Commodities, Donations, and Moral Contradictions:
An Exploratory Study of the Moral Economy of a Second-Hand Charity Shop

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Abstract

Second-hand charity shops are ubiquitous in Aotearoa New Zealand, supporting numerous causes, from animal welfare to hospice care. Research on second-hand shopping, charity, and for-profit enterprises often focuses on their environmental sustainability, professionalisation, place within specific industries (e.g. global fashion), and desires to hasten their expansion. However, research into second-hand economies often does not investigate the structural realities of second-hand charity, with research in Aotearoa remaining sparse. Utilising participant observation fieldwork and participant interviews, this research investigated the moral economy of a second-hand charity store in Aotearoa. The study focused particularly on the gifting and commodity forms of second-hand goods, as well as the moral-economic complexities and contradictions within this context. I argue that second-hand commodities can become cyclical or regenerative, enmeshed in cycles of (re)possession, (re)donation, and (re)commodification, while also being continually rearticulated and ethically framed by shoppers, donors, and volunteers as gifts, with a constant dialogue between an item's commodity, gifting, and possession forms. Furthermore the ethical consumption of second-hand commodities, as routinely found in second-hand charity, signigicantly relies upon constant overconsumption of first-hand commodities, a structural condition that also underpins a potential for overconsumption by second-hand consumers. Although second-hand charity shopping facilitates and encourages the moral organisation of commodity transactions and gift relationships, offering an avenue for sustainable consumption, a critical examination of its structural requirements is necessary to truly develop sustainable and circular economies. This begins with understanding that its reliance on overconsumption and other factors of the capitalist economy ultimately limits its countervailing position within them.

Keywords: commodification, consumption, overconsumption, second-hand commodities, moral economy, charity, gifting, donation

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Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The day I first walked into the charity store where I had volunteered to work, I was hit with the musty smell of clothing, like a closet where you had stored away your clothes for a different season. Clothes, neatly ordered upon racks, took up most of the floor, with enough space in between to allow only one person through. The walls and window displays were lined with shoes, crockery, cups, dinner plates, and toys. A mannequin had been placed near the door. It wore a pair of men's shorts and a patterned summer shirt. I mainly remember how hot I was – the little shop had no air conditioning, and a small fan by the counter was all there was to cool down whoever was serving. Walking into the back, I said hello to Henrietta, the store manager, placed my bag on a clothes hook, and set about getting to work. The store sits on the main street of the city's CBD, the bustle of town rushing past the windows. Second-hand stores, such as the SPCA, Salvation Army, and Red Cross, are dispersed across town. First-hand retailers dominate the space, including Cotton On, Postie, Briscoes, Paper Plus, Hallensteins, and The Warehouse. Many of the items in the charity store originally came from these first-hand retailers.

I began working in Henrietta's store as part of my participant-observation research into sustainability and green consumption within second-hand shopping as it unfolds in a North Island city of Aotearoa, New Zealand. As my research progressed through the addition of semi-structured interviews with the charity store manager, volunteers, shoppers, andd donors, I became particularly interested in how the dialectical forms and tensions present within second-hand charity, exemplified by charitable donating and subsequent commodification (generating funds for charity), interact and generate the moral economy of the store. My interviewees were all identified as women, as were the charity store managers, volunteers, and most shoppers. However, my analysis focuses on overarching moral and ethical beliefs, practices, and contradictions, and potential gender influences remain open to future research. For example, participants' anti-consumerist perspectives can appear to contradict their overconsumption of second-hand commodities, or indeed the reliance of second-hand charity on first-hand overconsumption and how people perceive second-hand charity as sites of anti-consumerist and ethical consumption. Three key research areas underpin my thesis (discussed below): overconsumption and second-hand commodities, donation and the gifting form, and moral/economic tensions. Within these I propose three significant contributions: *regenerative commodification*, whereby second-hand commodity forms are cyclically regenerated;

imaginative biographisation, where consumers imagine life biographies of second-hand items; and the *congealing gift*, when the gifting form of second-hand goods becomes 'congealed' in the perceptions of second-hand consumers, donors, and volunteers.

1.2 Moral Economy

Charity commodities are gifted donations – usually of previously purchased commodities that individuals voluntarily choose to give away to support a charity, are re-commodified for sale within a charity store and then sold at comparatively low prices. This process, unlike commercial second-hand stores or similar second-hand trading, does not seek to maximise the monetary value of the commodity or profits accruing to the seller. The money generated goes to charity, wages, rent, and other costs.

The entanglement of commodities, originally produced and sold in first-hand markets, are personally possessed by individuals who later dispossess themselves of these items via donation, recasting them as gifts, which are re-commodified by charity store workers/volunteers. Sold as second-hand commodities, these items are personally possessed by different individuals, with money generated going towards charitable causes. This constituted the moral economy of the charity store I studied. My working definition of moral economy (see Chapter 2.4) is of economic activities rooted within and dedicated to reproducing particular social relationships (Sneath, 2006) and which generate and reflect a personal sense of morality which arises, and is reinforced, by exchange transactions over time. Essential to any moral economy is that those within it perceive the relationships, obligations, andd exchange of goods within it as voluntary, fair, and just. I discuss this via Carrier's (2018) conception of transcendent moral values, whereby a person envisions a better world, held within their personal moral judgments of individuals and/or community. Furthermore, through the work of Sayer (2011) and Laidlaw (2010), I conceptualise a working definition of morality which foregrounds evaluations of human well/ill-being, heavily reliant upon specific socio-cultural contexts and community, group, and individual constructions. I argue people's transcendent values link to how they organise themselves economically and socially to pursue well-being (Sayer, 2011). The conjoining of morality and economy is especially evident in second-hand charity stores, such as SPCA charity stores supporting animal welfare or Hospice charity stores helping fund palliative care, whereby commodities are acquired through people donating personal possessions that are then sold to fund charitable causes.

1.3 The Commodity Form

Second-hand charity stores are primarily reliant on the donation of goods originally produced for market sale and purchased by consumers as first-hand commodities. At some point, however, possessing individuals decide that purchased items have outlived their use-value to them, and they dispossess by donating to charity stores. There are, of course, personally hand-made or hand-crafted items donated to charity stores (e.g. hand-knitted jerseys, hand-made wooden children's toys, etc.), but these also usually contain commodified components (e.g. industrially manufactured wool, lumber, etc.) and are small in number. Second-hand charity stores are thus essentially reliant on the supply and sale of dispossessed commodities that donors and volunteers assess as having potential use-value to others (see Chapter 6).

This circular economy of commodification, possession, dispossession/donation, (re)commodification, (re)possession (which many ethically support as an environmentally sustainable form of consumption due to the recycling of commodities and the ideally dampening effect this has on production) is nevertheless significantly based on the over-consumption of commodities in the first place (see Chapter 4), a practice that second-hand charity shopping can also engender (Parguel et al., 2017). Indeed, I often encountered individuals who donated large volumes of relatively new and unused commodities (primarily clothing) and whom I classified as 'over-consumers' (see Chapter 4.6). Furthermore, I also noticed the presence of price tags from other second-hand charity stores on donated items, which, although signifying recycling, also points to potential over-consumption. In fact, many individuals detailed how they would purchase second-hand items in bulk, often on impulse or when collecting items of a similar ilk (e.g. woven baskets, vintage magazines) over time. They would then periodically rid themselves of excess possessions, such as clothing or parts of their collections, by donating them to second-hand charity stores. I argue that some charity store consumers do often overconsume second-hand commodities (termed 'indulgent consumption') as the morality assigned to second-hand charity shopping reduces any associated cognitive dissonance by aligning consumption with personal moral and ethical values centred on environmental sustainability, affordability, and/or charity-supportive consumption (Parguel et al., 2017).

1.3.1 Regenerative Commodification

The overconsumption of second-hand commodities highlights the different 'economic' forms that second-hand items take – especially commodity, gift and personal possession forms and how items oscillate between forms over time and according to context. I have framed the cyclical nature of second-hand commodities within this economy as regenerative commodification (see Chapter 5.4) to highlight the cyclical, fluctuating forms and movements of commodities in second-hand charity (see Addo and Besnier (2008) for a similar analysis of gifting and repeated pawning of tapa cloths in Tongan communities). Regenerated commodities rely on their material durability, form, and enduring use-value to be repeatedly re-cycled through the second-hand commodity economy.

Investigations into second-hand commodification (Berge, 2024; Noon, 2011; Stansfield, 2022) have mostly focused on the initial re-commodification of an item, not its subsequent cyclical re-commodification. For example, Berge (2024), detailed how the process of re-commodification within the second-hand clothing market of Santiago, Chile, is underpinned by the importation of second-hand clothing from donation bins and organisations in Europe. Second-hand retailers in Santiago purchase bundles of clothing that they then sell individually. Regenerative commodification is defined by the repeated movement of items through the second-hand economy, from commodification to possession to donation (gift) to re-commodification, in a theoretically infinite cycle, dependent upon the item's material durability and whether a person re-donates, resells, or re-gifts it, or whether they continue to possess it or bin it as rubbish.

1.3.2 Imaginative Biographisation

A number of second-hand shoppers also imaginatively biographised commodities they encountered and/or purchased in the charity store (see Chapter 5.5). This *imaginative biographisation* was based on imagining a commodity's past, of old owners or stories of its use, and was undertaken to create social and emotional relationships with the object and its prior (effectively unknowable) existence. Bolin (2015), Herrmann (2015), and Lostavicka and Fernandez (2005) discuss the creation of similar biographical and socio-emotional elements of second-hand items when the production and personal ownership histories of commodities are known. For example, Herrmann (2015) discusses the biographical and affective content attributed by sellers to items in American garage sales they are offering for sale and how sharing their stories with buyers personalises or biographises the commodities. Biographisation can be seen as part of the ritual of possession divestment (McCracken, 1986). Utilising the concept of 'consumption visions' (Phillips, 1997; Walters et al., 2007), I argue that when the biography of a second-hand item is unknown or actively removed (via the commodity assessment work of volunteers in second-hand charity shops), consumers may actively create an imaginative biography to generate the emotional connections that other forms of second-hand shopping sometimes provide, such as feelings of nostalgia and meaningful social connections (with past owners and/or history), such as Cecilia, who collected out-of-print magazines for their nostalgic content and value, or Regina, who felt connected to others through purchasing second-hand clothing.

1.4 The Gifting Form

Donating and gifting forms are also central within the second-hand charity moral economy (see Chapter 6). Although I often use the terms donation and gift interchangeably, it is important to note that donating refers to a particular form of gifting related to second-hand charity and the unique relationships it forms and embodies. I outline an 'ideal' and 'negative' model of donations in order to contextualise the nature of donating or gifting within second-hand charity. The 'ideal' model (see Chapter 6.2) explores an archetypal donating scenario that exemplifies a 'positive' interaction with donors and the assessment of 'good' donations. The 'good' donation and the positive interactions it generates are defined by the ease with which a donated good can be re-commodified for sale in the store. This relies upon its material condition if it is clean, useable, and appropriate. Underwear, for instance, is not accepted in Henrietta's store due to the nature of the garment and its perception as unhygienic in a second-hand context. The 'negative' model (see Chapter 6.3) explores how volunteers and charity stores deal with donations they consider unusable and the possible rationales behind donating such discarded possessions, such as the donor's belief that the item still possesses use-value. Deploying Goffman's (1956) theory of front and backstage performance, I articulate the importance of volunteers never refusing donations, regardless of 'ideal' or 'negative' assessments, due to the store depending upon the donation of goods from the community, whereby the systematic denial of donations may alienate donors and risk the store's existence by stifling the frequency of donations.

1.4.1 The Congealing Gift

As previously discussed, participants often redonated items they had originally purchased at a charity store back to the same or different charity stores; some viewed this as a way of 'giving back' and also of allowing other individuals to benefit from the use of the items. As a structural reality of the store, donated items were sometimes ascribed a gifting essence or affordance by donors and store volunteers. I term this process the *congealing gift* (see Chapter 6.4). Similar to regenerative commodification, congealing gift ascriptions arise from the repeated, cyclical donation of a second-hand item. Like all donated goods, congealing gifts are immediately commodified and made ready for market sale shortly after receipt by a charity store. They are, nevertheless, repeatedly (re)constructed and (re)articulated as gifts. This is most evident when a donated good is purchased at a charity store and is later (re)donated by the purchaser. For instance, one of my participants went through a period of buying woven baskets from second-hand stores and then redonating them for someone else to use and appreciate, as she had. It can also occur when a second-hand good is purchased by a shopper as an item to be gifted to another person.

The continuing oscillation between commodity/gifting forms, at once a structural condition established by charity store economies and the ultimate goal of generating funds for charitable purposes, is also a matter of individual perception and intent. Gift ascriptions can, therefore, effectively 'congeal' over time, with the ascribed gifting form/essence being increasingly perceived as a seemingly innate quality of an item – a discursive process that can also be part of an item's imagined biographisation. Furthermore, repeated ascriptions and congealment often prompt or are prompted by an item's repeated existence within the charity store's moral economy, thereby facilitating its circulatory movement through this moral economy.

1.5 Moral/Economic Tensions

1.5.1 Commodity-Market Relations and the Ethic of Charity

I identify three primary points of tension within the moral economy of the charity store: commodity-market relations and the ethics of charity, the ethics of use-value and donation, and ethical consumption and anti-consumerist ethics. Commodity-market relations and the ethic of charity are characterised by a tension between the store's obligation to raise funds for charity and the expectations of consumers within the moral economy (Carrier, 2018; Scott, 1977; Sneath, 2006; Thompson, 1971) of the store, such as environmental sustainable consumption, anti-consumerism, product affordability and the contribution of funds towards the store's charity. I argue that consumers' expectations regarding the pricing of items in charity stores are often focused on affordability, particularly on the ethical obligation for charity store commodities to be significantly lower-priced compared to first-hand items and commercially traded second-hand commodities. Not only is the store's 'charitable' ethos extended to pricing and ensuring the commodities it sells are affordable, especially to low-income individuals, but this also reflects an item's 'used' status and its potentially reduced lifespan. This reproduces a social and moral precedence that is central to the moral economy of the store, and to ethically violate these legitimate practices by charging too much for an item jeopardises the moral-economic relationship between the charity store and its donors and customers.

1.5.2 Donation and the Ethics of Use-Value and Reuse

I also explore the ethics of use-value and donation. One of the most common reasons given by second-hand shoppers as to why they shop second-hand is to purchase and possess goods that are both 'useful' and fulfil a personal 'need' (Assima et al., 2023; Isenhour et al., 2024; Stansfield, 2022). Assima et al. (2023), Bohlin (2019), and Herrmann (2019) discuss how second-hand shoppers, sellers, and donors have a deep respect for the continued material existence and use-value of second-hand items. Bohlin (2019) found that second-hand shoppers, sellers, and donors thought it was moral to continually redonate or sell second-hand items, as it prevents them from being thrown away and allows others to use them. However, tension exists in second-hand charity when donated items are disrespected, and the cycle of use and re-use is disrupted or ended prematurely. Such disrespect is evident in two general instances – when donors leave donated items outside a charity store when it is closed (Martinez, 2024), potentially forcing the store to discard any donations ruined by environmental conditions, with the charity bearing the cost for their disposal. The second instance is when the charity store throws away donations that they assess as unusable and therefore unsellable, thereby contradicting the assessment of donors who perceived the items as usable and sellable. Second-hand charity stores exist as sites of moral commodity dispossession (Assima et al., 2023), and to disrespect this by improperly donating goods or by discarding usable and sellable donations is antithetical to the moral character of the charity store, causing stress between donors and the store, threatening their socio-moral relationship, as well as potentially disrupting the flow of donations and usable commodities.

1.5.3 Ethical Consumption and Anti-Consumerist Ethics

The final tension I discuss exists between ethical consumption and anti-consumerist ethics. Research participants frequently voiced their dislike of consumerism in contemporary society (e.g. the expectation to continually buy new clothes or other products and the waste this generates). This guided charity shoppers and other consumers towards second-hand shopping as a form of ethical consumption, with their belief that consumption of second-hand commodities reflected their anti-consumerist stance, especially as this was considered more ethical than first-hand shopping. However, several participants mentioned that they would purchase large quantities of clothing from second-hand stores, which would accumulate, eventually resulting in them redonating clothing they did not wear frequently. I also observed a tendency for second-hand shoppers to impulsively purchase items as they browsed through the store, such as one woman who was purchasing a dress but then also purchased a pair of shoes, jewellery, and other articles of clothing because they were just "so cheap". This accords with Parguel et al. (2017) analysis of indulgent consumption within second-hand shopping markets, where overconsumption can occur due to the relatively ethical nature and affordability of the commodities.

I argue there is a tension between people possessing an anti-consumerist ethic and indulging in overconsumption, which I explore through the concept of the neoliberal citizen (Wilson, 2017), where people's ethical and moral beliefs are articulated through consumption activism. I argue second-hand shopping and consumption are part of a moral geography (Mansvelt, 2005, 2008), where second-hand charity stores become sites of ethical and moral consumption within the consumption-oriented activism of neoliberal society and citizenship (Wilson, 2017). I also explore how people conceive of their second-hand consumption aligns with their moral and ethical stances, whereby consumption is framed as a moral act directed towards some form of progressive social change (Willis & Schor, 2012) – an ethos that has been widely analysed in other forms of ethical commodity production, retailing (for example, Trade Aid – Howland (2013) and consumption (Carrier, 2007)).

1.6 Demographic Information – National and Regional

In this section of the introduction, I briefly compare national and regional demographic statistics to the profiles of my participants to illustrate the demographic context in which they sit. My regional statistics are, at points, discussed without specificity to ensure the anonymity of my research site and participants, and in this regard.

Regionally, 63% of households (single, couples, or families) own, partly own, or hold their home in a family trust. 37% of households, however, do not own and do not hold their home in family trust. Homeownership rates are similar to national trends, with 66% of households owning their own home. The average rent paid by households is $500 (as of 2023), compared with the national rent of $524. Regionally, my research site is classified as an urban-rural area, with a large urban core containing the majority of residents, surrounded by rural areas with a population of 50,000 residents. This is similar to many other comparable regions in the North Island, with large urban centres surrounded by rural areas.

1.6.1 Ethnicity

Nationally, 67.8% of the population identifies as some form of European, followed by Māori at 17.8%, with those identifying as Asian accounting for 17.3%. Pacific peoples comprise 8.9%, and Middle Eastern, Latin American, and/or African (MELAA) comprise 1.9%. The remainder, 1.1%, identify as something else. By contrast, the regional makeup of the research site has a lower European population and a higher Māori population. Pacific peoples comprised 6%, Asians 4%, and MELAA 0.7%.

1.6.2 Age and Gender

The national median age is 38 years, two years older than the regional age of 36 years. Gender distribution nationally and regionally is similar. Nationally, 50.3% identify as female, 49.3% as male, and 0.4% as other genders. Regionally, 50.2% identify as female, 49.5% as male, and 0.2% as other genders.

1.6.3 Education and Income

Regional Income Range	Percentage of Working Population
$10,000 or less	13.7%
$10,001-$20,000	11.5%
$20,001-$30,000	18.3%
$30,001-$50,000	21%
$50,001-$70,000	16.6%
$70,001-$100,000	12.1%
$100,001 or more	6.9%

Tertiary educational attainment (university, vocational, polytech) is slightly higher regionally, at 39%, than nationally, at 36%. However, 20% of the regional population had no form of qualification (tertiary or secondary) compared with 15% nationally. Regional individual incomes range from $10,000 (or less) to $100,000 (see Table), with the median sitting at $35,000 a year, which is $5,700 lower than the national median of $41,500.

1.6.4 Occupation

There are three key occupational groups: the primary sector (agriculture, fishing, and forestry), industry (manufacturing, construction, and utilities), and services (all other industries). Services include healthcare, social assistance, retail trade, arts, recreation, and other similar services. Nationally, most people (74%) are employed in services, followed by industry at 20%, with the primary sector being the smallest at 6%. Regionally, service-based industries employed the most people collectively, at 35.3% of the employed population, broken down into healthcare and social assistance (11.5%); education and training (9.8%); retail trade

(7.6%); and professional, scientific, and technical services (6.4%). Following them, industry-based employment amounted to 17.1%, with construction accounting for 9.2% and manufacturing at 7.9%. Primary industries, agriculture, forestry, and fishing, amounted to 16.2%, while 31.4% of employed individuals are in other industries that are not specified but likely include smaller service-based industries and utilities. Regionally, of the population aged 15 years and over, 5% are unemployed, with those eligible for superannuation (aged 65 years and over) comprising 16% of the population.

1.7 Participant Profiles

Below is a table containing the demographic information of this study's participants. Due to the article structure of the analytical portions of this thesis, information will be repeated as required. However, this table's intended use is as a reference tool for readers, and it has been structured to allow readers to identify useful information quickly. The information gathered was voluntary and is how participants identify themselves.

Table 1

Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation	Income	Political Leaning
Shirley	71	Woman	European Icelandic	University	Retired	$20,000-$25,000	Left
Astrid	76	Female	Not Given	Secondary	Retired	$25,000-$30,000	Swinging
Robin	63	Woman	NZ European	Polytechnic	Registered Nurse	$100,000-$150,000	Centre
Henrietta	45	Woman	Māori/English/Scottish/Irish	Polytechnic	Op-Shop Manager	$25,000-$30,000	Unsure
Katherine	42	Woman	European	University	Garden Centre	$50,000-$60,000	Apolitical
Cecilia	33	Woman	Tongan, European, New Zealander	University	Shop Manager/Student	$35,000-$40,000	Libertarian
Belinda	27	Woman	Pākehā	University	Emergency Medical Tech	$60-000-$70,000	Left
Regina	18	Woman	Māori, Samoan, NZ European	Secondary	Student	$20,000-$25,000	Left

Of my participants, one declined to provide an ethnic identity; three (37.5%) identified as belonging to more than one ethnic group, with two participants (25%), Henrietta and Regina, identifying as Māori and of European descent, with Regina further identifying as Samoan (12.5%). Cecilia identified as Tongan (12.5%) and a European New Zealander. Of all participants, seven (87.5%) identified as some form of European or non-Māori ethnicity, including NZ European, English, Scottish, Irish, Icelandic, and Pākehā (non-Māori). Compared with regional and national demographics (Stats NZ, 2025), my participants are not indicative of the region's ethnic makeup, as a disproportionate percentage of my participants identify as European and NZ European.

Half of my participants sit within the median age range of 30 to 64 years, Cecilia (33), Katherine (42), Henrietta (45), and Robin (63), with two sitting below the median, Regina (18) and Belinda (27), and two above, Astrid (76) and Shirley (71). The range of ages is generally comparable to that recorded by Stats NZ (2025). The gender makeup of the region is 50.2% women and 49.5% men, with 0.2% identifying as another gender. All participants identified as women, representing 50.25% of the population, with this research not having any participants who identify as men or other genders. In terms of income, my participants range from $20,000 to $150,000, with the median income of the region sitting at $35,800. Of my participants, half sit below the regional median income, with incomes ranging from $20,000 to $30,000: 43.5% of income earners in the region earn below $35,800. The other four have incomes at or above the regional median, ranging from $35,000 to $150,000. Compared to the national median of $41,500, five participants are at or below the median, and three sit above. Six (75%) of my participants have received some form of tertiary education at a university or polytechnic level. Only 39% of the region has received higher education, making my participants more educated than most. The other two have completed secondary education; Regina (18) had plans to attend university, as she had completed high school, and the other, Astrid (76), was retired.

Regarding occupation, all those employed during their interview worked in service industries. Three participants (37.5%) worked in some form of retail: Henrietta as a second-hand store manager, Cecilia as a part-time second-hand store manager, and Katherine at a garden centre, which is higher than the 7.6% reported working within the retail sector regionally (Stats NZ, 2025). Two participants (25%) work in the healthcare sector, Robin as a nurse and Belinda as a medical technician, which is higher than the 11.5% found to work within the healthcare and social assistance sectors. One participant, Regina, categorised herself as a student, and two participants, Astrid and Shirley, are retired, which were not categories recorded by Stats NZ (2025). In terms of age and income range, my participants were indicative of those recorded by Stats NZ (2025).

Regarding education, ethnicity, and occupation, my participants were disproportionately more educated than most, primarily identified as European, NZ European, or other non-Māori ethnicities, and were in service-oriented occupations. Finally, my participants sit fairly evenly across recorded incomes, with half sitting above the median of $35,800 and half sitting below. Ultimately, however, my participants are not particularly indicative of the broad makeup of the region/city where I undertook this research, especially regarding gender, with all identifying as women. Due to this, my study could not ascertain the perspectives of men, non-binary people, and other cohorts regarding second-hand charity shopping. However, due to the gender makeup of this study, it is accurate to state that this piece of research explores, in part, the socio-cultural, economic, and moral/ethical perspectives of women second-hand shoppers in Aotearoa. However, it is not an analysis of gendered influences and roles. To ascertain this, further research and analysis is required, as it is to ascertain the gendered perspectives of men, non-binary people, and other cohorts within the second-hand charity shopping environment, which would require a more diverse range of participants and a greater sample size to ascertain broader trends within second-hand shopping.

1.8 Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured across eight chapters, starting with a review of applicable literature (see Chapter 2). I review first-hand and second-hand (commercial and charity) commodity retailing, as well as Aotearoa-specific literature on second-hand shopping, to provide background context for my research. I then discuss research into morality, ethics, and moral economy, constructing a working definition of moral economy (Carrier, 2018; Scott, 1977; Sneath, 2006; Thompson, 1971) and morality (Laidlaw, 2010; Sayer, 2011). In Chapter Three, I explain the methodology of this thesis, such as research design and methods, the ethics of this research, and data analysis techniques. Chapter Four is an overview of my ethnographic fieldwork, including my research site, the people I interacted with, customers, volunteers, staff, and donors, and the donations we received. Chapter Five deals with the commodity form of second-hand items. Specifically, it examines second-hand charity's significant dependence on – and contributions to – overconsumption, the process of regenerative commodification, and the socio-emotional connections people generate with second-hand commodities via imaginative biographisation. Chapter Six examines the gifting form in second-hand charity, outlining an 'ideal' and 'negative' model of second-hand charity donations and performative

(Goffman, 1956) aspects of second-hand charity retail. I also explore the ethos of the congealing gift and how this is generated within the moral economy of the second-hand charity store. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I analyse second-hand charity stores' moral/economic tensions, such as commodity-market relations and the ethics of charity, donation and the ethics of use-value and reuse, and ethical consumption and anti-consumerist ethics. In Chapter Eight, my conclusion, I summarise my research and discuss possible avenues of future research.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Research into second-hand consumption (both commercial and charitable) in Aotearoa is sparse, and this thesis aims to add to the nascent discussions on second-hand selling/purchasing/consumption and critically examine its place and influence in various people's lives (e.g. donors, consumers, sellers, volunteers, etc.). International literature on second-hand practices, however, is vast, and it is an examination of this literature I begin with, alongside a brief discussion of first-hand retailing (Cox & Brittain, 2004), comparing it with second-hand retail structures. I explore the literature on second-hand economies through the two spheres and registers of retailing and consumption, and peer-to-peer and institutional. The second-hand stores and markets explored in this section come from various socio-cultural backgrounds, from the American garage sale and Mexican swap meets to second-hand charity in Britain and South African markets. The purpose of this section is to establish the necessary background for my analysis of a second-hand charity store in Aotearoa (as discussed below) and to provide context for my discussion in Chapter Five, which utilises the work of Gretchen Herrmann (2015) to analyse imaginative commodity biographisation and regenerative commodification. Following this, I discuss second-hand research conducted in Aotearoa to provide the appropriate context for my findings, situating it within similar explorations of second-hand shopping.

Furthermore, concepts and theories of moral economy play a significant part in understanding second-hand charity's moral and ethical dimensions. Therefore, the latter two sections of this literature review focus on establishing a foundational conception of moral economy and morality/ethics from which I analyse and position my research. Utilising the works of Carrier (2018), Sneath (2006), Scott (1977), and Thompson (1971), I establish a definition and understanding of moral economy that focuses on the production and reproduction of positive social relations that fit within the context of the second-hand charity store and contextualises the social relationships that form the moral economy of second-hand charity. Furthermore, I examine the work of Laidlaw (2010) and Sayer (2011) to establish a general understanding of morality and ethics, incorporating this into my discussion of moral economy, based upon Sayer's concepts of well-being and ill-being and Laidlaw's discussions of socio-cultural context. Concepts and theories of moral economy play a significant role in understanding second-hand charity's moral and ethical dimensions (donations and consumption).

2.2 First-Hand Retail and Second-Hand Retail

2.2.1 Brief Overview of First-Hand Retailing

First-hand retailing is defined as the sale of new goods to consumers for personal or household use, and where the end-point of market and profit-oriented commodity production and supply chains sees commodities sold to consumers (Cox & Brittain, 2004). Unlike second-hand economies, which rely on donated goods, first-hand retail operates through complex supply chains, where buyers procure merchandise in bulk from wholesalers, who then distribute it to stores based on expected demand (Levy et al., 2023). Pricing, product selection, advertising, and merchandising (e.g., seasonal displays or demographic-specific assortments) are utilised to draw consumers in and create product demand, ideally maximising profit. Staff in retail environments are managed hierarchically, with store managers enforcing policies and expectations from corporate head offices, termed "centralisation" by Cox and Brittain (2004, p.232). The profit-driven, standardised model of first-hand retail contrasts sharply with second-hand charities' reliance on donated goods, volunteer labour, and charitable aims. However, second-hand charity stores increasingly adopt first-hand retail strategies (standardised pricing, visual merchandising, etc.) to remain competitive (Gregson et al., 2002; Wilson, 2012).

2.2.2 Second-Hand Retail

For this thesis, second-hand can be, generally speaking, thought of in two high-order spheres: peer-to-peer and institutional. Peer-to-peer second-hand is categorised as between individuals, such as online second-hand platforms, whereas institutional/corporate second-hand is stores usually run by organisations, such as commercial and charity second-hand stores. I have chosen to conceptually and theoretically work with these two spheres, as they encompass and overlap with the distinctions evident in second-hand environments, with peer-to-peer being an established phrase within the literature, helping to contrast with institutional second-hand charity. Peer-to-peer second-hand is categorised as between individuals, such as garage sales (Herrmann, 2015, 2019), whereas institutional/corporate second-hand conforms more readily to first-hand retail structures and hierarchies, such as establishing stores run by managers, who enforce the standardisation of practices set by a central authority (head office) (such as a second-hand charity store). These two spheres of second-hand experience overlap and create experiences and markets that are not as clearly delineated as they first appear (see Watt and Dubbeld (2016) and Nock (2009)). Furthermore, there are points of similarity between second and first-hand commercial retailing, such as curated shopping environments and a wave of professionalisation that has caused a shift in how second-hand stores (particularly those of the institutional variety) organise themselves.

Peer-to-peer second-hand exchange happens at the level of individuals, where an exchange of a person's possessions for money is undertaken, such as in garage sales. Garage sales are second-hand environments often charged with personal stories, as sellers infuse objects for sale with possessive biographies and affect. Sellers and buyers often exchange stories, conveying their reasons for sale or use aspirations, with biographical and emotional content leaping from one to the other (Herrmann, 2015). Herrmann (2015) argues garage sales in America are a rite of passage for the seller, signalling transitions in their life, marked by the dispossession of personal possessions (McCracken, 1986) and displayed through the quantity and type of possessions for sale ('dispossession' here is the act of giving up an item you own, not someone forcing or coercing you into getting rid of it).

Peer-to-peer environments also exist in cyberspace. Parguel, Lunardo, and Benoit-Moreau (2017) examine how a range of online peer-to-peer buying platforms influenced people's consumption habits. They focused on consumer justifications of indulgent consumption (buying more items and impulsive purchasing) in peer-to-peer second-hand markets, arguing that online platforms reduce cognitive dissonance, whereby people seek to establish internal consistency between values, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and consumption habits. This was most apparent in those who were materialistic and environmentally conscious. Parguel et al. (2017) focused on how their participants perceived the importance of reducing consumer waste, the environmental impact of their purchases (e.g. pollution), and whether this impacted how much they bought. Parguel et al. (2017) found that peer-to-peer second-hand consumption reduced cognitive dissonance, as people perceive it as environmentally friendly, ultimately self-licensing and partaking in indulgent consumption. Participants viewed such consumption as a way to sate their desire for material goods, aligning their consumption habits with their personal opinions and ethical perspectives.

Peer-to-peer second-hand also extends to more semi-structured events, such as the Milnerton Market in Cape Town, South Africa, where Watt and Dubbeld (2016) conducted ethnographic research into second-hand 'flea markets'. The market is an association of traders selling a mix of second-hand items paired with a culture of negotiation and bargaining. Watt and Dubbeld (2015) explain that the market appears to be a spontaneous centre of exchange, disorderly and chaotic; however, it is a veneer carefully orchestrated by the Traders Association and stall owners. Under the surface, the Milnerton Informal Traders Association and the Milnerton council have placed speed limit signs and rules of conduct at the entrances to the market, with plain-clothed police and uniformed association members patrolling the stalls. The traders, in contrast, have cultivated a sense of disorder, spontaneity, and chance through the layout of the stalls, the commodities on display, and the chaotic flow of people and banter, making it challenging to discern traders from customers.

Similarly, Turunen and Gossen (2024) analysed how vintage stores curate a sense of newness by periodically changing out products. This is similar to the performative environments of mass retailing (Cochoy, 2007), where retail environments are like curated 'gardens' that commodities inhabit and that consumers experience. Creating curated, yet seemingly 'spontaneous', environments of exchange can be similar between first and second-hand retailing. This 'spontaneity', 'disorder, 'chaos', and 'newness' are performative. The Milnerton Market may appear to any marketgoer as a spontaneous and seemingly chaotic environment (which is what many seek), but it does not really exist, with the Milnerton Association setting rules and boundaries that sellers follow, all to create a performative atmosphere which encourages and provokes second-hand commodity consumption (Cochoy, 2007; Levy et al., 2023; Watt & Dubbeld, 2016). Furthermore, traders at the Milnerton Market love to bargain, adding another layer of spontaneity, and in one interview that Watt and Dubbeld (2016) conducted, Tessa and her husband (routine traders at the market) will go out of their way to teach customers how to bargain, as they set their prices high so that customers have to bargain them down. A long-time market-goer, Amelia, also expressed satisfaction with bargaining, as it feels like winning.

In America, Nock (2009) researched swap meets of Mexican immigrants in San Joaquin Valley, California, which offer second-hand commodities popular among the resident Mexican and Latino populations. The swap meets, organised by managers, have vendors renting out spaces, often requiring a seller's license to do business, and contain vendors of new and used commodities. Furthermore, a sense of community is present in the swap meets that Nock (2009) visited. Being primarily composed of Mexican and Latino migrants, swap meets were often friends or family. People who visit or sell at swap meets, Nock (2009) observed, reproduce and form social connections, reminisce about home, and have fun in de-stressing from their everyday lives. Swap meets also allow bargaining, with some vendors allowing customers to layby items, called *apartado*. Milnerton Market and swap meets have some form of organisational structure to facilitate and maintain the peer-to-peer exchanges, with sellers directly interacting with buyers in recognisable 'retail-like' environments with distinct socio-cultural distinctions.

Institutional second-hand environments are those associated with particular organisations or chain stores; these can take the form of for-profit second-hand or second-hand charity retailers (the subject of this particular thesis). Similar to first-hand retail, second-hand charity retail often utilises a hierarchical organisational style, with managers as go-betweens, ensuring paid and volunteer staff adhere to the policies of head office. Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks (2002) found that a 'wave of professionalisation' had shifted British second-hand charity stores into mainstream retailing. They argued that reforms included store standardisation, image enhancement, segmentation (dividing your customer base into different cohorts based on specific criteria), and the specialisation of second-hand charity stores, whereby charity stores focus their advertising and commodities towards particular markets. Gregson et al. (2002) volunteered in an Oxfam second-hand charity store in Britain, which utilised a similar corporate structure discussed by Cox and Brittain (2004), where segmentation and specialisation meant reforming the image of the charity stores and their organisation. In a meeting with the district manager of the Oxfam store, Gregson et al. (2002) and the rest of the volunteers were told about the changes in structure and organisation – such as removing "bric-a-brac" (Gregson et al., 2002, p.1669) and instead focusing on Trade Aid goods, instituting sales targets, and maintaining particular "sections" or product departments to increase targeted sales. One team, which was comprised of two people, Sandra and Judy, were called "the bric-a-brac ladies", and the removal of bric-a-brac was couched in terms of "rubbish" (Gregson et al., 2002, p.1669) that never sold well.

In the case of the charity store where I volunteered, similar reforms had occurred some years prior. These reforms occurred when head office moved the local store to a different location. They established mainstream-like retail settings and introduced standardised pricing. Henrietta, the manager of the store, commented:

> "…when we first moved to where we are now, we went from being…$5-$3 to $10 and $15. I was worried that we were gonna lose customers. But overnight our customer [base] changed." – Henrietta.

This resulted in shifting the store's market to more affluent consumers and increasing revenue. A standardised pricing system was created, whereby each category of commodity was set at a specific price (books being set at $3, women's tops set between 7$ and 15$, etc.) due to other stores pricing donations inconsistently, such as on the personal tastes of managers and volunteers. The professionalisation (Gregson et al., 2002) of second-hand charity shops is being undertaken to compete with the expansion of commercial second-hand retailing, such as that found by Persson and Hinton (2023) in Sweden, who found a marked increase in for-profit actors within second-hand markets. Persson and Hinton (2023) argue that the commercialisation of second-hand markets in Sweden has led to marked decreases in the quality of clothing in not-for-profit stores, as for-profit stores began offering to buy people's unwanted clothing, accepting only higher quality clothing to sell at a higher price. Due to this, Persson and Hinton (2023) note that not-for-profit second-hand stores, seeking to compete with for-profit stores, have undertaken processes of professionalisation, such as reinvesting money into marketing, hiring professionals from for-profit retail, spending money to secure commodities, and to 'improve' organisational structures – resulting in decreases in charitable spending.

Finally, it is important to understand that second-hand retailing causes a disconnection between the original owner of an item and its subsequent owners. As Herrmann (2015) explored, peer-to-peer environments are suffused with biographical stories and emotions, which are transferred when something is sold. This is absent in second-hand retail and is explored in Chapter Five. Furthermore, commercial second-hand trading within peer-to-peer environments can involve the exchange of items also disconnected from their previous owners, an ethos particularly evident in on-selling, where a person will purchase second-hand items and then mark up the price to turn a profit when on-selling.

2.3 Second-Hand Literature in Aotearoa

Kirsten Koch (2021) discusses fast fashion, upcycling, and second-hand clothing in Otago, examining their roles within the fashion industry. Second-hand clothing within the global supply chain is often shipped to low-income countries in the Global South, serving as one of the ways the Western world exploits and profits from them (Koch, 2021). Furthermore, as the shift to fast fashion in the first-hand market increases, the quality of second-hand clothing has begun to decline, as observed by Persson and Hinton (2023) in Sweden (cited in Koch, 2021). Koch (2021) discusses upcycling in their investigation of textile use in Otago, which involves restyling, embellishing, altering, and mending second-hand clothes, extending the garment's life, and contributing to sustainable fashion. Koch's (2021) research focused on the uses people find for second-hand garments and their use as material for sustainable upcycling. She concluded that upcycling is a form of activism that aligns with her participants' philosophical and ethical views and situates such activism within the global fashion system as a means of increasing awareness of clothing waste and worker rights, with the caveat that upcycling and reuse are not easy fixes to either problem, due to the time required to develop such skills (Koch, 2021). Furthermore, according to Koch (2021), participants in the textile industry were unable to secure stable, full-time employment and had to seek alternative employment, which conflicted with their desired textile work.

Similarly, Deborah Noon (2011) concluded that second-hand shopping was partly motivated by a moral obligation to give back and a desire to consume ethically and sustainably, particularly concerning charity second-hand stores in New Zealand. However, Noon (2011) found that this was overshadowed by her participants' primary motivation of value thrifting (getting value for money, a bargain, or finding a 'treasure'), gaining enjoyment from the activity, having fun, and desiring to express their lifestyle aesthetic (though values of sustainable and ethical consumption do influence how people express themselves in this way).

A study in Otago by Valerie Wilson (2012) researched second-hand charity retail as an alternative mode of commodity consumption within a capitalist society. Wilson (2012) explored nine forms of charity retailing, including the Salvation Army, Presbyterian Support, Saint Vincent de Paul, and others. Wilson (2012), having researched a wider array of stores, found people often volunteer at multiple stores, generating thriving social connections and community among them. Furthermore, Wilson (2012) also found that second-hand charity stores had begun to shift and change their structures in a wave of professionalisation. This resulted in a change in store branding, a shift in acceptable donations towards better quality items, a greater use of 'retro' and 'vintage' marks to cast items as chic and thus desirable, and a commensurate increase in prices. This has shifted the customer base and perception of the stores, not as 'op-shops' but as destination stores for vintage and retro shoppers (Wilson, 2012). Finally, Wilson (2012) discusses how second-hand charity stores merge consumer culture with charitable goals while retaining their distinction from the first-hand retailing forms they seek to imitate.

Second-hand research in Aotearoa often focuses on the intersection between fashion, clothing consumption, and sustainability, as seen in the work of Lisa McNeill and Rebecca Moore (2015). They found that individual perceptions of fashion heavily influence the acceptance of second-hand commodities and participant attitudes regarding sustainable, ethical, and second-hand fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Some participants, seeking to reconcile their views on sustainability with their desire to remain fashionable, held positive views of second-hand shopping (McNeill & Moore, 2015). In contrast, others rarely or never shopped second-hand, viewing it as neither good nor bad (McNeill & Moore, 2015). McNeill and Moore's (2015) participants predominantly perceived second-hand and thrift stores as 'smelly' and 'dirty', rather than a form of consumption they enjoyed. McNeill and More (2015) recruited participants from a broad range of consumers, seeking to broadly contextualise how people in Aotearoa perceive second-hand shopping, in contrast to my participants, who all choose to shop second-hand.

A later study by McNeill and Venter (2019) examined female overconsumers and their motivations and barriers to collaborative consumption (sharing, swapping, renting, or trading goods). Similar to the findings of the 2015 study, McNeill and Venter's (2019) participants viewed fashion as essential to fitting in and generating positive self-perception. In contrast, however, participants preferred to shop second-hand for designer items, as these items were perceived as enhancing their social status. McNeill and Venter (2019) further note that such consumption was primarily motivated by limited finances and a desire to remain fashionable, rather than a commitment to ethical consumption.

Rachel Stansfield (2022) diverges slightly from the research discussed above, shifting her focus towards the materiality of second-hand items, their relational power, and the role of material affordances (durability, softness, hardness, smoothness, etc.) in how second-hand retail environments and items relate to humans and each other. Stansfield (2022) focuses heavily on the individual morals of her participants and, through a multigenerational perspective, examines their different moral perspectives. Furthermore, Stansfield (2022) discusses the apparent contradictions within broader narratives of second-hand consumption and greenwashing by corporate organisations in the disposal of items. Stansfield (2022) concludes that second-hand shopping is fraught with contradictions and moral ambiguities. On a final note, I would like to state that in the analytical portions of this thesis, I primarily compare my findings with those of Stansfield (2022) and Noon (2011), as their ethnographic investigations and research focus are more closely aligned with my findings.

2.4 Moral Economy

Before going further, it is prudent to address my use of the term 'moral economy'. Moral economy is, in its simplest terms, a way of viewing economic activity and organisation in terms of its moral aspects. The moralities and ethics at play within a given economic situation come in many forms, from the purely contractual and alienable (and perhaps even anonymous) transactional exchanges (Sneath, 2006) within contemporary market economies to the enactional exchanges (Sneath, 2006) used to reproduce ongoing, inalienable social relationships. The contrast between transactional and enactional exchange is evident in David Murphy's (2018) analysis of pastoral grazing rights in Mongolia.

Traditional pastoral grazing practices involve reciprocal gifting and the appeasement of spirits to evoke a sense of harmony and resolve in relationships (Murphy, 2018). In contrast, contemporary transactional monetary purchasing of land has led to the extraction of rent by a few wealthy herders, which holds negative moral connotations within Mongolian society (Murphy, 2018). Sneath (2006) argues that, due to the shift towards a capitalist economy in Mongolian society, there has been a transition from an enactional, 'positive' moral economy based on reciprocity and which reproduces social relations, towards a 'negative' transactional and monetary economy. Sneath (2006) discusses the differences between the positive and honourable enactment of social relationships (supplying goods and services in terms of appreciation and obligation) and the negative, corrupt transactions seen as instrumental in contemporary Mongolian society, which are, generally speaking, monetised transactions. The corrupt economy is a specific, negative moral economy, in contrast to my discussion of moral economy, which focuses on second-hand charity stores as positive, socially moral, and enactional economies.

An extended definition of moral economy, as put forth by Carrier (2018), utilising the work of E.P. Thompson (1971) and James Scott (1977), defines it as one where moral economic activity is deeply rooted in social relationships, in which obligations can arise from exchange transactions over time. Such social relationships are based on feelings of obligation and reciprocity that are reproduced through exchange transactions over time, where exchange promotes these feelings, generating social relationships that, in turn, create and are created by exchange. It is essential to note that these obligations are not expected or enforced within the context of second-hand charity stores, as they are personal and based on an individual's ethical and moral values.

For example, Carrier (2018) shops at a local grocery store – he has built up a rapport with the owner and workers, and the length of the relationship (15 years) has created a sense of mutual obligation (Carrier, 2018). The obligation manifests in feelings of unease if he has not purchased anything in some time, or gratitude if the owner sources items that Carrier (2018) expressed interest in buying, expending more effort than what would be gained. The relationship forms a moral economy by introducing an ethical and moral consideration of human relationships to exchange that is not solely predicated on self-interest (Carrier, 2018). In contrast, the historical legacy of Adam Smith, whos seminal work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776, as cited in Ritzer & Ryan, 2011), focused heavily on the conception of a rational economic man who is driven by self-interest and the invisible hand of the free market, meeting their needs through the exchange of goods. However, the free market ultimately benefits the initiator of the transaction and comparatively exploits other transactors, in the form of negative reciprocity, whereby each person seeks to maximise the transaction's output for themselves, to the detriment of all others involved (Sahlin, 1972). Smith's work laid the groundwork for neoliberal economic conceptions of social relations, based on individualistic, self-interested economic exchange, which scholars of moral economy often challenge when researching collective, communal, and altruistic forms of moral economic exchange.

Thompson's (1971) discussion of the moral economy of the English crowd, regarding starvation and the English food riots during the 18th century, was rooted in English society's social and cultural norms and the expected proper functioning of certain parties within the community. Thompson's (1971) moral economy was predicated on what the English crowd (men and woman who protested rising bread prices) saw as morally right regarding fair food prices during a time of scarcity (rather than seeking systemic change), and as such the crowd showed remarkable restraint during this time, as the rioting and protest they engaged in could have been more destructive. The work of James Scott (1977) similarly discusses the moral economy of peasant subsistence in Southeast Asia. Scott (1977) frames it as a moral economy that focuses on community welfare and the stability of the subsistence economy of peasants, critiquing the modernising, individualistic, market-oriented forces that often disregard the social needs and desires of peasant communities.

It is important to note that in Carrier's (2018) discussion, and which he argues is also present within the work of Thompson and Scott, is the association of 'moral' with obligation – that is, to call something moral in this sense is to point to the obligations between people and their underlying relationship. Such as an obligation of fairness when engaging in monetary transactions, predicated on past interactions forming the foundation of the relationship. Changes in the relationship, such as an increase in the price of bread, can lead to its dissolution, as bread buyers view the price increase as unfair and a violation of the relationship's obligations and past foundational interactions (Thompson, 1971). According to Carrier's (2018) definition, the moral element of moral economy is predicated on the perceived fairness of the relationship, its reciprocal content, and specific social context. It would be accurate to state, then, that the reciprocal nature of moral economy discussed by Carrier (2018) and myself is situated as a form of generalised and balanced reciprocity, with some elements of a ‘fair’ negative reciprocity, characterised by a sense of obligation to another, where the reciprocal nature of the relationship is not necessarily equal.

To Carrier (2018), fair and just, within his definition, are held within the ethical and moral judgements of individuals and communities, and refer to transcendental values by which a person or community envisions a better world (Carrier, 2018). Second-hand charity stores fulfil the definition set forth by Carrier (2018) in two ways: they fulfil the transcendent moral element in the causes they advocate and fundraise for (e.g. animal rights or hospice care) and in the commodity retailing services that are accessible to middle and lower-income individuals, whereby the affordability of the items for sale, and the ease of donation, builds and sustains unique customer-donor-store relationships (as will be discussed later), while maintaining a level of fairness and just redistribution (charity support). It is accurate to state that when I use the term ‘moral economy’, I am referencing the social relationships that comprise second-hand charity transactions, be it the exchange of a commodity for money or donating items, and the transcendent moral values that comprise a person or organisations possible motivations (e.g. environmentalism, anti-consumerism, animal welfare, and others). This discussion of moral economy is an effort to justify my use of the term and to provide context for later analysis, contextualising second-hand charity as a form of moral economy.

2.5 Morality, Ethics, and Moral Economy

Comstock (2022) delineates morality as descriptive (societal/individual values) and prescriptive (expected actions). In comparison, Durkheim (1961[1925]) theorises morality and ethics have three key attributes: social discipline, attachment to society, and individual autonomy. Durkheim was chiefly concerned with the disciplinary force of morality, enacted by the forces of society through which human wills are linked, and is the term he used to describe the regulatory aspects of society (Durkheim, 1961[1925]; Howland, 2013), for example, the social authority of a teacher in a classroom. The rules surrounding the situation, such as raising your hand to speak or answer a question, are ethics and rules of discipline that regulate human impulse and desire and are morally founded on the authority and respect ascribed to the teacher, relative to their pupils. Furthermore, authority figures (teachers and parents) transmit social norms to children, encouraging and directing appropriate social conduct. The collective moral and social attachment of people to society fosters a sense of belonging and connection with the group/community (Durkheim, 1961[1925]). Just as discipline seeks tries to instil social norms, feelings of attachment to a community make a person more inclined to adhere to social norms, such as a university student following rules of conduct to remain a member of the university.

Durkheim's (1961[1925]) third aspect of morality is autonomy, which, he argued, was essential to human morality as people do not regard any action as completely moral unless performed freely and without coercion (Durkheim, 1961[1925]). In Durkheim's (1961[1925]) understanding, autonomy is about following a rule/social norm because you understand the meaning or reason behind it, internalising and accepting it, and whatever authority governs it, with conviction, instead of through blind acceptance or coercion (punishment or exclusion). Durkheim (1961[1925]) viewed autonomy as a 'mature' stage, where individuals realise and understand that social norms and rules are essential for individual and collective social well-being.

However, Durkheim's conception of humanity's moral and ethical workings (evident within societal rules, codes, and precepts) was mechanical and left little room for reflection (Howland, 2013). This amounted to a morality of the powerful, which Pierre Bourdieu (1984) highlights in his analysis of dominant social groups and classes imposing 'morality' upon those beneath them through symbolic acts of violence (Weininger, 2002). As Durkheim's (1961[1925]) moral theory is a morality of the powerful, it fails when confronted with contradicting and diverse moral forms, based on class, ethnicity, age, gender, or even individual/personal moralities. Feminist scholars, such as bell hooks (2015), critique such notions of moral domination and discuss how oppressed groups generate opposing moralities within society (Bourdieu, 1984). Zigon (2008, cited in Howland, 2013) further critiques Durkheim, arguing that moral and ethical work is delineated between unreflective and reflective, and that changes in public and institutional moralities can occur over time when individuals undertake intentional ethical self-work, reflexively examining and critiquing the moral disposition of themselves and others. Finally, Durkheim (1961[1925]) discussed the transmission of societal morality through conscious, articulate pedagogy, failing to articulate unconscious and dispositional moralities, unlike Sayer's (2011) analysis of foundational habitus and often subconsciously reproduced and enacted moralities. However, Durkheim's (1961[1925]) analysis gave rise to moral pluralism and the notion of relativistic morality through the inclusion or exclusion of social groups (societies, families, nations, humanity, etc.), which leads me to the work of James Laidlaw (2010) and his analysis of moral beliefs and practices as relying upon the sociocultural context of a given society or community.

Laidlaw (2010) draws heavily upon Foucault's discussion of ethics as projects, hinging upon techniques of the self and choice, where people strive to become and act as different moral persons, and where ethical existence is nullified if a person's freedom is eradicated. Laidlaw (2010), arguing along similar lines, views individual choice within moral and ethical practices as indispensable, whereby individual autonomy, built through dependent social relations, is essential in creating ethical subjects. Laidlaw (2010) explains individual moral autonomy as achieved through dependence upon another, such as between a teacher and a student, where the student, taking a subordinate position, is led towards autonomy, becoming equal with the teacher once autonomy is reached.

A useful addition that contextualises Laidlaw's (2010) conception of morality is Andrew Sayer (2011), who argues that human morality and ethical action are often subconscious and habitual, are based on prior experiences and enacted via associated intuitive-like, emotional responses to current circumstances. Sayer (2011) also discusses the relativist lean within social sciences, where human morality is relative to an individual or community's contingent perspectives on what they consider moral or immoral, such as their perspectives on drugs or sexuality. Though this may apply to some circumstances and objects of moral debate, Sayer (2011) argues that some situations provoke widely shared emotional, moral responses, such as seeing starving children, that significantly counter relativist arguments of morality. Due to this, Sayer (2011) argues that foundational morality and ethicality stem from human conceptions of well-being and ill-being, and are often socio-culturally defined, consistent with Laidlaw's (2010) moral arguments. Furthermore, Sayer (2011) argues that social phenomena are, however, also subject to collective human evaluations and evaluative descriptions (such as compassionate, racist, cruel, or good), which reflect what people perceive as contributing towards individual and collective well-being or ill-being. Furthermore, social structures, norms, and social relations influence how we, in Sayer's (2011) analysis, construct and enact our moral and ethical lives.

Sayer (2011) also argues that it is possible to hegemonically fabricate a sense of well-being that aligns with socio-cultural contexts of domination and inequality. The social, economic, and political repression of women in America or New Zealand (historically and/or currently), for instance, was couched in positive moral terms (hooks, 2015) and was considered ‘right’ in terms of the patriarchal domination of society. However, Laidlaw (2010) and Sayer (2011) argue that the inability to exercise personal freedom and benevolent humanity constitutes ill-being, making any overarching, oppressive socio-cultural principles, structures, and practices inherently immoral. In contrast, well-being, and thus morality, would be measured by the freedom and access women (or other populations) have to economic, social, and political resources, roles, and practices within any given society, necessitating a shift in moral thought away from the prior acceptance of domination and inequality. Freedom and choice, in this instance, are the foundation of my conception of a well-being-based morality, which recognises different socio-cultural contexts and what these might entail (Laidlaw, 2010; Sayer, 2011). It is important to recognise that Laidlaw’s (2010) argument regarding morality, although morality being socio-culturally defined, it is not static or unchanging; societies have continuing moral and ethical arguments and the circumstances that inform Sayer’s (2011) conception of ill-being and well-being morality shifts depending on the collective perspectives on what people think makes a good life, which he does recognise in his work. This reflexive moral work interwoven with people’s habitus (Howland, 2013) allows the dynamic alteration of a person’s morality and ethics as they interact with the world and the moral situations that inhabit it.

The participants in this study have perspectives on what is or is not moral; they enact these morals through ethical actions, such as donating to and purchasing from second-hand charity stores, producing and sustaining the store’s moral economy. These moral perspectives of the charity as an institutional collective, which intersects with (and dialectically generates) individual shoppers’ moral perspectives, are based upon what Sayer (2011) would define as well-being, as they are concerned with the well-being of people (sustainability, providing end-of-life care, proving housing, etc.) and, in the case of animal rights charities such as the SPCA, non-human animals also. These values also envision and seek to enact a better world (albeit in an effectively enclaved social context), meeting the requirements of Carrier (2018) in his discussion of transcendent values in moral economy. It is accurate, therefore, to state that the foundation of my thesis is predicated upon the conception of moral economy as a set of moralised human relationships and the transcendental values (or morals) they hold (Carrier, 2018), as it relates to Sayer’s (2011) conception of well-being and, as Laidlaw (2010) discusses, the specific, yet varied, socio-cultural contexts encountered in a second-hand charity store in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review aimed to examine academic works that contextualised my analysis of second-hand shopping and charity within the appropriate literature. It explored second-hand retail to provide examples of the forms it can take. It discussed the varied socio-cultural and moral phenomena that influence first-hand and second-hand (commercial and charity) consumption and the moral economies these generate, as well as the similarities and differences between them, such as the importance of biographical stories (Herrmann, 2015) in peer-to-peer second-hand commercial exchange. It explored the concept of moral economy and constructed a working definition from the works of Carrier (2018), Sneath (2006), Scott (1977), and Thompson (1971), which has allowed me to apply the concept of moral economy to my analysis of second-hand charity, understanding and contextualising the social relationships that comprise such an economy. Finally, to understand people's moral and ethical motivations in my research, I constructed a working definition of morality and ethics that focuses on how action and transcendental values (Carrier, 2018) impact people's well-being and ill-being, which is compatible with my definition of moral economy. It is essential to consider how people's actions and transcendental values influence a discussion of moral economy, as they directly correlate with how people conceptualise and seek to attain or bring about human and non-human (animal) well-being.

Chapter Three – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The original objective of my research was to explore sustainability ethics within the second-hand shopping community of a semi-rural New Zealand City. In reality, I found a more diverse and untapped area of investigation that called for a reflexive adaptation of my research methodology and preconceptions of second-hand purchasing and consumption. The theoretical stance of this research remains the same, firmly situated within the domain of critical theory. The reflexive nature of critical theory allows for an adaptive research approach while maintaining the core goal of examining, exploring, and critiquing the social world and the relations of domination within society (May, 2011, pp.38-39). This research is also fundamentally exploratory, being firstly based on research into the moral economy of a single second-hand charity shop, and, along with its critical leanings, seeks to expand upon an area of research that is relatively limited in scope and theoretical analysis. It is the nature of exploratory research, as Denscombe (2010, pp.109-110) discusses, to be flexible, often exhibiting an emergent design, adapting to the circumstances of the research.

Before moving forward, a note on the theoretical influences and the ultimate concern of this piece of research is required. This thesis will utilise Marxist theory to analyse and conceptualise its findings at several points, taking a critical perspective as the basis of this study. My research is primarily concerned with people and commodities and the underlying ethics of second-hand consumption and purchasing. That is to say, this thesis is concerned with the relationship between people and things, and it is relevant to include Marxist theory within it, especially in the critique of how people conceptualise their social lives in material objects (commodity fetishism) (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006, pp.68-69). In terms of scope, this research does not possess an adequate number of participants to examine the trends of entire cohorts, such as that required by class analysis, or has the required diversity to explore the differences between ethnic, gender, or queer cohorts. The specifics of this study will be discussed later in this chapter.

My research aimed to explore second-hand charity shopping, examining the emergent ethical, economic, and socio-cultural aspects that exist between participants and second-hand charity shopping as an institution. To explore second-hand charity shopping, I deployed a two-step mixed-methods approach, consisting of participant-observation fieldwork, where I volunteered at a second-hand charity store every Thursday afternoon for three months and where I also distributed short recruitment questionnaires aimed at recruiting research participants to participate in semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). After the conclusion of my participant-observation fieldwork and the collection of completed questionnaires, semi-structured interviews (n=8) were conducted to ascertain shoppers' perspectives regarding second-hand charity shopping. The sequential nature of the research allowed me to become more familiar with the second-hand environment, including its internal processes, practices, management, volunteers, and clientele. It allowed me to generate more data than I could by conducting interviews alone. My participant-observation fieldwork also fostered relationships with the people I worked alongside, creating shared experiences with some of my interview participants, and led to deep social and reflexive insights, which will be examined in later chapters. In this chapter, I first discuss the research design and methodology. Secondly, I discuss the ethical considerations. Thirdly, I discuss the recruitment of interview participants, the structure of the interviews, and data analysis. A table of the participants has also been provided and will be referred to where appropriate.

3.2 Research Design and Methods

Qualitative, exploratory research approaches are taken when an area of inquiry is under-researched and requires researchers to maintain flexibility, reacting to the circumstances and findings that arise during research (Denscombe, 2010, p.109). The original data collection of this research consisted first of a recruitment questionnaire and then of semi-structured interviews. However, when I began this research, I realised that my familiarity with second-hand shopping and the research's exploratory nature required an element of depth I was lacking. I decided to utilise a multi-methods, ethnographic approach centred on participant observation fieldwork to understand and familiarise myself with second-hand shopping. David and Sutton (2011, p.151) argue that participant-observation fieldwork within explorative research methodologies offers a greater source of exploratory data collection than methodologies solely utilising interviews or other practices. Alexandros Argyriadis (2021, pp.2037-2038) discusses the ability of ethnography to generate an in-depth understanding of what is being researched, alongside the researcher's reflexivity becoming an instrumental tool in data collection. This required me to utilise participant-observation, write up fieldnotes, and ask customers, other volunteers, and workers questions. Observation played an important role, allowing me to see and experience second-hand shopping. My fieldwork involved volunteering at a charity second-hand store between October 2023 and December 2023. Concurrently with my fieldwork, I utilised a short questionnaire (see Appendix A) to recruit possible interview participants and background information for interview question generation. These questionnaires were placed at my fieldwork site and several other charity stores in the city.

The second stage of my research involved undertaking semi-structured interviews, which were utilised due to their fluid nature, with a mix of open-ended and closed questions to collect participant views on second-hand shopping (Curtis & Curtis, 2011, pp.27-28). Utilising open-ended questions allows the participant to discuss what is relevant to them; the role I played during the interviews was to ask for elaboration and clarification, or in many cases, I joined in on what was being discussed, offering my experiences as points of discussion. The interview is not a one-sided process but a dynamic space where knowledge production is collaborative (Curtis & Curtis, 2011, p.49). The interview participants were selected after I had collected the questionnaire. First, I reviewed each questionnaire, collecting the contact details of those interested in becoming interview participants. This process gave me a pool of 18 possible interview participants. Eight were randomly selected out of those who replied to my efforts to contact them. For the scope of this thesis, eight participant interviews, ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour, gave a considerable amount of usable data, adequate for the scope of a MA Sociology thesis.

3.3 Ethics

This project underwent a peer-review process and was deemed low-risk by the Massey University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Ethical considerations arose around the privacy, rights, and safety of participants and researcher. It is often essential within research to maintain the privacy of participants. Given this, my fieldwork site, participants, and questionnaire sites have been anonymised via pseudonyms. Furthermore, in line with MUHEC guidelines, all information has been kept confidential, with participants informed of their rights via information sheets, detailing the research and systems in place to protect their information (Wiebe, Mills, & Durepos, 2010). The information sheets, consent forms, recruitment questionnaire, and demographic form are in Appendix A (identifying information has been redacted). Furthermore, the agency of participants has been protected per MUHEC guidelines, with all participants able to withdraw within a reasonable amount of time and receive a copy of their interview transcripts, audio recordings, and a findings document at the conclusion of this research. Participants were sent a copy of their completed transcript and were given a month from receiving it to pull from the study – this time was provided to allow participants to add comments or notes, though no participants did.

3.4 Interviews

The second data generation phase involved semi-structured interviews, held in meeting rooms at the local library. The rooms offered a silent environment with clear public access. The interview process began with participants filling in a brief demographic form (see Appendix A), which collected basic demographic information.

Building a strong rapport with interview participants in social research is important. Curtis and Curtis (2011, pp.63-66) stress the importance of rapport-building in creating and maintaining an interview process conducive to data collection. Rapport building begins with putting the interview participant at ease; Curtis and Curtis (2011, pp.64-65) suggest beginning with non-threatening questions, such as name, date of birth, and occupation. Besides collecting potentially useful information, the purpose of the demographic form was to help participants feel at ease and give them a chance to ask any questions about the interview or research. My fieldwork and growing experience with second-hand shopping also contributed to a shared common ground that allowed me to undertake the interview with a greater depth of understanding and shared experience.

Interviews allow researchers to gain insights into people's lived experiences, opinions, values, and aspirations (May, 2011, p.131). The interviews were structured using primarily open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The first section of the interview contained questions that ascertained how often participants shopped and how they felt about second-hand shopping. The middle of the interviews was structured so participants could reflect on their second-hand shopping experiences and their ethical, social, cultural, and economic views. The final section of the interview focused on more abstract or unfamiliar terms used to gain an understanding of how participants conceptually understood second-hand shopping and the items they were buying. This final section contained questions about the 'cost of living crisis', severe weather, and whether participants thought about production labour rights and conditions when purchasing second-hand. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow for spontaneous avenues of questioning (May, 2011, pp.134-135); this allowed me to shift the interview down new avenues of questioning, while maintaining a general structure to return to. The semi-structured nature allowed me to draw comparisons and differences between those I interviewed and created a depth of qualitative data that has complemented my ethnographic fieldwork.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis began during my ethnographic fieldwork. Observing, asking questions, and participating as a volunteer provided a wealth of data, which I recorded in my field notes. Well-written and full field notes are the foundation of good ethnographic research, as David and Sutton (2011, p.161) suggest. The inductive nature of ethnographic research allows the researcher to examine and conduct preliminary analysis, where thoughts are written down, and interpretive readings can be adjusted to explore unexpected avenues of knowledge. This form of data analysis, where theory generation feeds back into the data generation process, is referred to as qualitative data analysis (David & Sutton, 2011, pp.321, 323). Using fieldwork allowed me to conduct a preliminary analysis, forming interview questions that targeted points of interest I wanted to discuss with participants.

My fieldwork was essential in forming preliminary thoughts and theories; however, as David and Sutton (2011, pp.330-331) discuss, robust initial findings should be critically re-examined via a 'second round' of data generation. In line with qualitative analysis, the second round of data generation (one-on-one interviews) challenged and improved upon my initial thoughts and findings from my ethnography. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed by me. During the interviews, I would write down keywords or phrases that participants used, such as 'unique', 'quality', or 'cleanouts'. These words were common among participants and were highlighted to compare similarities or differences between interviewees. This helped me identify qualities, habits, perceptions, and descriptions that participants made about second-hand shopping and their practices. David and Sutton (2011, pp.331-332) discuss identifying common themes as coding. Coding is the process by which qualitative analysis identifies and collates data. Each time a common theme is identified, it is tagged in some form, which allows the researcher to identify how uncommon or common a theme is. Themes refer to words, phrases, and meanings within the data (David & Sutton, p.331), such as 'unique' or 'quality'. The utilisation of coding (identifying themes) must be paired with deciphering, which is the process by which a researcher must justify their claim of having identified a pattern, connection, or difference between data sets (David & Sutton, p.331). The justification of a claim through qualitative analysis is often achieved by demonstrating several examples of a particular claim, demonstrating a pattern and supporting the researcher's argument.

Identifying what each participant had in common first allowed me to generate 'memos' which David and Sutton (2011, p.332) define as "…notes that researchers leave for themselves as they go through the data…". These memos allowed me to keep track of possible linkages, descriptions, and examples that illustrated particular points. Using these tools allowed me to identify similar themes in my field notes, and, due to my fieldwork work, I could ask clarifying questions or prompt more descriptive examples and explanations from participants about particular themes in my preliminary analysis, further challenging and improving it. Taking notes and utilising codes, themes, and memos allowed me to structure my thoughts in a tangible format. Identifying themes and placing memos allowed me to identify current research around particular topics, helping me narrow down the relevant literature.

3.6 Conclusion

Throughout my research, I learned to become a competent and responsive researcher, listening to people's stories. It also allowed me to re-examine my preconceptions of second-hand shopping, gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of it. The initial aim of this research was to examine whether recent extreme weather and awareness of climate change had influenced people's choices to shop second-hand, with a particular emphasis on environemntal sustainability ethics. I found a more diverse and contradictory practice, with multi-layered ethicalities and underlying contradictions connecting to broader socio-economic realities. My method evolved with this, and undertaking ethnographic research has allowed me to gain first-hand knowledge and experience that aided my analysis of the practice. This chapter, having detailed my research design, its methodology, and analytical tools, also discussed the exploratory purpose of this study, based within the realm of critical theory and Marxist critique. The next chapter will contain my ethnographic write-up, which is separated from my methodology to maintain its narrative flow.

Chapter Four – Ethnographic Fieldwork

Vignette 1.

The store became familiar to me, the smell of dust in the air, the methodical sorting of donations becoming routine. It was the 23rd of November, the afternoon was hot; a small fan working overtime to cool down the room. Henrietta had asked me to look at an old clock; I knew very little about clocks, so I looked it up to see if I could fix it. It was a torsion clock, it ran through the rotation of a weight at the bottom of a piece of string. The cord was broken, and the glass-panelled case was missing one side. We put it out anyway, people still bought things like that.

Later on, an older Pākehā lady came in whom I had seen before. She had bought a vintage handmade purple glass from Scotland. Me and Henrietta got to talking with her as she took notice of the old clock. She had several, she said, sometimes she would sell them. She could repair the clock on sale, but it would not be worth it with its panel missing. She loved old things, sometimes selling them, she enjoys finding something old and unique. It gives her a sense of joy, of connection to the past.

Vignette 2.

"I love it," said the woman standing in the doorway of the changing room. She was a middle-aged Māori woman, trying on a pair of black heels and a black cocktail dress. The next time she came out, having changed back into her own clothes, she was coming up to the counter to pay and would spot something else she liked. Since I started working at the store, I had become familiar with what was happening; people would often find the thing they were looking for and, on their way up to the counter, spot something else they liked the look of. Whether what they found was a kid's toy, a dress, a pair of pants, a blanket, a plate, or an earring, people rarely left with just one item; it was like watching people on a scavenger hunt, repeatedly digging through everything to find something they liked.

Vignette 3.

"We kind of rely on people who shop a lot, who buy too much or go through clothing really fast."

This was from one of the first conversations I had with the manager at the op-shop where I did my fieldwork. I was working at the counter, getting used to how the store register functioned, when a lady came in. She was Pākehā, between 30 and 40 years old, carrying a bag of clothes;

the manager, Henrietta, talked with her a bit, thanking her for her donation. I asked Henrietta how often people donated regularly, and she said the lady who was just in was a frequent donor and often brought clothes into the store. Henrietta said the store has several frequent donors. Some used to own businesses and donate old stock, and others just shop a lot, donating clothes they never wear. She said the store relies on these people, the people who buy more than they need or can possibly wear.

4.1 Introduction

The smell of dust is the first thing you notice when walking into any second-hand store; it fills your nose and becomes ingrained into your memory. This chapter will explore the experiences, events, and conversations I had or overheard when conducting my ethnographic research in a North Island charity store. This chapter is comprised of four parts, each exploring integral aspects of life in a second-hand charity store. Firstly, I discuss my experiences with customers in the store, conversations I overheard, and their reasons for shopping second-hand. Secondly, I explore the conversations I had with volunteers, and in the case of the manager, paid staff, and their views on second-hand shopping. Thirdly, I examine the experiences I had with donors, people who would come into the store, donating items or money. Finally, I explain the process that donations go through once they are received by the store, what kinds of items come in, and how they are sorted, cleaned, priced, and discarded. To begin, however, I briefly describe the store and environment in which I conducted my participant-observation research.

Before moving on, however, a point on the structure of this chapter is required. During my time at the op-shop, I broadly categorised people as either customers, volunteers, or donors. The creation of three broad categories is a structural device for the purpose of analysis and is not meant to segregate people into one category, as I will discuss in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.2 Research Site

The store sits on an intersection with the main road, just past the main shopping area in a small North Island city. The pavement is cracked, and the roofing overhead needs replacing. The smell of hot pies and fresh chips lingers just outside the doors. Stepping through, you are hit by the smell of old things, lifetimes of living cling to the clothes on hangers or the vintage glasses on the shelves. That dusty smell hangs in the air as people mill about, while the click-clack of hangers hitting each other as customers rifle through the displayed clothing joins in with the soft sound of the radio in the corner. A volunteer or two walks about, dusting or tidying up the clothes and other displays, humming to themselves as they work. The windows along the side mute the sound of cars and people, and you feel separate from out there, like you have wandered into someplace distinct, with its own rituals, culture, and practitioners.

The store itself is small. Racks of clothes take up most of the space, ordered into men's, women's, and children's. Women's takes up the most space, with only enough aisle space for one person to browse at a time. Men's and children's clothes all fit on one set of racks. The far wall is lined with books and homeware, vintage glasses, and mass-market items, such as identical white coffee mugs, sitting side by side. Vintage glasses were always distinct and colourful and often twisted in shape. The mass market was plain, clear and easy to find in any homeware store. A low table holds children's books and toys, knitting needles and spare yarn. You can see shoes and bags along the windows, and next to them sits a shelf holding bed sheets and duvet covers, curtains and tablecloths. At the counter, you will find jewellery, and on a display shelf, also for sale, you will find more expensive pieces, from small porcelain dishes to vintage and handmade items such as children's knitwear, often made by retired women. Henrietta's store is small but extremely tidy compared to the other second-hand charity stores in the city, containing large spaces to store and display items. Sitting along Main Street, next to a popular bakery in the city, the store gets plenty of foot traffic.

The back room is smaller, filled to the brim with piles of clothes waiting to be sorted through and broken items waiting to be thrown out. A small table sits in the middle, where volunteers and staff patiently and diligently work through the never-ending tide of donations. At the back of the room, a few hooks and a sink finish off the room, and a jug sits on the side, often used to boil water for a cup of tea in the afternoons. Leaving this room, and off to the side of the store area, is a small rectangular room, where donations are often piled high, waiting to be sorted through. Old boxes, grocery or shopping bags, and black garbage bags hold the donations people give to the store. This crowded room also acts as an impromptu office for the store's manager, Henrietta, where she prints out the labels for pricing the store's stock from the computer and printer on her small wooden desk.

4.3 Customers

I rarely went into second-hand stores before this research began, but as I did, I started to pay attention to the items that would come in, first for the purposes of my research, but it quickly led to me purchasing items whenever I would be working at the store. I found myself taking an active interest in purchasing from second-hand stores. I have developed an appreciation of second-hand stores and items. All the customers I spoke to expressed how great the 'deals' are in second-hand stores and how they can always find something they can use. This primarily took the form of clothing. In one conversation I had with Henrietta, I asked her what items the store sold the most of, to which she said women's clothing, men's clothing, and homeware, showing me a spreadsheet of the different categories. In most cases, customers bought clothing and homeware; this included cups, glasses, kitchen utensils, and a myriad of other everyday household items. In some instances, customers would come in to look through the linen shelf, an old bookcase which held duvet covers, sheets, towels, and tea towels.

Customers ranged from young to old and were often women; though men do shop at the store, they came in far less than women, who made up the majority of customers. Teenagers would come in semi-regularly; however, regarding age distribution, most of the store's customers were middle-aged to elderly patrons and were most often women. However, it is important to reiterate that men did shop at the store, but during the times I worked, it was primarily women.

It was common for people, as they were coming up to pay for something, to find several other items they liked. Because of the low prices of the items, customers would often purchase multiple items. It was so common, in fact, that almost every day that I worked, at least one person would do it, almost like a performance; an expression of concentration would cross their faces as they spotted something on a passing rack or shelf. They would pause, reach out and have a look at what they saw. A flicker of surprise or a smile would take hold of their face before they would carry up the item along with the rest of the stuff they wanted to purchase. Often, it would be followed by them saying how they 'couldn't resist' or 'I'm glad I found that', or some other exclamation. It was a treasure to them, a prize they received while hunting through the myriad of items in the store.

The first purchase I made in the store was a bracelet made of a black cord, and a smooth flat stone with 'Lombok' scratched into it. I Googled it, finding out Lombok is an island in Indonesia. I imagined someone must have bought it there on holiday to bring home, but gave it away for some reason.

The 'typical' customer of the op-shop sought a bargain, often going through the donations to find something they needed, that was unique, high quality, or interesting. These customers would often re-utilise the items they purchased. An older Māori lady I spoke to bought an old vintage suitcase, saying she planned to make it into a piece of furniture. Some broken items, particularly jewellery, was kept for a particular patron who would come and pay $20 a bag for it. Though I never met this customer, Henrietta said they liked to make jewellery out of broken pieces.

In comparison, the more ‘atypical’ customers hunted for specific items. They are the collectors seeking out particular pieces. These customers were sometimes harder to identify, as they did not outwardly display excitement at an item as the ‘typical’ shoppers would. One woman in *Vignette 1* was one of the few collectors I encountered. She collected old pieces, such as old transistor radios, clocks, vintage glasses, and a myriad of other items, for personal enjoyment and to sell. In my first meeting with her, she came in with a piece of costume jewellery, a fake pearl ring, which she had bought for $10. Henrietta was there and knew her, as she came in often. Henrietta introduced her as Kathy, and they began talking; the ring was scratched, and Kathy wanted to exchange it. To demonstrate this, she pulled out a magnifier with a built-in light, the kind a jewellery appraiser or collector would have. Henrietta let her exchange the ring for something else in the store, a purple Caithness glass. As I was processing the sale, she said she collects them, and with that, she left the store.

The second collector I met was a middle-aged Pākehā woman. I went into the store one day to start my shift. It was hot, and the little store was stuffy and crammed with people. Putting my bag away, I signed in at the counter, and one of the other volunteers was putting through this woman’s sale; it was several different kinds of Barbie Dolls. I was listening to the conversation the volunteer, Pam, was having with the woman, who talked about having a collection of ‘Barbies’, which she gave to her daughter. Later, when I was talking to Pam, she said that the woman was very particular, making Henrietta check each of the dolls for a particular mark or items of clothing. She took a long time getting through the sales process, and a line began to form as she was fussing about the dolls, refitting the clothes on them and trying to flatten their hair. The Barbie Dolls had been donated together, which Pam thought came from someone else’s collection, as they were all different and well cared for. Similarly, a man came in on one of my last days working at the op-shop. He was a middle-aged Pākehā man looking for DVDs. We showed him our DVDs, which were not what he was after. He said he was trying to rebuild his collection, as he could not bring it back with him when he moved from America. Henrietta knew the other second-hand stores around the city and pointed him in the direction of those that might stock what he was looking for.

Collectors (unlike average consumers) are more concerned with the details and condition of the objects they find in second-hand stores. In the case of the Barbie Doll collector, she examined each one, commenting on their condition and accessories. In the case of Kathy, she was particular about the ring's condition, and that (whether on purpose or by chance) allowed her to decrease the price of the vintage glass she purchased. Attention to detail and particular ideas of what they want appear common among collectors. In some cases, this may be motivated by seeking to profit. Kathy, for example, sold some of what she found or was motivated to possess specific items, with those items being in good condition, such as collecting Barbie Dolls. Another shared trait between collectors and customer types is a sense of joy at finding what they want, similar to the more typical shopper in second-hand environments. Kathy finds joy and fulfilment in discovering old and unique items and, ultimately, in possessing them. For instance, the second time I met her, she showed me a picture on her phone. It was of King Charles when he visited New Zealand, taken by her sister, the only one of its kind. Her face lit up, and she continued talking about how great it was to find and own old things like that, which had a history to them.

While at the store, I purchased various items, sometimes acting as the typical shopper, impulsively, such as two wool jumpers, two sizes too big, but on sale for $10, which would have cost me over $100 first-hand. The financial barriers in first-hand shopping are significantly lessened in a second-hand charity setting, with normal expectations (such as clothing size) lowered. However, in other purchases, I acted similar to a collector, such as when Henrietta asked me to find out what three items were, two pieces of amber, carved to resemble a book and a heart, and a glass face, which I found was a '(Don't) Worry Monk' made by a Wellington artist, Graeme Hitchcock, some of whose artwork sold for thousands. I told Henrietta what the items were, and sensing that I wanted them, she asked if I would pay $40 for all three items, to which I readily agreed. I knew, to some extent, that all three items were likely worth more than what I had paid, but they were unique, with the glass face the first piece of handmade art I was able to afford. In retrospect, my motivations can be summarised as wanting something beautiful and unique with a price far below what a collector or gallery would ask for.

4.4 Volunteers and Staffing

Like many charity stores in Aotearoa, volunteers are essential to their everyday operation and success. The op-shop I worked in was run almost exclusively by volunteers. The only exceptions are Henrietta, the store manager, and Courtney, a recently hired Saturday manager. As far as I know, these were the only paid positions within the store. The makeup of the volunteers at the store was varied, but was almost exclusively composed of older retirees. Retired women, in particular, were the only volunteers I met. Being a 23-year-old Pākehā man, I was often asked why I was volunteering or, more often, told what a ‘nice young lad’ I was by older customers. I would often say I was doing research into second-hand shopping or that I was staying at home while studying. This was often received with smiles and questions about what I was studying. The people who did ask seemed interested or happy that someone was researching second-hand shopping.

The volunteers play essential roles within the store, often determined by their experience and life practices. Though I never met her, one volunteer dealt exclusively with the plants the store has for sale, coming in each morning to water and replace the plants for sale. Another volunteer deals with the jewellery in the display area by the register. She rotates jewellery through the displays, prices it, and orders it so it can be appropriately stored. If any items come through that are suspected of being ‘worth something’, she takes them to the local jewellery store for a professional appraisal. As far as I know, this appraisal process does not occur often and is primarily achieved through a volunteer who knows the local jeweller. The dollar amount of the item is then raised and is either put back out or advertised on TradeMe. Many volunteers, however, do the general tasks that let the store function, such as maintaining the clothing racks, dusting and cleaning the mirrors, vacuuming the carpet, and shifting displays around to get more donations from backroom storage and onto the store floor.

The first volunteer I met was Marie, an elderly Māori woman who came in most days I was working. She often wore a beanie and a cardigan, regardless of how hot it was. She would sit and diligently go through piles of donated clothing, price it and put it on a hanger before putting it onto the display racks. She was friendly and polite, but did not speak a lot; she just did her work silently and diligently. She was, however, also forgetful and would often ask which rack a piece of clothing should be on or how much something should be. This did not interfere with the work she was doing, however, and she would get through at least a bag of clothes in a few hours. Another volunteer I worked with at the store, Pat, a retired Pākehā lady who had been on holiday when I started, would go through and do various tasks. From cleaning to sorting through clothes, she often hummed some tune or song from the radio in the corner. She would often talk about her family, especially her grandchild, whom she would find things for in the store, putting them aside to buy at the end of the day.

I met one volunteer on the last day of my fieldwork. I had been sorting through some jewellery with Henrietta, and we had just finished when an older woman came in. She looked to be in her mid-to-late 70s, Pākehā, with grey hair. Henrietta said hi to her and introduced her as Kim, a volunteer at the store. Meeting another volunteer was nice, as I had only worked with a few other people there. The three of us talked; Kim was in to tell Henrietta about times she was available to volunteer over Christmas, and the topic somehow ended up on politics. It was the middle of December, election day had been and gone, and Kim was rather vocal about her support for the new government. Kim was not the kind of person, it seemed, to hide her views. She told me she was a farmer's wife, and it was about time the Government stopped demonising the farmers. Kim also thought it was about time the Government, particularly the newly elected Prime Minister, Christopher Luxon, would get people off welfare benefits and back into jobs. Kim's political views were very apparent, clearly aligned with the core tenets of neoliberal capitalism, in line with the contemporary National Party, which had recently been elected to form a coalition Government, along with the other right-wing, neo-liberal parties – ACT and New Zealand First.

In contrast to Kim, another volunteer, Alice, an older Māori woman whom I worked with and who lives in publicly-funded housing, dislikes the National Party and the current and prior right-wing Governments. She was vocal about her dislike of the current Government, their stance on beneficiaries, and the current arguments against Te Tiriti o Waitangi. When I worked with Alice, a woman came into the store (see *vignette 2*) and asked if we knew if the WINZ office was open, as she had come from out of town to organise her benefit. I looked the address up on the store computer, and it was closed, with a temporary office being opened in another location. Alice and the woman were talking about it, and Alice was highly sympathetic. I found Alice easy to get along with and great to work with. However, in an interesting comment, Kim mentioned Alice and said she was 'difficult' and that she would become annoyed if you disagreed with her opinions. Alice and Kim provide an interesting dichotomy regarding the volunteers at the store, both believing it to be a cause worthy of their time and energy. However, Alice appeared to empathise more closely with the lower-income individuals who came into the store, possibly because she had experienced similar situations and hardships. Kim, however, is wealthier than Alice and, though expressing the hardships associated with farming in our conversation, did not appear to have experienced the same socio-economic deprivations that those on benefits or lower incomes typically struggle with. This is reflected within their respective political views, with Kim leaning towards the neoliberal right-wing, categorised by hyper-individualism, the supremacy of the market, and a reduction in Governmental interference. Alice leant towards the left wing with concerns for those in poverty and the consequences of having a right-wing government.

4.5 Donors

Customers and volunteers often overlap with each other; the same can be said of those who both donate to and purchase items from second-hand charity stores. In the time I spent at the op-shop, I grew motivated to clean out my wardrobe. I stepped back and thought about how much I have and how much I use. I donated several bags of clothes I barely wore and boxes of books I had from my childhood. During my time at the store, I found that people who donate to second-hand charity stores can be broadly classified into three cohorts. The first cohort I classify as ‘over-consumers’; they come in semi-regularly, and you begin to recognise them; the items they bring in are often very new and have hardly been used. The brands of clothing they donate are recognisable: Cotton On, Just Jeans, Hallensteins, and others. The over-consumers who donate items often keep the op-shop going, as Henrietta commented that they are the primary source of donations, particularly clothes, the bread and butter of the store (see *vignette 3*).

The second cohort, I termed ‘cleaners,’ many routinely went through their homes, finding items or clothes they do not use and donating them to the store. Their donations are often an eclectic mix of clothing and household items. They are usually small bags, as opposed to the volume of the over-consumer. For example, one of the donations I received was from an elderly Pākehā woman. She had brought in a small paper bag filled with a few clothes and kitchen utensils, and I thanked her for the donation. She replied, saying it was just some odds and ends she found while cleaning some things out. Many of the smaller donations I received while in the store belonged to this cohort. It was common for them to say they had been cleaning or clearing something out, either to a volunteer, such as myself or someone they recognised in the store.

The final cohort are the dumpers. Donations from this cohort are often unfit for the store to sell or give away. The items they donate are often broken, very well-worn, or soiled. Often, we would go through a mountain of donations and find broken items, such as cups, boxes, plates, and other household goods, as well as old clothes, some just starting to break and others that should have been thrown out years ago. One donation I received that would fit this category was a small cardboard box of random clothes and miscellaneous items that a middle-aged Pākehā woman and her daughter brought in. I remember her in particular as they browsed around the store for a time. She loudly exclaimed that she 'hoped old Winnie got in' when Winston Peters (the New Zealand First politician) spoke on the store's radio. The items in the bag were old and well-used, most of which were unsuitable for sale in the store and ended up in either the rubbish or the giveaway bags. These giveaway bags would be full of items that, though unsuitable for sale, were not rubbish and could still be used by others, as they were not broken or soiled but were too well-worn and used for sale. Henrietta would sometimes donate them to other stores and local charities or, more often, leave them outside her house for second-hand Sunday, where people would put old furniture and other items outside their houses for people to take for free. Henrietta did this so donations were not wasted, and anyone who wanted or needed them could take them.

In another instance, an older man came in carrying a large bag full of sheets and a winter duvet, which we thanked him for and began examining. It was, unfortunately, covered in old stains and was unsuitable for the store. However, the donation was not wasted, as it was put with a collection of other donations that Henrietta thought the local SPCA might like, as she had donated similar items before, which they used as animal bedding. Henrietta tried to save as much out of these types of donations as she could, but this would often leave the sorting area half-full of unsuitable and broken items waiting to be thrown (or given) away. This third group tended to use the op-shop as a dumping ground, getting rid of unwanted items without the personal costs involved in public rubbish collection, believing the store could profit from selling them as rags, etc., or were genuinely uncertain as to whether the items were reusable. Either way, this has the unfortunate consequence of taking up the time and energy of the store volunteers and the limited space they have to work with.

4.6 Donations

The most interesting element of the second-hand store was how donations were handled. The entire process was not explained to me from the day I started, but it was gradually explained as I came across items that needed to be sorted correctly. To better articulate this process, I have depicted it in *Figure 1* (see Chapter 5.4) and called it the Donation-Use Cycle. When an item is donated, it gets processed, where a volunteer or manager examines the item to see if it is accepted or rejected. As previously discussed, not all items are accepted, and they are either thrown away in the rubbish or, if they are unacceptable for the store to sell but are still useful from an end-user functionality standpoint, they will be given away to other charities to distribute freely. The store I worked in gave away many donations, depositing them at other charities and sites that would hand them out to those in need. However, when an item was accepted, it would be priced and placed in the store. Some items, such as clothing, would be washed and ironed before being sold. The store has several tricks to improve an item's condition, such as lint removers to improve the condition of clothing, and, in the case of wooden items, they would clean them and use a small amount of sunflower oil to improve the item's condition. From there, the items are sold. *Figure 1* depicts the completed cycle from donation to purchase.

I began this research with a linear understanding of donation to purchase, similar to first-hand shopping. However, sorting donations revealed items often had old price tags from other charity stores, such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, or the SPCA. Judging by the condition of the items and the age of the old tags, it would be reasonable to suspect that the donated items had undergone the process depicted in *Figure 1* multiple times. In addition to the physical store, Henrietta would advertise items on TradeMe, an online second-hand trading platform. This required a significant amount of work on Henrietta's part, including managing bids, writing descriptions, and sorting out postage, in addition to her managerial responsibilities. The quality and appearance of these items had to be worth the time and effort required to sell them online, so they were typically more expensive items, such as leather bags, priced at $40 or more. These items were priced at the manager's discretion, and all others were priced via a standardised pricing scheme. This pricing scheme grouped items by categories, such as books, which ranged from fifty cents to three dollars, depending on whether they were children's or adult books. Clothing was categorised into men's, women's, and children's, and each was sub-categorised into particular items, such as pants, jackets, and other styles. Items of high quality, such as designer clothes or leather bags, were discretionary, based on Henrietta's assessment of their value.

Some items also change as they break. Broken jewellery in the store does not get thrown out but is sold to a particular customer who uses the broken pieces, paying $20 a bag. The use-value changes as it is broken, with said use-value dependent on the individual. Another customer bought pottery just to break it, using it in mosaics. Returning items is allowed, with Henrietta offering to exchange the item, removing the amount they have already paid from their new purchase. If the item returned had only a minor problem, it would be re-priced to account for the issue. Henrietta would try to reuse as much as she could, investing considerable time and effort in washing and sorting donations and redistributing items the store could not sell.

4.7 Conclusion

My experiences working in Henrietta's charity store allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of second-hand charity. It shaped how I interacted with my interview participants and allowed me to place their responses within the context of their lived experiences. My participation in commodity exchange and sorting through donations has allowed me to explore interesting forms of the commodity (see Chapter 5) and the gift (see Chapter 6), as well as the intricate moral and ethical dimensions (see Chapter 7) of second-hand charity. Furthermore, my experiences in the store have shaped my perception of my possessions and consumption habits. I donate more possessions than I previously would have and buy fewer new items, preferring to stop by second-hand stores to see what they have. My ethnographic work has also helped me overcome my preconceptions about second-hand consumption and has allowed me to grow as a researcher. The content of this ethnography and other experiences I had while conducting my fieldwork will inform and contextualise the following chapters, providing insight and examples to illustrate essential arguments and concepts.

Chapter Five – Overconsumption, Regenerative Commodification, and Imaginative Biographisation

5.1 Introduction

"We kind of rely on people who shop a lot, who buy too much or go through clothing really fast." – Henrietta, Op-Shop Manager.

The quote above was from a conversation I had with Henrietta, the manager of the Op-Shop, where I did my field research. It was a contradiction that I had not considered nor encountered in any research on second-hand shopping. It seemed so obvious when she said it, so integral to the vitality of second-hand retailing, and yet it appears untouched and largely unresearched by the academic world. This chapter will start by exploring people's reasons for shopping second-hand (through participant interviews), and the reliance of second-hand retailing on overconsumption and durable goods. The second part of this chapter will explore a concept I am terming *regenerative commodification*, a process by which an item is repeatedly commodified and sold in market exchange. It will examine the donation and sorting processes in second-hand charity stores. Finally, this chapter will explore the relationships between second-hand consumers and the items they purchase and how consumers biographise the items they consume, reimaging an object's prior owners and uses to construct an *imaginative biography*. It is essential to note that my research primarily deals with second-hand charity retail. Previously, I established the composition of second-hand shopping (see Chapter 2); specifically, my research primarily deals with institutional, retail-oriented, second-hand charity, and the interviews I conducted reflect this fact, as will later be seen in the following chapters. However, it is important to note that concerning this chapter, my findings, such as *regenerative commodification* and the *imaginative biography*, may apply to other forms of second-hand commodities, such as swap meets (Nock, 2009) and commercially oriented second-hand markets (Watt & Dubbeld, 2016).

My research seeks to contribute to the sociology of consumption, which recently moved away from the 'cultural turn', which examined conspicuous aspects of consumption and its role in communicating and supporting expressive individualism, towards critical examinations of practice (see, for example, Graeber (2014) on the role exchange, debt, and precedence plays in reproducing socio-economic hierarchy)(Welch & Warde, 2015). In part, this turn towards practice directs greater focus on the various practices that people undertake in life, generating and responding to the contexts and boundaries created by social, cultural, economic, and technological/technical modalities that promote resource-intensive or sustainable consumption (Gram-Hanssen, 2021; Welch & Ward, 2015). The practice turn specifically focuses and conceptualises 'the consumer' as a significantly habitual, bounded, yet also agentic being, with the understanding that practices are socially, culturally, and economically framed (class, ethnicity, wealth, etc.) and whereby consumption is mostly routine and habitual within broader social practices – such as purchasing food for a meal and taking a shower before work, which are moments of ordinary consumption embedded with broader practices of time-reckoning, employment etc. (Ward, 2015). In this regard, Warde (2015) argues that theories of practices view 'the consumer' not solely as a socially conditioned actor embedded within normative and institutional contexts but rather as an agentic bearer (sometimes disrupter, innovator, and/or resistor) of practice.

The two dominant lines of inquiry within contemporary investigations of sustainable consumption focus either on the importance of materiality (physical objects, technologies, infrastructure, etc.) in understanding the trajectories (how practices and materials change over time) that practices create and how they relate to changes in consumption or on the social and cultural variation evident in the plurality of practices in society (Gram-Hanssen, 2021). My arguments within this chapter, and more broadly across my thesis, focus heavily on the materiality of the commodities present within second-hand charity and how people assign shared and different values to commodities, donations, and/or gifts during moments of consumption within the socio-cultural context of Aotearoa. In this regard, I seek to contribute to the practice turn within the sociology of consumption as it is generated within the moral economy of second-hand charity consumption, focusing on the materiality of second-hand commodities and people's associated ethical practices.

5.2 Why Do People Shop Second-Hand?

The first question I asked interview participants was " Why do you shop second-hand?". Their answers revolved around general concepts of affordability, ethicality, personal interest, product rarity or uniqueness, materiality, and quality. Affordability was a primary concern for many; Regina, an 18-year-old student, shopped primarily for financial reasons:

> "…being a teenage girl, clothes change a lot... I can't justify spending over $100 on stuff that I'll just wear for a little bit or... that I might like this week, but hate next week." – Regina.

Across studies on second-hand consumption, affordability is a common driver of second-hand consumption, with Noon (2011) and Stansfield's (2022) participants viewing second-hand stores as affordable alternatives to first-hand consumption. However, affordability as a primary motivator of second-hand consumption has regional, cultural, and economic contexts which influence people's second-hand shopping motivations. Seo and Kim (2019), for example, explore consumer purchasing habits in non-profit thrift stores in South Korea. They found environmental and sustainability concerns, rather than affordability, are a primary motivator in South Korean second-hand shopping, primarily due to the presence of inexpensive clothing in first-hand markets (Seo & Kim, 2019).

Among my research participants, financial and life-course factors influenced the motivations of second-hand shoppers, with perceptions of the 'quality' or degree of 'usedness' of different second-hand goods available guiding their specific purchase choices. Cecilia, a 33-year-old part-time store manager and student, primarily shopped second-hand for economic reasons, especially as she has grown older and now has a family (a partner and kids):

> "I used to just be looking for clothing, but I would say as I've gotten older, having a family, those kinds of things. Now it's everything..." – Cecilia.

Ethical considerations also played a significant role in my participants' decisions to purchase second-hand, with some wanting to support charities, while for others, environmental concerns drove their choices, as expressed through anti-consumerist sentiment. Regina expressed her dislike of the expectation to overconsume first-hand commodities:

> "I really hate the overconsumption in our culture where you have to buy something new for every occasion... It's just too much production and waste... I really dislike it." – Regina.

Over the past two decades, second-hand shopping has gained traction as an anti-consumerist act, interwoven with narratives of ethical living. Steffen (2016) argues that second-hand consumption has become a lifestyle choice, labelling it as 'modest' consumption. Modest consumption is a conscious choice by consumers to reduce the quantity of goods they purchase (Steffen, 2016). Absent from Steffen's (2016) analysis, however, are how narratives of ethical/anti-consumerist consumption appear to be linked with consumers' desires for quality or personally interesting goods. Robin, a 63-year-old nurse, when asked about what she considered to be most ethical about second-hand shopping, said:

"…anything that can be recycled, even when I've finished with it, that will be quality and will last… if the product will decompose, like linen, cotton, [or] wool… whereas polyester and all those things will never decompose…. that [is] a big aspect for me." – Robin.

The materiality of an item (made from natural material, ability to decompose, or longevity) is a defining motivator for the second-hand shoppers I interviewed. My participants also referred to liking unique or interesting items. Belinda, a 27-year-old medical technician, would go searching for unique and exciting second-hand items:

> "I'm obviously looking for clothes, whatever I need at the time, and anything that I find that's interesting or cool… Anything that's exciting. I always love finding something that you wouldn't expect or that you wouldn't find in other places." – Belinda.

The items Belinda found allowed her to express her individuality and personal identity via her consumption. However, individuality played a comparatively minor role in the overall motivations of my participants, as Noon (2011) and Stansfield (2022) also found, wherein individuality was only a partial motivator of people's second-hand consumption. This is not to say individuality is not important in such consumption, just that it is not a focus of my analysis.

5.3 Overconsumption

Little, if any, acknowledgement exists within academic and popular circles that second-hand shopping exists and is reliant upon a) the overconsumption perpetuated within the first-hand economy and potentially its extension via second-hand shopping and b) the existence of resilient, durable commodities that can be repeatedly bought, sold and/or gifted over time. The first of these points will be explained below, and the second will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Receiving donations at the charity store was a fairly simple process, with most being small collections of items (boxes of clothes, bags of household items). However, people would often come in with several black rubbish bags of items, typically clothing, and often new and unworn. Often handing their donation over and saying, "I've barely worn any of it", with Henrietta thanking them, chatting with them if she recognised them. Early in my fieldwork, I asked Henrietta if they got donations like that often, and she replied that they kind of rely on people who overconsume. In a later interview I conducted with her, I asked if second-hand stores were sustainable; she replied:

> "Yes and no… It is sustainable because we're not buying any of our stock, but then we've gotta rely on people donating to us. And if they don't, then we don't get donations, so it's not quite sustainable." – Henrietta.

The volume of donations the store received fluctuated, though the storage/sorting areas would often be full of items (sorted and unsorted). The volume of donations was necessary, however, with items selling quickly, especially clothing made of natural fibres (such as wool). Customers often consumed impulsively, picking items they liked as they went past. This is similar to the indulgent consumption discussed by Parguel et al. (2017) in their discussion of peer-to-peer second-hand buying habits. In contemporary discussions of second-hand consumption, focus is placed on reusing commodities and the extension of product lifespans, therefore contributing to sustainability via reducing first-hand consumption (and commodity production as a consequence), well potentially increasing awareness of associated environmental degradation (Choudhary et al., 2022; Stansfield, 2022; Steffen, 2016). Parguel et al. (2017, p.53) found, however, that second-hand consumers would "self-licence and… give way to indulgent consumption…". The overconsumption of first-hand consumers, with regular donations to charity stores, ultimately fuels the moderate and indulgent consumption of second-hand consumers. Prior research (Choudhary et al., 2022; Stansfield, 2022; Steffen, 2016) appears to overlook the reliance second-hand stores (for-profit and charity) have on the overconsumption that occurs in the first-hand economy, complicating and contradicting established preconceptions of second-hand shopping as environmentally sustainable and anti-consumerist. This is not to say second-hand consumption is not more ethical or less wasteful than first-hand consumption, as it does reduce consumer waste (Gopalakrishnan & Matthews, 2018).

The implicit ethical values that dominate the ethical/moral preconceptions shoppers often justify second-hand consumption, wherein consumers act intentionally, taking personal moral responsibility for their actions (Laidlaw, 2014). Consumers reflect upon and evaluate their moral and ethical values, wherein second-hand consumption is perceived to be in accordance with them, reducing harm and any associated cognitive dissonance (Parguel et al., 2017; Sayer, 2011). However, this appears to reproduce a form of commodity fetishism that obfuscates the foundational productive realities of second-hand consumption, whereby people have little (or no) knowledge of the exploitative, ecologically unsustainable, and unethical aspects of commodity production and in which they perceive the social relations of production as effectively naturalised, therefore not necessarily considering the morality and ethics of profit-driven, exploitative, labour and workers (Abercrombie et al., 2016; Lasky, 2023). Commodity fetishism focuses on how people perceive and relate to commodities within capitalism and how the commodity form hides the nature of its productions and the social relations that enable said production (Abercrombie et al., 2016). Ethical consumption and the social movements that support it can, argues Carrier (2010), fetishise the ‘ethical’ nature of objects, from tangible to abstract commodities, focusing primarily on sustainability considerations ascribed to ‘green’ holidays or household appliances. Ethical objects can, therefore, be perceived in ways that doubly hide their productive realities and the exploitative social relations that produce them (Carrier, 2010). The first-hand overconsumption that fuels second-hand charity is, in a way, hidden by the construction of second-hand commodities as more ethical. Furthermore, second-hand commodities are further removed from the context of their production than first-hand commodities, as their conception as ‘ethical’ objects diminishes the unethical nature of their production. Belinda expressed that:

> “…The energy consumption from creating so many new items, freighting them, and packaging them is not sustainable; it’s a lot of materials and energy, and a lot of it goes to waste. So a circular economy means that, at least if that item is being produced and freighted and packaged, then the next time it has more of a lifetime before it does eventually end up degrading wistfully in the landfill.” – Belinda.

I term this ‘moral washing’, whereby a commodity’s unethical production is diminished via its immersion into the second-hand economy. This is not to be confused with greenwashing or ethics washing, which is the usage of ethical language by corporations to simulate the appearance of ethical and sustainable behaviours (Bietti, 2021; Myers, 2023). Though aware of the productive context of commodities, the participants I interviewed viewed the act of reuse as having washed away some or all of the immoral realities that create them.

The reliance upon overconsumption, perhaps hidden from everyday consumers, is a matter of fact for those who work and volunteer within charity stores. Astrid, a 76-year-old retiree who volunteers in a Hospice shop, remarked: “I would rather…people didn’t actually buy so much stuff, so they don’t have so much to donate…”. The second-hand market has consumers whose primary motivators revolve around waste reduction, anti-consumerism, environmentalism, affordability, and quality (see Chapter 5.4) and who are ultimately reliant upon the overconsumption of others. Second-hand consumption, while decreasing levels of direct waste in society, does not necessarily or even significantly prevent the overconsumption (and overproduction) that exemplifies contemporary consumption. The participants of this study felt, however, that they were doing something ethical with their choice to consume second-hand. Furthermore, donated goods (often reliant on overconsumption as they are) provide an avenue for second-hand charity stores to raise funds for charity, while providing an ethical avenue of reuse for people to rid themselves of unwanted possessions. This, however, is reminiscent of the cultural industry of capitalism, where "Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape; differences are hammered home and propagated" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p.97). In this sense, second-hand markets allow people to practice their moralities by utilising the waste and excess of the productive forces of capitalism.

5.4 Regenerative Commodification

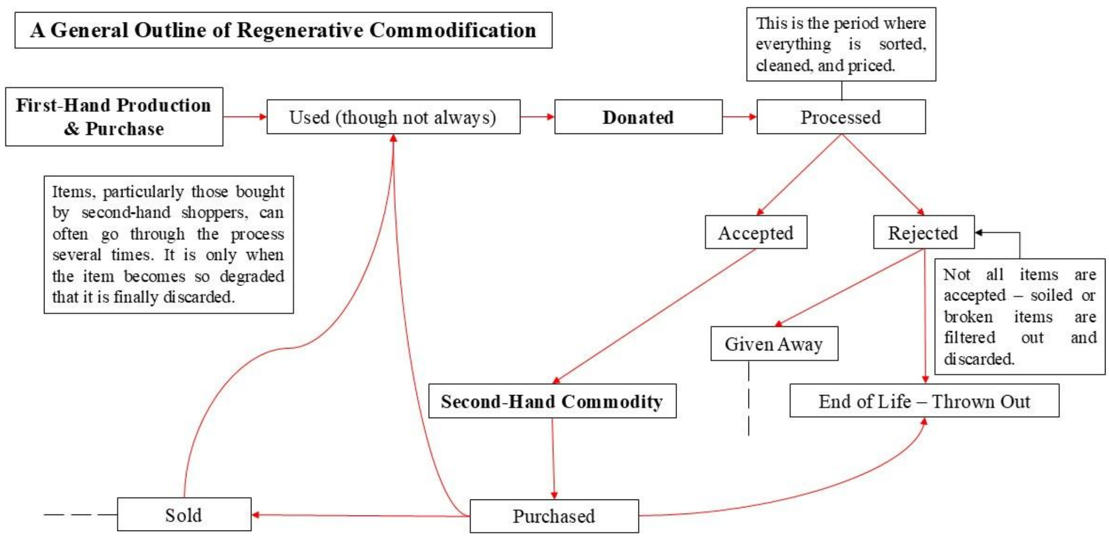

Figure 1: A General Outline of Regenerative Commodification

During my time working in a second-hand store, I often found price tags on the donated items from other charities. These price tags belonged to stores such as the Salvation Army, Red Cross, and SPCA. It became apparent that many items being donated to the store had already been through the entire second-hand charity economy before (*Figure 1*). Figure (1) depicts the cycle of commodities within the realm of the second-hand economy, from initial purchase to re-commodification and possession/dispossession. Once an item was donated, it was sorted and assessed, then depending on its physical condition, it would either be rejected, in which case it was given away (to other charities or Henrietta would take it, displaying it for people to take outside her house), discarded, or accepted for sale in the charity store. Once an item was accepted, its price was determined by a standardised pricing matrix, separated into categories (women's/men's clothing, homeware, books, etc.). Unique, rare, or designer items were priced at Henrietta's discretion. During our interview, Henrietta mentioned that she would compare prices with other second-hand charity stores, adjusting prices according to how frequently items sold. If items were clean and presentable, they would be put out and sold. If items were soiled or required ironing, Henrietta would take them home to wash, or a volunteer would iron them.

However, purchasing an item was not necessarily the end of its life within the charity second-hand economy. Katherine, a 42-year-old retail worker, when asked if she re-donated clothing, said:

> "Yes, sometimes you'll buy something and then [you'll] get home and then you wear it for a day or two and… [it] doesn't quite fit. And it might be something that I can't alter or fix because it's too much work, then I'll re-donate it back." – Katherine.

Like Katherine, most of those I interviewed would redonate items back to second-hand charity stores. Belinda viewed buying and re-donating to second-hand charity as a way to affordably and ethically cycle through clothing:

> "I like to buy quite a bit from op-shops, and then I give things back… It can go back and find another owner. I end up buying a lot because it's cheap and relatively ethical, and then I can put it back into the cycle for free and not feel bad about it." – Belinda.

For those I interviewed, re-donating to charity stores is imbued with meaning, particularly in terms of reuse and supporting ethical causes. The items transition from a commodity for market sale to a personal possession, moving through a transitory space where they are a donation (gift) until they are sorted, assessed and processed back into commodities. The process is similar to the pawning of a Tongan *koloa*, which are prized possessions, made from pandanus leaves (*lālanga*) and mulberry bark (*ngatu*), and gifted at important life-events, serving as symbols of social status (Addo & Besnier, 2008). However, in times of financial hardship, *koloa* are used as collateral to secure emergency loans, with their owners seeking to reacquire their *koloa* from pawnshops that often deal exclusively in them (Addo & Besnier, 2008). Just as *koloa* transitions into commodities, from gifts and prized possessions, so too do second-hand commodities.

This cycle largely depends on an item's physical durability; if the commodity, such as a tweed jacket, is well maintained, it can cycle from commodity to possession to gift and back again as long as its material structure is sufficiently maintained. The durability of an item, along with its aesthetic appeal, contributes to its popularity in a second-hand context, such as tweed jackets, which are highly prized, selling for $40 or more. The jackets are old, their brand labels faded, often outliving the companies that created them. Extremely durable commodities, such as ceramics, exemplify this, with their longevity and durability often discussed in archaeology (Deboer, 1974). How, then, is a person's donated possession transformed into a commodity? It begins with mushrooms.

Anna Tsing (2013), in her examination of the matsutake mushroom economy, first identified they are harvested in the wild, sorted, categorised, valued and sold to wholesalers who then on-sell them in retail markets where they are bought by individuals and then frequently gifted to others to be terminally consumed. Tsing (2013) argues that a defining feature of commodity chains is the strategic deployment of assessment work to (re)conform objects and services as commodities. Assessment work in the matsutake commodity chain occurs several times: once when the matsutake is harvested, a second time when it is sold to buyers, a third time before shipment, and a final time in Japan, before being packaged and sold. (Tsing, 2013). Each assessment removes the mushrooms further from their natural context. Certain defining features are foregrounded as the mushrooms are graded and categorised in a system that aligns them with commodity standards, thereby stripping them of their relational "tentacles" (Tsing, 2013, p.31).

Tsing (2013, pp.22, 31) argues these tentacles are the values and social relationships that compose the regime of gifts and associated "social obligations, connections, and gaps" that cling to the mushrooms; the repeated acts of assessment clean these gift tentacles off, evermore transforming the mushrooms into a commodity, moving them into the value regime of commodity use and exchange. The mushrooms are initially a gift from nature; the social relations, obligations, and gaps of their harvesting and purchasing are meaningful for those involved. Through repeated acts, these gifting tentacles are removed, until eventually they reach Japan, where they are wholly removed from their natural context and transformed into commodities to be purchased as gifts for clients, family, or special events.

In a second-hand charity store context, commodity assessment is similar; the donor first sorts their possessions to donate, assessing that they could still be useful to others and have monetary value to the charity store and its causes. These possessions are then donated or gifted to charity stores, where they are sorted and assessed again, this time by charity volunteers, to determine whether they are suitable for commodification and sale in the charity store. Being ascribed and inhabiting the commodity form at different points in the second-hand charity store economy, items can be framed as regenerative commodities. A commodity is regenerative whenever its use and market exchange values are perceived to be continual or repeatable (Marx, 1996 [1867]; Ralph, 2008, p.78; Tsing, 2013). A theoretically infinite form of re-commodification, blooming from the past lives of all those discarded things. However, when a commodity is no longer wanted and donated, it is briefly regarded as a gift. A scenario whereby commodities are destined to become gifts and where gifts are destined to become commodities.

Donors have undertaken a possession divestment ritual, transferring meaning and attachment away from the object so that they may dispose of it (McCracken, 1986). However, it is not a matter of simply throwing the object away; conceptions and moralities of reuse and waste also play a role in a donor's divestment ritual. Donors have invested varying degrees of time and effort into the items being donated, firstly in possessing the item and then assessing it for donation. Thus, they carry a semblance of sentimentality.

Acts of donation may, therefore, be similar to the reinvestment rituals Assima, Herbert, and Robert (2023) discuss, which, they argue, arise when a person tries to reinvigorate dormant possessions. They found that reinvestment rituals arose when people had dormant possessions, items that they 'failed' in some way (in their social lives, its material condition, an incongruence between themselves and the item), and which they tried to instil some meaning into them. This was achieved by people redesigning, mending, upcycling, or repurposing the items.

For items people donate, Assima et al. (2023) argue that reinvestment rituals can be undertaken via external valorisation, where an item is gifted, such as donating it to a charity store. The donation allows a person to discard an item without feeling like it was wasted (Assima et al., 2023). This was similar to what Anna Bohlin (2019) found in her ethnographic research on for-profit and charity-based second-hand markets, where purchasers and sellers possess an ethic of re-use that influences their decision to undertake divestment rituals by selling or donating second-hand goods. Bohlin (2019) argues that this ethic of reuse is based on the belief that the continual circulation of items and commodities for ongoing use is an inherently moral and ethical act, contributing to the existence of second-hand commodities and, I argue, regenerative commodification.

The time and effort that go into donating items leave sentimental traces, which charity volunteers remove through commodity assessment work, thereby foregrounding an item's commodity form. Second-hand items are sorted into commodity categories, assessed (as previously discussed), and priced. The categorisation of the item finalises its reformation as a commodity. However, like matsutake mushrooms (Tsing, 2013), second-hand commodities contain a kernel of the gift, shifting into the regime of gifts almost as soon as they are purchased via immediate gifting. Otherwise, they take the form of personal possessions. Second-hand goods appear to cycle between possession, gift, and commodity, with this continual cycle allowing items to be continually recommodified, which I term regenerative commodification.

Not all objects can undergo the processes of regenerative commodification. For items to undergo the process, they must possess material durability (which can include the potential for being repaired, as well as being long-lasting), use-value, or some other appeal, such as aesthetic or historical value. Clothing has aesthetic and use-value appeal; if an article of clothing goes out of fashion, it may lose some of its aesthetic appeal. However, if it is considered 'vintage', this reinvigorates its aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, material durability is a structural requirement for regenerative commodification, as the item must last through periods of extended ownership, punctuated by time as a commodity.

The items prone to becoming 'regenerative commodities' thus possess marked material and other 'actancy', as Jane Bennett (2004, p.355) argues in her discussions of 'thing-power'. Actancy is a form of agency ascribed to human or nonhuman things and is part of the new materialist turn. An actant, a thing possessing actancy, can potentially shift between different states of being and has relational effects, operating concurrently or in conjunction with other things (Bennett, 2004, pp.334-355). For example, due to its durability and sought-after aesthetic (as previously stated), a tweed jacket enacts a level of actancy that maintains its existence. You maintain the jacket, hang it up, keep it clean, mend it, and when you no longer want it, having served you well, you give it away, wanting it to live on. A person buys it, enjoys it for several years, and then decides to give it away. This process can be repeated for years, with each owner passing it along, reforming its possession, gifting, and commodity forms. Regenerative commodification appears to accentuate the durable qualities of objects, with these qualities exuding Bennett's (2004) thing-power, making them seductive and tantalising. Cecilia remarks on the desirability of old, durable items:

"…I got a China cabinet [second-hand]. It's probably 50-odd years old, it's perfect… I've got kids, and they break everything, but they don't break any of that old hardwood and stuff, it lasts." – Cecilia.

It is only when a second-hand commodity has become too frail, when a jacket has frayed around the edges, or when its stitching comes loose, when the wood of a desk succumbs to termites or a ceramic pot cracks that it is finally discarded, its long life far outstretching the lifecycle of a typical terminating commodity (such as foodstuffs) or commodities with built-in, planned, obsolescence (Abramson, 2012). Furthermore, exceptionally durable items, such as iron fry pans or diamond rings, do not necessarily require the same level of care as a piece of clothing.

5.5 Imaginative Biographisation

Imagine, for a moment, that you were browsing through a garage sale – the selected contents of someone's life laid bare for you to see, and as you stop on something you like, a bookcase or lamp, their owner comes over to you. They begin to talk, and before long, you know where they first acquired the item, why they are selling it, and you feel as though you understand the bookcase or lamp, that somehow, you have bought more than a bookcase or lamp, but also a biographical story of the object, its owner and their relationship, an emotional history of object possession and personal use. This is the premise of Herrmann's (2015) investigations into garage sales. In addition, the work of Abdelrahman et al. (2020) investigated the biographies of second-hand items in vintage marketplaces, and the participants in their study heavily valued the biographical content of the commodities they purchased. As Abdelrahman et al. (2020) found, similar to Herrmann (2015), the biographical historical context of an item is an important element in how people interact with history and the values/importance ascribed to an item. They utilised the premise of a curatorial consumer, where the owner of an item with strong mnemonic value, usually a family member looking after an heirloom, preserves the item and passes it along with its biographical and historical elements. Abdelrahman et al. (2020) extend this to include merchants who trade in vintage objects, passing on a vintage commodity's biographical information.

During the interviews I conducted, it was common for participants to mention these emotional and historical connections with the things they owned or purchased. Robin, when I asked if she ever thought about the 'story' of an item (we were discussing a linen tea towel from Ireland), said, "Yeah, and the story that someone's cleaned out someone's house. And where's it been?...". The biography of an object is a common point within research on peer-to-peer second-hand markets. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) discuss the prevalence of shared, positive stories between sellers and buyers in second-hand exchanges. One of their participants, Kathleen, emailed the story of her wedding dress to potential buyers when she was selling it. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) argue that this passes forward a possession's private meaning and is an important step in disposing of possessions with positive or negative biographical histories. However, some items do not possess this, which they term 'not me' items (items which a person no longer identifies with as part of the expression of the self) (Lastovicka & Fernandex, 2005). Noon (2011) also encountered a penchant for consumers in second-hand stores to focus on the history of objects. One of Noon's (2011) participants, Christine, said that the history of an object, its personal history, such as those who owned it, and the productive history, all added to the appeal of the item. Furthermore, she found that history played a significant role in her participants' perception of the second-hand, from collecting pieces of history to authenticating the vintage and retro in second-hand markets (Noon, 2011, p.50).

When interviewing Tessa, a trader at the Milnerton market, Watt and Dubbeld (2016, p.155) found that she sold old items to people who wanted: "…to find something second-hand and something used and something with a history behind it". Joanne, a regular at Milnerton Market, argued that the (perceived) disorganisation of the market fulfilled people's 'hunter-gatherer' urges and that the market was known for primarily selling used goods. Joanne and Tessa valued the second-hand aspect of the market, decrying the introduction of commercial and hand-made goods in other markets. The Milnerton Market Association held a similar opinion, restricting the sale of certain goods (contraband goods, pornography, narcotics, livestock, pets, etc.)(Watt & Dubbeld, 2016, p.155).

Similarly, one of Koch's (2021) participants, Lucy, commented that the personal history of a second-hand item was fascinating, and though the connection to the personal history of the prior owner (or owners) was lost, she would still ask herself, who had worn something and where did they wear it. Furthermore, Stansfield (2022) argues that second-hand items hold 'traces' of their prior owners, which impact people's conception of an item and how they deal with it. These 'traces' are what Stansfield (2022) says people want, inhabiting some form of co-mingling social connection. However, Stansfield discusses these traces on items within families, such as an aunt's dress or a sister's hand-me-down clothes.

While the originating context of a commodity's production is visible through literal signs such as a label detailing its fabric and place of origin, this potentially as commodities are possessed and repeatedly used by individuals over time. This biographical aspect of commodities is therefore not always apparent or so obvious in second-hand commodities, as labels have often worn away, faded or been removed, rendering them less durable than the commodity itself. Moreover, possession and time add to a commodity's biography and slowly subsume the signs of their production, contributing to the commodity fetishism that commodity biographisation - including imaginative biography - may instigate.

As previously discussed, objects in second-hand charity stores have had their histories removed, their social and affective tendrils of production and sequential personal possession stripped away to reform them as commodities for market sale. Their biographical stories are not passed on from one person to the next, as they were among Herrmann's (2015) garage sale transactors. This absence of actual story or biographisation can be replaced, in part, by rendering an imaginative history or biographisation. The imaginative biographisation of a second-hand commodity is the imagined creation of an item's life history; Robin, when discussing whether she ever thought about the work or labour that went into something at a second-hand store, said:

> "I think my favourite things to buy sometimes are actually the handmade items in Op-shops… embroidered scarves, pieces of pottery, and little artwork[s]… Sometimes, I'll go shopping, and I'll just make up a whole story of where this piece of clothing has come from… I like to imagine somebody made this with love for someone, and now they've donated it. It's just little things like that. It's almost like sentimental." – Robin.

The imaginative biographisation of a second-hand commodity appears similar to the imaginative practice of 'consumption visions' (Phillips, 1996, p.70). Consumption visions occur when people "imagine themselves playing the major role in a tentative future consumption situation" (Phillips, 1996, p.70). The imaginative practice of consumption visions allows people to examine and anticipate their relationship with a commodity, how they would use it, and the consequences of buying it, good or bad (Phillips, 1996). However, imaginative biographisation, as well as maintaining the speculative premise of commodity visions, also appears to extend from the personal to the interpersonal. In commodity visions, the focus is on the imagined relationship between the consumer and the commodity and how their relationship may play out in a speculative future. In imaginative biographisation, however, the focus is on the prior relationships that the object may have potentially had and the connection between the imagined past and the consumer's present. From this perspective, the commodities mediate a social connection between the present (possible) owner and prior owners and create a sense of shared or at least sequential sentimentality. Following Robin's (above) statement, she went into a discussion of two ball dresses she had purchased:

> "… I bought both my ball dresses from [an] op-shop… I have this coworker, and I was showing her my ball pictures. She's like, "Oh, my God, I donated that dress". I was like "What are you serious?"… She's like, yeah, I donated that dress. I love that. You know, clothes are like a connection to people…" – Robin.

For Robin, the feeling of connection had been realised by chance, and her imaginative biographisation of one of her ball dresses was actualised by a chance encounter with its original owner. This is similar to what Herrmann (2015) argues Americans seek at garage sales, framing it as a sense of community and longing for social connection via exchanging personally and biographically charged goods instead of the socially antiseptic commodities (especially mass-produced) of first-hand exchange. I argue something similar occurs when someone imagines a second-hand commodity's biography as they seek a connection with a fellow human (though situated in the past). Cecilia, for instance, collected old tabloids and newspapers, viewing them as important to hold onto and the connection they have to the past:

> "… like news formatting tabloids, and so I got three of those, one 1945, 1942, and 1935. They'll just sit at home… but I feel like it's really important, with like our digital age, that these bits [of] history [are kept]. The generation that would have held on to that, they're all dying off, and I think it's really important those little bits of history get kept… They've been with someone that whole time… and I don't know where it comes from, but I really feel that item has a little bit of that person [in it]…" – Cecilia.

For Cecilia, the objects she collects do not simply signify a period of history but are a socio-physical connection to a valued past and embody or retain, in some way, a piece of their prior owners. The investigation conducted by Appelgren and Bohlin (2015) significantly accords with the experiences of my interview participants. Appelgren and Bohlin (2015) briefly discussed the occurrence of this imaginative function within second-hand exchanges. What they found was that, in the absence of an accurate history, an imaginative one is created, often based on similar classes of items that a person may have knowledge about, and that for particular objects, signs of use and visible markings provide context that may bolster the imaginative history that is created, similar to the patina discussed by McCraken (1990). In some cases, the presence of a prior owner on an object, such as smells or stains, are regarded as problematic and are removed to ready the commodity for sale – in a sense, aspects of a patina (McCraken, 1990) (bad smells, stains, cracks, etc.) are antithetical to its re-commodification within the second-hand charity economy.

Further research by Bohlin (2019) unveiled that second-hand commodities contain the potential to trigger emotions and fantasies in their owners, further reinforcing the creation of imaginative biographies. Finally, it is essential to note that Kopytoff's (1986) work is an important element of the imaginative biography. Kopytoff (1986) discusses the human slave trade to illustrate the movement of a commodity's life. An object's life as a commodity is but a small part of its existence as it moves from commodity to possession and even back into a commodity. Though Kopytoff (1986) discussed the abhorrent practice of the slave trade, the theoretical notes of his biography of commodities can illustrate how, when a second-hand commodity is stripped of its history, people can create one to fill the space left behind.

Furthermore, the perceived social connections that these imaginative and historical biographies create are reminiscent of Marx's commodity fetishism. As previously discussed, commodity fetishism is where people perceive their social relations as generated and naturalised in the form of the capitalist commodity exchange, consumption, and possession, and that this obscures or distorts a person's relationship with the original producer of an object and the conditions of production (Abercrombie et al., 2016; Lasky, 2023). In forming the imaginative biography of a second-hand commodity, people perceive the object as a tangible thread that travels back and connects the present with the imagined social and historical relationships of the object's past. This potentially defetishises the item's previous possession but arguably reaffirms the fetishisation of the object's originating production by effectively muting/obscuring the social, labour, and capital relations that underpin production, instead emphasising the consumption biography of the item. As previously discussed, participants talked about items in terms of the emotional and historical biographies they perceived them to possess. The possessive human connections and experiences (those who owned the item) take precedence in the minds of the current owner, backgrounding the item's material origins, such as the human and environmental costs of its creation. Second-hand commodities then take on a mystical quality (Lasky, 2023), feeding off their new owner's imagination and creating an enchanted story of connection to the object's prior history and possessors. But it obfuscates the original production of the item and the exploitative origin of its creation, like the Fates of

Ancient Greece or the Norns of Norse myth, the commodity now sits and spins out a life that hides its origins. It is also accurate to argue that the older a second-hand commodity is, the longer its imagined biography may be. The age (or perceived age) of a second-hand commodity potentially extends its biography further, but also acts to additionally remove the object from its original productive context.

5.6 Conclusion

> “Well, I would rather that people didn’t actually buy so much stuff, so they don’t have so much to donate…” – Astrid.

I argue that academic research and business-oriented literature on second-hand shopping notably backgrounds, indeed, often appears (as far as this author has read) to neglect, discussions regarding its apparent reliance upon the overconsumption of found in the first-hand markets in favour, perhaps, of the optimistic and genuinely positive reuse, sustainability and anti-overconsumption ethics and practices that second-hand stores consumerism promotes. Similarly, the research and literature frequently overlook the provocations to overconsume that second-hand markets and regenerative commodification potentially engender, especially in terms of the repeated consumption of materially durable and aesthetically valued commodities. Much of the literature on second-hand purchasing and consumption focuses on the moral realities and environmental focus of reusing discarded commodities and how, by extension, the expansion of the capitalist market can undertake and make profitable the waste of the first-hand marketplace. However, as Astrid and Henrietta point out in their interviews, and evident in my own experiences when conducting my fieldwork, this does not necessarily decrease the overproduction within the first-hand market. Petra Kuppinger (2023) conducted an ethnographic investigation into a thrift store in Germany, arguing that it provides insight into a non-capitalist exchange. However, the findings of this research indicate that second-hand consumption relies upon the overconsumption of first-hand items and, as previously discussed, is becoming more commercialised as market-oriented research continues to explore new realms of profit and commodification.

The reliance that second-hand stores have upon overconsumption (which it may potentially provoke) is a fact of their existence. However, it provides an avenue for reusing excess commodities, which supports charity second-hand stores. It is a complex interplay between the destructive forces of contemporary overconsumption and the moral causes that many charity stores support. Some, such as Kuppinger (2023), say they provide an avenue against the overproduction that plagues contemporary society. However, it is a reality that these places, suffused with ethical notions of sustainable consumption and moral cause, exist because of overconsumption and subsist off of it. Without overproduction and the subsequent overconsumption within the first-hand market, second-hand stores would be greatly diminished and perhaps far more reliant upon regenerative commodities instead.

It is also apparent that second-hand stores, as exemplified by the commodities formed through regenerative commodification, are places where the productive realities of commodities can be increasingly muted, backgrounded, or diminished through repeated commodification and exchange. However, this process is countered, in part, by consumers constructing imaginative commodity biographies, illuminating how, without concrete histories, people can create their own feelings of connection to others and/or a commodity's valued, post-production and personal possession, past. This is promoted by, or leads to, a greater sensitivity of an item's prior possession and use existence.

However, second-hand stores also reproduce the realities of the first-hand marketplace, fetishising and obfuscating the productive realities of a product and providing an apparent avenue of ethical, sustainable consumption without threatening the exploitative productive forces that feed capitalism and contemporary society. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) discuss the different products within the culture industry, from A and B-grade movies or short stories in magazines, not as actual markers of differences but as a way for differences to be provided for and commodified without threatening the capitalist logic that has become so ingrained. This logic hammers home how we perceive choice – we choose to consume, or not to consume, to be loyal to brands that align with our ethics or opinions. Second-hand shopping provides modalities of consumption for people to act sustainably and ethically, yet the institutions – both charitable and commercial – nevertheless thrive off of overconsumption within the first-hand market and obfuscating the productive realities from those who consume within it. The second-hand market is a wealth of contradictions, and greater exploration of it is needed to both create robust, sustainable methods of production and to also contribute to the expansion of critical research into the second-hand economy.

Chapter Six – The Gifting Form in Second-Hand Charity Stores

6.1 Introduction

Gifting is a common occurrence in societies like Aotearoa. Here, we give things to each other all the time, on special occasions, such as a birthday or wedding, a baby shower or a housewarming. Sometimes, we give things to make us feel good or because we know it might help someone else. Second-hand charity stores, such as Henrietta's, are centres of goodwill, cornucopias of gifting – they are sites reliant upon the generosity of others for donated goods, volunteer labour, charity funds, money, and skill.

In this chapter, I discuss gifting in second-hand charity shops. I explore an ideal second-hand donating model and how the gift relationships in the store are structured via a series of unilateral gifts: from the donating public to the charity store; from the charity store to charitably worthy individuals; from volunteers to the store; and from the store's manager Henrietta to the community. Following the ideal model, I examine a negative model of second-hand donating and discuss the gifting relationship of the 'bad' donation. Finally, I discuss the concept of the *congealing gift*, whereby the gifting essence sometimes ascribed to personal possessions and to commodities within second-hand charity, effectively congeals or pools as items are recycled through the moral economy of second-hand charity stores. I focus primarily on the specific moral economy of the second-hand charity store where I conducted participant-observation, although it is likely my analysis will be applicable to other second-hand charity stores. However, this gifting ethos and practices may not be replicated (or readily evident) within for-profit second-hand markets, as such economies lack the structural conditions and praxis of charitable donations, volunteering or gifting.

Another point of clarification that I wish to address is the unique form of unilateral gifting that comprises the moral economy of the second-hand charity store. A unilateral gift is asymmetrical – given from entity A to entity B; for example, when a person gives or donates without expecting a return (Godbout & Caillé, 1998, p.53). In some cases, such as Parry's (1986) discussion of the dāna in India, the unilateral or 'pure' gift must be given in secret by the donor (whoever that may be) to a Brahmin (or monk) (though this form of gifting has spiritual significance, see Parry (1986)), no recognition or status must be taken for the act and there is no 'maussian' obligation on the gift recipients to reciprocate. Unilateral gifts are frequently freely given and unsolicited.

Second-hand charity donations fit the definition of a unilateral gift, being given by donors to the store with no mechanisms or expectations of a reciprocal return by the store to donors. Donors exist on a spectrum of being anonymous (ranging from one-off donors through to unstaffed and unseen collection/drop-off points) to those who are known to store workers (e.g. friends, volunteers, and regular consumers). Donations are freely given in that donors have agency in choosing to donate or not donate, including whether to choose to accept or reject any social and/or religious prompts to be charitable or, in other ways, ethical (e.g. practising sustainable consumption). Charity stores 'gently' solicit donations in terms of advertising in newspapers, online, and store windows, making it known they accept donations, wherein funds generated are used to support worthy causes. Indeed, a charity store's presence in the community effectively 'invites' donations, although this form of 'soft solicitation' is more toward the non-solicitation end of the gifting spectrum (as exemplified by dāna – Parry, (1986)) and especially when compared to advertising for first-hand commodities that can literally 'scream' at consumers to 'buy now!'.

Current research into the sociology of charity generally focuses on critiquing the structural and individual realities of charity and how charity can, paradoxically, act to sustain exploitative relations while doing good in the world (Dean, 2020). Dean (2020) argues that charity has a 'glow' to it, a symbolic power that foregrounds 'goodness' and is bestowed upon those organisations or individuals who are perceived as charitable, regardless of whether they are or not (Dean, 2020). Gamal-Eldin (2012) examined the influence of the Islamic Philanthropic Society had in establishing the Egyptian nationalist movement (from 1881-1882) via providing medical care, housing, food, and education to young Egyptians under British occupation. He argues that charity can be used as a lens to examine socio-political organisations outside offically recognised political movements/parties, wherein charity acts as a form of political/ideological force within society (Gamal-eldin, 2012).

In their examination of international relief during the Somalian famine from 1991 to 1992, de Waal and Omaar (1993) argue international aid groups (some providing actual aid and working with local groups) are inefficient and incompetent when organising aid during disasters. The perception of charity within disaster zones, they argue, provides a simple 'white savour' narrative to be communicated to wealthy Western nations, wherein underdeveloped countries get saved by (usually white) aid workers (de Waal & Omaar, 1993). Ethnographic work into charity shopping, undertaken by Fitton (2013), focused primarily on the structural changes of charity, how it becomes professionalised, establishing internal hierarchies, and the conflicts which arise from the contradictory obligations and objections between capitalism and charity. Contradictions evident in my research and other ethic-based consumer initiatives (see Howland (2013); Parguel et al. (2017); Livingstone (2011)).

Utilisation of gifting scholarship within the sociology of charity primarily utilises the work of Mauss (1954) and his focus on the socio-political cohesion and points of tension generated by obligatory, reciprocal gifting (Dean, 2020; Fitton, 2013). However, the argument presented within this chapter adds a focus on charitable donations as unilateral, non-reciprocal, gifting, which underpins underpins a dialectic of commodities and gifts that generates and reflects the moral economy of a second-hand charity store.

6.2 Gifting in Second-Hand Charity Stores – An Ideal Model

Imagine that you work in a second-hand charity store; a person enters, a bag bulging with clothes strains in their hands. You recognise it as a donation, and, seeing you at the counter, they approach, bag already stretched out to you, a smile on their face. Greeting each other smiles on your faces, you exchange pleasantries as you take the bag from them, thanking them for it. The donor shakes their head smiles, saying, "it's nothing; they were clearing out their wardrobe and thought it might be useful". You chat a bit, perhaps commenting on the weather, before you exchange farewells. They browse through the store before exiting, quickly glancing through the racks of clothes. The store is empty, and the day is slow, so you begin sorting through the bag. Chatting with a few volunteers, you comment about how wonderful the items are, how they are clean and nicely folded, easy to price and put out, and easier still to sell. In this interaction, we can see the elements of the gift exchange.

The above is an ideal model, constructed from the spectrum of second-hand donating I witnessed and discussed with volunteers during fieldwork and is provided as a benchmark for analysis of donating/gifting in the second-hand charity economy I studied. Second-hand donating is a particular form of unilateral gifting between individuals and charity organisations. The above interaction is typical of the exchanges I encountered and participated in during my research. Furthermore, as evident by the end of the above model, the donation is considered useful, desirable, and easily transformed into a sellable commodity. To understand the donation relations within a second-hand charity store, I categorised donors into three general cohorts (see Chapter 4 for further detail): over-consumers, cleaners, and dumpers. Each cohort had a distinct donation style – over-consumers would bring bags of clothes or other items, generally new and unworn. This first cohort was the lifeblood of the store, and items from their donations were easy to sort, price, and sell. The second cohort, cleaners, would often bring smaller donations, such as a small bag or box of eclectic items, from when they cleaned or cleared things out of their home. The final cohort, dumpers, would donate things unfit for the store to sell or give away – items that had been soiled, heavily used, degraded, and broken. The ideal model above deals with the first two cohorts, over-consumers and cleaners, with dumpers being discussed in a later section.

Three primary actants comprise the donating relationship and economy in a second-hand charity store: the donor, the volunteers, and the store itself. Donors appear to give freely all the possessions they no longer need or want without expectation of material return. This does not exclude emotional return, such as guilt assuagement and/or satisfaction garnered from undertaking charitable and ethical deeds. Volunteers appear to give, just as freely, their time and labour to make second-hand charity stores function. The store is a social and moral environment where gifts, gifters, and gifting relationships are promoted in the ideal and/or normative, assessed accordingly, and either sanctioned or rejected. In this section, I explore the gifting relationships that arise from these two roles and their interactions within the moral economy of the store. However, it is important to note that a donor can also be a volunteer and vice versa. The donation relationship explored in this section is the most common, being between donors and the charity store, of which volunteers are representatives.

Although I primarily focus on one section of the gifting exchanges – when a donor enters the store and eventually leaves having handed over their donation – the entire assemblage is far greater, comprising the establishment of normative gifting/charity morality and ethical practices that include acknowledgement and assessment of donations, the redistribution of money generated from donations, and the donor's decision-making process before engaging in donation to the charity store. The store, as the socio-spatial setting for this exchange, is characterised by its charitable status; within it are prior donations, now commodified, with other people shopping or donating items. It is a place where giving things away without the expectation of compensation is expected. It is a condition of the store that Henrietta runs that donations are never turned away. The store, therefore, acts as a hegemonic site of expected and thus predictable giving – similar in a way to the obligatory gifting relations discussed by Mauss (1954) and the socially expected gifting in contemporary Western societies analysed by Carrier (1995), and Godbout and Caillé (1998). However, instead of gifting prompted by celebratory events, such as weddings, childbirths, or birthdays (Carrier 1995; Godbout & Caillé 1998), second-hand charity is similar to more banal, yet still episodic, events such as blood donation, with the charity store permitting gifting at any time, with a guarantee that the gift will be accepted, except if it is immediately recognisable as rubbish, such as food waste. Volunteers represent the store and the charity by accepting and sorting through donations. The volunteer is a sort of assessment broker; they are not the donation's recipient but accept it on behalf of the charity, sort through and assess it, determining what is/is not acceptable.

This exchange is also similar to the process of unilateral gifting detailed by Parry (1986) and Godbout and Caillé (1998). The donation, like the *dāna* discussed by Parry (1986), is a one-sided transactional occurrence and has an inherent structural asymmetry. *Dāna* is also anonymous, with the giver never accepting or seeking praise or enhanced status from it. While gifting to a second-hand charity store can be done anonymously (for instance, via after-hours collection points), it is frequently done in person, with the giver accepting thanks from volunteers or staff, and being undertaken in public, thus making others performatively aware of the charitable act. Overall, it appears to be a complicated balance – the store requires donations to fulfil its function of generating money for charitable causes, ensuring its survival; however, it never goes out of its way to robustly solicit or demand donations. The store, then, largely relies upon the spontaneous giving of people in the community.

Carrier (1995), drawing upon the work of Colin Campbell (1987), argues that in contemporary Western societies, one's personal feelings are often regarded as valid moral judgements within gifting deliberations and that, because of this, a good/ideal gift is an expression of said giver's inner self and feelings while being representative of (and reproducing) the gifter-recipient's social connectedness and relationship. If the gift is good in this sense, then it is also personally and socially moral good. Utilising this aspect of an ideal gift, one can view acts of donation as moral gifts, whereby donors respond to inner feelings, reflecting and enacting their moral selves. Regarding second-hand charity stores, these inner feelings often reflect ethical values centred on charity, environmental sustainability, and sociability considerations:

> "It's nice that it gives back and I love talking to the people behind the counter and that they're giving their time [to charity]. And then obviously environmental... I think it's the waste [prevention]. Recycling items that might otherwise end up spending 300 years degrading for no reason..." – Belinda.

For Belinda, and from the benchmarking perspective of the ideal gift, her donations are acts suffused with social and environmental ethics and feelings. Thus, donating her possessions to charity stores is a reflexive and intentional moral act. Although, there are potentially two forms of return when such a donation occurs. For Belinda and other donors, there is an emotional return from the volunteers, that of thanks, an acknowledgement that the gift is appreciated, which is, arguably, an approval of the feelings and moral judgements of the giver. Secondly, donors enact and are socially accorded a *removal* of possession; that is to say, they materially and ethically rid themselves of unwanted or unneeded possessions. Of those I interviewed, all donated, at some point, because they no longer wanted or needed a possession but felt that other individuals may still want it or be able to use it. Such acts of dispossession and the emotional and ethical return a donor receives are similar to the requirement within Maussian (Mauss, 1954) conceptions of obligatory gifting, whereby gift recipients are socially and morally compelled to first receive the gift (which gifters are obligated to give), and more importantly to my argument, are then obligated to reciprocate with a return gift. However, in Maussian gift exchange, the return is generally delayed, though not always, and is a normative part of reproducing enduring gifting and social relationships. Some academics, such as Howland (2023), argue that assessing the social and moral worthiness of gifting by such rigid standards is unconducive to critical gifting scholarship and overlooks the nuanced social, cultural, and context complexities that necessarily inform all exchange relations. I would argue that the latter application of gifting scholarship is needed to analyse the complex dimensions of ethicality and feeling present in the act of donation.

6.3 Gifting Garbage, "Dumpers", and a Negative Model of Second-Hand Gifting

In the ideal model, donations are gifted in an ideal material state – they are lightly used, if at all, and are given in quantity or at regular intervals, sustaining the store. Furthermore, the good condition of the items makes the assessment work of highlighting their commodity forms easier. As Tsing (2013) discussed, assessment work foregrounds an item's commodity form. Ease of this assessment significantly facilitates a donation's categorisation as a saleable commodity for the store. An ideal donation is clean and presentable within a retail environment, as it requires little labour to transform into a readily saleable commodity. An item that is not clean and presentable (creases, dust, or other visible signs) can be made acceptable through the labour of volunteers. In Henrietta's store, this often involved taking the items home to clean, and she or other volunteers would iron or steam donated clothing. The result is that the donated commodity is sold for money, which then is gifted to support charitable endeavours.

However, the ideal model is dependent upon the condition of the items donated, with over-consumers and cleaners bringing in donations in good material condition. The 'good' donation is therefore defined by its good material condition, easing its transformation into a commodity and eventual sale. Dumpers' donations are 'bad' due to poor material conditions, such as being soiled or broken, or the donation itself being inappropriate and/or unacceptable. Unacceptable items included underwear, which was viewed as unpalatable, even if they had possibly been cleaned. In this regard, 'unacceptable' donations are dependent upon socio-cultural perceptions of hygiene and acceptability – bras, for instance, are acceptable, yet underwear is not – somewhat mirroring the return policies of many first-hand retail stores. Items with similar associations of uncleanliness would likewise be unacceptable. Furthermore, items appropriate between adults in private (and not the public, morally charged atmosphere of a second-hand charity store) would also be unacceptable, such as adult toys or sexually provocative media.

One sweltering day in the summer of 2023, a woman and her daughter came into the store, handing over a small cardboard box of bric-a-brac. Having received the donation, I wrote it into the donation book – a workbook that kept track of donated items, what they were, the time and day, though no donor information was ever put in it. I thanked her, and as she and her daughter browsed through the store as they slowly made their way out. I began sorting through their donation as they left – a few old baby clothes (full of holes), perished plastic containers, a few usable utensils (a pasta spoon, some knives and forks) – most of it had to be discarded, though the utensils were put on sale for $1 each. Henrietta was unsurprised by this. It was not uncommon for people to bring in such donations, though they never turned anyone away, lest people stop donating to the store. During her interview, I asked Henrietta what she though of people donating 'rubbish':

> "I think it's poor. But I wonder if they just haven't thought about it: have they actually stopped to think, "Oh, does this shop really want this dirty old thing?"… or if they intentionally just can't be bothered getting rid of their own rubbish. I don't know. Because I don't do that." – Henrietta.

It is important to note that I did not interview any dumpers – any such discussion would be sensitive and/or a hostile subject matter – and the following discussion is, as such, speculative. Two possible reasons can be inferred from Henrietta's comment. The first of these is that dumpers do not believe the item is entirely without use, monetary, or aesthetic value, even if they have no use for it themselves, which resonates with an earlier comment Henrietta made when I became annoyed at the donation described above, that is, "Even if the store only makes $1 for charity, it's still something". Furthermore, said donation may still hold use-value to someone, even if I (as a volunteer) view it as worthless. Such donors may have similar motivations, wherein they think the item donated may be useful to the store, regardless of its physical condition. This, paradoxically, holds an element of Carrier's (1995) ideal gift, in which he argues that the sentiment a gift contains (intention and feeling) transcends the materiality of the gift, wherein the materiality of the gift is secondary to what the gift represents within the context of the social relationship it is given in. The dumpers' gift is improper to the store, it provides little (or no) benefit for the charity. Yet, for the dumper, the gift is an act of charity, motivated by the belief that the item is still useful to the store (for sale) and shoppers (use-value). Similarly, they may possess the perspective that 'beggars can't be choosers', where the store, as a charity, cannot be picky when it comes to items given to them.

The second perspective is that the dumper does not care and simply wants to be rid of rubbish. In this regard, it is important to understand that the cost of throwing away unwanted items has increased and is likely prohibitive for many people. This would necessarily incentivise people to dispose of their items in ways which may inconvenience or burden second-hand charity stores. For instance, Cecilia, an interview participant who worked at a second-hand store, said:

> "We're seeing it a lot more now with recycling/dumping fees having gone up, but we're now seeing [the shop] used as a dumping ground... so we'll get whole boxes of rubbish, broken items or items that aren't sellable [and] we've got to sort it out." – Cecilia.

Even though people dump items at second-hand charity stores, said stores often have a rule mandating the acceptance of all donations that come in. Cecilia said, "I'll never turn away a donation because if you say no to someone, they won't [donate] at a later date". Never refusing donations appears paradoxical if a store wishes to minimise its intake of rubbish; however, it bears a resemblance to the gifting economies discussed briefly by Carrier (1995) and Mauss (1954) on the obligation of the recipient to receive a gift. Gifting economies are a basis of exchange wherein the necessities of life are primarily derived from the interpersonal social (gifting) relationships a person is a part of. Similar logic appears to apply to the relationship between second-hand stores (and volunteers) and donors, where the store occupies the positionality of an actant in need of the necessities of a charity economy (donated, sellable goods). Without donations, charity stores would not fulfil their purpose of fundraising for charitable causes and would not survive, so are reliant on the charity of others. However, donations that hold no value for the store's survival require performative acceptance in public, as the store cannot afford to offend current possible and future donors, while privately rejecting the donation. I never encountered any instance where a donation was refused in Henrietta's store, nor was any discourse present within the store which discouraged dumping – this may have been because the store did not have accessible drop-off points (see discussion below), which therefore required donors to enter the store and interact with volunteers. To reject the gift privately, at least within Henrietta's store, comes with little cost, as she tried to use as much as she could and give away everything else, and when they had to throw stuff away, they used pre-paid rubbish stickers (stickers bought from the local council that authorises rubbish collection). Henrietta did specify, however, that she thinks her store is one of the few that can do that, as other stores pay thousands of dollars a year to get rid of their wasted donations.

The requirement to accept all gifts is similar to the front and backstage work analysed in Goffman's (1956) dramaturgical theory (Shulman, 2016). The front and backstages delineate different personas a person takes on to deal with particular audiences. When working in customer service, you act to fulfil a particular role, with the audience being customers. However, when that customer departs, and perhaps they were especially aggravating, the mask is allowed to slip, and you may 'shit-talk' them with your coworker. In a second-hand charity store, the volunteers are actors, the store acting as a set where they act out their parts. Referring back to the ideal model, we can see this performance play out. This is a sincere performance in the ideal model because the volunteer feels grateful for the donations. However, subtracting the ideal donation and replacing it with the donation of the dumper means the smile becomes forced, and those thanks become insincere.

It is important to note here that the store I worked in did not have an external location to drop off donations, and I only witnessed donations being dropped off in the store. Other second-hand charity stores, however, did have people deposit donations outside their stores (though no collection points outside were present), avoiding the possibility of face-to-face rejection (see below). This also extends to any person present in the store at the time. All are potential or actual donors, and to refuse one gift risks threatening the social relationships that already exist or may arise in the future. Therefore, volunteers must accept all donations. To play out the performance of acceptance to maintain the perception of the store as a place to give freely and, perhaps, to feel some satisfaction or positive feeling at having donated to charity. When their mask is removed, and the donor has left, volunteers reject the donation in their backstage assessment work and evaluations. Their disappointment or disgust at the offending donation manifests in its subsequent rejection as a gift and, ultimately, as a commodity to be sold in the store. This does not, however, preclude the fact that sometimes, even though they are not meant to, volunteers at charity stores will deny a donation. Astrid, a volunteer at a local charity store, when I asked if she had ever turned a donation away, said, "We're not allowed to. But I have. But we're not allowed to...". Furthermore, she expressed annoyance at people who donate items without checking if they are actually usable:

> "...the amount of junk that we get and then have to pay to get rid of it. I [the store] can get a box of books that's been in somebody's garage, it's gotten damp, well, the whole lot just has to go." – Astrid.

For volunteers and the store, dumpers represent an unavoidable fact – that some people will donate items that do not contribute to the charitable purposes of the store. However, directly refusing all donations that are rubbish would run the risk of threatening all possible donations, as refusing the gift is, in the Maussian sense, tantamount to declaring war. It is, perhaps, a problem of perception. Some donors may believe that 'beggars can't be choosers' – and for the charity store that Henrietta runs, as well as many others, they do rely upon the charity of others (though I am hesitant to refer to such institutions as 'beggars'), and as such, are hesitant to refuse anything given to them, even if it takes up the time of volunteers and the added cost of having to pay to dispose of the waste it creates.

6.4 The Congealing Gift

Donations may also become enmeshed in cycles of repeated gifting and thus be ascribed with an affordance (Ingold, 2018) of a *congealing gift*. Characterisations of the congealing gift occur when items (now donations) enter into the second-hand charity store environment, whereby the item's gifting form is foregrounded (while its original commodity form is backgrounded) and is, thereby, afforded as primarily being a gift. Such ascriptions, particularly by donors and charity store shoppers, further congeal (though not wholely solidify) the gifting affordance accorded to items, especially when they repeatedly pass through the moral economy of the charity shop. It is important to recognise, however, that an item's potential commodity form (affordance) still exists and is foregrounded whenever it is priced, put on sale, and sold.

It is more accurate, then, to describe the item as having a pearl of the gift nestled within the clamshell of the commodity, a hybrid of forms, similar to what Howland (2023) discusses in his exploration of wine as an imbricative hybrid of gifting and commodity forms, and to the shifting between gift and commodity forms discussed by Addo and Besnier (2008) in their discussion of *tapa* cloths turning from *koloa* (valuables) into commodities within Tongan pawnshops. Howland's (2023) discussion, however, deals with the hybridity of these two forms – the wine is both a gift and commodity – whereas Addo and Besnier (2008) deal with the changing of forms from gift/possession into a commodity, dependant upon the socio-cultural situation and environment the *tapa* cloths are in. Many (though perhaps not all) gifts in contemporary and other Western societies have their origins as commodities or are adjacent to commodities (e.g. are made from commodified components, such as commercially sold wool and knitting needles used to hand-knit a jersey); the act of donation, gifted labour, and even the method of intentionally low pricing and the fact that money from the charity shop sale will also be donated, all potentially hold the vitalism of the gift and work to reinforce the gifting affordances ascribed to an item, as well as simultaneously positioning it as a commodity to be sold, creating a gift-commodity hybrid within second-hand charity retail. The donated item becomes a congealed gift as people re-gift it to the store and/or each other. The re-gifting of the object causes it to become more enmeshed in the morality of a gifting economy, which (in spite of brief moments of commodification) causes this gifting affordance to be increasingly biographised and conceptualised by shoppers, donors, and store personnel. The gift affordance becomes potentially congealed in these actors' perceptions and valuations of the traded object.

Affordance is a term that originates in ecological psychology; it is the way for things, such as commodities, are afforded or ascribed certain categorisations, activities, values, and practices by individuals and cultures (Ingold, 2018). An item's vitalism – or percieved 'inherent' or irreducible material and/or behavioural qualities – arguably shapes this affordance – that is to say, the perceived and/or 'actual' enduring materiality of its form allows it to exist and in terms of second-hand goods, also gather a long history of use, possession, donation, commodification, repossession, and re-commodification. It may be accurate to say that at some points, a donated item is a gift-commodity hybrid, where it exists for a time before becoming a commodity (holding the pearl of the gift) or a gift (which holds a pearl of the commodity). This depends on whether it is made ready for sale, turning it into a commodity, or deemed unacceptable for sale but acceptable to be given away, turning it into a gift. There is a tension between a second-hand commodity's existence as a gift and commodity (Chapter 5), as in the moral economy of the second-hand charity store, the commodity and gifting forms exist simultaneously and are enacted through similar processes of re-donation and re-commodification, and dependent upon context are either foregrounded or backgrounded.

The affordance of a second-hand good as a congealing gift is a continuous yet incremental process, reliant upon its movement within the moral economy of the second-hand charity store. Imagine, for a moment, a vast ocean. In this ocean is a whirlpool – this whirlpool represents the charity store economy – and when an item is donated, it enters the currents of this whirlpool. People journey into this whirling economy, fishing things out. They remember where they bought it from, and if the time comes when they no longer want it, they throw it back into the whirlpool. All those I interviewed donated and re-donated to second-hand charity stores. The initial donation of a first-hand commodity establishes its presence within the moral whirlpool of second-hand charity retail. It is then re-donated into the second-hand charity economy, and it is important to note here that the donor is a different person from the one before, and all future owners are likely to be different as well, reinforcing its gifting essence. Beyond the act of donation, you have the labour involved in highlighting the commodity aspects of the donation and maintaining the store, the charitable pricing of the item and the act of exchange itself.

According to Graeber (2014), there are three modalities of moral economies: communism, exchange, and hierarchy (though hierarchy is not applicable to my discussion here, so it has been omitted). Communism (based on Marx's famous maxim): 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'. Such socio-economic relationships are pervasive in everyday life, Graeber (2014) argues. Wherever people collaborate in settings such as family households, friend groups, voluntary clubs, and community organisations, they act, interact, and allocate resources and tasks that seek to socially and functionally utilise individuals' capabilities, fulfilling individual and collective needs. Graeber's (2014) position is that this practice, which is akin to Sahlin's (1972) mode of generalised reciprocity, is essentially based on eternal, yet equally assumed, indebtedness and is the foundation of all human sociability.

Exchange, the second moral economy, is based upon equivalence of exchange, whereby interactions are transitory and are broken off when overall exchange outcomes or debts incurred are deemed equal, cancelling any obligation for further exchange or social relationship (e.g. buying shoes or artwork). The people involved generally view each other as equals, with transitory exchanges requiring a measure of sociality even in the most impersonal interactions, such as the facade between customers and retail assistants. Communism and exchange rely upon conceptions and practices of reciprocity, the first ongoing, the latter transactional and temporary, where human relations and accordant subject positions are constructed whether it be a never-ending gift exchange within communist frameworks or the equivalent, and typically immediate, reciprocity of exchange (Graeber, 2014).

Within human society, these economies mingle together, melding, shifting, and layering over each other, acting as a kind of moral accounting, where gifting within them represents particular forms of sociality. In the charity second-hand shop, an amalgam of the communist and exchange economies exists. A communistic relationship exists between the store and individuals in the community: the store needs donations to sell as commodities, and those in the community provide donations, with the caveat that the donations are unwanted/unneeded possessions. This relationship then allows individuals to divest themselves of unwanted possessions, which echoes the premise of Graeber's (2014) exchange, as the store is under no obligation to reciprocate the donation. However, it also enacts an 'exchange' hierarchy, whereby the store is placed in a subordinate position, evidenced by 'no refusal' practices and with the charity organisation giving funds and/or services to people in need, creating and reproducing status hierarchies.

Donations, sold as commodities within the store's retail environment, are not dependent on profit maximisation, as they are in first-hand retail, but on raising funds for charitable causes. The price of commodities in a charity store is also intentionally set low, or a '*charitable*' price. Charitable pricing is twofold: it allows people in the community access to resources they would otherwise be unable to obtain and, secondly, raises funds for charity.

Conceptions of obligation within second-hand charity stores are fuzzy. Some of my participants felt obligated to donate to charity stores because they, like Belinda, "get so much from it" and desire to give something back to the stores, whereas others felt no sense of obligation to donate. This is in line with Bohlin's (2019) discussion of the instability of buyer perception within second-hand exchanges and each exchange existing along a commodity-gift continuum. That is to say, the context of the exchange, such as being primarily commercial (for-profit second-hand) or socially engaged and gift-like (charity second-hand), influences how people perceive a second-hand item and their relationship to it. Bohlin (2019) discussed this perception concerning the ease with which a person may divest from an item, whereby a second-hand item that has been thoroughly commodified has had all bonds to its prior owner cancelled out, allowing a person to divest from it more easily. However, applying a similar logic to a charity second-hand store, where the exchange is more gift-like, sociable, and obligatory than for-profit second-hand, would arguably infuse a second-hand item with more (potentially congealing) gift meaning and value to the buyer/owner. A person may then feel obligated to re-donate it to a second-hand charity store.

Furthermore, Bohlin's (2019) research into a myriad of second-hand economies, from second-hand charities, flea markets, online second-hand stores, and for-profit vintage second-hand, found that people perceive a moral virtue in keeping things circulating and how they enact divestment practices when donating (or selling) second-hand possessions. This moral virtue of circulation would also aid in the formation of a congealing gift – as Bohlin's (2019) participant-observation research at a jointly run religious and governmental charity store found people were motivated to donate items because they saw it as good for the environment and wrong to throw away things other people could use. There exists a cyclical moral relationship between donors/consumers and the store. The charitable price of items allows easy, guilt-free consumption, and the store provides a free means to divest themselves of their first and second-hand possessions (See Chapter 5.5).

Essential to the cyclical movement of commodity donations and all tasks (sorting and pricing donations, cleaning, setting store displays, etc.) in second-hand charity is volunteer labour. As with donation and pricing, volunteer labour fits within communist and exchange economies, as discussed by Graeber (2014). The volunteers within Henrietta's store were all older, retired women with the time and desire to volunteer. Sometimes volunteer labour was specialised – one volunteer (whom I did not meet) would sort through donated jewellery, getting any she suspected was precious (gold, silver, other precious materials) appraised by a local jeweller. Another volunteer, a prolific gardener whom I met briefly, donates and cares for plant cuttings in the store (sold for $2 to $5), writing notes to identify plants and explaining how to care for them. The labour by volunteers appears to become part of the biography of these items (see Chapter 5.5).

Volunteer labour within a charity second-hand store thus clearly relies upon a communistic relationship. Volunteers use their skills and time to meet the store's needs. Volunteers also get something out of this relationship, with many desiring to do something with their spare time, trying to remain active. Astrid, a volunteer at another local charity store, stated that:

"I retired at 65. When you retire at 65, you need to make a new life for yourself… so you look at things that, you know, you can join… And that's when I started volunteering for the [charity] shop." – Astrid.

Volunteers have time to spare, and retiring from work is a significant transition in a person's life. Shirley, a 77-year-old retiree, volunteered in Henrietta's store, and in her interview, volunteering was one of the few times she would come into town. In this sense, the exchange gives people a means to sustain social connections and receive a sense of fulfilment from working in the store. However, due to professionalisation (see Chapter 5), charity stores mimic/closely resemble the hierarchy of corporate, first-hand, retail – head office, to regional managers, down to store managers, to paid employees and volunteers – there is a clear delineation of authority and position.

The gifting essence, the affordance, of second-hand commodities becomes congealed, like a covering of moss on a commodity, watered by the human hands that carry it through an economy dependent on the gift. The congealing gift is a particular phenomenon of charity second-hand stores and the hybridisation of the commodity/gifting forms. Perhaps it is unique to them, as is the cycle of gifting and commodification through which donations go through within charity second-hand.

6.5 Conclusion

I have explored the general gifting relationship within the second-hand charity store. The ideal model detailed the 'perfect' second-hand charity donation referencing the work of Mauss (1954), Parry (1986), Carrier (1995), and Godbout and Caillé (1998). From this perspective, second-hand charity donation is an interesting amalgamation of varying positions of gifting. It holds to aspects of the unilateral gift, such as the *dāna*, yet it also contains an emotional reciprocation or return, similar to conceptions of Maussian obligatory gift exchange. Furthermore, the donations can hold donors' moral and ethical feelings, embodying ethics of environmentalism or supporting a charity's cause (Carrier, 1995).

Examining possible donor motivations revealed two primary possibilities – that they believed that the items may still be useful or that the donors did not care and viewed the second-hand charity store as a place to rid themselves of unwanted possessions/rubbish. I then examined the relationship between charity second-hand stores and donors. Similar to relationships within gifting economies, the store relies upon donations, where refusing a donation may jeopardise its position within the community as a place where people can freely rid themselves of their possessions. The store must instead discreetly dispose of such donations backstage; while on the front stage, they accept all donations with wide-eyed thanks and acceptance.

Finally, I discussed the concept of the congealing gift, whereby second-hand commodities have their ascribed gifting affordance congealed; the essence of the gift is suffused throughout the second-hand charity economy and by the commodity's presence within such an environment, it congeals with gifting ascription, much like a bee collecting pollen. It passes through hands that leave traces upon it, and those traces build up and congeal gift affordances within a whirling moral economy. So far, I have encountered no other mention of it or similar discussions within current gifting literature, and more research must be conducted to better understand its importance within second-hand charity and wherever else it may exist. Ultimately, this chapter was but a brief foray into the gifting world of charity second-hand, and it revealed itself to be a complex, multifaceted area of study.

Chapter Seven – The Moral/Economic Tension of Second-Hand Charity Stores

7.1 Introduction

It is perhaps impossible for any examination of second-hand shopping, especially within the second-hand charity store context, to avoid discussions – implicit or explicit – of such an economy's 'moral' and 'ethical' elements. Unlike preceding chapters, where considerations of morality and ethics are mostly implied or embedded within other ethnographic details, this chapter explicitly focuses on my interview participants' ethical and moral motivations and how these are enacted within the second-hand charity store economy.

It is important to recognise that second-hand charity stores' moral and ethical realities are not homogenous. In my fieldwork and through my participant interviews, I encountered a myriad of moral/ethical lives that generated and interacted with the moral economy of second-hand charity. However, I encountered three primary moralities/ethical modes: First, commodity–market relations are moderated by an ethic of charitability; second, donations to charity stores are driven by empathic use-value considerations and an ethic of reuse; and third, ethical consumption motivations fused with affordability ethics to produce moral shopping. This chapter deals with the moral and ethical dimensions of second-hand charity as they are incorporated into the concept of moral economy discussed in Chapter Two.

The commodity relationship within the context of a second-hand charity store, unlike first-hand retail or for-profit second-hand, is mediated by an ethic and precedence of affordability, with lower prices on commodities that the store is voluntarily given, which are expected by those who consume in the store. Nevertheless, it is also equally accepted that the money paid for any commodity will predominantly go towards a 'good cause' (such as the store's dedicated charity) and often influences the consumer's decision-making when buying something. A potential tension, however, exists in the relationship between consumer and charity stores, especially as prices fluctuate. Prices must never be set too high, as shoppers can become frustrated and angry, even if they know their money primarily goes to a moral cause they agree with. The condition of 'too high' appears to be mediated by individuals' socio-economic positions and conditions, precedence/prior experience with second-hand charity stores, and personal acceptance of the price. As discussed in Chapter Two, the resulting relationship illustrates Carrier's (2018) conception of moral economy.

A foundational moral relationship within the second-hand charity economy is the unilateral giving of items to the store (donations), which are commodified and sold to raise funds for charity. As noted (see Chapter 6.3), there is potential for tension between the store and donors who do not give donations the store can easily commodify and sell.

Finally, and perhaps the most discussed within academic and economic investigations of second-hand shopping, is the notion that second-hand shopping, either in charity stores or for-profit, is a way for people to consume ethically. For many of my participants, second-hand stores are sites of anti-consumerism, commodity reuse/recycling, and ideally as, significantly limiting production and advancing environmentally sustainable consumption. In this sense, productively neutral is where consumers view a second-hand item's initial productive circumstances (pollution, worker exploitation, etc.) as being washed away or diminished through its entrance and continued presence within the second-hand economy (see Chapter 5). A reality of this ethical consideration of second-hand shopping does show that it decreases consumer waste (Appelgren & Bohlin2015; Parguel et al., 2017); however, what this perspective often misses is the fact that overproduction still occurs within the first-hand economy and that in order for second-hand charity stores and for-profit stores to exist, overconsumption within the first-hand economy is required in order to funnel commodities into second-hand economies (see Chapter 5). This chapter focuses on the presence of an anti-consumerist ethic and the apparent tension it has with indulgent consumption (see Chapter 5), second-hand overconsumption, and second-hand consumption as ethical consumption. Though second-hand consumption can be viewed as ethical consumption, it can also be viewed as a form of neoliberal consumer citizenship and commodity activism based upon market morality (Wilson, 2017, p.191), whereby second-hand consumption, as a form of ethical consumption, can become an extension of the capitalist market system (Carrier, 2007).

7.2 Commodity-Market Relations and the Ethic of Charity

In the capitalist economy that dominates contemporary society, the commodity-market relationship, based on exchanging commodities for money, is an everyday occurrence. It is generally held within dominant economic theory (Hart, 2007) that the exchange of commodities for money is a socially indifferent relationship (Carrier, 2018) – the people involved embody the perceived logic of the market as transactional and contractual. In this sense, the commodity-market relationship is about maximising the profit extracted from the sale of commodities (Wilson, 2017) and gaining 'use-value'. This perspective is a detached, fetishised view of commodity production/exchange. It obscures labour and the exploitative relations of commodity production, sale, and the capitalist appropriation of surplus value that underpins this economy. Immense effort is expended in the moral sanitisation of commodity markets (Hart, 2007), though the commodity-market relationship of the second-hand charity store partially subverts contemporary practices of neoliberal economics (Wilson, 2017), wherein profit maximisation and the impersonal free-market dominate.

In appearance, exchanging commodities for money within a second-hand charity store is similar to any other commodity exchange, albeit with two significant differences: the pricing of the commodities is far below what one would expect of both first-hand and commercial second-hand commodities, and the money generated from the sale predominantly goes towards charity. Second-hand charity stores are, however, expected to have low prices (Isenhour et al., 2024; Noon, 2011). The general understanding is that this is because the commodities are second-hand (Isenhour et al., 2024), potentially diminishing their use-value, aesthetics, or functional lifespans. The preconception of second-hand items as affordable due to prior ownership can, however, be undermined by for-profit second-hand enterprises seeking to maximise profits (thus setting higher prices).

Furthermore, second-hand charity stores have minimal overhead costs compared to first-hand and for-profit second-hand stores. They often must pay rent and other commercial costs, such as point-of-sale systems, shelving utilities, and EFTPOS terminals. However, second-hand commodities are donated freely, with no cost in their procurement, while sorting, assessment, pricing, and selling of these goods rely heavily on volunteer labour. Second-hand charity stores often have a paid managerial position to administer organisational requirements, hire and vet volunteers, and deal with administrative duties. Overall, wage bills are, due to a volunteer labour force, kept low. Low operational costs in their stores allow the charities that run them to (ideally) maximise the funds raised for their other causes, whatever they may be.

There are several reasons why the prices of commodities in second-hand charity stores remain relatively low when, by the logic of neoliberal capitalism (Wilson, 2017), profit maximisation would be incentivised, even for a store raising funds for charity. As discussed in Chapter Two, the moral economy of a second-hand charity store is framed by transcendent moral values, such as animal rights or affordable housing, and the associated creation and ongoing reproduction of ethical social relationships. This morality, with the ethics underpinning the sale of freely donated goods, extends the expectation that commodities sold in charity stores will be priced at what customers consider reasonable and affordable (especially to those facing economic hardships – see Chapter 6.4). To transgress this premise of the relationship by overpricing donated items angers customers:

> "When I go into second-hand shops, sometimes if I see something and it's $40, I'll just be really mad… if it's for a charity shop, then the money's going to a good cause but... I think local charity shops shouldn't be pricing [donations] really high… I donate a lot of my clothes back, and I wanna put a note in [saying] "this better not be more than $3"" – Regina.

To understand this relationship, a comparison to Thompson (1971) and his discussion of the English (peasant) crowd during the food riots of the eighteenth century is constructive. Thompson (1971) explains that the actions of the English crowd operated within a moral economy of what they considered legitimate and illegitimate practices regarding the marketing, milling, and baking of bread.

Violating the legitimate relationship practices in a second-hand charity store by setting prices too high (determined by consumers' and donors' individual and collective expectations) causes anger and/or dissatisfaction, with donors and/or customers protesting or boycotting the store for violating the perceived boundaries of the relationship. To violate the legitimate relationship practices in a second-hand charity store by charging too much, determined by consumers' and donors' individual and collective expectations, would force the second-hand store to decrease its prices accordingly. For Regina, when second-hand stores price donated commodities too high, it violates the expectations she has of what constitutes a reasonable price. She understands, however, that the store has an institutional/corporate responsibility to raise as much money as possible for their charity's purposes. Participants I interviewed recognised the charitable purpose in the price of second-hand commodities, such as Shirley (a volunteer at a local charity store), who said, "It's always going to a good cause [and] it's not often I see people pricing things way too high...". The charitable purpose of the money may take precedence, therefore, in the minds of some consumers, volunteers, and donors. However, Shirley was also acutely aware of the price of items and placed "a limit on [how much] I spend". Henrietta would often compare her store's prices with those of other charity stores around town:

> "To make sure we're not overpricing our stuff… to see if our [donations] [are] too pricey compared to the other shops or have they gone up a little bit more, do we need to come up?" – Henrietta.

The comparison allows Henrietta to understand the range of prices customers accept for donated items. However, this is mediated by the pricing scheme that the charity makes all the stores follow (see Chapter 5.3). Accordingly, the pricing of second-hand charity commodities is not strictly financial, being moderated by the charitable contexts in which it is obtained and sold. Furthermore, Henrietta states, "I'll never put a price on that I wouldn't pay…". Those who work and run second-hand charity stores are, typically, also consumers and donators – they are thus fully integrated into the relationships that comprise the moral economy of the store and understand the limits to pricing and what types of items are currently popular with customers.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the *charitable* aspect of pricing commodities in relation to the affordability enabled by the effective redistribution of excess commodities via donations. Regina remarked that increases in prices had driven people away:

> "…the people who actually needed to do second-hand shopping, it's driving those people away… You go to a second-hand shop 'cause it's cheap…" – Regina.

Regina points out that second-hand charity stores allow those needing cheap clothing or other goods to access them, with charity as a byproduct of such a relationship. Accordingly, the socio-economic position of those who choose, or are compelled by circumstance, to consume at second-hand charity stores is another significant factor in how individuals assess the affordability of second-hand items for sale. For wealthy individuals, $20 for a shirt may be reasonable, but for someone less well-off, $20 may be completely unreasonable. In second-hand charity stores, you are likely to find a range of commodities priced along a continuum where quality, demand, and condition all influence the price. Some items may be priced higher and out of the range of those in economic hardship. However, you will also find commodities significantly reduced in price and within the range of those in economic hardship, but these commodities are often not of 'interest' to those in higher socio-economic positions. Thus, the second-hand economy of charity stores reproduces some of the social distinctions and stratifications that have long characterised capitalist societies (Bourdieu, 1984), although by offering a cornucopia of varied and cheap commodities, it also facilitates more fluid social distinctions associated with consumer omnivorism and the distinctions generated by different stylistic modes of consumption (Holt 1997). Moreover, the exchange of commodities within a second-hand charity store is often a form of two-way charity. The store makes money for their nominated charity via commodity sales, making some prices higher to maximise funds for their charity, while the 'charitable pricing' of other commodities creates a commodity market that those in economic hardship have access to, all predicated and enabled by the free gifting/donating of free commodities.

Therefore, the price of a second-hand store commodity can be viewed as the *respected* price of charity. The price of second-hand commodities, instead of the maximised price in first-hand and for-profit second-hand stores, is mediated by a dual charitable ethic, with the price paid taking into consideration the needs of the store to maximise charity funds and countervailing needs of most consumers to minimise expenditure, with the understanding that this is a compromise which respects and seeks to maintain the store-donor/store-consumer relationships. It is important to recognise that this relationship is not negative. In a sense, it is a recognition of limits – the store needs a level of income to remain open, to raise money for charity, and to provide economic, charitable, and moral services to the community. However, those who work and run the store recognise that to price items too high would lock out sections of the community that rely on the provision of low-priced commodities, which would then risk losing money/funds that would otherwise go towards their charity's causes. They also recognise that pricing items too high risks alienating donors who freely gift items being offered for sale, thereby potentially diminishing the flow of donated goods that could be sold. This is a continual tension within the moral economy of the second-hand charity store – if prices are too low, the store may not make enough charity money, too high, and you alienate those who would otherwise donate and/or purchase from you, again restricting charity monies.

7.3 Donation and the Ethics of Use-Value and Reuse

One of the most common explanations people give for donating and shopping second-hand (Isenhour et al., 2024), is that of "usefulness" and "need" – that is, the use-value of the donated item and the perception that others may need it (Assima et al., 2023; Stansfield, 2022). Use-value is the ascribed utility of a commodity: how people perceive it to be useful and fulfilling some human need (Marx, 1983, as cited in Livingstone, 2011, p.64). For Marx, "nothing can have value without being an object of utility..." (Marx, 1983, as cited in Livingstone, 2011). It is the creation and perception of use-value that significantly influences people to freely donate items to second-hand charity stores.

The notion of need and use-value to other speaks to Sayer's (2011) conception of well-being. Everyone needs things to live, such as food, clothing, housing, and entertainment. To consider the needs of others is an innately empathetic and social act, one which morally foregrounds and considers the foundational well-being of other people. The act of donation considers this need alongside the desire to divest oneself of unwanted possessions (Assima et al., 2023). However, it also takes into consideration the charitable exchange value of commodities within second-hand charity stores, as discussed above.

The consideration of use-value to others is in accordance with the findings of Stansfield (2022), whose participants were heavily influenced by this use-value consideration in their decision to donate items. The consideration of use-value is partnered with the possible exchange value of an item (as perceived/negotiated by both transacting parties). Belinda, one of my participants, discussed a time when she was downsizing and needed to get rid of a lot of her possessions:

> "I turned up and opened the boot. I said, "Look, this is how much is in here; you can take or leave as much as you like"… I just went and got rid of it all, and hopefully, they make some money off it, and other people find some things they need for cheap…" – Belinda.

Belinda needed to "get rid of" or exchange her possessions when moving by donating them. She hoped the charity store could benefit in the form of the items' exchange value, raising funds for charity through their sale, along with shoppers in-store finding something they needed and/or want at an affordable price. Moreover, though the charity store would accept everything offered, as to ideally maintain an ongoing relationship with donors, there was also an assessment of the exchange value of donated goods to determine what could be on-sold in the store, given away freely, or thrown away in rubbish skips (see Chapters 5 and 6).

The donation of possessions to second-hand charity stores, as a form of reuse, is taken as a moral/ethical act, as opposed to disposing of the item by throwing it into the rubbish. Bohlin's (2019) research into second-hand markets, such as charity stores, swap meets, flea markets, and church sales, found that often, people who shop, donate, and sell within these markets share an ethic of reuse. That is, there is a perceived inherent goodness in keeping second-hand items in constant circulation within these second-hand economies. Regenerative commodification (see Chapter 5) and the congealing gift (see Chapter 6) are both examples of this ethic of reuse. The act of getting rid of an unwanted possession through donation, argues Bohlin (2019), is that it exemplifies a morality of thrift, allowing for the moral and ethical replacement of transitory possessions while also engaging in a form of consumerism. As discussed, my participants would often purchase items from second-hand stores with the understanding that they may, or very likely will, re-donate them at some point in the future. Though they enjoy the item and make it theirs, it is often regarded as a temporary act of possession before willingly giving it away. Similarly, Herrmann (2019) found that in garage sales, buyers hold an ethical and moral perspective that the continued use of an item prevents it from going to a landfill and that these items hold affective value (see Chapter 5) that they enjoy caring for. Herrmann (2019) found that sellers and buyers, in garage sales, noted that "it keeps items in circulation, which is good" (p.5), a sentiment similar to Bohlin's (2019) research findings.

This form of second-hand consumerism, however, significantly differs from first-hand consumerism as the ethic of reuse necessitates a form of conscious care for possessions: "...the consumption in focus in my fieldwork was suffused with expressions and practices of care" (Bohlin, 2019, p.8). Assima et al. (2023) found that when people decided to get rid of a possession by donating it, they would often initiate divestment rituals such as washing or repainting a possession, which, in a sense, diminishes or breaks their emotional and psychological connections to it (McCracken, 1986). Bohlin (2019) had taken interest in a set of second-hand chairs that one of her participants, Helen, had bought and talked about in "almost animist language with which she described how they seemed happy in their new home" (p.5); two years after their initial interview, Bohlin (2019) found that Helen had sold the chairs and had mentioned it so offhandedly that Bohlin was shocked at the change in emotional connection with the items. Helen replied, "that's the way these things work" (Bohlin, 2019, p.5). Mansvelt (2012), who examined the perspectives of elderly New Zealanders in regard to the reuse of items and responsible waste management, found that they saw it as a means of identity stabilisation to responsibly dispose of unnecessary possessions. Similar to the findings of Bohlin (2019), Mansvelt (2012) found that elderly New Zealanders would, if possible, question if they actually needed or wanted an item anymore, donating or gifting the possession as a form of divestment (McCracken, 1986). One of my research participants, Astrid, held similar values: "...at my age, you don't want stuff. You're trying to get rid of stuff." and would only purchase what she 'actually needed' and try to give items away. Reuse, in whatever form that takes, appears based upon an appreciation of the items, or at least, if the items may have a use-value in some way.

The ethic of reuse ultimately requires some level of detachment from the items donated – however, in discussions with donors and shoppers, I found a prevalent sense of respect and appreciation for the donated goods and a recognition that most people tend to empathetically consider that others may have need of the items they are giving away. In several discussions I had with people in Henrietta's store, they mentioned how another second-hand charity in the area had been throwing out a lot of donations that they had seen as perfectly reasonable, and how this had lead them to stop donating or shopping there. One lady was incredibly irate at the disrespect that they had shown to her donations, which she described as "perfectly usable". To understand this situation more, I kept an eye on the second-hand store that they had mentioned, noting that they often had several large bins worth of donations at the back of their building, waiting to be disposed of. This was in stark contrast to the actions of Henrietta, who would only throw away items that were genuinely unusable; anything that was not deemed suitable for sale, she would donate to other charities or give away (items deemed too worn, for instance, that were still usable, but not up to the standards of the store). Reflexively speaking, my immersion into second-hand charity has led me to shop second-hand and donate possessions I no longer use. My relationship with Henrietta has also predisposed me towards donating my possessions to her store, as opposed to others.

There is a clear tension within the store-donor/customer relationship – that of respect and intention. In Chapter Six, I discussed how second-hand stores, in order to maintain their existence, need to obtain a steady flow of donations, whereby in instances of 'bad' donations, they publicly accept the donation, disposing of it as privately as they can. This argument, however, presupposed that an 'ideal' assessment of donated commodities would only result in the item being thrown out if it was truly unusable. Charity stores are regarded as sites of ethical dispossession and reuse. However, the transgression in the case above disrupts is against the ethical relationship that is presumed to exist between charity stores and their donors/customers, by 'unfairly' disposing of items donors view as useful and/or sellable. However, transgression can go both ways – a recent news article (Martinez, 2024) on a Salvation Army store in Mount Maunganui reports on how donations were dumped outside the store, creating a mountain of clothes that the volunteers had to sort through, and that any found damp or dirty were thrown away. Such inconsiderate actions of donors violate the respect that should be given to the store as a place of reuse and charity and also disrespects items that others could use, transgressing the ethic of reuse found by Bohlin (2019) and my own ethnographic research.

7.4 Ethical Consumption and Anti-Consumerist Ethics

"We have to stop this rampant consumerism... If you're buying second-hand, you know that at least something is going to live its natural life. Instead of being thrown away – Astrid."

Ethical consumption, in its simplest form, is buying commodities produced in circumstances that meet the ethical criteria of the buyer or which are purchased to support, directly or indirectly, moral/ethical causes, such as environmentalism, social justice movements, or other causes (Carrier, 2007; Willis & Schor, 2012). For example, an indicator in the *Ethical Consumerism Report* published by the Co-op bank (as cited in Franklin, 2011) includes "buying for reuse" and "buying reused clothing". For the participants in this study, environmentalism, charity, economic affordability, and anti-consumerist ethics variably played important roles in their motivations to shop second-hand. Those I interviewed were fairly aligned with the ethics of participants in other studies into second-hand consumption (Brace-Govan & Binay, 2010; Noon, 2011; Stansfield, 2022), who often donated and purchased goods in a second-hand store as a way to exercise an anti-consumerist ethic.

Regina, an 18-year-old student, when I interviewed her in late 2023, had turned second-hand shopping into an integral part of her life, as it counted for the majority of her consumption:

> "I would say I would buy 70% second-hand [and] maybe 30% first-hand. I think it's kind of impossible to only buy second-hand in every single aspect [of life]" – Regina.

Regina's purchasing habits are based primarily on environmental and economic concerns, grounded in an anti-consumerist/anti-waste ethic that considers the initial production of an item and the environmental consequences of throwing it away (such as polluting the environment as it breaks down) (see Chapter 5): "I really hate the overconsumption... in our culture where you have to buy something new for every occasion". Regina feels as if there is a social expectation to buy, one which she refuses to participate in. Regina's experiences are similar to Cecilia's, who remarked on her experiences with overconsumption and, later, its rejection:

> "I did go through a phase… [of] ordering lots of cheap stuff online… but it arrives, and it's rubbish… And then you do a little bit of research, and you look at pictures of Bangladesh, and the waterways are just full of the remnants of [companies] like SHEIN. You can go to an Op-shop, get something and you don't feel it on your conscience as much" – Cecilia.

Participants often cited how much first-hand commodities they use to buy and how much their friends or families consumed, and talked about feeling disgusted or bad because of the damage (environmental, worker exploitation, etc.) they perceived that consumption to have done. Second-hand shopping, by comparison, was often perceived as an alleviation of this moral burden. The act of donating and resale washes away or diminishes (see Chapter 5) any initial negative moral consequences ascribed to production as the commodity's life is extended, thereby potentially reducing future (or 'replacement') production by virtue of maintaining the total number of commodities in circulation. Indeed, the ethic of anti-consumerism appears to be relative to the market being discussed. Several of the participants in this study mention how they would buy many items from second-hand stores, with the understanding that they would donate them back at some point (as discussed above and in Chapters 5 and 6). This is likely due to indulgent consumption (see Chapter 5), whereby impulsive purchasing of commodities is increased in second-hand commodity markets due to affordability, with a reduction in cognitive dissonance related to environmentalism and overconsumption due to the perceived ethicality of second-hand consumption (Parguel et al., 2017). To clarify, second-hand consumers were also likely to overconsume due to their perceptions regarding the ethical nature of second-hand consumption. For Henrietta, she found that:

> "I think working in an op-shop every day and buying up large for the first three or four years and then getting home and feeling like your home is becoming an op-shop… kind of cured me from buying everything that I liked" – Henrietta.

Buying second-hand may be more moral and ethical in respect of mitigating waste and contributing towards a moral economy of reuse. However, it does not make customers immune from overconsumption. The perception of the second-hand charity store as a site of moral and ethical consumption can mitigate a person's anti-consumerist ethic by removing the elements of overconsumption that people perceive as negative – such as the 'throwaway culture', environmental damage, or worker exploitation – which are diminished within the second-hand moral economy. Indeed, they are outweighed or overwritten by new moral/ethical and economic connotations, those of charity, reuse, affordability, and production neutrality. Furthermore, second-hand consumers can always re-donate the item back into the second-hand charity store economy or sometimes resell it within the for-profit market.

There is a contradiction between the anti-consumerist ethics of second-hand shoppers and their willingness to overconsume second-hand commodities. However, I am unsure if there is a moral argument to be made against this version of overconsumption, as the morally and ethically dubious elements of second-hand commodities are significantly reduced by the continued reuse of an item, avoiding additional replacement production and associated environmental damage from its disposal and by raising money for charity. Moreover, the store's continued survival creates a means of redistribution within the community, allowing those in need to obtain what they need to live.

In an effort to understand the different moral and ethical perspectives against overconsumption in first-hand retail versus its apparent acceptance within second-hand retail, I turn to Juliana Mansvelt's (2005) discussion of moral geographies of consumption. Moralities of consumption, as discussed by Mansvelt (2005), highlight the importance of different geographies and perspectives in the construction of theoretical and moral perspectives, and the influence of social and political realities on such moral and theoretical perspectives. In this respect, second-hand charity stores represent a specific moral geography of consumption (Mansvelt, 2005), highlighting the generative importance of different, intersecting, geographic, moral, social, and political modalities – especially regarding the environmental impacts of consumption and production, peoples political and moral beliefs regarding charity, all intersecting within a retail charity environment. Mansvelt (2008) discusses how moral, self-regulating citizens within contemporary neoliberal society are seen and judged by the consumption practices they undertake and the different geographical realms they inhabit. Utilising alcohol consumption as an example, Mansvelt (2008) discusses how citizens often judge and perceive their own moral and ethical lives based on when and where they consume alcohol. For instance, drinking at a wine and food festival is socially and culturally accepted and governmentally condoned, but drinking publicly in a central business district is frowned upon and often banned (Mansvelt, 2008). Furthermore, such judgements have elements of prejudice, such as classism or racism, alongside the geographical and socio-cultural dimensions.

Second-hand charity shopping, and second-hand consumption more broadly, are also informed by their geographic position (as retail/commercial stores/areas and drop-off points for donations, physcial locations of gifting) physical sites where second-hand items are re-commodified and reformed as moral objects, ones which reflect the consumer-oriented ethics of progressive, liberal change discussed by Mansvelt (2005, 2008) and Wilson (2017) in regards to consumer activism in neoliberal societies. As noted the tendency to overconsume can be justified by the ethical nature of one's consumption, especially evident when framed as commodity activism and citizen consumption (Wilson, 2017). Wilson (2017) argues an element of consumer citizenship exists within contemporary neoliberal culture, often foregrounded through commodity branding (e.g. fairtrade coffee) and associated consumption. Second-hand markets are promoted as sites of ethical consumption, which the public acknowledges, rearticulates, and enacts as ethical citizen-consumers and agentic individuals of neoliberalism. Indeed, their ethical second-hand consumption enhances their individual moral positions and feelings of agency, contributing to their self-appreciating individualism. In this sense, second-hand consumption can be an integral part of a person's moral/ethical identity and life, becoming part of how they express their individualism.

Participants in my study appear, at least in part, reproduce this consumer-oriented politics of change. However, it is important to recognise that the general understanding of consumer citizenship discussed by Wilson (2017) is individualising – that is to say, the act of political and conscious consumption gets reduced down from realising the need for structural and systemic changes to foregrounding individual, lifestyle-oriented movements (Maniates, 2001). For Maniates (2001), the individualisation of political social action distracts from systemic collective struggle and further reinforces myths of consumer self-balancing and the autonomous self-correcting market. Furthermore, the individualisation of responsibility, which emerges as politically and ethically motivated consumption choices, often leaves people unable to think institutionally, such as changes to the economy or acts of government.

It is important, however, to recognise that people who shop second-hand as a form of limited individual activism can also be aware of the systemic and structural problems that affect issues they care about. Willis and Schor (2012) discuss this neoliberal conception of activism as a form of aggregationist change. However, they distinguish between *naïve* aggregationists and sophisticated forms of aggregationist change. *Naïve* aggregationists are unlikely, argue Willis and Schor (2012), to consider the structural and systemic issues (or are unaware of them) that consumption alone is unable to change. Whereas sophisticated aggregationists do consider structural realities and power relations when bringing about positive social and economic change (Willis & Schor, 2012). It is essential to recognise that ethical consumption, as a form of activism (though individual in action), is focused on the social and economic relations of people. Buying commodities within this context is about trying to support, in some small way, the well-being of people or communities.

> "I wouldn't say I'm changing the world… it's a small thing. But you know, if everyone does start practising just those little things, it does eventually add up. I don't know if it would ever change how the companies produce their clothes, but if more people stopped buying directly or stopped the massive consumption of all of this stuff, brands [would] be forced to change" – Regina.

In addition to the consumer activism discussed above, a form of *leisured activism* coined by Howland (2013) in her exploration of Fair-Trade stores in Wellington, New Zealand, plays a part in some second-hand consumer's choice to shop second-hand. Leisure activism sanctions people's consumption desires by rendering them as ethical and moral acts. Howland (2013) utilises Bourdieu (1984) to explain how those leisure activists are distant from necessity – they are distant from utilitarian consumption forms, from mainstream unreflective, uncaring, and unethical consumption – and, as Howland points out, materially and socially distant from those who they consider to be in need. Viewing the context of second-hand consumption, especially within the realm of second-hand charity, through the lens of leisure activism further moralises second-hand commodities and legitimises people's enjoyment of consumption while reconciling it with their moral/ethical beliefs.

For Regina and other participants, though they felt good, in an individual sense, about buying and donating second-hand, they were aware that their actions might have no effect unless more people began to change their consumption habits. This is an aggregationist approach to social change, which recognises that there are practice and structural changes that need to happen (Willis & Schor, 2012). It is important to remember that such individualised approaches within the context of a neoliberal economy (Wilson, 2017) and individualised societies (Maniates, 2001) does limit the ability of individuals, even collectively sharing a morality and ethically aggregated in practice, to undertake and bring about structural change. Moreover, although participants in this small study were aware of the systemic and structural problems of contemporary society, it does not mean that all consumers are. While some consumers may embody the enlightened and sophisticated aggregationist perspectives (Willis and Schor, 2012), it is highly likely that others do not have the time or energy to understand the structural realities that influence their consumption choices. There is a tension between consumers' ethical and moral perspectives when they shop second-hand, such as helping the environment and the structural and systemic realities of contemporary capitalist society that negate their ethical consumption.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter utilised my prior discussion of the works of Laidlaw (2010) and Sayer (2011) in Chapter Two to identify and critically analyse some of the relevant morality and ethics at play with second-hand charity consumption specifically and second-hand consumption more broadly. Furthermore, a moral economy lens illustrates the importance of social relationships enacted (Sneath, 2006) by the intersections of moral and economic decision-making.

Furthermore, a well-being-focused analysis of the moral economy of second-hand charity shopping also reveals several moral and ethical tensions that exist within this economy.

There are intricate dynamics at play within the moral economy of second-hand charity stores, where the commodity and gifting forms of objects come out and carry a myriad of moral and ethical meanings. The commodity-market exchange, for instance, carries an ethic of charity so ingrained that transgressing this expectation invites anger and outrage. At the same time, price increases within second-hand charity can also be ameliorated through consideration of the moral and ethical causes to which the money contributes. The needs of others directly contribute to the donation of second-hand commodities, as donors often consider the use-value of their possessions to others before donating them. Transgressing the gifting relationship between donor and store means disrespecting the commodities/possessions that represent the possible needs of other people. Furthermore, disregarding a donation, either on the side of the store by unjustifiably throwing it away or on the side of the donor by simply dumping it without care, is breaking an apparent ethic of reuse within the second-hand economy. Finally, it is apparent that an anti-consumerist ethic exists within second-hand shoppers. This ethic disdains the overconsumption and overproduction of the first-hand economy and urges people to shop second-hand. However, It is plausible to perceive this ethic as relative to the economy being discussed, as second-hand shoppers can tend to overconsume second-hand items, with the ethical realities of second-hand stores diminishing the unethical and exploitative conditions that a commodity may have been produced in.

Though I have critically examined second-hand shopping within this thesis, this is not done to dissuade people from shopping second-hand. The moral and ethical dimensions of second-hand commodities are far more positive, though perhaps no less complicated, than first-hand commodities and help to contribute towards social, economic, and environmental causes, well-being and ill-being, that significantly require constructive attention. Yet, it is not prudent to ignore the complex realities of these ethical dimensions, some of which can obfuscate the negative realities that contribute to the continuing systemic and structural challenges that humans need to face.

Chapter Eight – Conclusion and Future Research

I have learnt and grown much over the course of this research, contributing towards my growth as a researcher, while instilling in me a greater appreciation of second-hand goods, the relationships that comprise them, and the economic and moral complexities present within them. This thesis has sought to contribute to the nascent pool of New Zealand literature on second-hand charity shopping. It has explored three primary areas of interest: overconsumption and second-hand commodities, donation and the gifting form, and the moral/economic tensions of second-hand charity. The first two areas, covered in Chapters Five and Six, dealt with the commodity and donation/gifting forms of items in second-hand charity, and my substantial contributions towards second-hand shopping literature: the regenerative commodity, imaginative biographisation, and the congealing gift. Chapter Seven dealt with my final topic, the moral/economic tensions of second-hand charity.

8.1 Overconsumption, Regenerative Commodification, Imaginative Biographisation

In Chapter Five, I sought to contribute to the sociology of sustainable consumption by examining four aspects of the consumer/commodity relationship: second-hand shopping motivations, overconsumption, regenerative commodification, and imaginative biographisation. Three key reasons motivated participants: affordability, ethicality, and interest/quality; findings that align with prior research by Noon (2011) and Stansfield (2022). Within popular discourse and academic literature, second-hand shopping is often positioned within discourses of sustainability and ethical consumption (Choudhary et al., 2022). However, my ethnographic research reveals two significant contradictions within this perspective. First, indulgent consumption (Parguel et al., 2017) manifests within second-hand charity contexts, through which second-hand shoppers frame their overconsumption as ethical. This creates a paradoxical scenario whereby the act of ethical consumption enables patterns of overconsumption. Secondly, and more fundamentally, second-hand charity economies are structurally dependent on first-hand over-consumption, as Henrietta, the store manager, candidly observed, “We kind of rely on people who shop a lot, who buy too much or go through clothing really fast”. Instead of decreasing overconsumption and first-hand production, second-hand charity relies on it, and in many ways, appears to legitimise it by serving as the afterlife of first-hand consumption.

The third aspect, regenerative commodification, is the process by which a second-hand item is continuously bought, used, donated, and sold within the second-hand charity economy. In regenerative commodification, items with continuing use-value and material durability circulate after their owners no longer want them. This cyclical process of repeated commodification reveals how second-hand charity extends commodities' lives and potentially contributes to overconsumption within second-hand economies. Finally, imaginative biographisation explores how second-hand shoppers create socio-emotional connections with second-hand commodities' largely unknowable pasts, endowing the items with imagined past lives, prior owners and stories of their use. Overconsumption, regenerative commodification, and imaginative biographisation demonstrate how second-hand charity economies not only operate through the physical circulation of commodities, but also through the social and emotional connections people forge with them.

8.2 The Gifting Form and the Congealing Gift

In Chapter Six, I analyse second-hand charity's gifting dimensions, seeking to contribute towards the sociology of charity via contrasting 'ideal' and 'negative' donation models, revealing their performative underpinnings. The 'ideal' model, where donations are easily converted to commodities, illustrates a positive interaction, where front-stage performances are genuine and backstage acceptance of the donation transforms it into a commodity (Goffman, 1956; Tsing, 2013). In contrast, the 'negative' model examines 'unworthy' donations that are unable to be converted into commodities. It further demonstrates the performative aspects of second-hand charity donation by showing the front-stage acceptance of 'unworthy' donations and their subsequent rejection backstage (Goffman, 1956). I also explore the concept of the congealing gift, where certain second-hand item's gifting form and affordance are repeatedly (re)constructed and (re)articulated by shoppers, volunteers, and donors, as they move in and out of the charity store economy. The continual oscillation between commodity and gifting forms, a structural reality of the charity store, is, to an extent, a matter of individual perception and intent, whereby the gifting ascriptions effectively congeal over time and are perceived to be an almost innate quality of the item. The repeated ascriptions of an item's gifting form and its congealment are further prompted by an item's repeated existence within the moral economy of the second-hand charity store and facilitate its circulatory movement through this moral economy.

8.3 Moral/Economic Tensions of Second-hand Charity Stores

In Chapter Seven, I discussed three moral/economic tensions within second-hand charity: commodity-market relations and the ethic of charity, donations and ethics of use-value and reuse, and ethical consumption and anti-consumerist ethics. I argued that the tension between commodity-market relations and the ethic of charity lies in the stores' obligation to raise charity funds while navigating consumers' expectations about the affordability of second-hand commodities. I argued that second-hand shoppers' ingrained norms of affordability mean price increases risk damaging the moral-economic relationship between the store and customers/donors. Regarding price increases, Regina remarked that "…the people who actually need to do second-hand shopping, it's driving those people away…". This sentiment embodies the redistributive nature of second-hand charity stores, generating a dual ethic of charity where the store raises funds for its charity while giving people (particularly those in economic hardship) access to affordable commodities. However, shoppers' expectations are mediated by the charitable goals of the store and the pricing continuum of second-hand commodities, whereby some will pay more with the justification that it supports charity. In contrast, others still have access to comparably cheaper commodities compared to the first-hand market.

Secondly, donations and the ethics of use-value and reuse dealt with the tension between the store and donors when donated goods were perceived to be disrespected. People within second-hand economies often possess an appreciation for the use-value of a commodity, whereby the extension of an item's useful life is perceived to be an innately ethical and moral act (Bohlin, 2019). I argued that disrespecting the use-value of donated goods, either by donors, through improper donation practices (such as dumping it outside the store, see Martinez (2024)), or by the store throwing away donations people perceive as usable, constitutes a transgression of the moral relationship, contradicting the charity store as a site of ethical dispossession and reuse creating tension in the relationship.

The final tension is more a contradiction between second-hand shoppers' ethical consumption and anti-consumerist perspectives. Participants often cited a moral aversion or hatred of overconsumption, which manifested as a moral reason to shop second-hand, alleviating the ethical burden of first-hand (over)consumption. However, as discussed throughout this thesis (see Chapter 5.3; Chapter 7.4), overconsumption also persists in second-hand markets (Parguel et al., 2017). To understand this contradiction, I turned to moral geographies of consumption (Mansvelt, 2005, 2008) and theories of neoliberal consumer citizenship and activism (Willis & Schor, 2012; Wilson, 2017). From this perspective, I argued that second-hand consumers view first-hand overconsumption as immoral and second-hand (over)consumption as moral, as second-hand charity stores are understood as sites of moralised and ethical consumption and commodification. Furthermore, I argued that such ethical consumption allows them to realise their ethical and moral values and beliefs within the bounds of neoliberal consumer activism (Willis & Schor, 2012; Wilson, 2017), adding further moral 'layers' to their (over)consumption, reflecting the consumer-oriented ethics of change discussed by Mansvelt (2005, 2008) and Wilson (2017) within consumer oriented activism of neoliberal societies.

8.4 Future Research

Avenues of possible future research are varied. However, the application of my three substantive concepts – regenerative commodification, imaginative biographisation, and the congealing gift – could be applied to the analysis of other human-object relations, such as understanding the acceptance, rejection, or disposal of inherited goods, such as heirlooms (Tezer, et al., 2024) or houses. An application of regenerative commodification, for instance, could explore how it interacts with collectable goods, such as action figures, antiques, or fragile commodities, like old books. Additionally, regenerative commodification and the concept of the congealing gift could be applied to understand why people would keep or sell items passed on to them, such as the significance (or lack thereof) that creates an attachment to jewellery or childhood homes. Furthermore, when the stories of a family heirloom are lost, do people imagine the histories, stories, owners, and prior places of said heirloom, like second-hand charity shoppers do with the items they purchase, which I examined through the lens of imaginative biographisation.

8.5 Final Words

Christmas was on the horizon on the last day I worked at Henrietta's charity store, and the summer heat was reaching its yearly crescendo. The store was baking in the heat. Henrietta had opened the floor-to-ceiling windows on the side of the store, allowing the wind to blow in, carrying in the sound of passing cars. The wind was cool, the air dry, and it carried away the tell-tale smell of second-hand clothing. A smell I had become accustomed to during the time I spent working at Henrietta's store. I sat on a small stool, sorting through some donations, drinking an instant coffee for afternoon tea. Henrietta sat in the back, cutting up some price tags and drinking her afternoon cup of tea. It was a quiet day, with only a few people meandering in to browse around. Henrietta had made a new display in the middle of the room, and donated Christmas goods sat neatly arranged on a red tablecloth. Toys, baubles and other decorations, books and wrapping paper, and jewellery (a pair shaped like candy canes and another set with bejewelled reindeer). The sun was still high in the sky as 4 o'clock approached, and we began to close the store. I felt a sense of finality as I cashed up for the last time, the clatter of coins loud in the now silent store.

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Appendix A

Second-Hand Consumption Recruitment Questionnaire

Questionnaire Number: ________

SECOND-HAND SHOPPING

QUESTIONS:

How often do you shop at second-hand stores?

- Once a Week
- A Few Times a Week
- Once a Month
- A Few Times A Month
- Several Times a Year
- Almost Never

What are your reasons for buying second-hand? (Choose all those that apply)

- Price
- Enjoyment
- Ethical or Moral Concerns
- Environmental Concerns

Other (Write your reason in the box):

How influential do you think each of the following reasons are when you shop at second-hand stores? Rank your choice from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Price	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyment	1	2	3	4	5
Ethical or Moral Concerns	1	2	3	4	5
Environmental Concerns	1	2	3	4	5

Would you be willing to participate in an interview about second-hand shopping? If **YES** or **MAYBE** please fill in your **Personal Information**

Yes ☐ No ☐ Maybe ☐

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Questionnaire Number:

First Name: Last name:

Date of Birth: DAY / MONTH / YEAR

Gender: Man Woman Non-Binary/Third Gender Prefer Not to Answer

Email:

Phone Number:

Please note your personal information will be removed and be kept separate from your questionnaire and in a secure lock box to ensure your privacy.

Organisational Consent Form and Information Sheet

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Consumption Ethics in [redacted]

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – Organisation

I have read and understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study prior to hosting the researcher's (Takoda Ackerley) questionnaire.

1. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
2. I agree to host a questionnaire for Takoda Ackerley's research.

Declaration by Participant:

I ____________________ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: ______________________ Date: _______________

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Ethical Consumption in [redacted]

Organisation Information Sheet

Researcher Introduction

This research is being conducted by Takoda Ackerley for the purpose of completing a Master of Arts, majoring in Sociology. This research is being conducted through Massey University.

Project Description and Invitation

This project explores the potential ethical reasons for buying second-hand commodities that motivate residents of [redacted] It involves a short recruitment questionnaire and an interview to collect participants' views on their second-hand purchasing and any associated ethical considerations (e.g. environmental sustainability, etc.). Investigating how people think about their second-hand purchasing and associated ethical motivations is important in understanding how individuals respond to various social, economic, and environmental challenges evident in the [redacted] community.

The benefits of this research for your organisation include gaining a deeper understanding of why people shop at your store and forming greater understandings of the ethical concerns and practices of the wider community. This research will benefit from your participation and aims to provide you with a broader understanding of how your community is tackling the challenges mentioned above.

You are invited to participate in this research as a research site where questionnaires will be placed for staff and customers to fill in as desired. Your rights and the processes involved in this study are outlined below.

Project Procedures

The questionnaires will be collated and used to recurit research participants and to generate research materials for the project. All identifying information will be kept confidential to the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) and his supervisors (see below).

Data Management

Any data generated at your store will be kept secure until the conclusion of the research project. Consent forms and any other identifying material will be kept in a separate secure lock box until my MA thesis is submitted and assessed. They will then be destroyed to ensure ongoing confidentiality. Physical copies of questionnaires will be kept secure in a separate lock box. Digital copies will be kept on file, behind password protection, via Massey University's secure OneDrive cloud storage. All participant identities will be kept confidential to myself and my supervisors. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' real identities in transcripts and any subsequent publications (e.g. my MA thesis and academic publications).

Participants can request a summary of my research findings once my research thesis is completed and published.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

• Withdraw from the study without explanation and at any time prior to hosting the questionnaire;

• Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

• Provide information on the understanding that your organisation's name nor any personally identifying material of organisational representatives will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;

• Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) or his supervisors.

Researcher:

Takoda Ackerley

takoda.ackerley.ma@gmail.com

Supervisors:

Dr Matthew Wynyard Sociology, Massey University Email: M.Wynyard@massey.ac.nz	Dr Peter Howland Sociology, Massey University Email: p.j.howland@massey.ac.nz

LOW RISK NOTIFICATIONS

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz”.

Ethnographic Fieldwork Consent Form and Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Consumption Ethics in [redacted]

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - [redacted]

I have read and understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study, and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time until the completion of the researcher's (Takoda Ackerley) ethnographic fieldwork at the [redacted] understanding that any research collected until this point is the property of the researcher.

1. I agree to allow the researcher, Takoda Ackerley, to undertake ethnographic research at the [redacted]
2. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____________________ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _______________________ Date: ________________

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Ethical Consumption in [redacted]

Researcher Introduction

This research is being conducted by Takoda Ackerley for the purpose of completing a Master of Arts, majoring in Sociology. This research is being conducted through Massey University.

Project Description and Invitation

This project explores the potential ethical reasons for buying second-hand commodities that motivate residents of [redacted] It involves a short recruitment questionnaire and an interview to collect participants' views on their second-hand purchasing and any associated ethical considerations (e.g. environmental sustainability, etc.). Investigating how people think about their second-hand purchasing and associated ethical motivations is important in understanding how individuals respond to various social, economic, and environmental challenges evident in the [redacted] community.

The fieldwork element of this research consists of me volunteering at your second-hand store and while doing so simply observing/engaging as a volunteer with customers and volunteers' spontaneous discussions related to their purchases or jobs. I will introduce myself as a researcher to members of the organisation present during any ethnographic research periods. As appropriate I may direct customers' attention to my questionnaire. However, I will only interview those individuals who indicate their desire to be interviewed in their response to the questionnaire form.

The benefits of this research for your organisation include gaining a deeper understanding of why people shop at your store and forming greater understandings of the ethical concerns and practices of the wider community. This research will benefit from your participation and aims to provide you with a broader understanding of how your community is tackling the challenges mentioned above.

You are invited to participate in this research as a research site where questionnaires will be placed for staff and customers to fill in as desired and where the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) will undertake ethnographic research, at agreed dates and times. Your rights and the processes involved in this study are outlined below.

Project Procedures

The questionnaires will be collated and used to recurit research participants and to generate research materials for the project. All identifying information will be kept confidential to the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) and his supervisors (see below).

Data Management

Any data generated at your store will be kept secure until the conclusion of the research project. Consent forms and any other identifying material will be kept in a separate secure lock box until my MA thesis is submitted and assessed. They will then be destroyed to ensure ongoing confidentiality. Physical copies of questionnaires will be kept secure in a separate lock box. Digital copies will be kept on file, behind password protection, via Massey University's secure OneDrive cloud storage. All participant identities will be kept confidential to myself and my supervisors. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' real identities in transcripts and any subsequent publications (e.g. my MA thesis and academic publications).

Participants can request a summary of my research findings once my research thesis is completed and published.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

• Withdraw from the study without explanation and at any time prior to hosting the questionnaire;

• Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

• Provide information on the understanding that your organisation's name nor any personally identifying material of organisational representatives will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;

• Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) or his supervisors.

Researcher:
Takoda Ackerley
takoda.ackerley.ma@gmail.com

Supervisors:

Dr Matthew Wynyard Sociology, Massey University Email: M.Wynyard@massey.ac.nz	Dr Peter Howland Sociology, Massey University Email: p.j.howland@massey.ac.nz

LOW RISK NOTIFICATIONS

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Human Ethics Number: 4000028135

Interview Participant Consent Form and Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Consumption Ethics in [redacted]

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study, and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any point, up to the completion of the transcription review process, as set out in the Information Sheet.

1. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
2. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded (circle your preference).
3. I agree to the interview being transcribed by the researcher (Takoda Ackerley).
4. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings and transcript returned to me (circle your preference).

Declaration by Participant:

I _____________________ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _______________________ Date: ________________

Interview Participant Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

An Exploratory Study of Second-Hand Purchasing and Consumption Ethics in [redacted]

Interview Participant Information Sheet

Researcher Introduction

This research is being conducted by Takoda Ackerley for the purpose of completing a Master of Arts, majoring in Sociology. This research is being conducted through Massey University.

Project Description and Invitation

This project aims to explore the ethical reasons for buying second-hand commodities that motivate residents of [redacted] It will involve an interview to collect participants' views on their second-hand purchasing and any associated ethical considerations. Investigating how people think about their second-hand purchasing and associated ethical motivations is important in understanding how individuals potentially respond to various social, economic, and environmental challenges evident in the [redacted] community.

This research will provide participants with an opportunity to discuss their second-hand purchasing and how this may be responding to various environmental, social, and economic challenges. This research will benefit from your participation and aims to provide you with a broader understanding of how your community is tackling these challenges.

You are invited to participate in this research as an interview participant. Your rights and the processes involved in this study are outlined below.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Interview participants will be selected at random from those who expressed an interest in being interviewed through the recruitment questionnaire. I am looking to interview between 10-15 individuals, which will provide adequate scope for a Master's thesis.

Interview participants will be acknowledged for their time with a koha of a $40 grocery card.

Project Procedures

The interview will be semi-structured (i.e. consisting of both pre-formulated and open-ended questions) and will take approximately one hour to complete. The interview will be audio recorded for later transcription by the researcher (Takoda Ackerley). Once interviews are transcribed, the audio recording will be deleted, although a copy will be sent to participants if requested.

The interview will occur in the meeting spaces available in the [redacted]

Data Management

The data generated from your interview will only be transcribed by the researcher (Takoda Ackerley), and will not be distributed to any third party other than my thesis supervisors (see below). The transcriptions, recordings, personal information, and questionnaires will be kept secure until the conclusion of the research project. Consent forms and any other personally identifying material will be kept in a separate secure lock box until my MA thesis is submitted and assessed. They will then be destroyed by my supervisors to ensure ongoing confidentiality. Physical copies of questionnaires and transcripts will also be kept secure in a separate lock box. Digital copies will be kept on file, behind password protection, via Massey University's secure OneDrive cloud storage.

All participant identities will be kept confidential to myself and my supervisors. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' real identities in transcripts and any subsequent publications (e.g. my MA thesis and academic publications).

If research participants experience distress at any time during the interview, they have the right to decline to answer any questions and to withdraw from the interview without explanation and will also be provided with contacts to appropriate counselling and/or support services (See Below).
Mental Health and Support Services:

- Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor.
- Lifeline: 0800 543 354 or (09) 522 2999 Free text 4357 (HELP)
- Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO) Trained counsellors will put the distressed person in touch with [redacted] services if it is an imminent crisis.
- Youthline: 0800 376 633
- Samaritans: 0800 726 666

[redacted]mental-health-and-addictions-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/

Research participants may also choose to withdraw from the study without explanation and at any time up to completion of the transcription review period (see below). All data generated in participantterminated interviews or research will be destroyed immediately and will not used to inform research findings.

Participants may request to review their interview transcripts and have the right to additionally comment on or clarify any previous points made in the interview or provide any additional information that will also be added to the original transcript. Participants will have one month to review and comment on their transcripts following receipt of their transcripts. Additional comments can be audio recorded by the researcher or provided as text by research participants. Once my research thesis is complete and published, all participants can request a summary of the research findings.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to: • Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation; • Decline to answer any particular questions without explanation; • Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview and that any information

imparted during this period will not be recorded in any way;

- Have the right to review and add to your interview transcript up to one month after receiving the transcript;
- Withdraw from the study without explanation at any point up until the transcription review period is complete;
- Provide information on the understanding that your personal name or identifying information will not be used in any transcripts or research publications;
- Be given a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

If you have any further questions, please contact the researcher (Takoda Ackerley) or his supervisors.

Researcher:
Takoda Ackerley
takoda.ackerley.ma@gmail.com
Supervisors:

Dr Matthew Wynyard Sociology, Massey University Email: M.Wynyard@massey.ac.nz	Dr Peter Howland Sociology, Massey University Email: p.j.howland@massey.ac.nz

LOW RISK NOTIFICATIONS

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Human Ethics Number: 4000028135

Interview Participant Demographic Information Form

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Please note that if you feel uncomfortable with any of the demographic questions set out below, you can refuse to answer them. If you have any questions about what this information will be used for, please ask the researcher (Takoda Ackerley).

Name: ☐ Age: ☐ Date of Birth: Day ☐ Month ☐ Year ☐

Gender (Please Circle): Man Women Non-Binary Other (Write): ☐
I Prefer Not to Answer

1) Do you have an ethnicity? If so, how would you describe this?
....
....
....
....

2) What is the highest level of education you have attained?

Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ University ☐ Polytechnic ☐ Other Tertiary ☐

3) What is your occupation? (Please state below)
....
....
....
....

4) Where do you normally reside? (Please state towns or cities below)
....
....
....
....

5) How would you align yourself politically? Such as left, right, centre, etc? (Please state below)
....
....
....
....

6) What is your individual income range? (tick box)

Zero Income	
$1 - $5,000	
$5,001 - $10,000	
$10,001 - $15,000	
$20,001–$25,000	
$25,001–$30,000	
$30,001–$35,000	
$35,001–$40,000	
$40,001–$50,000	
$50,001–$60,000	
$60,001–$70,000	
$70,001–$100,000	
$100,001–$150,000	
$150,001 or More	

Please note that all the information collected here will be kept private, and used only in the terms set out under the Interview Participant Information Sheet. All identifying details will be kept private, and pseudonyms will be used in place of names.

Interview Participant Questions

1. Why do you shop second-hand?

2. How often do you shop second-hand? Why this often/not often?

3. What kinds of products are you looking for when shopping second-hand?

4. Tell me about the last item(s) you purchased at a second-hand store – what was it (were they)? Why did you buy them? Did you keep them or give them away? If kept are they in use? If given away – to whom and why? What do you value most about them?

5. Tell me about your best ever second-hand shop purchase – what was it and why was it the best?

6. Are you always satisfied by prices in second-hand prices? If not so, how do you determine a fair price for a second-hand product?

7. What do you enjoy about second-hand shopping?

8. What do you enjoy least about second-hand shopping?

9. Do you donate to second-hand stores?

10. What kinds of items do you usually donate?

11. When you shop second-hand, do you ever like finding particular brands? If you do, why do you look for these brands?

12. Do you shop for economic reasons? (price, affordability, etc.)

13. Do you shop for social reasons? (e.g. to support charities, etc)

14. Do you shop for environmental reasons?

15. What do you consider most ethical?

16. Are there any other reasons you shop second-hand?

17. Do you think current concerns around living costs in Aotearoa have influenced your decision to shop second-hand?

18. Do you think current and recent extreme weather, both here and in other parts of the world, has influenced your decision to shop second-hand?

19. Do you ever feel embarrassed in some way by shopping second-hand? If not, why?

20. What does sustainability mean to you? What does a circular economy mean to you?

21. Do you think about the work/labour that went into something you bought second-hand?

22. Do you ever think about the impact of a second-hand item?

23. Do you think second-hand stores are a good way to be sustainable?

24. Do you feel like you are making a positive difference to society because of your second-hand buying habits? If so, how? If no, why not? Do you think you are making a negative difference to society with your first-hand buying habits? If so, how? If not, why not?

25. Are you a collector? How do you feel when you find something you know to be expensive or rare being sold cheaply? What do you do about this?

26. Anything else you would like to add?