

APPENDIX C
SimplePaths Presentation Questionnaire

Zaccheaus as a Simple Living Model Presentation

1) Have you heard about "living simply" before the presentation? If so, where did you learn about simple living?

2) What new information did you learn about in this presentation? Did you find it useful?

4) What information did you find unnecessary? Why?

3) Is there anything the presentation should expand on?

Echo Footprint Presentation

4) What new information did you learn about in this presentation? Did you find it useful?

4) What information did you find unnecessary? Why?

5) Is there anything the presentation should expand on?

The Spirituality of Simplicity Presentation

6) What new information did you learn about in this presentation? Did you find it useful?

4) What information did you find unnecessary? Why?

7) Is there anything the presentation should expand on?

6) What advice or suggestions do you have on how to promote living simply to others?

Would you like to be on the XXXXXXXX mailing list?
Yes_____No_____

Would you be willing to be interviewed on your opinions of the presentations to help with future presentations and/or research on the topic of living simply?
Yes_____No_____

Name: _____

Address:_____

_____

Phone Number:_____

Email: _____