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## **Food-based Activities versus Material Possessions: Alternatives to Consumption**

ROBIN R. WIKOFF AND MADELEINE E. PULLMAN

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**Abstract.** We examine how food-related experiential activities offer different types of intrinsic pleasures, create an alternative path to consumerism, and subsequently affect happiness and well-being. Participant's perspectives on these activities are compared to those of their favourite material possessions to explore the differences in meaning and motivations. Phenomenological interviews centred on food activities and material possessions revealed that experiential food-related hobbies are valued highly and a source of great life satisfaction because of meeting a variety of psychological needs. These activities offer an alternative conception of what it is to flourish and to enjoy a 'high' standard of living as they were found to be mostly intrinsically motivated. Many material possessions also suggested intrinsic aspirations while others showed a mix of both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The data reveal that the need for adopting extrinsic life aspirations is not strongly expressed when food-related experiential activities, such as food growing and preparation, are a part of regular life. These food-based activities and certain types of material possessions with intrinsic values encourage a more ecologically sustainable use of resources and reduce social and environmental exploitation associated with consumerism. This research contributes to new modes of thinking about happiness and well-being by supporting the 'alternative hedonism' concept as remedy to consumerism.

### **Introduction**

Consumer culture offers the promise of happiness through acquisition of material goods, encourages the depletion of natural resources, reduction in biodiversity, excessive waste, and other negative sustainability outcomes (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2002; Crompton, 2008). Contemporaneously, food production and preparation activities have gained national attention with increasing focus on healthy food, food production and preparation and diet-related health issues. As experiential ac-

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tivities, food activities are a potential source of personal satisfaction and can offer an alternative to consumerism. Soper (2007) describes this alternative, called ‘alternative hedonist’, as ‘the sensual pleasure of consuming differently’. Thus, looking at the relationship between food-based activities and their motivations is an important area for research. The present study was driven by the desire to understand satisfying experiences in urban food growers through the lens of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations. By understanding different aspects of an individual’s relationship to a favourite material item versus food-based activities, we explore the potential intrinsic and extrinsic goals that emerge, commonalities and differences between food and material objects, and their relationship to life satisfaction.

Soper (2007, 2008) posits that intrinsic pleasures can be found in simple everyday sustainable decisions such as walking or cycling instead of driving a car. Further, our conceptions of high standard of living and the ‘good life’ can be shifted to focus on the intrinsic pleasures of more intentional living, such as spending time cooking instead of eating fast food (Soper, 2008). This shift in choices leads to less environmental damage, less focus on individuals’ identities as consumers, and more life satisfaction for individuals (Soper, 2007, 2008).

Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) posit that the difference between materialists and non-materialists (i.e. alternative hedonists) is between extrinsic and intrinsic goals, where extrinsic goals (e.g. financial success, physical appearance, and social recognition) are materialistic and rely on external sources to fulfil psychological needs, through rewards and praises. Intrinsic goals (e.g. self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling) are non-materialistic and lead to greater satisfaction of psychological needs, since these goals lead to greater satisfaction regardless of external sources, i.e. other people or events (Pierce, 2000; Shaw and Newholm, 2002; Huneke, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006) (see Figure 1).

Van Boven (2005) shows that both intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction may involve purchasing material possessions, but create different experiences; intrinsic purchases involve buying material possessions in order to have a life experience, while ex-

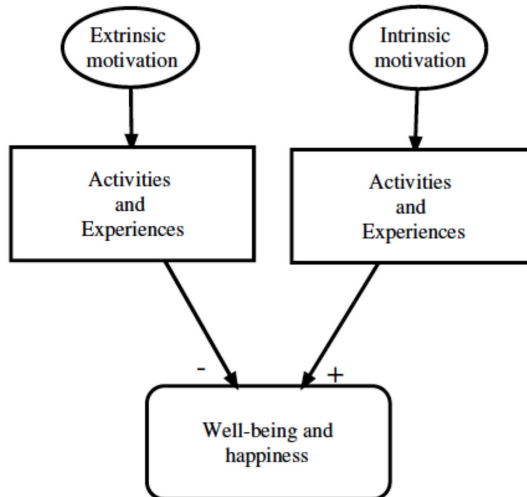


Figure 1. Model.

trinsic purchases involve buying a material possession as the terminal experience. Intrinsically motivated activities show potential to decrease overall materialist life aspirations and behaviours in favour of more intrinsically motivated and, in general, more sustainable and satisfying activities. Soper (2007) posits that consumerism creates an environment that blunts sensibility to sensual delights, and that the negative effects of consumerism will be difficult to change without an active 'disenchantment', with consumerism or without a 'seductive alternative' to consumerism.

Food-related activities such as growing or preparing food are generally regarded as experiential pursuits (Waliczek et al., 2005; Clayton, 2007). Thus, this investigation sought to explore the extent to which those who engage in those activities are solely intrinsically motivated. Conversely, experiences with material possessions are potentially more extrinsically motivated than food activities (Van Boven, 2005). Therefore, understanding the relationship between people's motivations around food activities versus their material possessions provides an opportunity to tease out commonalities and differences in their intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations and how they relate to satisfying life experiences. The research questions are posited as the following:

1. to what extent is engaging in food-related activities (i.e. gardening and preparing food) intrinsically motivated?
2. to what extent are food grower's experiences with material possessions consistent or contradictory with intrinsic and extrinsic motivations?

To begin to explore these questions, phenomenological interviews were conducted, comparing and contrasting subject's gardening experiences with their experiences of favourite material possessions. The analysis of these narratives reveals a surprising diversity of descriptions of how and why food-related activities are satisfying, as well as a spectrum of types of motivations involving material possessions.

## Literature Review

In this section, two distinct areas of research will be reviewed: the impact of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation on well-being, and how extrinsic or intrinsic motivations may be expressed in experiences of food activities and material possessions.

### *Effects of Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation on Well-being*

Individuals who are primarily extrinsically motivated seek happiness through acquisition of material goods, through tightness with money, or through external praise. Typically, researchers have found that these behaviours do not lead to long-term increased happiness (Maslow, 1954; Fromm, 1976; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Sheldon and Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon et al., 2001; Tatzel, 2002; Kasser, 2003; Kasser and Kanner, 2004; Van Boven, 2005). While there have been many studies exploring aspects of extrinsic motivation (Inglehart, 1981; Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Richins and Rudmin, 1994; Kasser, 2003; Van Boven, 2005), far fewer studies have addressed intrinsically motivated experiences (Pierce, 2000; Sheldon and Houser-Marko, 2001; Schwartz, 2004; Doppelt, 2010).

Comparing extrinsic versus intrinsic aspirations, research indicates that if an individual has extrinsic life aspirations then they will not be as happy as if they had more

intrinsic aspirations, i.e. they will be doing a poorer job of satisfying their psychological needs (Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kasser, 2003; Van Boven, 2005). Unmet psychological needs both motivate extrinsic aspirations and are a result of extrinsic motivations, in a reinforcing cycle of high consumption (Maslow, 1954; Fromm, 1976; Kasser, 2003). Extrinsic aspirations are chosen as a short-term, quick fix for unmet psychological needs for a number of reasons, but this strategy tends not to be helpful in meeting psychological needs in the long term, and may actually harm an individual's psychological well-being.

Whereas extrinsic aspirations require external sources (outside of the individual) to meet psychological needs through rewards, praise, or acquisitions, intrinsic aspirations such as self-acceptance, affiliation, physical fitness, and community feeling, allow the individual to meet their own psychological needs as a direct result of attaining the life aspiration (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Sheldon and Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon et al., 2004). Intrinsic or extrinsic aspirations are not good or bad in and of themselves, just as material goods are not positive or negative, it is only when extrinsic aspirations are excessive and/or distracting from intrinsic aspirations that problems occur. Addressing the imbalance can help with personal integration, actualization, and satisfying basic psychological needs (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996).

#### *Barriers to and Opportunities for Alternative Hedonism*

The concept of alternative hedonism was popularized by Soper (2007, 2008). Rather than working for and purchasing luxuries to achieve happiness through extrinsic motivations, alternative hedonism indicates that a life of pleasure comes from doing those 'simple things' in life that are free or at least inexpensive, such as spending time with friends and family, reading, pursuing creative activities, gardening, going for a walk or swim, or just setting and contemplating nature. Literature on actual processes or experience of adopting alternative hedonism is limited, although popular writing abounds about the virtues of abandoning extrinsic motivations (De Graaf et al., 2001; Schwartz, 2004; Carlomagno, 2005; Beavan, 2007; Robin et al., 2008; Andrews and Urbanska, 2009; Elgin, 2009; Center for the New American Dream, 2011). There are several psychological barriers to people shifting their aspirations and purchase behaviours away from extrinsic motivation including: 1. a culture of defined needs that far exceeds what is necessary; 2. materialism blindness or unawareness; and 3. hedonic adaptation (Van Boven, 2005; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006; Sundie et al., 2010). The prolific nature of advertising feeds expectations that material acquisitions will lead to psychological well-being and reinforces the luxurious definitions of what is needed to fulfil basic needs (Maniates, 2002; de Geus, 2003; Kasser, 2003; Schwartz, 2004; Huneke, 2005; Crompton, 2008; Elgin, 2009). As alternative hedonism, pursuing food activities has the potential way to shift consumptive patterns to more intrinsically satisfying behaviours.

#### *Material Possessions*

The desire to consume material goods for non-utilitarian purposes has been present for most of human civilization but, historically, this type of consumption was only accessible to the wealthy. More recently, the act of acquiring non-utilitarian material possessions has become more readily available to the masses in the developed world. While the extrinsic motivations to acquire material goods have not changed,

the expectation that these possessions will somehow lead to happiness and psychological well-being has been encouraged increasingly by consumer culture (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Crompton, 2008).

In an attempt to understand how these material purchases influence happiness or well-being, various researchers have compared these types of purchases to other types such as experiential purchases or creative activities. Van Boven (2005) found that experiential purchases have longer lasting positive effects on happiness. Millar and Thomas (2009) found that highly extrinsically motivated individuals experienced greater happiness from material purchases than from creative activities or experiential purchases. These motivations for and impacts of experiences with material possessions and food activities will be explored further by examining lived experiences of individuals and their favourite material possessions.

### *Food Gardening and Preparation*

For many, food gardening and food preparation are activities done outside of a profession, but such activities differ from other more passive non-market activities such as watching television because gardening is a more participatory and intentional pastime. Food gardening may be intrinsically motivated (Kaplan, 1973; Cheng, 2010; Hale et al., 2011), and has also been shown to increase a gardener's sense of connection with the natural world due to the constant and intentional interactions with nature while gardening (Kaplan, 1973; Hale et al., 2011).

Food garden therapy is sometimes used to help children with behavioural disorders or to gain more environmental awareness (Lautenschlager and Smith, 2007). Many studies, exploring the psychological benefits of food gardening, focus on mental illness, or connections with nature, or food gardening as a catalyst for an ethical awakening (Waliczek et al., 2005; Sumner, 2008; Weinstein et al., 2009). Despite the numerous articles regarding food and gardening experiences, there is a lack of research on food gardening as a type of non-market activity that is internally motivated, and the resulting psychological benefits. The motivations of individuals will be explored further by contrasting food activities with experiences of favourite material possessions.

### **Research Objectives**

Drawing on the literature, we fill the research gap by looking at how individuals are intrinsically versus extrinsically motivated in their perceptions of food-related activities and material possessions. There is a lack of in-depth understanding of how the same individual experiences both things and his or her associated satisfaction. The study builds on Soper's 'alternative hedonism' as a complementary paradigm to consumerism (2007, 2008) by exploring phenomenological topics such as satisfaction of psychological needs, meanings of personal possessions, and experiential activities. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic life aspirations relate to food activities and material possession experiences.

### **Methods**

A methodology called existential phenomenology provides a framework for exploring first-person lived experiences, such as intrinsic motivation, voluntary simplicity,



mindfulness, gratitude, and satisfaction (Maniates, 2002; Groenwald, 2004). Phenomenological research focuses on thickly described first-person lived experiences, to explicate the essence of the structure and meaning of a phenomenon (Thompson et al., 1989; Moustakas, 1994; Groenwald, 2004; Giorgi, 2006).

Phenomenology can provide some much needed insight into this process by starting with first-person lived experiences of phenomena related to extrinsic and intrinsic motivations such as happiness, experiential purchasing, and meeting needs. Examples of phenomenological studies exploring the experience of deciding to make a purchase include Thompson et al. (1989) and other research addressing home, sense of place, and relationships between the environment, people, and their behaviour (Seamon, 1982, 2000; Russell and Levy, 2012). Thus, it is apparent that there is opportunity to make a contribution using phenomenology to explore the relationship between people's lived experience with food activities and types of motivation.

To illuminate the phenomenon, the authors conducted a series of one to two hour interviews where participants were asked about their food activities, their favourite material possession, and their experiences around the material possession (Holt, 1995; Huneke, 2005).

### *Participants*

Participants were recruited based on the intensity sampling criterion (Patton, 2002; Bailey, 2007), through community gardens in Portland, Oregon. Intensity sampling is a type of purposeful sampling (as oppose to probability, or random sampling), where cases are selected for systematic study that are information rich (Patton, 2002). In intensity sampling, participants are selected for in-depth knowledge or experience of a topic or phenomenon. Since the topic was food activities and material possession experiences, urban gardeners were selected for their in-depth knowledge and experiences of food activities, but not for unusual, extreme, or novel food activities compared to standard food production and preparation practices and activities. Also, by recruiting from community gardens, the participants were somewhat standardized; all participants had the same amount of space to grow food on, and to be a community gardener they had to live within the city limits, which limited the extremes of their living conditions (e.g. no rural participants). So the participants were 'normal' in terms of their food activities among urban gardeners, but were more intense in the level of food activities than the city population in general, since they chose to spend more of their time growing and preparing their food by being part of a community garden. An upper limit of 10 participants is recommended for phenomenological study (Groenwald, 2004; Creswell, 2007), and in this study, eight was adequate for saturation for the lengthy, semi-structured interviews and in-depth analysis necessary for phenomenology. The sample of eight included a broad cross-section across ages and genders (see Table 1).

### *Procedures*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted during February and March 2012 and, in all cases but one, the interviews took place at the gardener's home. The interviews were both audio and video recorded, and transcribed by the author. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their confidentiality. Each interview was

**Table 1.** Demographics of participants.

Participants	Work status	Age (years)	Gender
Mike	Retired	65	Male
Melissa	Disability	59	Female
Charles	Full-time	44	Male
Joe	Retired	70	Male
Cathy	Full-time	50	Female
Sue	Part-time	56	Female
Danielle	Disability	65	Female
Annie	Part-time	44	Female

guided by questions designed to explore participant's experiences of food and material possessions, and related materialist and experiential activities: 'tell me about your favorite material possession' and 'tell me about the last time you completed a project involving food'; each question was further probed by asking 'how' and 'why' to elicit comprehensive details.

In addition to interview recordings, observational data were collected including field note observations of the participants during and after the interview, and photographic and field note observations of the participant's home and garden spaces. At the time of the interviews, observations were made of the participant's living space, including 200 photographs of their possessions and food activities and 20 pages of field notes. The 104 single-spaced pages of transcripts served as the raw data for interpretation.

### *Analytic Strategy*

To insure that the data were transcribed correctly and to improve validity, the transcripts and descriptions were sent to the respondents for evaluation and none had corrections. The data analysis then began by reading and rereading all the transcripts, to become more sensitized to major themes. Following Moustakas's and Groenwald's recommendations for explication of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994; Groenwald, 2004), each transcript was reviewed and separated into smaller units of meaning, ranging from a few words to a few paragraphs in length, each of which represented an illuminating statement about the phenomenon. Initial coding was inductive, based on particularly poignant statements within the units of meaning. After several transcripts were reviewed, the units of meaning (i.e. data) were iteratively clustered into discrete themes.

Other themes were more deductively created, based on the research scope of food activities, material objects, and motivations. A subjective heuristic was used to determine whether or not categories and topics were significant enough to become a discrete theme. Significant themes needed to be: 1. described by multiple participants; 2. described as poignant or particularly meaningful; and 3. relate to relevant aspects of the research, such as satisfaction, happiness, well-being, and meaning making of food activities or favourite material object.

As more transcripts were reviewed and separated into units of meaning, these data were clustered into existing themes, clustered into new themes, or sometimes



used to split an existing theme into two or more new themes if the new theme concepts were discrete enough from other themes. Convergence and saturation were reached when many similar units of meaning were found to reflect the same or similar experiences between gardeners.

Calculations such as reliability coefficients are not typically used in phenomenological qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994; Groenwald, 2004). Rather, two researchers separately coded the transcripts and iteratively came to consensus on the themes. During the theme exploration process, the diversity and similarity of the data were explored, in terms of representation among the participants, and in terms of the specific meaning making. Through the theme exploration process, units of meaning were occasionally reassigned to a different theme, to increase the saturation of themes, and to aid in settling on a parsimonious set of themes.

## Results

Qualitative analysis of the interview data led to six distinct themes regarding participants lived experiences of food activities as satisfying activities and as favourite material objects. Photos of the favourite material possessions for each participant are provided in the Appendix. The six themes that are discussed include: 1. relatedness: allows for, builds on or enhances a relationship; 2. connection: creates a direct relationship to the source or earth; 3. sensations: stimulates sensory awareness and pleasure; 4. expectations: encourages a belief of high quality outcomes; 5. competency: engenders pride in abilities and self-sufficiency; and 6. abundance: produces feelings of plentitude, wealth, and gratitude or related to the opposite: feelings of not enough, scarcity, or too much. The themes are described next.

### *Relatedness*

The theme relatedness addresses social connection and personal relationships that are enhanced by the participant's interaction with others during their food activities or with their material object. Growing food in a community garden, preparing and cooking food, and eating with others are all food activities that create social connection and enhance interpersonal relationships. The theme also came through in the interviews with several people when they talked about their material possessions. The items came from a beloved friend or family member or were created from interactions with another person.

*Food:* Many participants described how much they looked forward to and enjoyed spending time being social during food activities. Sharing food experience with others made the experiences more enjoyable, strengthened social relationships, and helped lessen the amount of work. While social food activities can be focused on sharing sensory pleasure, food can also play a major role in social capital. Danielle lived near her daughter, and they often cooked together. She felt very nurtured and was very grateful to her daughter when she broke her leg and her daughter brought her fresh produce and cooked meals for her:

'My daughter is very interested in cooking with me; we do some cooking together. When I broke my leg, she really came through and brought food to me, and as I was being able to get up and cook, we cooked together.'

For Annie, cooking and sharing food was an important part of her social experience:

'We made Indian food for a couple of friends who came over a few weeks ago. The one gal, she cooks a lot, and she's a real foodie, so I was really trying to impress her. It worked.'

*Material Possessions:* Many favorite material things were connected to relationships from the present or past. They are special things because they show love from the giver or receiver and continue a relationship with someone who passed away or is no longer in their lives, thus preserving the relationship. Mike talked about his favourite thing, a particular drawing of his partner, which is part of a much larger collection of sketches or paintings done of the person.

'It's a drawing I did of my partner. I like that drawing very, very much... For five to six years, I just, almost exclusively, not exclusively, but... drew my partner, because he was available. In my extensive schooling in art, I had one memorable teacher who told me, he said, "You know if you want to make it easy on yourself, and you want to make things that satisfy you, draw things that you absolutely love, or you absolutely hate. Anything you feel really strongly about, and just forget about trying to draw the rest." So I drew him for five, six years before I even decided to get back into colour... I have tons of drawings of him, and paintings.'

Danielle has a collection of kitchen tools from her grandmother. While they take up a lot of space in her kitchen and she is trying to get rid of clutter, she cannot part with these tools. In this example she talks about her grandmother's knife as well as other tools, and how these objects show love from her grandmother.

'It's very useful. We don't buy our bread pre-sliced. I have this and one other knife, and this is my go-to knife. It's something that my grandmother gave me. She was my favourite... she was the relative that could really show me that she loved me... This is my go-to knife. She died when I was in my 20s... So, I have her breadboard and her rolling pin, that my grandfather made, and this knife.'

### *Connection*

The theme of connection covers the idea of knowing the point of origin, a sense of place or cultural identity, and exactly where the food or materials came from.

*Food:* The idea of knowing where their food came from and having a relationship with their food as it was growing, was very important to most participants. For some participants, this meant knowing the people who grow their food, and having an active role in harvesting the food. Mike enjoyed harvesting his own berries, and was consistent about going to the same pick-your-own place.

'I go to a blueberry place, and formed a relationship with a farmer there. I always look forward to the season; I look forward to seeing her, three or four times during the growing season.'

For Charles, having a connection with his food was more about growing his own food in his garden plot and making an effort to use everything that he grew in meals that he and his family prepared. He seemed to relish the idea that he knew where his food came from.

'I think a lot of this came from my father in a lot of ways, his family being Depression Era kids, they made their own whiskey, they distilled, they grew 99% of their food. His father was an iron miner, but he was also the town butcher. So, it's really doing for yourself, and being able to know how to do these things. I just think that's very important for all of us to know. Where does your meat come from? Where does your food come from? And if that wasn't there, can you do it yourself?'

Sue described an experience she had eating chicken soup at a restaurant where she was not sure of the quality or origins of food.

'Even though the taste was OK, there was something about it. I could feel that my digestion was not happy. I think that the connection between your stomach and your head, they are connected. So, I'm thinking "oh uh, there's gristle in here, oh the chicken, they are probably not using organic". That all starts to effect how my body reacts. I didn't get nauseous, but my stomach wasn't settled because my mind wasn't settled about it.'

Sometimes a desire for awareness and connection led participants to unpleasant food activities, when they could not enjoy a meal because they were aware of poor quality and were unsure of the practices associated with production.

*Material Possessions:* Similar ideas about connection arose from the discussions of favourite material objects. Here, Sue talks about wood used in her ukulele and how it connects to where it comes from and its origins as a tree.

'What's really neat is that [smelling the instrument] it still has the smell of the wood. It's Koa wood. So, I just love that, that it maintains that. Again, it's a reminder of where it comes from. This was a tree (or several kinds of trees) that someone lovingly put together.'

The most common theme in food activities and material possessions was the idea of something being made by hand. Almost every participant talked about making food by hand and many of the favourite material objects were also handmade (sketch, sculpture, cutting board, and ukulele) Mike's quote was representative of many of the respondent's feelings, thus creating a connection between the passion for food activities to the favourite material objects.

'I like doing things with my own hands, making things, taking care of things, and producing things.'

Annie's favourite material objects, her house, show a slightly different perspective on handmade as a way to express themselves as people.

'We worked on it, so it's not just my material possession; it has been my passion, and my husband's too... It's not just the building, it reflects my husband and I as people, and how we express ourselves artistically.'

### *Sensations*

The idea of sensations covers sensory exploration, i.e. sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste. Food activities are inherently filled with all these sensations, but the favourite material objects also have plenty of sensory engagement for these participants.

*Food:* Food touches on almost all of the senses so it is not surprising that respondents connect sensory aspects with food. Often these experiences focused on the sensations of simply prepared foods. Almost everyone had a 'fresh produce straight from the garden' story. Sue talks about the sensory aspects from growing through processing and how the senses are engaged throughout the whole period.

'I guess it is pretty sensory, from growing to processing. You do have to use a lot of your senses. When you're fermenting, you have to check in with them [your senses] a lot. Especially because of doing it in the summer, the temperature really dictates how fast things ferment. I like that aspect.'

Melissa described how she savoured her cooking experience, and focused on flavour and quality over quantity during her gardening experiences:

'I've learned, I'm a slow cooker; I have the slow cooking mentality. I love to grow leeks, because you can put the leeks in the soup stock. I grow for flavour. I do it for fun, too. I grow for flavour, so I don't need a lot of what I grow, but it has to have really good flavour.'

Mike usually preserved half of his harvest from the blueberry fields by freezing them, and the rest he ate fresh. Mike's attention and mindfulness to his experience allowed him to experience the berries most fully. He described how he chose to eat his berries simply prepared:

'The blueberries... I'm not a big cook, I don't make muffins or pancakes, I just eat them as... I have a horrible sweet tooth, so I use them like I would cookies or candy. I eat them frozen during the winter, and I just love it. I eat cups of blueberries.'

*Material Possessions:* Sensory aspects come through in several of the material possessions. For example, in Sue's quote about her ukelele, she talks about smelling the wood and recognizing the tree from which it came. Mike described how his drawing showed a sense of movement and visual interest.

'It's loose, it's exaggerated, it has a lot of nervous diagonal lines, it sort of vibrates with movement. It's just very quick, very successful drawing. It takes a lot of, in my case I am someone who can draw very well, and I can draw very realistically, with a lot of shading and... a lot of light and dark... molding, shaping, a lot of perspective.'

Similarly, Charles focused on spending his money on sensory experiences.

'My wife's father has a saying, and the more I say it and hear it, the more I believe it: "You cannot spend too much money on a good time." In other words, those memories, those memories are worth a car, worth anything... You give me access to a library, and a way to grow food, and make beer, and I'm OK.'

And Joe described his experience of driving his Porche car:

'If I'm driving the Porche, I'll drive 70. If you go faster than that, you're risking a ticket. I've gotten one speeding ticket in my whole life, and it was when I was 18 years old. So I don't speed. One of my friends said, "Joe, the Porche is wasted on you" [laughing]. But I enjoy it, it handles so well, and you don't have to drive it fast.'

*Expectations*

The theme of expectations encompasses how participants connect with perceptions of quality through their food activities or material possessions. Typically they now desired to eat higher quality food because the food growing and preparing experiences had changed their standards. Looking at favourite material possessions, high quality expectations came from things like a Porsche or a Finnish-made food steamer.

*Food:* Many participants voice their expectations about the quality of food that they prepare and eat. Melissa worked to increase the quality of her soil by adding organic amendments, composting, planting cover crops, and layering mulches. She felt that the produce she grows in her garden and donates to others are the highest quality possible, and she now expects to maintain very high quality in her produce:

'I know that the quality from the soil we've made is about as good as you're going to get with your produce. And I like doing that. I just love the fact that everything I've done is completely, I guess it's organic. And so I'm giving them something that is good.'

Annie kept chickens in her back yard, and she was very fond of them. She described preparing a Greek lasagna recipe using some of her chicken's eggs:

'But it was wonderful, because I got to use our tomatoes, and the lamb, and our eggs. Our eggs are, you know, the sauce in the picture was white, like béchamel sauce, but ours isn't like that, it's yellow! They are just great little girls! "Braack!"'

She noticed that when she cooked with her chicken's eggs, the food tasted richer. Since becoming more involved in food production, participants described how their food quality has increased, and how they have become accustomed to this higher quality.

*Material Possessions:* Several participants discuss the aspects of quality in their favourite material possessions. Quality aspects are connected to European-made and also aspects of value. Melissa talks about one of her cooking pans, a steamer in this way.

'I have this triple steamer... well, I have the kind that's from Finland, like the super type. They only go up in value. That's how I do the raspberries; that's how I do a lot of things. It's just distills it down.'

Similarly, Joe talks about his Porsche as being the best but not too expensive. He compares it to other European sports cars and its affordability.

'But in terms of material things, this [Porsche] is the most expensive purchase. You can see how I love it, because it's covered up. I'd been interested in sports cars for a long time, and I've always thought Porsche was the best, not too expensive car. I wouldn't want a Ferrari or a Lamborghini, but Porsches are very good. I had books about Porsches. I guess I had reached a point, when I was about 65, this was five years ago, and I was thinking "gee, I can afford one, I can write a check, I don't have to finance it."'

### Competency

A common feeling from most participants was a sense of competency, doing something well, successfully, or efficiently. Competency ideas came through in most of the gardening activities and several of the material possessions. In some respects, competency creates a self-identity; one can call oneself a 'gardener' or 'game player'.

*Food:* In almost all cases, participants who succeed in actually growing something and then creating something successfully from their food derive an enormous amount of satisfaction from the process. Sue grew cucumbers and made pickles for herself. She derived satisfaction from making a processed food item for herself, from produce she had grown:

'I just love that, I love that feeling, "Ooo, I GREW all of these!" And not just the pickles. All right, so then there was the garlic, I grew all the garlic. I like that aspect of it: "I grew all of this, I put it all up." I ferment them first, so I don't just make a brine and put the pickles in jar. I actually brine the pickles first, and that takes about two weeks, and then you can 'em. So it's a big process, and it just makes me feel good.'

For Joe and Charles, competency was focused more on caring for others. Joe had an extra plot where he grew food to donate, and enjoyed dropping off the produce at a community soup kitchen and receiving gratitude from the donation recipients:

'Usually, at least at the height of the growing season, the car is just full of produce of one kind or another. So I go into the dining hall, and meet with the co-managers if they are there, or the cook, and they usually come out and give me a dolly or a cart to bring the stuff in. There are always volunteers from the dining hall, they greet me, and it's very nice, "Thank you! Thank you for this wonderful produce." Talking to the cook, of course, they have a lot of canned goods, and packaged goods, but... I know I'm not the only donor of fresh produce, but it is very appreciated and it makes me feel very good.'

Charles was the one who prepared most of the meals for his household, and was proud of his role in providing high quality nutrition:

'[My wife] doesn't like to cook as much as me. She'll do it out of necessity, and that's about it. When I go out of town for work, Mom is making dinner, it's "where are we going, Mom?" If it wasn't for me, our family would not eat that healthy, to put that bluntly.'

He saw this responsibility as solely his, and was not confident that his family was competent without him. For some, competency was expressed as a need for food security; for others, it was being able to make processed foods for themselves (e.g. pickles), provide good nutrition for their family, or share their abundance with their community.

*Material Possessions:* Like the food activities, material possessions created by the participant show the same ideas around doing something successfully. When Mike discusses his sketch, he talks about his competency in drawing and how he learned and improved over time.

'I was able to be successful because he accommodated me by being a muse. It's just very quick, very successful drawing. It takes a lot of, in my case I am someone who can draw very well, and I can draw very realistically...



That drawing like that is not natural to me... you have to evolve into that. You... think that more is better, then learning that less is better is a very arduous task, it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to learn. It seems like it's a simple lesson, but it takes – you can do all these flourishes and all these tricks, but to make it seem simple is really hard.'

Cathy's favourite object is a heliosphere that she created. She talks about the challenge of creating the shape as well as the integration of mathematics and physics ideas required to understand it.

'So this one is a heliosphere, that's what it's called. They come from the solar winds. And let me tell ya, they're hard to create. There's some crimps that I didn't get quite right, you can see those too... A lot of it is based in mathematics, and the physical sciences. So the physics of working with nature elements is very phenomenal. Eventually, it was just like, I started working with plutonic solids, I started working with Plato's mathematics, and Aristotle's, and with Pythagoras... so all this mathematics! Not just in terms of what we know, but in terms of sacred geometry, sacred mathematics, which is very different than our normal math, started coming up.'

Other material possessions, allow the user to illustrate their competency and identity related to that competency. Charles talks about his Xbox and how it reflects his game-playing ability:

'But playing Xbox video games, head to head, especially with another person, that's something I really enjoy, I really do. That's a fun thing to do, and I can get sucked in for hours. Whether, way back Dungeons and Dragons, now I play cribbage. I've always been a game player. Not really gambling, because I hate losing money, but always games, I've always been a game player.'

### *Abundance*

The theme of abundance came from multiple perspectives: the idea of having too much, having enough to feel secure, never having enough or trying to avoid having too much. These ideas come through both food and discussions of material possessions.

*Food:* Gardening and other food activities often resulted in periods of heavy production and large harvests for the participants. These periods of large harvests were highly enjoyable for the participants; they reveled in the abundance. Cathy had been using soil amendments, and her production had increased beyond her expectations. She described what she did with her large squash harvest during a visit from her mother:

'I made pie filling. I didn't just make the pie level filling. I tripled it. So you don't need to eat a lot, but it was exceptional. [My mother] was here for days, and we ate on it the whole time. Then we cooked it the way she told me about, so we cooked it a... Turkish way. That is, you cut up a little of it, then you add cinnamon, and maple syrup on top. Then you bake it. So we had that for dessert. So we were eating on this squash as the starch in the meal, or as the dessert. And then I made soup with another part of it. So there were all these different ways we were eating this.'

Charles moved from Texas to the Pacific Northwest with his family a few years ago, and one of the biggest changes he had noticed was the abundance and cheapness of berries. Every year he felt fortunate to be living in a climate that offered such high production:

'Up here, compared to Texas, your plethora of fresh berries and fruit, I mean, come on! The blackberries that are such a nuisance are so darn sweet and, down there, they are as tart as all could be. My God, there's so much fruit. I'll pay these kids, go find me a gallon of berries, OK, here's \$5, awesome.'

Similarly, Melissa had raspberry plants in her garden plot, and when they were ripe, there were many more berries than she could eat at once, so she used a distiller to boil her berries down into a thick juice that she froze and ate throughout the year:

'So that's one way to work with some things that you have in overabundance. You can steam them down. Then you can work with it that way. Or you can just serve it as juice, what the heck! Oh, you can get concord grapes and do that. Oh, God, it's really, really good.'

*Material Possessions:* Participants like Melissa differentiate between abundance in food and hoarding other things.

'I live with a person now who does that, it's pack ratting, hoarding. Everywhere you step, you run into something. I remember when I was moving, she said, "you can't have too many books", and I said, "yeah, you can, you can have too many of everything." You just don't need it. There's ways to make do with it. It's nice to have the food. That's the one thing I really like, to have that around, but the stuff, it's just... it gets in the way, unless you're really neat and tidy.'

Here Annie talks about the decision to buy her favourite material possession, her home:

'We lived in a tiny little house. That house was really small. I wanted a bigger house. I grew up in a great big house. I like lots of rooms that I don't even go in most of the time. I love to work on houses.'

And Danielle further describes her relationship with her kitchen items, starting with her cutting board that her grandfather made:

'It's big and heavy, about this thick [shows two inches between thumb and finger]. I don't use it all that much; it's in the kitchen. Actually, I don't use the rolling pin, either. I've got about five different rolling pins [laughing], so I use the one with ball bearings that rolls. But I also don't really get rid of the stuff that was hers.'

The results are summarized in Table 2, a short description for each of the general type of activity, the specific activity, and the personal meaning.

## Discussion

This inquiry was motivated by a desire to understand how urban gardeners experienced food activities versus their material possessions. Research to date on intrinsic

**Table 2.** Coded food and material possession themes and connections.

Respondent	Food Experience	Theme	Material Possessions	Theme
Mike	Gardening Gathering Preserving	Connection Sensation	Portrait Bike	Relatedness Connection Sensation
Melissa	Gardening Donating Preserving	Sensation Expectation Abundance	Distillation pot Inherited stuff	Abundance Expectations
Charles	Gardening Brewing Sharing	Connection Competency Abundance	Xbox video game console	Sensation Competency
Joe	Gardening Sharing	Competency	Car-Porsche	Expectations
Cathy	Gardening Cooking	Abundance	Geometric Sculptures	Competency
Sue	Gardening Processing	Connection Competency	Ukulele	Connection
Danielle	Cooking	Relatedness	Grandmother's bread knife Rolling pin Bread board	Relatedness Abundance
Annie	Gardening Sharing Cooking	Relatedness Expectations	House (s)	Connection Abundance

and extrinsic experiences has been informed by quantitative consumer psychology perspectives. Most have found that negative psychological effects of materialist lifestyles can be mitigated by adopting more intrinsic life aspirations (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Richins and Rudmin, 1994; Grouzet et al., 2005). Our participants' experiences contained elements of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, both within each theme and within each participant. Thus, the results from this current study offer a different perspective of the materialism phenomenon and contribute to emerging literature on alternative hedonism.

The themes that emerged coincide with previous work around needs. There is general consensus about the types of needs that must be satisfied for individual well-being, with each of the four non-hierarchical sets of needs empirically associated with quality of life (Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996): 1. safety, security, and sustenance; 2. competency, efficacy, and self-esteem; 3. connectedness; and 4. autonomy and authenticity.

Using the lens of materialism literature, the experiences of the participants can be explored in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations; extrinsic motivations are characterized by life aspirations of social status, financial status, and physical appearance, while intrinsic motivations are characterized by life aspirations of autonomy, relatedness, and competency (Belk, 1985; Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Richins and Rudmin, 1994; Grouzet et al., 2005).

For example, Annie's description of owning a house that has more room than she'll ever use seems less intrinsically motivated, since her decision to own a large place is not focused on a utilitarian desire rather to own something for the sake of owning it. Similarly, Danielle's description of owning more rolling pins than she

needs is not clearly intrinsically motivated, although it is not clearly extrinsically motivated either, since Danielle expressed the connection to her grandparents. And although Joe's Porche car may seem to be extrinsically motivated, as many luxury purchases are, when reviewing his description of his car use, he seemed more focused on enjoying the driving experience even when his friends make fun of him for not driving very fast.

On the other hand, some participants described food activities in terms of wanting to impress others, or be recognized for their efforts, indicating that they may not be doing the activities solely for their own internal experience, such as Joe donating produce and appreciating the recipients' gratitude, Annie cooking to impress a friend, and Charles's claim that he is the only one who can provide nutritious meals for his family.

Many other food activities and material possession experiences did seem to be intrinsically motivated; the participants described these experiences as richly complex and deeply satisfying multiple psychological needs. Within individuals, some participants were more obviously intrinsically motivated in both their food activities and their relationship with their material possessions, such as Mike, Melissa, Cathy and Sue, while other participant's motivations were not clearly consistent between their food activities and material possessions, such as Charles, Joe, Danielle, and Annie. Within themes, intrinsic motivations were clearly expressed for the sensations experiences, both with food activities and with material possessions, but other themes were less clearly only intrinsic, indicating the complex nature of an individual's motivations in the context of everyday decisions. Table 3 shows which participants are more intrinsically motivated for their food activities and material possession experiences.

The exploration of food activities in this study revealed that food-related experiential activities such as gardening, preparing food, and eating food are effective at supporting intrinsic life aspiration and satisfying a diverse set of psychological needs. Material possessions can also be highly experiential, particularly if they extend or enable a relationship, are made by hand, or connect to nature. Thus in our study we see that material items can enable aspects of alternative hedonism, an area that has not been discussed in previous research. And, because of the ability to uniquely and intrinsically satisfy an individual's psychological needs, food activities also present a key area of alternative hedonism.

## **Conclusion**

This study revealed that individuals who engage in non-market home production activities such as gardening and cooking can be motivated in their experiences of food and their material possessions by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. The current study provided groundwork for future studies to develop measures for satisfaction from food activities by characterizing and synthesizing thick descriptions of satisfaction.

The present study has several limitations that lead to opportunities for further research. First, the study was limited by the sampling strategy since participants were recruited from two community gardens, lived in the same area, were of middle age, and lacked ethnic diversity. Future research could include gardens in parts of the city or country with younger and more ethnically diverse populations. Including younger participants would present a different perspective since Bhattacharjee and

**Table 3.** Motivations for food activities and material possessions by participant.

Respondent	Food activity motivations	Theme	Material possessions motivations	Theme
Mike	Intrinsic	Connection Sensation	Intrinsic	Relatedness Connection Sensation
Melissa	Intrinsic	Sensation Expectation Abundance	Intrinsic	Abundance Expectations
Charles	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Connection Competency Abundance	Intrinsic	Sensation Competency
Joe	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Competency	Intrinsic	Expectations
Cathy	Intrinsic	Abundance	Intrinsic	Competency
Sue	Intrinsic	Connection Competency	Intrinsic	Connection
Danielle	Intrinsic	Relatedness	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Relatedness Abundance
Annie	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Relatedness Expectations	Intrinsic/Extrinsic	Connection Abundance

Mogilner (2014) found that when comparing extraordinary versus ordinary experiences, younger people tend to report greater happiness from extraordinary experiences. Ordinary experiences provide longer-lasting happiness, and as individuals age they increasingly report greater happiness and define themselves by ordinary, not extraordinary experiences. So one might expect to find different motivations and resulting satisfaction for younger gardeners compared to older ones.

Another limitation was the scope of the study, which focused predominately on two areas, food activities and material possessions, with respondents that grew food in community gardens. This sample group could potentially have constrained resources such as income or home gardening space, thus affecting their consumptive behaviour. The area of material possessions could be explored in more detail to include questions about the most expensive item owned by the participant, what they would purchase if they had more money, whether they bought more things before engaging in gardening, and how this behaviour may have changed through pursuing food activities (e.g. Miller and Thomas, 2009).

Both food activities and material possessions touched on many different intrinsic motivations and life aspirations, both within themes and within individual participants. These findings contribute to literature on materialism, life aspirations, and alternative paradigms to typical consumerism by helping to broaden of understanding of experiences of intrinsically motivated activities. Many participants appreciated activities that were focused on sensations and feeling a connection with the source of their food or material possessions, which is similar to Van Boven's (2005) and Soper's (2007, 2008) descriptions of experiential purchases and alternative hedonism, respectively.

As expected, the results of this study indicate that at least some of the experiences and relationships of the material possessions, such as cooking equipment and houses, were less obviously intrinsic and may be extrinsically motivated. But even in these material possession relationships, there were some intrinsic motivations

involved in the explanations of experiences. Surprisingly, some of the participants showed extrinsic life goals and motivations around food activities, such as cooking and growing food for others, so food activities are not a purely intrinsic. Further studies involving food activities could deepen the understanding of the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and increased well-being as well as their relationship to alternative hedonism.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Photographs of participants' favourite material possessions.



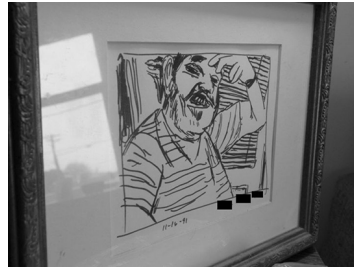
Sue – Ukele musical instrument



Joe – Porsche car



Annie – Her house



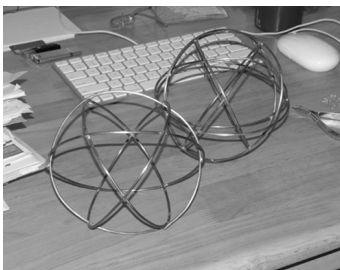
Mike – Drawing he made



Melissa – Triple steamer for food processing



Danielle – Grandmother's bread knife



Cathy – Heliospheres garden art



Charles – Xbox video game console