OBJECTIFICATION AND REDIRECTION OF DESIRE: EXPOSURE TO CONSUMER CULTURE IN THE LOW INCOME CONTEXT

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OBJECTIFICATION AND REDIRECTION OF DESIRE: EXPOSURE TO

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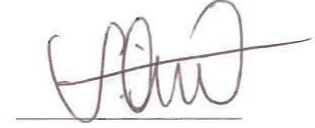
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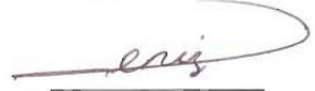Approval of the Graduate School of Social Sciences

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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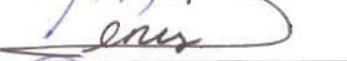Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIFICATION AND REDIRECTION OF DESIRE: EXPOSURE TO CONSUMER CULTURE IN THE LOW INCOME CONTEXT

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The number of studies in the fields of marketing and consumer research on low income people and their consumption behavior is in great contradiction with the importance of this segment, which has reached almost 80 % of the total world population. Considering the prominent gaps in the consumer research literature, this study focuses on the desires of low income consumers, and how they are shaped, directed and redirected by the institutional forces of the capitalist market system. Through an interpretivist approach, 60 in-depth interviews were conducted with low income consumers in 6 different settings in Izmir, Turkey. The findings point at mainly two broad discussions. On the one hand, the findings reveal the causes of persistent poverty and suggest that the major institutions of the contemporary society deepen the problem even further. On the other hand, through the discussions on

desire, hope and power, this study also shows that the objectification of desire have severe consequences both in the cases of attaining and not attaining the desired object. Furthermore, it contributes to the current literature through revealing that, not attaining the objectified forms of desire may lead to its redirection onto non-material assets through religion. However, according to the findings, religion may also become an extension of the market rather than being an alternative for it through creating an illusory sense of powerfulness, postponing (but not suppressing) the desire by the representations of heaven, diminishing the possibility of resistance and redirecting the desire back onto commodities (re-objectification) by religious commercialism.

Keywords: Desire, Low Income Consumers, Poverty, Consumer Culture, Religion

ÖZET

ARZUNUN NESNELEŞTİRİLMESİ VE YENİDEN YÖNLENDİRİLMESİ: DÜŞÜK GELİR ŞARTLARINDA TÜKETİM KÜLTÜRÜNE MARUZ KALMA

Yurdakul Şahin, Dicle

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Pazarlama ve tüketici araştırmaları alanlarında düşük gelirli kişiler ve bu kişilerin tüketim davranışları üzerinde yapılan çalışmaların sayısı, toplam dünya nüfusunun yaklaşık %80'ine ulaşmış bu segmentin önemi ile büyük çelişki içindedir. Bu çalışma, tüketici araştırmaları literatüründeki önemli boşlukları göz önüne alarak, düşük gelirli tüketicilerin arzularına ve bu arzuların kapitalist piyasa sisteminin kurumsal güçleri aracılığıyla nasıl şekillendirildiğine, yönlendirildiğine ve yön değiştirdiğine odaklanmaktadır. Yorumsal bir yaklaşımla, İzmir, Türkiye'de yer alan 6 farklı ortamda, düşük gelirli tüketiciler ile 60 derinlemesine mülakat gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları iki genel tartışmayı işaret etmektedir. Bulgular, bir taraftan süreğen yoksulluğun sebeplerini ortaya çıkarmakta ve günümüz toplumunun temel kurumlarının sorunu daha da derinleştirdiklerini öne sürmektedir.

Öte yandan bu çalışma, arzu, umut ve güç üzerindeki tartışmalar aracılığı ile, arzunun nesneleştirilmesinin, arzu edilen nesneyi hem elde etme, hem de elde edememe durumlarında ciddi sonuçları olduğunu göstermektedir. Ayrıca, arzunun nesneleştirilmiş formlarına ulaşılamaması durumunun, arzunun din aracılığı ile maddi olmayan varlıklara yeniden yönlendirilmesine yol açabileceğini ortaya koyarak, mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ancak bulgulara göre din de, yanıltıcı bir güçlülük hissi yaratmak, cennet betimlemeleri aracılığı ile arzuları (bastırmaktan ziyade) ertelemek, karşı koyma olasılığını azaltmak ve dini ticarileşme yoluyla arzuları yeniden ticari nesnelere yönlendirmek suretiyle piyasanın bir alternatifi olmaktan çok, bir uzantısı haline gelebilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arzu, Düşük Gelirli Tüketiciler, Yoksulluk, Tüketici Kültürü, Din

To my beloved family:

*my parents, my sister and my husband.***

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My Ph.D. journey started in 2008, and it seems that I have finally reached the end of this great adventure. Looking at the past 5 years, I can state that these were the most challenging times of my life. The reason for me, and for many Ph.D. students, to face all these challenges is hidden in the joy of seeing yourself, your thoughts and your perspective change day by day. This personal evolution is like growing your own wings, and I believe that these wings will help me in my future journeys, hopefully taking me farther than I can imagine.

It would have not been possible to write this doctoral dissertation or remember my Ph.D. experience as a happy and pleasant one without the support and help of the wonderful people in my life, to only some of whom it is possible to give particular mention here. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Deniz Atik, for her continuous support, patience and enthusiasm. I strongly believe that meeting her was a turning point in my academic career. I am grateful to my committee members, Prof. Dr. Fuat Fırat and Prof. Dr. Nikhilesh Dholakia for their encouragement, insightful comments and questions, and for giving me the honor by being the members of my committee. I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Fuat Fırat and his wife, Linda Lewis, Asst. Prof. Dr. Mohammadali Zolfagharian, and all Ph.D. students and candidates of 2011 Spring

Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank the participants of this study wholeheartedly. These kind, generous and modest people made me understand one more time that poverty has nothing to do with money. Their struggle gives me hope and a purpose in life.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the first orbital space tourism activity was accomplished with the first space tourist's visit to the International Space Station. The trip cost $20 million and was funded fully by the multimillionaire tourist who has a special interest in space exploration. By the end of 2009, the number of space tourists reached 7, who paid 20 to 35 millions of dollars for a 10 day visit to the space.[1] Most people might think that this is the ultimate point for the things that money can buy, however, the question prevails: where is the line to be drawn? Today, money can buy almost everything and we are surrounded by countless opportunities to choose from and consume. There is no limit to consumption as the dominancy of the consumer culture in the contemporary society directs our desires to commodified representations of almost anything. We just need to explore and find out what will provide us with the satisfaction we search for, and supply required financial resources. However, our attempts in search for satisfaction lead to a cycle of consumption which begins by the possession, continues with the frustration due to the temporary feeling of satisfaction and results in a new search. The good news is that, we have the right to make infinite numbers of attempts, as long as we have the means of exchange.

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[1] http://www.spaceflightnow.com/news/n1101/12soyuz/, retrieved Feb. 18, 2012.

Yet, we need to face the bitter reality that majority of the world population do not have the chance to make these attempts as they lack the required resources. Almost 20 percent of the world population (1.3 billion people) is living below the international poverty line (US$ 1.25/day) while more than 80% lives on less than $10/day. This means that a great majority of the world population lack the resources even for the basic necessities of survival. We are living in a world of deepening income inequality and expanding poor population as the recent financial crises also contributed to this severe problem of the world economy by adding 64 million people more to the extreme poverty population (Worldbank Poverty Overview, 2010).

The current literature reveals that, lacking required resources not only restraints consumption and poses an obstacle to being a part of the contemporary consumer culture, but also results in a lack of attention from marketing practitioners and scholars. Low income consumers have not been the focus of attention for many years except for a few studies in the literature providing important insights (Caplovitz 1963, Andreasen 1975, Darley and Johnson 1985, Andreasen 1993, Alwitt 1995, Curtis 2000, Prahalad and Hammond 2002, prahalad and Hart 2002, Prahalad 2004, Hamilton and Catteral 2005, Hill and Gaines 2007, Martin and Hill 2012, Varman et al. 2012, Viswanathan and Sridharan 2012, Blocker et al. 2013). Most of the historical models of consumer behavior do not take into consideration the low income consumers, and therefore, are less relevant for the majority of the humankind (Hill and Gaines, 2007). New marketing tools and models which have been developed to identify and target "important" customers in terms of life-time value contribute to this disinterest in low income consumers further (Curtis, 2000) as

they are often evaluated as an unprofitable and risky segment (Alwitt and Donley 1996, Hamilton and Catteral 2005).

Yet, even if not a member of the target market, it is not possible for any individual to abstract herself/himself from the messages of the consumer culture in this era of evolving information technologies and rapid globalization. Globalization of the consumer culture leads to widespread application of its practices around the world by consumers who want to participate in this dominant way of constructing a "meaningful" life. Consumers are exposed to millions of messages regarding the dominant consumption practices through consumer socialization agents. Regardless of who we are, where we live, and which social class we belong to, we are face to face with the inescapable messages of the consumer culture about how to be a part of this "modern, sophisticated, and trendy" way of living. Compliance to these dominant patterns is of key importance as the ones who fail to live according to the standards of this "normal" life are labeled as undesirable, deviant or abnormal (Bauman, 2005). Therefore, the members of the society feel a need to comply with its rules in order to ensure social acceptability. However, the consequences of this compliance might differ tremendously from one segment to another, and especially in the low income context because of their financial constraints.

Previous studies in literature provide some insights about low income consumers and their consumption behavior (Caplovitz 1963, Coleman 1983, Hill 1995,2001,2002, Curtis 2000, Kochuyt 2004, Bauman 2005, Hamilton and Catteral 2005, Hill and Gaines 2007, Üstüner and Holt 2007, Hamilton 2009, Viswanathan et al., 2010); however, there is an urgent need in the consumer research literature for

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theoretical and empirical explanations of the effects of exposure to consumer culture on low-income consumers' desire to adapt their consumption practices to the dominant pattern. Taking these gaps in the literature into consideration, this study attempts to explore the effects of the consumer culture and other institutions of the capitalist market system on the objectification and redirection of desire, as well as the consequences of these objectifications in the low income context. Although being discussed intensely in the literature review chapter, a brief synthesis of the current literature and gaps are also presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. *Synthesis of the literature and literature gaps*

Research on Low Income (Poor / Disadvantaged) Consumers	Articles		Books
	Consumer Research Literature	**Other Literatures**	
Cultural Aspect	Hill 2002, Hill and Gaines 2007, Üstüner and Holt 2007, Hamilton 2009	Harvey and Reed 1996, Lewis 1998, Jones and Lou 1999	Lewis 1966, Lewis 1975, Bauman 2005
Descriptive Aspect (describing and measuring poverty)	Blocker et al. 2013	Allen 1970, Hagenaars and De Vos 1988, Maxwell 1999, Pradhan and Ravallion 2000, Jolliffe 2001, Hulme and Shepherd 2003, Meyer and Sullivan 2003	Collier 2007, Banerjee and Duflo 2011
Practical Aspect (evaluating consumption practices, coping strategies, consumer psychology)	Hill and Stamey 1990, Hill 1991, Ozanne et al. 1998, Hill 2001, Elliot and Leonard 2004, Duhachek 2005, Hamilton and Catteral 2005, Henry 2005, Chakravarti 2006, Üstüner and Holt 2007, Hamilton and Catteral 2008, Martin and Hill 2012	Hundeide 1999, Kochuyt 2004, Viswanathan et al. 2010, Gulyani and Talukdar 2006, Gulyani and Talukdar 2010,	Caplovitz 1963

Social Welfare Perspective (Poverty alleviation)	Hill 1995, Ozanne et al. 1998, Karpatkin 1999, Curtis 2000, Prahalad and Hammond 2002, Baker et al. 2005, Hill 2008, Blocker et al. 2013, Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2012, Varman et al. 2012, Viswanathan and Sridharan 2012	Moser 1998, Bowring 2000, Gulyani and Talukdar 2006	Andreasan 1975, Alwitt and Donley 1996, Narayan 2002, Prahalad 2004, Collier 2007, Banerjee and Duflo 2011
Exposure to Mass media in Low Income Context	O'Guinn and Shrum 1997	Katz and Foulkes 1962, Block 1970, Greenberg and Dervin 1970, Stephens 1972, Gerbner et al. 1980, Chatman 1985	Condry 1989
Desire in Low Income Context	Belk and Ger 1993, Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, Belk 1997, Belk et al. 1997, Belk et al. 2003, Blocker 2011		
Literature Gaps			
Effects of exposure to consumer culture on low income consumers' objectifications of the desire	Elliot and Leonard 2004, Varman and Belk 2008	Rosenblatt (eds.) 1999	
Strategies to attain the desired object (what can and cannot be sacrificed/substituted to attain the desired object)	Belk and Ger 1993, Belk et al. 2003	Halnon 2002	
Coping strategies in case of a failure in attaining the desired object (desire-hope relationship)	Belk et al. 2003, Rosa et al. 2012		
Redirection of desire (power and religion in the low income context)			

The conceptual framework of this study is informed by different literatures in economics, sociology, anthropology and psychology, as well as marketing and consumer research literatures (*please see Table 1*). In the first section of this dissertation, a review of the literature is presented which covers the theoretical framework of the study. The inquiry begins with the importance and significance of consumer culture in the contemporary world specifically on self-expression and identity construction. The discussion continues with the global expansion of consumer culture through consumer socialization agents and the effects of exposure to consumer culture in the low-income context. In the last part of the literature review section, the reasons behind the desire to join the consumer culture will be discussed comprehensively, followed by the presentation of the research model and questions. After explaining the details of the methodology followed, findings of the study will be presented before arriving to the final discussion.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Meaning of Consumption in the Contemporary World

In the attempt to explore specific consumption behaviors of low income consumers and their exposure to the dominant practices of the contemporary consumer culture, I first take a glance at the importance of consumption in society and how it has become such a major tool in constructing identities.

Being one of the most important phenomena constructing and shaping contemporary society, consumption and the influencing factors behind have been a topic of intense interest for many decades in academia (Belk et al. 1982, Campbell 1987, Belk 1988, Featherstone 1991, Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, Fırat et al. 1995, Fırat 1997, Holt 1997, Slater 1997, Fırat and Dholakia 1998, Slater and Tonkiss 2001, Arnould and Thompson 2005). There are different streams in literature pointing out different motives behind consumption preferences of consumers. According to one of these major streams, namely the neoclassical theory of consumption, individuals try to maximize the utility according to exogenous preferences, and consumers are fully rational in their consumption choices. This theory, neglecting the social interactions, culture or significant others, assume that

leading motives behind consumption choices are price, income and personal taste (Hayakawa and Venieris 1977; Ackerman 1997), and they are assumed to be independent. Ackerman (1997) names this assumption of neoclassical theory as "asocial individualism" which refers to the independency of the preferences of consumers from social institutions and interactions with/observations of others. Especially people with limited income are thought to focus on the cognitive aspects of decision making rather than taking into consideration the emotional aspects. They are often evaluated as consumers who are fully rational in their consumption behavior, engaging in utilitarian consumption rather than symbolic or hedonic consumption due to the lack of resources (Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996).

However, regardless of the level of income, these assumptions of independency and pure rationality are far from being a good description of consumption behavior of contemporary consumers. Contrary to the neoclassical economic theory's focus on rationality of choice, the symbolic aspect of consumption has been long recognized and studied by consumer researchers (Veblen 1899, Belk et al. 1982, Levy 1982, Solomon 1983). From the consumption experience to all types of commodities, consumers are defining themselves, and others in terms of the symbolic aspects of consumption (e.g. Belk 1988; Elliott 1997; Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Levy 1982; Solomon 1983; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988) and this is not only valid for consumers with high incomes but for all classes in society. We are all affected by the contemporary consumer culture, and at the core of this culture resides the symbolic meanings of commodities which are regarded as major contributors to and reflection of our identities (Belk et al., 1982; Belk 1988). Today, rather than the cognitive decision making processes, our consumption is

shaped by products' social meanings as symbols and their private meanings as signs (Solomon, 1983), and the recognition for this symbolic aspect of consumption starts developing as early as primary socialization and secondary socialization in grade school (Belk et al.,1982). By means of the socialization agents such as family and peers, educational institutions and mass media, we develop this recognition and align our consumption accordingly.

Although we all pass through such similar processes of socialization in terms of developing an understanding about symbolic meanings of commodities, Wattanasuvan (2005) suggests that these meanings are negotiable and subject to different interpretations and expectations of the society or group in which we live. The socially constructed symbols of consumption (Elliott, 1997) are subject to different interpretations with reference to different social environments (Wattanasuvan, 2005). In terms of such different interpretations and expectations, we alter our consumption behavior and use our possessions for self-expression in order to construct socially-acceptable identities.

Being one of the key constructs in forming and shaping identities, social status has a great influence on the economic behaviors and consumption patterns of individuals. We use symbolic meanings of commodities to locate ourselves in the society as well as for self-creation and self-expression. Similarly, Armstrong (2007) states that, according to the symbolic interactionism perspective, individuals organize their behaviors in accordance with the general expectations of the society and how they expect other people to behave. People guide their behaviors accordingly, for example, to be considered as a member of a certain group by interpreting their

physical environment and mediating the reality by the symbolic environment. The commodified representations of these meanings are among the most important tools we use to locate ourselves to the desired position in the society.

By the Theory of Conspicuous Consumption, Veblen (1994 [1899]) also suggested an explanation to the attempts of positioning oneself in the society via symbolic meanings of commodities. Criticizing the rationality assumption of Neoclassical Theory of Consumption, Veblen stated that consumption preferences of people depend on their actual and desired positions in the social hierarchy. According to this theory, there are two major reasons for people's tendency for conspicuous consumption: to distinguish her/himself from the members of the same social class or the desire to be considered as a member of a higher class. Veblen's theory assumes that utility is based on status rather than price-quality tradeoff. In spite of the commonsense, Veblen further argues that spending money on commodities basically for their symbolic meanings which communicate the membership of a higher class is not valid just for the rich, but for all classes of the society, meaning that even the poorest people engage in conspicuous consumption.

Similarly, according to Duesenberry (1949), the reason behind conspicuous consumption and imitation of other people is the need for enhancing one's social status. Consumption of status symbols such as particular goods or brands is a useful means for gaining status and social prestige (Eastman et al., 1999). Similarly, Kilsheimer (1993) states that status consumption is the motivational process behind the desire to improve one's social status by means of commodities. We decide what we consume under the influence of a projection of how we will be perceived by

significant others according to the meanings embedded in commodities, and in the consumption activity itself (Solomon, 1983). The importance of status consumption is also pointed out by Belk (1988), expressing that even in developing countries, the level of importance people attach to conspicuous and status consumption is more than the importance of food or shelter. This means that, these are identical characteristics of consumption and regardless of income level or social status, people consume for social acceptance and for enhancing their social status according to the pre-defined patterns of consumption, under the influence of the consumer culture.

This self and status expressive aspect of consumption became especially important in modernity as commodities became a building block of self-constructed identities of the modern individuals. In this culture of derived meanings, signs and "free choice," individuals use possessions as a way to construct, express and re-construct their identities (Belk et al. 1982, Campbell 1987, Belk 1988, Slater 1997, Fırat and Dholakia 1998, Schor 2004). Contemporary consumers define both themselves and others in terms of possessions which are symbols of personal qualities and interests (Solomon 1983, Belk 1988, Mehta and Belk 1991, O'Cass and McEwen 2004).

According to Ransomee (2005), consumption supplies us with new opportunities to experiment with and consume the meaning of identity. The marketplace has become a source of symbolic meanings in which consumers, who are described as identity seekers and makers, construct narratives of identity through consumption (Belk, 1988; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Levy, 1981). The symbolic meanings embedded in commodities are also in charge of bridging self-derived

meanings and society's interpretations to ensure that our identity is truly communicated (Wattanasuvan, 2005). As we invest effort and time to our possessions, we identify ourselves with them, which means that our self concept is extended by these possessions (Belk, 1988). This is basically the reason why Fromm (1947) defines people as "marketing characters" who try to manage their very own lives and identities to enhance their social status, socioeconomic exchange value and welfare. We choose one of the possible selves which are collections of our past selves, current role models, personal values and perceptions of social expectations according to the requirements of the situation and time (Schouten, 1991). This cycle of construction never ends as we are surrounded by many opportunities within the limited space provided to us by the modern project for feeling free and in control of our own lives and identities. Another important aspect of this situation of expressing the self by possessions is its being valid in different places and cultures (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Within the context of this dissertation, commodified self-expressions of low-income consumers will be investigated in detail, taking into consideration the effects of being exposed to the agents of the global consumer culture.

2.2. The Construction and Effects of Consumer Culture in Modernity

With the increasing interest in the expansion of consumer culture globally, scholars pointed out the need for comprehensive studies on globalization of consumer culture and its effects on consumption patterns of consumers, especially in less-developed countries and transitional economies (Wilk 1995, Bonsu and Belk

2003, Coulter et al. 2003, Arnould and Thompson 2005). Being exposed to consumer culture each day through the consumer culture agents and developing communication technologies, consumers in these countries may also be attracted by these new lifestyles and practices, and they may try to adapt their consumption behavior to the dominant consumption patterns even though they lack the required resources (Tse et al. 1989, Üstüner and Holt 2007, Zhao and Belk 2008). In the attempt to understand the possible effects of global consumer culture and the dominant consumption practices on low income consumers, this section tries to provide a review of the development of the consumer culture and its importance in the contemporary world.

Observations of contemporary society, social institutions, and in general, the modern world in which we live indicate that humanity is surrounded by its own constructs, namely, the market system and the consumer culture. Today, consumer culture is one of the major forces shaping our identities, lifestyles and in general, our society (Belk 1988, Holt 1997, Kozinets 2002, Thompson and Hirschman 1995, Elliot 1997, Levy 1982, Solomon 1983). Our lives are shaped by the inevitable reality that the contemporary society is basically a consumer society and we should adapt our lives to operate within the limits of the consumer culture (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, Giddens 1991).

Consumer culture is defined as a social arrangement that developed during modernity in which the market plays a mediating role between lived culture and social resources, between a meaningful life and the symbolic and material resources available in the market (Slater, 1997). In the contemporary consumer culture, the way to a meaningful and valuable life is passing through the symbolic meanings

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embedded in commodities by the market and its actors. In addition, it frames consumers' interpretations of the world and their behaviors by promoting certain consumption patterns (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard 2002, Holt 1997, Kozinets 2002, Thompson and Hirschman 1995). The market has become a source of symbolic meanings through which people, including those who lack the required resources to participate in the consumer culture, construct narratives of identity (Arnould and Thompson 2005, Belk 1988, Hill 1991, Holt 2002, Levy 1981). Consumer culture helps people to make collective sense of their environment and orients its members' lives towards the system of commercially produced objects and the meanings embedded in them (Kozinets, 2001).These meanings are communicated by the members in their daily lives through social roles and interactions. Similarly, Slater (1997) argues that the study of consumer culture is a study of the social conditions under which personal and social demands define and construct each other, rather than being a study of wants and of individual choice.

Although it has been claimed that the influences of the consumer culture on the society was evident even in pre-modern societies (Slater 1997, Slater and Tonkiss 2001), it can be argued that today, the dominance of consumer culture is so powerful that it has become one of the major institutions of the modern world, structuring the society and individuals (Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, Featherstone 1991, Campbell 1987, Miller 1987, Fırat and Dholakia 1998, Schmookler 1993). By the proliferation of communication technologies all around the world, consumer culture and its effects on individuals, societies, and local cultures are widespread and inevitable. All of the previously hold boundaries to consumer culture such as geographic borders—proximity to the West, which is regarded as the motherland of capitalism

and consumption—or on economic circumstances—such as welfare, income level and purchasing power—have become blurred and are far from posing an obstacle to its expansion. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that this boundaryless expansion of consumer culture also erodes the binary oppositions of modernity, such as center-periphery, rich-poor, and developed-underdeveloped, bringing societies and individuals exposed to its practices together under common denominators of lifestyles and consumption patterns. As the notion of consumer culture has become a key factor affecting consumer behavior, emphasis has been placed on this construct to have a deeper understanding on its development, meaning, and effects on contemporary society (Levy 1981; Featherstone 1991; Fırat and Venkatesh 1995; Slater 1997; Holt 1997; Fırat 2001, Kozinets 2001, Slater and Tonkiss 2001; Holt 2002; Arnould and Thompson 2005). The next section focuses on the construction of the consumer and the consumer culture under the influence of modernity, and the expansion of this culture to all classes of the society including low income segment.

2.2.1. The Construction of the Consumer and the Consumer Culture

There is an ongoing inquiry about the development of consumer culture as some scholars argue that its development began as early as the Eighteenth Century (Slater, 1997), while others claim that although the development began in previous centuries, its domination and its effects on the construction of the individuals and the society has became more intense in the contemporary society.

The construction of the consumer culture begins with the construction of the consumer and this process is not independent from human culture and

institutionalization (Fırat, 2001). According to Slater (1997), consumer culture is a universal project of western modernity which is bound up with other projects of modernity such as individual freedom, free choice, and rationality. In addition, this project was at the core of the modern market-oriented economy. The necessity of consumption and the consumer for the sustainability of the market system was realized in early 20th Century with the understanding that economic wealth is dependent on maximization of production, which necessitates maximization of consumption. Consumption gained importance as the leading factor for fostering economic growth. It even became a responsibility of citizens especially after or during crisis or critical events such as World War II (Cohen et al., 2004) or September 11, 2001 (Hill, 2002) in order to keep the machine (capitalist system) in operation. Citizens were encouraged to consume to improve their country's economic situation and wealth, regardless of their level of income or social class.

In a similar vein, the process of creating the consumer can be explained by the division of human activity into spheres such as production and consumption to articulate and promote the activities of production in order to contribute in the wealth of nations (Fırat, 2001). Though distracted from production activities, consumption activities were considered to be necessary in order to "re-energize" production. The emphasis on individualism and free choice in modern thinking contributed to the isolation of the consumer, which resulted in the separation of public and private domains. Public domain was the domain of production and private domain was the domain in which consumption practices took place (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001). Through practicing their freedom of consumption in the private domain, the so called "free" and "satisfied" consumer would be able to re-produce in the public domain.

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Slater (1997) further argues that Fordism is the pioneer of consumer culture which reinforced the colonization of everyday life by corporations, being status driven and conformist. Through mass production and consumption, the image of a good life as the ability to keep up with the Joneses was reinforced (Slater, 1997).

The production – consumption dichotomy was one of the fruits of modern thought, and it gain more importance as this 'double sided' economy attracted the attention of the economists, resulting in an understanding of the importance of turning individuals into consumers for the sustainability of the capitalist system. 'Consumerization' of the members of the society was as important as turning them into productive people in order to realize the economic value created through production (Fırat, 2001). Therefore, regardless of the social class, income level or the productive activity they participate, all members of the society needed to be turned into consumers as well as producers. As a consequence, participating in the dominant consumption practices and joining the consumer culture has become a necessity for all social classes in the society. By means of the expansion strategies which particularly target high and middle income consumers in developing countries to reach those markets, low-income consumer have also been seduced to join the consumer culture along with the rest of the society in order to avoid social exclusion (Hamilton, 2009). Low income consumers, who are not primary target markets in most of the marketing practices, have also engaged in adopting these dominant consumption patterns (Belk 1988, Hamilton and Catteral 2005). However, the consequences of low income consumers' conformity to the dominant consumption patterns might differ dramatically from high income consumers due to their constrained resources. Spending scarce resources for joining the consumer culture

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may lead to more severe consequences compared to consumers in higher income classes. In addition, the desire to join consumer culture conflicts with feelings of access, and this conflict creates a tension which becomes a source of stress and dissatisfaction for the consumer (Hamilton, 2009). Therefore, it is of great importance to investigate this compliance behavior in detail especially for low-income consumers in order to understand the effects of living in a consumer culture with scarce financial resources. In the attempt to explain this willful participation to consumer culture and the consumerization process, the next section sheds light on the role of consumption in identity construction and how "identity" has become such an important construct in the modern society.

2.2.2. "The Identity Project" and the Construction of Identity

The Identity Project is one of the major projects of modernization which aims to reach the ideal self and idealized ways of living through continuous improvement. This project of modernity plays a significant role in our understanding on the contemporary society, as the primary responsibility and ultimate goal of the modern individual has become successfully constructing her/his identity. The importance of this identity project for the context of this dissertation stems from the key role played by the consumer culture and commodities in constructing identities. Considering the need to elaborate this project and its importance for our understanding on low income consumers' consumption practices, this section provides a brief historical view of modernity and the identity project, its interplay with the consumer culture and its effects on consumers in the contemporary society.

The transformation of identity in modernity has begun with the change in its perception as being given or ascribed. In traditional societies, identity was largely given through membership to a certain group, basically through ancestry and religion (Slater 1997, Dunn 1998, Fırat 2006). Identity was fixed and stable rather than being open to change or improvement mainly because of the fixed structures of the social class and belief systems. In addition, one's faith and life was thought to be in the hands of superior powers rather than the individual as s/he had limited capacity to change his life and her/his given position in the society (Fırat, 2006).

However, new beliefs and ideologies inspired by Enlightenment ideals of progress through science and arts revalued the potential and creativity of humankind to construct his own destiny instead of the belief that he is ruled by the superior powers and has no control over his life as well as the world and the nature. In the modern discourse, the individual and society is separate and this separation provides people with the autonomy to construct their own destinies, lives and identities (Fırat, 2006). The locus in the modern society shifted to the individual and her/his inner life. According to Dunn (1998), the rise of individualism, autonomy, freedom and choice necessitated the self-definition and construction of identity rather than a stable, pre-described and constructed identity provided to the individual by the society. In addition, modernity created different spheres of life through institutionalization such as work, leisure, family, gender, nationality and ethnicity which results in multiplication of social roles, relationships and practices. These various roles also necessitated choosing different identity traits to be adopted for each role. Therefore, the identity became a matter of choice and acquisition, and a life-time project to be completed successfully (Fırat, 1994).

As discussed in the previous section, in modernity, the construction of the consumer culture necessitated the construction of the consumer and all individuals in the society to be "consumerized" to foster the economic growth. Therefore, the modern society required individuals to be free and autonomous in creating and constructing their own identities, and in addition, the need for economic growth also necessitated these individuals to be turned into consumers. These two projects, namely the consumerization and the identity projects completed each other in the modern discourse, and provided the social and cultural basis for our society. The individual, who had lost her/his given identity, was in search of traits and images to construct her/his self-defined identity. According to Fırat (2006), the modern culture provided the individual with images to construct her/his identity through the market, through acquiring the correct products, and using the meanings embedded in those products to construct a correct (socially acceptable and likable) identity. Selecting the desirable identity traits to be adopted, and acquiring them through the portfolio of symbolic meanings of products available in the market, the individual is now both a consumer who acquires these meanings through consumption, and an identity constructer who uses these meanings to build up and reflect her/his ideal self.

In spite of the debate about the contemporary society being either a modern or a post-modern society, we see that the discussions above are still not away from being a good description of the contemporary situation. Yet, this discussion also highlights the severity and importance of the problem regarding the low income consumers living in a modern society molded by the consumer culture.

As discussed above, modernity provided the individual with the autonomy to construct her/his own identity and consumer culture provided her/him with a portfolio of meanings and images embedded in commodities to be chosen and used in this construction. However, the case of low income consumers who lack the required resources to provide themselves with commodities, and therefore, meanings and images embedded in those commodities to construct their identities, is still unexplored and open to question. There is an urgent need in the consumer research literature for finding answers to questions such as how low income consumers will be able to construct their identities without these images and meanings, the consequences of living in a consumer society without the required resources, how their identity construction is affected by this lack, and without the opportunity to construct their own identities through these symbolic meanings, whether their identities can be considered as given rather than acquired. These are some of the questions which needed to be answered in the attempt to understand the behaviors of low income consumers living in a modern consumer society, however, they have not been elaborated deeply in the previous literature. Within the context of this dissertation, I will attempt to explore the answers of these questions, in addition to exploring the effects of exposure to consumer culture on low income consumers' consumption practices.

2.3. Exposure to Consumer Culture through Consumer Socialization Agents

Today, we are exposed to various media which communicate how to be a "good" consumer and how to position ourselves in society by following specific

consumption patterns. This knowledge about the rules of being a good consumer is learnt through a process called consumer socialization, which is defined by Ward (1974, p.2) as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace." By means of consumer socialization, we not only learn how to function as a consumer, but also adopt the dominant consumption patterns and practices which are communicated by the consumer socialization agents such as the mass media, internet, family and peers. These agents, in a sense, guide our way to be a part of the consumer culture by teaching us the social significance of commodities and the contribution of taking their possession to our success in social roles and relationships (Ward 1974) Today, by means of the wide expansion of communication technologies and globalization, consumer socialization agents such as the mass media are reaching millions of people around the world. In addition to the affluent members of the world population who are the target market for many businesses, low income consumers are also exposed to these inescapable messages of the consumer socialization agents which invite people of the modern society to join the consumer culture. Yet, as discussed in the previous sections, the consequences of this exposure might differ immensely in the low income context due to the resource constraints. As the main focus of this dissertation, the next section will elaborate the consumer socialization agents and how exposure to consumer culture through these agents might affect low income consumers' consumption practices and their desires to join the consumer culture.

2.3.1. The Mass Media

"Something is provided for all so that none may escape . . ."

(Adorno and Horkheimer 1993, p. 123)

Mass media is a basic institution of our contemporary society which shapes our interpretations of the social world by its representations of reality. Mass media includes the electronic media of radio, television, music and film, and the print media of newspapers and magazines, reaching billions of people around the world by its wide infrastructure and rapid diffusion (Ward, 1974). It plays a key role in consumer socialization by exhibiting the standards of consumer culture and by communicating the portrayals of a meaningful and desirable life. Being one of the most powerful institutions of the contemporary society, the messages conveyed through mass media are in a sense, inescapable for all members of the society.

This extensive role of mass media in the contemporary society has been argued especially in communication and sociology literatures, and the debate regarding its power and influence still continues. According to the Marxist theory, mass media serves the interests of the ruling classes as it legitimizes their power and tries to build a consensus in the society by suppressing consciousness. In addition, it is criticized to promote a mass culture which results in the erosion of the values of other cultures (Ward, 1974). Furthermore, according to the cultivation theory, television significantly affects the construction (cultivation) of the perceptions of reality and this reality is biased towards the narrative content constructed by the mass

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media (Gerbner et al. 1977). The theory states that heavy viewers interpret the social world consistent with the televised representations of it (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Therefore, it can be argued that higher levels of exposure to television may result in uniform social perceptions, interpretations and values (Gerbner et al. 1977, O'Guinn and Shrum 1997), regardless of the differences between cultures, societies and social classes.

In a similar vein, Clayton (2007) states that the industrial production of culture, which is the construction of a culture serving to the economic needs of the capitalist system, is the monopolization of practices and meanings in life to ensure the expansion of capital and accumulation of more wealth, and this process is conducted by means of mass media. Clayton (2007) further argues that culture is a contest to define and organize life in a way that is open to exploitation, and it is the construction of a similar sense of reality for all people in the society which makes this exploitation easier. According to Clayton, the power of media in the contemporary society is intense as it creates and influences masses, and directs them towards identical senses of reality and meaning.

In the capitalist system, one of the most important roles of the media is to stimulate consumption to keep the machine in operation (Hill, 2002), and this role also includes the reinforcement of global commercialization. As discussed in the previous section, the main reason of the construction of the consumer culture is to foster consumption and economic growth, and mass media is one of the most important tools in communicating this culture all around the world. In consideration of these discussions, it can be argued that the wide expansion of the consumer culture is a fruit of the rapid diffusion of mass media (Ward, 1974) and the developments in

the communication technologies such as computer networks, fiber optics and cell phones. Considering its accessibility and widespread effects especially on low income consumers, the evolution and diffusion of television will be elaborated further in the forthcoming section in order to have a deeper insight about its immense power.

i. Effects of the Rapid Diffusion of Television

According to Fiske (1987), the rapid diffusion of television is one of the most significant events of the Twentieth century which affected and transformed cultures radically. Before the introduction of the television in our lives, one of the most significant developments affecting the relationship between marketing and mass media was the use of photography in advertisements as it contributed to the idealization of certain looks and lifestyles, providing consumers with the opportunity to construct their own idealized images of self. The construction of these ideal images was not only based on the suggestions provided by the advertiser, but also on their own desires and needs (Bogardus, 1998).

During 1930s, in spite of and as a cure for the effects of the Great Depression, special attention was paid to the role of media and particularly the radio, in promoting a culture of consumption. Lavin (1995) states that it was during 1930s when using phrases such as "American Dream", which is associated with the material and social well-being of American nation, became common. During 1930s, soap operas in radios were started to be used as media of promoting specific products of the sponsors, as advertisements were not considered to be reliable sources of

information by skeptical audiences with relatively lower disposable incomes. Portraying idealized families who were able to live according to the standards of the American dream; these broadcast programs had important influences on consumer desires and tastes. As the listeners were rejecting direct sales messages, broadcast programs became media of subtle messages of advertising in plot lines. Listeners were identifying themselves with the characters of the soap opera and considering the characters as important sources of advice. Plot lines of soap operas were written with sponsors in order to promote their products, but what is more important than the promotion of commodities was the promotion of consumption as a mindset and a lifestyle (Lavin 1995, Hirschman and Thompson 1997). This mindset contributed further to the idea that acquiring the symbolic meanings embedded in products through consumption is the ultimate way to reach the ideal self portrayed in mass media. Similarly, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) argues that mass media provides the individual "a visual department store of symbolic possibilities that can be tried on, adopted, altered, or discarded in keeping with their desired self." (p.54) Most of the images and icons portrayed in the media, which are representations of the ideal self, move consumers towards attaining this ideal. The possibility of a failure in attaining the ideal does not cause frustration but it is the source of its attraction. The continuous strive for the ideal is an attempt to reach the best. Instead of thinking that these idealized images of mass media are not corresponding to reality and are images constructed by advertisers, consumers prefer to believe that the realization of a particular look or lifestyle by any human being makes it possible for the consumer as well (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997).

With a different perspective, Richins (1991) states that comparing oneself to the idealized images portrayed in the media can cause dissatisfaction with oneself. These unrealistic images of beauty, happiness and affluence raised the standards of the ideal self, and comparing one's own traits with these images causes the feeling of dissatisfaction with the current situation, leading to feelings of unhappiness and anxiety (Richins 1991, Hirschman and Thompson 1997). However, according to Hirschman and Thompson (1997), this is where the advertisements step in and propose the fulfillment of this emotional void by commodities. Attempts to attain these idealized images and lifestyles lead consumers to a cycle of consumption which never satisfies or fulfills that emotional void.

Considering the case of low income consumers, displays of these idealized images which are beyond their reach can be a major source of dissatisfaction and may trigger negative feelings (Belk and Pollay, 1985). Lack of the required resources may restraint low income consumers attempts as well as their hope to reach these ideals. Yet, the exposure will prevail, deepening the contradiction between the ideal and their current situation. Therefore, it is of great importance for consumer researchers as well as sociologists and public policy makers to understand the effects of exposure to mass media on low income consumers, and the behaviors and coping strategies they develop.

ii. Exposure to Mass Media in the Low Income Context

According to the previous studies, television is one of the most important media of exposure to consumer culture in the low income context due its wide reach in comparison to other forms of mass media. First of all, Greenberg and Dervin (1970) state that low-income people are as likely as people with higher incomes to own a TV set. In addition, it is explained that low-income population spent more than one half of their day watching TV which is much higher than the population average. Similarly, Condry (1989) states that education and income are negatively correlated with the amount of television view. Less educated people with lower incomes have fewer opportunities as leisure activities, and therefore, they prefer watching TV as an affordable, low cost entertainment (Gerbner et al., 1980). In addition, people may use media to escape, mainly from the feelings of alienation and the difficulties they face in their daily lives (Katz and Foulkes, 1962) which may result in increased exposure to media especially in the low income context. Mass media can be used to keep oneself closer to the desired other or the idealized images and lifestyles, providing the opportunity to identify oneself with these idealized images and ensuring an escape from the less affluent and desirable reality.

Stressing the importance of television in the lives of low income consumers further, Tellefsen and Takada (1999) state that although the patterns of consumption are communicated to a mass market, the social stratification of the society and the growing gap between high and low income population also change the effects of media on different groups. Mass media exposes consumers to certain prototypes of consumption patterns. In addition, if reflects the categorization of people according

to their income level, gender, age, or occupation (Hirschman 1988, Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Furthermore, according to O'Guinn and Shrum (1997), mental representations of the social world and perceptions of affluence are shaped during the socialization process on which television has a powerful influence. Providing consumers with images and lifestyles which are not a part of their daily experiences, television programs offer a world of affluent images. In addition, mass media rarely communicates images of low-income people. In Lichter et al.'s (1994) study, it is stated that blue-collar and low-status occupations and lifestyles are underrepresented in TV shows compared to real life. However, in spite of this discrepancy between the real world and the affluent world of television, consumers do not question or reject these discrepancies as they are in a passive state of engagement while watching TV (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997).

In addition to above discussions, being exposed to affluent characters and lifestyles, heavy viewers of television may develop a belief that the real world is an affluent place. As low income consumers have relatively low possibilities to experience the affluent life, they might fall into the predicament of thinking that the televised representation of the world is the reality. In addition, this knowledge about the lifestyles of affluent people can transform their desires, and affect the satisfaction they get from and motivation to material accumulation and consumption. This biased perception about the well-being of others in the society and the social comparison might also provoke different feelings from dissatisfaction to class envy and can raise material expectations of the individuals (O'Guinn and Shrum 1997). In consideration of the previous studies, it can be argued that the effects of exposure to mass media may affect low income consumers' desires to adjust their consumption behavior to

join the consumer culture. However, different interpretations of these messages might trigger different behaviors such as rejecting or being skeptical about the televised representation of reality or may lead in to feelings of admiration and desire to identify with the idealized images. In consideration of the different consequences of these different interpretations, the next section reveals the approaches in the literature regarding the interpretive role of consumers as being passive receivers of the media messages or being active members of the communication process.

iii. Consumer Agency in Interpreting Media Messages

In previous research, there are two main streams regarding the agency of the audience in interpreting media messages. One of these streams state that audiences are passive receivers of the messages provided by mass media who have no active role in interpreting these messages (Schramm 1971, Gerbner et al.1986). Contrary to this argument, the other stream is focused on the claim that consumers are active producers of perceived meaning, and they interpret media messages intrinsically with an interactive process (Bauer 1963, Blumler 1979, Hall 1980, Levy 1982). Fiske (1987) states that people who are exposed to mass media messages are able to construct their own meanings, and these meanings could even be against the discourses of the industry. This socially derived meanings and knowledge cause audiences to construct unique experiences in their interpretations of mass media according to their social class, occupation, gender and age (Hirschman and Thompson, 1997). Interpretation of the messages conveyed through mass media will differ according to personal history, perceptions of peers about the individual,

individual's own evaluations about herself/himself, and to the cultural code of the particular society in which the consumer lives. Therefore, Hirschman and Thompson (1997) claim that, rather than adopting the idealized image totally, consumers choose to focus on specific aspects which are meaningful according to their values and cultural code. While interpreting and adopting the messages within the cultural frame of reference, consumers construct a bricolage of dreams of identity, in which they select novel meanings and images, in a way, preserving their autonomy in decision making.

Hall (1980) explains the shared meanings and understandings between the mass media and the consumer with the concept of the cultural code, which is defined as a shared understanding on the symbolic meanings embedded in objects or images. This cultural code develops during socialization. However, it is also this shared cultural code which is used by the producers to direct consumers to specific patterns of decoding and interpretation. In contrast with the discussion above regarding the active role of the audience in interpreting media messages, Hall (1980) states that, media images are interpreted by means of the predominant cultural meanings without criticism. Therefore, the active interpreter role of the audience is limited by the cultural code as it provides them similar patterns of decoding, resulting in similar interpretations.

In terms of the debate of consumer agency, previous researchers have also stated that consumers have the personal autonomy to control their practices in spite of the exposure to the unrealistic idealized images portrayed in the media. In terms of personal choice and rational consumption behavior, consumers are stated to have the

power and right to preserve their autonomy on their decisions, regardless of the level of exposure (Bordo 1993, Nichter and Nichter 1991). However, this stream also indicates that, there are differences in perceptions of autonomy in terms of gender, as women are exposed to the social pressure of identifying themselves with the idealized images of beauty more than men. This social pressure exerted on women for adhering to the standards of beauty decreases the personal autonomy for making decisions freed from the idealized images of media. Hirschman and Thompson (1997) also contribute to this claim by stating that while men see media products as threats to individual choice, women are more inclined to interpret these products and images as a threat to their self-confidence. These discussions also reveal that the social and cultural code plays a very important role in the interpretations of the audience.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, lack of adequate resources to reach the idealized images of media may also affect the interpretations of media messages in the low income context. Although being a topic of debate in the literature, it can be argued that Lewis's (1965) culture of poverty, which refers to a subculture of negative beliefs and attitudes emerging as a response to their poverty and alienation, may also influence the perceptions and interpretations of people living within this cultural context. Therefore, as well as the effects of exposure to mass media, different cultural factors affecting the interpretations of low income consumers should also be investigated in detail in order to have a comprehensive understanding on their consumption behavior.

In addition to the effects of exposure to mass media, the roles played by other consumer socialization agents may also be of key importance for this understanding. The next section discusses the role of one of these consumer socialization agents, namely, the "significant other", in low income consumers' exposure to the consumer culture.

2.3.2. Social Comparison and the Frames of Reference: The Significant Other

The family and peers are among the most important consumer socialization agents because of their intense influence on the learning process in addition to their roles as frames of reference. Belk et al. (1982) discuss that the recognition of the symbolic aspect of consumption starts developing during primary socialization. Consequently, previous studies in the literature mostly focus on the effects of family on the socialization of children and adolescents. For example, in Moschis and Moore's (1979) study, the influence of family on the development of consumer skills of adolescents is investigated. According to Moschis and Moore (1979), parents have an important effect on the consumption behavior of children through providing purposive training, material reinforcement and opportunity for observation. They further argue that the structure of family communication affects the perceptions of the child about the marketing stimuli. A socio-oriented family structure emphasizes the importance of social relationships, and parents in these families encourage their children to evaluate their behavior according to other people which consequently may lead to materialistic orientations. In addition, in pluralistic families which reinforce open communication without the feeling of authority and encourage their children to express their ideas freely, the children have a greater knowledge about

consumption and marketing practices and are more able to filter the information provided by the advertisements.

Previous research also suggests that the family communication has an important effect on the socialization process as it affects all social relationships as well as the use of mass media (Chaffee et al. 1971 and 1973, McLeod and Chaffee 1972). In a similar vein, Moschis (1985) discusses that family communication has some indirect effects on consumer learning. According to Moschis, direct effects involve acquisition of information about consumption (specifically on rational aspects of consumption) and indirect effects involve the knowledge about relationships with other consumer socialization agents such as the mass media and peers. Indirect influences of family on consumption behavior occur when the family affects the interaction between the children and other sources of consumption information such as the mass media. Family communication and patterns of mass media use may affect the degree of exposure to mass media and the marketing messages conveyed through it.

Emphasizing the importance of family communication further, Rindfleisch et al. (1997) argue that young adults grown in disrupted families are more materialistic and engage in higher levels of compulsive consumption, supporting Belk (1988) and Schouten's (1991) assertions of material objects and consumption's use as replacements for social relationships . Similarly, An et al.'s study (1993) reveals that, due to the stressful life change and lack of parent support, the children in disrupted families are more inclined to rely on possessions to compensate the feeling of

insecurity. This also sheds light on the importance of family communication in developing materialistic orientations.

Previous studies also reveal that family and peers have different roles in the consumer socialization process. According to these studies, children learn consuming for the satisfaction of needs (utilitarian consumption) from their family, while they learn symbolic aspects of consumption such as styles and moods of consumption from their peers and the mass media (Parsons et al. 1953, Reisman and Roseborough 1955). The content of the information received from the family about the rational aspects of consumption include consumer decision making, price-quality, expenditure allocation, product decisions and brand preferences (Parsons et al. 1953, Riesman and Roseborough 1955, Ward and Wackman 1973, Moore and Stephens 1975, Moschis and Churchill 1978). In addition to these effects, Moore and Moschis (1985) suggest that rather than the frequency of communications, patterns and quality of communication between the family members have a greater effect on learning these cognitive aspects of consumption. In addition, although the communications about consumption decline by time, observations of the consumption patterns of the parents have no relation with the age of the children (Moore and Moschis, 1983). Therefore, the family keeps being an important source of information for consumption practices even in adulthood.

Considering the case of low income consumers, Ward and Wackman (1973) suggest that purposive training of children by their parents occur more frequently in families with higher incomes. Similarly, according to the findings of Moschis and Moore (1979), in lower social classes, the family communication about consumption

focuses more on product and brand names rather than a purposive training about consumption. The limited number of studies on the effects of family communication on consumption behavior of low income consumers unfurls the need for further research on the topic.

In addition, in spite of being one of the most important agents of consumer socialization, little attention was paid to peers' effects on consumer behavior. General findings of studies regarding the relative importance of family, peers and mass media on consumer socialization reveal that with age, parental influence decreases while the influence of peers increases (Ward 1974, Stephens and Moore 1975). Being skeptical about the messages of mass media and advertisements, young people attach more importance to the opinions of parents and peers. Furthermore, communication with peers also improves the awareness about the market and buying process, and this awareness may mediate the effect of other consumer socialization agents such as the mass media. Emphasizing the effects of peers on consumer socialization further, the social comparison theory of Festinger (1954) states that because of the need for conformity, young people evaluate their knowledge about consumption patterns and practices by comparing this knowledge with other people's practices. Peers have an important role in this comparison as they form a frame of reference for the individual. Starting as early as childhood and becoming more important during adolescence, peers significantly affect the consumption practices and choices especially in terms of symbolic meanings of commodities (Elliot and Leonard 2004).

In addition, previous studies in the literature mostly focus on effects of peers on children's and adolescents' knowledge about and practices of consumption (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Moschis and Moore 1982, Elliot and Leonard 2004). According to Remmers and Radler (1957) and Moschis and Moore (1979), adolescents are open and responsive to the opinions of peers who have similar interests and opinions. In addition to family and parents, Moschis and Churchill (1978) declare that adolescents acquire cognitive knowledge about consumption from their peers. However, they also state that peer influence is more evident in acquiring knowledge about the expressive aspects of consumption, the symbolic meanings of products and brands and their social importance.

In a similar vein, according to Moschis and Moore (1979), effects of peers' opinions on certain products which are key to social acceptance is more important than parents' influence, while parents are evaluated as sources of information for products with high performance or price risk. Similarly Bachmann et al. (1993) found that peers influence consumption decisions about publicly displayed products but do not have an effect on commodities used privately.

In the low income context, along with the mass media, family and peers can be considered as the most important agents of consumer socialization as their social relationships and life spheres are mainly restricted to their neighborhood. Due to resource constraints, they have limited alternatives for developing social relationships aside from their family and their friends in the neighborhood. Therefore, in addition to the effects of mass media, influences of family and peers on

consumption behavior of low income consumers should also be investigated in detail.

2.3.3. Exposure to Consumer Culture in the Low Income Context

As explained in the previous section, consumer socialization agents have an important role on our perceptions of reality, our understanding of the consumer culture and consequently, on our consumption behavior. In the low income context, the reflection of and responses to these effects might be different as exposure of low-income population to portrayals of consumer culture deepens the contradiction between "the culture of poverty" in which they live, and the material world surrounding them (Hill, 2008). For example, Hill and Gaines (2007) state that impoverished children develop a baseline standard of living through the images of material well-being portrayed in the media, and they evaluate their lives according to this standard baseline. Consequently, failure to live a 'normal' and affluent life and exclusion from the dominant consumption patterns cause the individual to develop negative feelings such as dissatisfaction and anger (Hill and Gaines, 2007). As stated by Andreasen (1975), people lacking adequate resources to join this lifestyle see themselves as deprived, powerless and alienated. In addition, according to Hamilton (2009), shopping experience, which is mostly described as an enjoyable activity, turns out to be a nightmare and is described as hateful, full of struggle and stressful by those people who evaluate themselves as living below the standard baseline of affluence. The unsatisfied desire to consume leads to feelings of exclusion, anger, shame, humiliation, and "alienation from the mainstream consumer culture" (Bowring 2000).

Hill (2001:4) argues that, being restrained by their financial resources in a highly materialized world, low-income people face the violation of their basic economic and social rights such as "the right to basic goods and services, the right to human dignity and self-respect, the right to participate in a meaningful way, the right to a living wage and the right to a positive future." The ability of these consumers to reach material prosperity is in doubt as their material world is best characterized by restriction, and therefore they do not have any hope for any improvement in their lives (Hill, 2008). In their study of consumer culture of poverty, Hill and Gaines (2007) list the main characteristics of this culture as the lack of familial relationships, falling into greater poverty, consumption restrictions, reactions to lack of support, fighting a deviant label and an uncertainty about the future. Hill and Gaines further argue that the lack of material resources cause a decrease in the quality of life which results in negative reactions and behaviors. Many of these people accept their situation to be beyond their control which is one of the main reasons of their pessimism about their future.

In response to these effects, Hamilton (2009) states that many low-income families develop coping strategies such as not engaging in impulse buying. Hamilton claims that they rather prefer planned shopping, making lists for their basic necessities and searching for discounts which helps them to control their financial resources. These families try to avoid credit with the fear of a debt spiral, yet some of them were forced to use credits in spite of the fear that the debt will worsen their financial situation (Hamilton, 2009). Hill (2001) argues that due to one of the most serious threats they face in the marketplace, the debt spiral, these consumers are

unable to improve their current situations which leads to more severe consumption restrictions.

Furthermore, Hamilton (2009) states that, due to their resource constraints, the shopping experiences of low-income consumers are largely utilitarian, and are not based on hedonic motivations. This statement is in contradiction with the arguments of Veblen (1899) and Belk (1988), who claim that regardless of their income level, all consumers engage in conspicuous consumption in varying degrees. Some of the previous studies suggest that lack of resources to join dominant consumer culture stimulates consumer misbehavior such as robbery, in order to provide resources to consume or to gain access to certain social groups (Ozanne et al., 1998). Findings of these studies also reveal that, low income consumers not only have the desire to join the consumer culture, but also actually participate in this culture by adopting dominant consumption practices in spite of the consequences of creating resources for it.

As a conclusion, the limited number of studies reveal that low income consumers are also trying to adopt the dominant consumption practices of the consumer culture even at the expense of debt or consumer misbehavior. Within the context of this dissertation, the reason behind this willful participation is explained by the construct of "desire". The irresistible and cyclical nature of consumption is investigated in detail in the next section through theories of desire.

2.4. The Desire

2.4.1. Definition and Importance of Desire on Consumption Behavior

Constructed by complex relationships of the individual with herself/himself, her/his body, the social environment, culture and time, desire is a fundamental concept in consumer research as it plays a focal role in consumption behavior (Belk 1997, Belk 2001, Belk et al. 2003, Fırat and Venkatesh 1995, Wilk 1997). The concept of desire provides an important understanding on the complexity of the human behavior, and plays a focal role in identity construction as we shape our desires according to the society and culture we live in. For the purposes of this research, desire is defined as *a cyclical journey of socially defined attempts to fulfill the lack, which is doomed to failure in reaching its destination, yet, is willfully taken and pursued due to the jouissance felt through and at the end of each attempt.*

Slater (1997) explains that desires are the driving force behind the marketplace and ensures the sustainability of consumption in the capitalist system and the contemporary culture which can be described as a mass consumer culture. Wilk (1997) states that, according to moralistic perspective of anti-consumption, mass consumer culture means commercialization of democracy based on wealth instead of culture. With a similar point of view, commentators like Roland Barthes and Christopher Lasch are also portraying modern consumption for masses who are isolated by modernity and individualism, and who seek for a dream of identity to substitute for the emptiness they feel. Wilk (1997) relates this search in modern consumerism to desire, stating that in the moralistic approach, consumption is

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equated to desire, a continuous search for pleasure and relying on acquiring and displaying commodities for happiness and satisfaction. Within this hedonistic search, desire is the driving force for the individual and for the marketplace. In a similar vein, Belk et al. (2003) emphasize the importance of desire in developing an understanding on consumer behavior and consumer culture through stating that, although manifested differently according to the cultural context, time, and intermediaries such as media and marketing, global capitalism channels the desire unto objects of consumption.

According to Belk et al. (1997), although including some states that are negative, desire is generally considered to be a positive emotion which is linked with dreams and fantasies, providing a basis for departures from ordinary life. Desire is depicted as passionate, hopeful, imaginative, empowering and fun. Similarly, Campbell (1987) argues that desire is a state of frustration and longing, yet it is also enjoyable. He describes desire as an "enjoyable discomfort", which creates the need for a clarification of what makes it enjoyable and what makes it uncomfortable (Belk et al., 2003).

The concepts of wants, needs and demands have been investigated in many studies in the consumer research literature previously. However, the concept of desire differs significantly from needs and wants which, unlike desire, can be satisfied and reached. Contrary to needs and wants that can be explained on the consciousness level, desires are unconscious motives (Lacan, 1977). The complexity of the relationships underlying desire makes its definition more difficult compared to explaining the dynamics of supply and demand, which are considered to be focal

concepts in understanding the Market. Desires could only be understood within the social context as they relate closely to social relationships and the symbolic meanings.

Belk et al. (2003) suggest that there is still a need for an explicit development of the construct of desire, and it is misperceived and degraded to a process of need-fulfillment and utility maximization. They further argue that needs can be controlled, planned and satisfied however, desire is the power that controls us and dominates our feelings, ideas and actions. Desire is considered to be more intense and powerfully motivating compared to wants. In addition, being shaped by cultural and historical forces, desire is a more conceptually rich construct in reaching an understanding of the contemporary consumer culture. While the concept of need involves naturalization of the social and biological roots of the lack, desire is a construct which is deeply rooted in social relationships (Girard, 1996) and value systems of the individual and the society. Rather than a reason based experience, desire is a passionate emotional experience which has its roots in dreams and fantasies. Bouchet (2011) explains that needs take a different form in the symbolic order which is called desire. Compared to wanting, desire is consistently characterized as more intense, profound, and powerfully motivating.

Furthermore, Belk et al. (2003) argue that consumer desire stems from the dreams and social realities of the consumer. It is a search for goods that are not yet acquired but thought to have the magical meaning of life embedded in them. The dreams and imaginations of people shaped by the social environment about better life forms the essence of the desire. Feelings triggered by the imaginations of a better life

might be more intense for consumers living in less affluent contexts, which emphasize the importance of desire for the purposes of this study.

This motivational force, desire, takes the form of consumption in our contemporary culture and directs people to consume in their search for satisfaction. Bauman (Rojek, 2004) argues that desires are the driving force now, as the needs cannot be stretched but there is no limit to desiring. He describes seduction and temptation as "the midwives of desire" by which "consumer demand had been wrenched out of the deadly grip of needs, those innocent and incorruptible children of nature, and entrusted to human cunning, shrewdness, ingenuity, acumen, inventiveness, creativity – and zeal." (p.298)

Forthcoming sections provide a deeper analysis of the construct of desire through discussions of different theories in psychology, sociology and consumer research literatures.

2.4.2. A Brief Historical View

Being one of the most powerful and passionate motivating forces of human behavior, desire has been a topic of interest for many philosophers and social scientists in history. Sahlins (1996) states that, the vain search for the satisfaction of human desire traces back to Adam when he disobeyed the rules of God and was "burdened with wants ever beyond his powers and became homo economicus." Desire, the powerful emotion inborn with the human being and shaped by the social relationships, is her/his essence, and this essence is an expression of a power that

nothing can put an end to, pointing to the cyclical characteristic of the desire (Bouchet, 2011).

According to Bouchet (2011), effects of religion on our current understanding of desire are significant. He states that in Christianity, desire was turned into an expression of evil and a diversion from God. Therefore, desire was considered to be related with sin and lack, recalling man to its imperfections. As suggested by Belk et al. (2000 & 2003), although in some forms of Islam, desire has been approached in a more tolerant way, most of the religions suggest that desire ought to be controlled, as the uncontrolled desire will drag people to guilt and sin. However, according to Bouchet, in spite of the multiple and usually excess forms of its expression, desire should not be considered as deviant or sinful, but should be understood within the context of the cosmic order.

Humanity has been facing significant changes from the times when desire was restricted and suggested to be suppressed by religious doctrines through our time of postmodern practices where people try to regain their sense of freedom and construct their own identities by expressions of desire through consumption. However, desire directed to consumption in search of satisfaction is not a practice of the contemporary society. According to Rassuli and Hollander (1986), a desire to purchase and consume above some minimum level and innate desire to be conspicuous dates back to antiquity. As also stated by Veblen (1899), consumption in search for social status and acceptance was well evident in previous centuries. Bouchet (2011) states that, during the 16th Century the nobility was spending conspicuously and competitively for power and social acceptance. However, the

majority of the society was directed to hard work and little consumption for the development of the industry and accumulation of wealth. The Renaissance revalued the creativity of man and reconsidered desire as a potential for social development rather than a threat to the social order (Bouchet, 2011). With the emergence of consumption as a requirement for economic growth, the society was directed to consumption as well as production. This new focus basically resulted in the promotion of desire as a force directed at consumption. Due to the need for increased consumption in order to support economic development, work and free-time relations were reorganized and people started to spend more time in leisure. Contrary to the ideas in previous centuries, consumption was no longer evaluated as sin but a necessity for the development of the society and reaching the goals of modernity (Slater, 1997). In addition, desire for consumption and commodities was no longer limited to nobility, but to all members of the society, regardless of their social class or income level. By this way, the meaningfulness of consumption was fostered and with greater social value, commodities became the focal point of a desirable life. According to Bouchet (2011), the important point in this new way of expressing desire was not the spread of luxury but the spread of hedonism, and this required the kindling of desire by the advertiser, contrary to previous centuries when desire was restrained by priests as it was evaluated as a threat to the social order. This powerful intrinsic motive was, by this way, directed towards commodities and consumption. Yet, in order to have a deeper understanding on how and why the desire can be directed to commodities, we need to have an understanding on the source of the desire, which is "the lack" (Lacan, 1977).

2.4.3. Lacan and the Source of Desire: The Lack

The construct of desire was one of the focal points in Lacan's work in which he discusses that the essence of desire is lack. Lacan describes desire as "the lack of being", "the desire of the other" and "the metonymy of being" (Braunstein, 2003, p.102-103). The lack emerges from the division into being a man or a woman and results in the loss of the other half. In order to fulfill this loss, which is not possible, the individual searches for ways to recover herself/himself during her/his entire life (Fırat and Venkatesh, 1995)

According to Lacan, the essence of desire lies in the very beginning of man's existence. It is an unconscious search and longing for the maternal love which began by the separation of the infant from the mother and therefore, doomed to frustration. The infant expresses her/his needs through the symbolic order, through language and cultural code, which makes the expression of the demand possible. Turning to a different form by its expression through the linguistic code, the original relationship of the desire and the subject is broken by its symbolic representation. Lacan argues that desire is created in this gap between the language (the symbolic expression of desire) and the unconscious (the innate drive) and desire does not search satisfaction but it desires desire. Similarly, Bouchet (2011) states that the distance between the intrinsic need felt by the individual and the need expressed through cultural code (symbols or language) is what creates desire, as expressions of desire through the cultural code will not be able to define its nature.

Lacan's mirror-phase describes the moment when the child recognizes himself in the mirror and its image is constructed by the transformation of the

imaginary to the symbolic (Elliot, 1997). A symbolic world means absence in Lacan's view, but in order to grasp a meaning of the real, the symbolic medium of language is used in spite of its contradictions and fragmentations (Elliot, 1997). In relation to this, Elliot (1997) discusses the role of image in postmodern consumption, stating one of the reasons why images are so desirable in contemporary culture is that they feed desire and never satisfy it. According to Elliot, postmodern consumption is directly linked to sexual symbols and meanings and, promises the satisfaction of these desires which includes a direct linkage of body to consumption and which are previously considered to be taboos.

Lacan (1977) states that in order to have an understanding on the complexity that constitutes desire, we need to have an understanding on "jouissance". He describes jouissance as being "always in the nature of tension, in the nature of a forcing, of a spending, even of an exploit. Unquestionably, there is jouissance at the level at which pain begins to appear, and we know that it is only at this level of pain that a whole dimension of the organism, which would otherwise remain veiled, can be experienced" (Braunstein, 2003, pp.103). On the other hand, Braunstein describes jouissance as positivity. Considering desire as a lack in being, jouissance "is a 'something' lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure. It is a plus, a sensation that is beyond pleasure" and it is "the dimension that opens beyond satisfaction." (Braunstein, 2003, p.104) However, jouissance is involved in the destruction of goods and the value created by this destruction - exchange and use value - can be described as the value it holds for the Other. As jouissance is linked to the other, its carries its reason within. Lacan indicates that the source of energy of

life is desire, and this energy is directed at fulfilling the incompleteness of ourselves by turning to the Other. This means that the desire is always for the Other, which makes it also inaccessible.

With a Freudian perspective, Lacan describes drive as "a constant force, an unending requirement that is imposed on the psyche due to its link with the body." The whole object of the drive, according to him, is the impossibility of its satisfaction. Desire is a closed path which is impossible to come to an end, leading each time to the search of the lost and impossible to reach object. Therefore, in desire, only "driving" is possible. Lacan further argues that the driving force stems from the difference between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and which is actually achieved. Similarly, Campbell (1987) explains that the motivation for imaginative hedonism is the difference between the imaginative world where one can experience perfect pleasure and the disappointment faced in reality. The main reason of the impossibility of the fulfillment of desire is that it stems from the difference between the imagined object and the real object which is never as magnificent as the imaginary (Campbell, 1987). This explanation also sheds light on the unsatisfactory nature of the desire to consume. Fırat and Venkatesh (1995) suggest that the Lacanian theory provides one explanation of modern consumption through desire being directed towards material objects in order to fulfill the lack. However, especially for the low income consumers, attempts to fulfill the lack through material objects are bounded by monetary constraints. Therefore, the consumption directed towards the fulfillment of lack will end up with frustration, not just because of the impossibility of fulfilling the lack by jouissance, but also because of the failure in attaining the desired objects.

As the discussion above also states, the impossibility of fulfilling the desire also stems from its mimetic nature. In consideration of the discussion regarding the exposure to consumer culture through mass media and other socialization agents, the desire for the "other" becomes a key factor in explaining not only the motives behind consumption, but also the necessity to develop coping strategies for low income consumers. The next section will elaborate the social aspect of the desire through the discussions of "the other".

2.4.4. The Mimetic Desire

Previous studies emphasize the mimetic nature of desire and its tie to social relations (Girard, 1996). According to Girard, individual's desires operate through the Other, through society's order and culture. The mirror image is created through the Other as well. Nothing a person has in oneself could be desirable; therefore the nature of desire is mimetic. The qualities to be imitated are developed in the social relation. Girard (1996) calls the model that a person imitates "the mediator" and states that the relationship is triangular. Operating between the subject of desire and the object, the most important role in this triangle is the mediator's role as the source of desire. In this triangle, the basis of the mimetic desire is the battle for prestige and social recognition rather than the desire for the object itself. This mimetic nature of desire also helps us to justify our desires as the object of desire is also desirable by others which makes it valuable (Belk et al, 2003).

Bouchet (2011) explains the rise of desire also with the increasing number of mediators in our contemporary society, stating that in aristocratic societies, the mediator was in such a higher place than the rest of the society that it was unreachable and remained unrivalled. However, in the contemporary consumer culture, the mimetic desire became competitive, obsessive and exhausting as it is fostered by a large number of mediators, which placed the desire at the center of the relationships in the society.

Similarly, Belk et al. (2003) state that, though felt internally, desire is ultimately social and the desired object mostly signifies a longing for better social relationships. Desire is an escape from the current situation to a better life which could not be acquired yet. Belk et al. (2003) indicate that in developing countries, this desire could be towards a freer, modern and civilized life, fostering the will to join modernization and Westernization basically by material objects and through consumption, which will provide a transformation to a better and meaningful life. This argument also provides evidence to the importance of desire in understanding the motives behind low income consumers' willful participation to the consumer culture, as the desire is directed towards commodities which are evaluated as tools for the transformation to a better and meaningful life.

2.4.5. Jouissance and the Cyclical Path

Belk et al. (2003) argue that desire is a passion which involves an endless quest for otherness, danger and inaccessibility. What underlies this endless and

powerful quest is "self-seduction, longing, desire for desire, fear of being without desire, hopefulness, and tensions between seduction and morality." (p.326)

One of the most important characteristics of desire is its being dangerous as it poses a threat to individual and social control. Although described as a positive emotion, desire is also depicted as dangerous. This thought might be fed by the religious doctrines of previous centuries which declared that desire is evil and sinful due to its uncontrollable nature (Bouchet, 2011). According to Belk et al. (1997), desire can be related to loss of control as well as guilt and sin. Desire, which is described as the blind force by Plato, includes irrationality and animality (Freudian id) which gives the idea of dangerousness and loss of control as obedience to pleasure. This necessitates the rationalization and reconstruction of the expressions of power in a socially acceptable manner.   However, in case of an attempt to control, desire loses its essence, the power and passion hidden in its wild, uncontrollable nature, and yields to a new desire which is not yet controlled. Using the metaphor of Damocles' sword, Belk et al. (1997) state that desire "can lead us to great pleasure, but we are inevitably balancing on the edge of falling victim to the uncontrollable character of our transgressive desires" (p.5). The addictive character of desire is one of the reasons why it is depicted as unpleasant and powerful (Belk et al. 2003). According to Bouchet (2011), similar to Lacan's arguments, desire can never be taken to an end state. It was not the individual controlling desires, but the desire "taking the individual for a ride."

This dangerous character of desire can be sublimated by rationality and morality. However, it is the uncontrollable nature that is the essence of the desire. It

is "the urge to tame the untamable" (Belk et al. 2003, p.338). This cyclical path desire follows is further explained by Belk et al. (1997). The cycle begins with the before state, in which the subject perceives the feelings aroused by desire predominantly as positive (hopeful, imaginative, enjoyable, fun). At the moment of the acquisition of the desired object, feelings are again declared as being positive, however, after the acquisition, they are turned to be mostly negative (worry, burdened, bored, disappointed, fearing loss, empty, without goals, needing something more). In addition, even the probability of reaching the desired object also affects the intensity of the desire, as the difficulty or impossibility of acquiring it nourishes desire. The acquisition of the object leads to the loss of desire which arouses feelings of anxiety and emptiness. Thus, in order to fulfill the emptiness perceived due to the loss of desire for the desired object, desire is revitalized by directing it towards new objects. In addition, the realization of the desire might lead to two possible outcomes, one of which is the "boredom-initiated cycle of desire focused on a new object", and the other is "a fulfillment-initiated attempt to recycle desire in order to repeat these pleasures." (Belk et al. 2003, p.342).

Bauman (Rojek, 2004), states that as desire has an infinite potential for expansion, new ventures for seeking more pleasure which was not experienced previously, and new problems to be solved, which were not even thought to exist, can be triggered by the endless desire. This search for new, unexplored desires and pleasures can be considered as a focal dynamic behind the never-ending cycle of consumption. According to Bauman (Rojek 2004), "consumerism's seductive power rests in its promise of liberation from the power of 'things' " (p.294). The importance

of goods stems not from their ownership but from their being consumable, and by consuming, they are disposed immediately to ensure that they do not form obstacles in our way, leaving their place to new objects of desire.

2.4.6. Effects of Desire on the Consumption Behavior of Low Income Consumers

Obviously, desire is a focal construct in our understanding of the consumer culture and motives behind the cyclical and unsatisfactory nature of consumption. This powerful and never-satisfying motive is directed towards commodities in our contemporary culture, and although being uncontrollable by the individual, we witness that it can be mediated and directed towards specific consumption patterns by consumer socialization agents such as the media and the Market. Stating the focal role of desire in the Market, Elliot (1997) argues that, advertisements operating at an unconscious level target our desire for meaning and coherence to the ideal or imaginary self, feeding further the desire to reach the unobtainable unity of self (Featherstone, 1991). Elliot (1997) states that the attachment of meaning to consumption is realized by the "attachment of bodily desire to symbolic meaning where the inchoate needs of the pre-linguistic self are channeled into language." (p.288).

As a focal construct in explaining human behavior, and specifically, consumption behavior, desire directs and shapes individuals' behaviors and social relationships regardless of the culture, context, social status or income level of the subject. This study attempts to have an understanding on the desires of low-income

consumers to join the consumer culture by adopting dominant consumption patterns. However, different dynamics inherent in the low-income context should be investigated in detail in order to reach a comprehensive understanding.

Belk et al. (2003) explain in their study that hope is an important dynamic in the attempt to fulfill desires. They make a very important distinction, stating that the desire is alive only if there is hope for attaining it. If there is a hope for attaining the desire, the emotions it triggers become more intense and powerful, reinforcing the will to overcome the obstacles on the way to reach it. However, if the desire is considered to be inaccessible, then it is muted.

In case of barriers to reach the desired object such as financial constraints and social obligations, Belk et al. (2003) state that the subject could work hard for the realization of the desire and increase hopefulness by increasing the chance. "Earning money, saving money, devoting time, sacrificing by foregoing other things, persuading others who are blocking the realization of a desire..." are some of the ways that make the desire more accessible (p.343). However, if there seems to be no way to fulfill the desire, then the lack of hope will diminish its intensity and strength, and it leaves its place to another object of desire to which there is a hope for access.

In addition, specific cultural and religious effects can mediate the relationship between the individual and the desire. In the study of Belk et al. (2003), traditional cultural emphasis on family (or on collectivity) and religious doctrines are emphasized as they lead in the devaluation of the individual choice, will and any attempt for the realization of the imaginary and desire. In that case, the desire is not

repressed entirely, but muted. However, they further state that, in contrast with the ideas of elderly people, younger urban consumers pursue their desires in spite of the financial constraints. In that case, it could be argued that barriers to reach the desirable object could make the desire even more intense and powerful. These statements regarding the consequences of not having hope for attaining the desired object are contradictory, as the hopelessness either results in muting the desire or intensifies it further. Therefore, there is a need for exploring the mediating factors between hope and persistence of desire which might be helpful especially in explaining the behaviors of low income consumers. Stating the importance to explore how affordability, hope and despair affects desire, Belk et al. (2003) point out a gap in the literature on how consumers who are exposed to a consumer society, but who cannot afford acquiring the desired objects, mute or negotiate their desires, and if they let their desires to be limited to the context of dreams and fantasy.

After these discussions on the effects of consumer culture, exposure to consumer culture through consumer socialization agents and the desire on low income consumers' consumption practices, the forthcoming section provides the literature gap, research questions and the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3. THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Considering the discussions presented in the previous chapter, it can be argued that the consumer research literature needs further explanations of the consumption behavior of low income consumers (Hamilton and Catteral 2008, Hill and Gaines 2007) and how exposure to consumer culture affects the objectification of the lack. There is a gap in the literature regarding the strategies developed by the low income consumers to attain the desired object. In addition, Belk et al. (2003) point out the need for future research on the transformation of desire (whether it is muted or intensified) in case of a failure in attaining the desired object.

In consideration of these suggestions for future research, this study attempts to reach an understanding on the effects of exposure to consumer culture on the objectification and redirection of desire, and how these desires are affected, re-shaped and transformed according to the feelings of access in the low income context. Figure 1 represents the conceptual model of the study and the relationships between the major constructs.
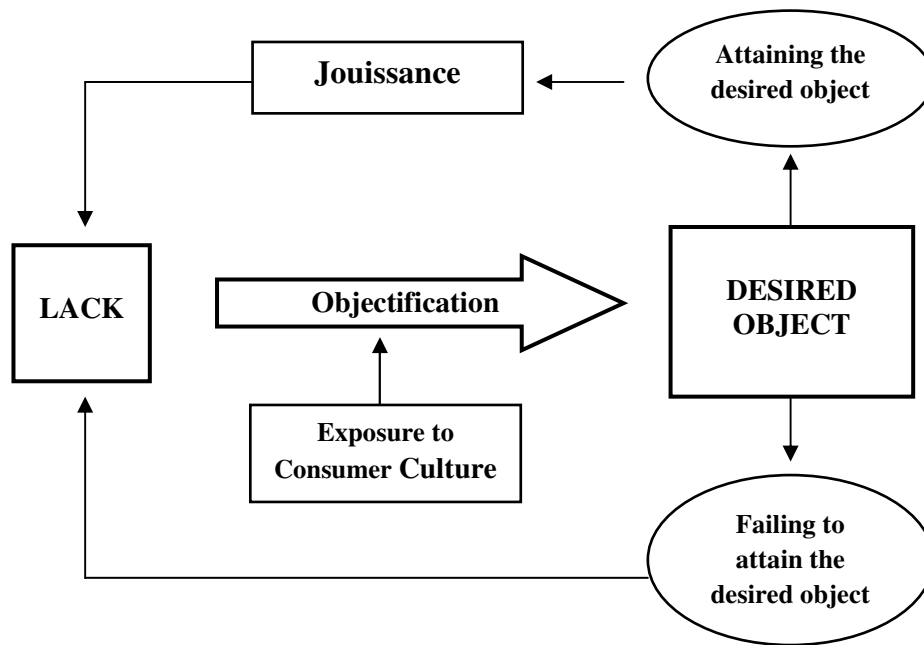
Figure 1. *The conceptual model*

According to the conceptual model, the endless desire to consume stems from the attempt to fulfill the lack by its objectification through commodities, and this objectification process is mediated by the social institutions and individual characteristics. Culture, religion, education, primary and secondary socialization, and individual traits such as age, generation, sex and ideology are some of the factors that can mediate this objectification process. However, within the scope of this study, effects of exposure to consumer culture on the objectification of desire are explored through the following inquiries:

- How does exposure to consumer culture affect the objectification of desire?
- Which agents of consumer culture have the most important effect on directing the desire to specific commodities / consumption patterns?

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In the attempt to fulfill the lack, the individual objectifies the desire and directs the powerful drive to attaining the desired object. However, the commodified representations of a good life communicated through the media and other consumer socialization agents might be beyond the reach of people with low incomes. Even if the desired object is attained by the low income consumer and jouissance is reached, the jouissance will result in the feeling of an unfulfilled lack (Lacan 1977, Campbell 1987), and the cyclical process will continue by directing the desire to new objectifications and new attempts to attain it. Furthermore, this whole process is bound up with feelings of access and financial restraints in the low income context, and it is of focal importance to understand how the feelings of access affect it. Therefore, the inquiry continues with the questions of:

- How do feelings of access affect the desire?

- What are the consequences of attaining the desired object by "creating" resources in low income context?

- Do low income consumers give up or substitute anything in order to attain the desired object? Where is the line? What can or cannot be substituted?

On the other hand, in case of a failure in attaining the desired object, previous literature suggests contradictory statements such as muting the desire, changing the focus to another object of desire which is more attainable, or sustaining the desire as the strive to attain the desired object makes it even more attractive (Belk et al.,2003). In the context of low income, attaining the desired object might not be possible in many cases. The alternatives developed in such a case needs to be understood in

order to shed light to the consumption behavior of this segment which forms a significant part of the society. Therefore, the study also investigates below inquiries:

- What kinds of feelings does the unattained object trigger?
- What are the alternatives developed by the subject in case of a failure in attaining the desired object?

While this study aims to fill an important gap in the literature by providing answers to above inquiries, it also attempts to attract attention on the effects of marketing practices on society, and specifically on its vulnerable members. Considering the role of marketing as a focal institution of the contemporary society, this study also aims to emphasize the responsibility of marketers and scholars in creating a just and fair society.

The next section discusses the methodology followed in the attempt to explore the answers of the research questions.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

Looking at the focal constructs of the issue under investigation and the research questions mentioned above, it can be clearly seen that the required methodology to answer and explain the phenomena should be a method which ensures a deeper investigation of human feelings and experiences. In my struggle to find the right perspective, I investigated many approaches including existential phenomenology, hermeneutic philosophy, semiotics and grounded theory. During these investigations, I tried to adopt a perspective which may serve me in reaching the aim of this research which is to explore the feelings and thoughts of low income consumers about consumption as well as the effects of exposure to consumer culture on their experiences and lives. Although I know that I could not be completely freed from my biases, I tried to adopt a perspective which could help me manage those biases through developing an understanding on them just like another research question that needs to be answered.

In consideration of the focal constructs of this dissertation and the research questions at hand, a humanistic approach is adopted and qualitative data collection techniques were used to reach deeper insights. Looking at the discipline from a relatively new perspective, naturalistic inquiry has started to be used to understand the socially constructed relationships, behaviors, values, feelings and thoughts which

are at the center of all consumption activities. Early perspectives on marketing were evaluating the discipline as a branch of business, and therefore, claimed that it required a point of view focused on profitability and cost minimization. This perspective required marketing research to be conducted with a positivist approach. Today, we see that there is a change in the perspective as people start to evaluate marketing as a socially constructed institution (Hirschman, 1986). This also required a change in the research perspective as the need to investigate socially constructed phenomena required a humanistic approach.

Stating the fundamentals of humanistic inquiry, Hirschman (1986) declares that the research process consists of the socially constructed subjective interpretations of the researcher which makes the knowledge derived from the research constructed rather than being discovered. In line with this perspective, I think that my interpretations of the data are shaped by my own experiences, pre-understanding and language which are all constructed socially.

My aim in this research is not to figure out cause and effect relationships, measuring and quantifying variables or confirming hypothesis, but to explore the social and cultural dynamics behind the objectifications of desire in the low income context through interpretations, and to reach a general understanding on the phenomena. Therefore, in line with the arguments of the humanistic approach, I try to determine the nature of the issue at hand, rather than trying to figure out static cause and effect relationships.

4.1. Dealing with Self-Biases and Pre-Understanding

"The reality of everyday life is taken for granted as reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply there, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I know that it is real. While I am capable of engaging in doubt about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life. This suspension of doubt is so firm that to abandon it, as I might want to do, say, in theoretical or religious contemplation, I have to make an extreme transition. The world of everyday life proclaims itself and, when I want to challenge the proclamation, I must engage in a deliberate, by no means easy effort" from 'The Social Construction of Reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.37)

"Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definite reality. Its limits are set by nature, but, once constructed, this world acts back upon nature. In the dialectic between the nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself." from 'The Social Construction of Reality' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.204)

Regardless of the efforts to become freed from self-biases, I believe that it is not possible for anyone to remove the effects of a socially constructed pre-understanding. Keeping this in mind during my efforts for deriving interpretations and meanings from the text, I tried to be aware of my own biases, so that I could increase my self-consciousness about its effects in my meaning creation. I did continuous triangulations between my biases and the quotations to be able to understand the effects of these biases on my interpretations. During the research process, I realized the changes in my own perspective towards the issue which made me reach different interpretations when evaluating the previous data.

This situation could be explained through a hermeneutic philosophy perspective. According to contemporary hermeneutic philosophy, the cultural viewpoints shaped through one's life and context are the underlying dynamics behind

one's expressed meanings. The aim of hermeneutic research is, therefore, to understand this cultural viewpoints behind the meaning, in Thompson et al.'s (1994) terms, 'the unspoken background of socially shared meanings' (p.432). Hermeneutics deals with the interpretation of an understanding, and according to hermeneutic philosophy, the researcher has a pre-understanding which is an accumulation of culturally constructed beliefs, codes, metaphors, ideologies and language (Arnould and Fischer, 1994). This means that the interpreter and what is being interpreted are already related to each other through a cultural pre-understanding (sometimes also called prejudice). Yet, when the events or objects are not in compliance with our pre-understanding, it is challenged to change. This pre-understanding is of key importance as it effects our interpretations. It changes and evolves continuously through unusual or puzzling events or words.

Considering the role of this pre-understanding in interpreting the text, McCracken (1988) suggests the researcher to review her/his personal experiences, assumptions and associations. Through this review, the researcher is also being made an instrument of the inquiry. These prejudices were discussed to distort researcher's understanding of the intended meaning, and because of this view, in existential phenomenology, it was suggested to be bracketed (hold in abeyance). Yet, according to hermeneutics, the pre-understanding should be the starting point for any interpretation, be investigated and understood as it plays an enabling role in deriving meaning (Arnould and Fischer, 1994). Similarly, Gadamer (1975) states that the pre-understanding or preconceptions are not distorting biases, yet, are provisional perspectives which shapes our interpretations, and which are derived from the previous cultural and theoretical background of the researcher.

According to my point of view, no matter what we do, it may not be possible to bracket our pre-understanding. However, to reach the intended meaning in the text, the researcher should develop a self-consciousness through noting down her/his perspective, possible effects of this frame of view on interpretations, and try to stay away from reflecting her/his thoughts on the interpretation. To ensure this, I tried to take notes about my own perspective, biases, understanding and thoughts about the phenomena continuously during the research process.

In addition, through this continuously challenged and changing pre-understanding, I, as the researcher, will not have the same pre-understanding I have before, at the end of each interview. Knowing that the new pre-understanding will shape my future interpretations, I need to examine the changed pre-understanding continuously. Therefore, I tried to take notes about my perspective during the research process and below, I present two different notes from different times of the research:

> *December 8th, 2011 – "Falling into the trap of advertisements, marketing, all messages of the consumer culture around…How can this need for conformity be justified? How can a father buy a touch-screen phone to his wife on her birthday, instead of buying a pair of shoes to their barefoot children? Can we explain this by being uneducated or illiterate? Can we think that if required skills are developed, these people will stop doing these kinds of things? Should I think that these people are victims of the system or should I think that this is all about their personality? Honestly, I don't think that there is a good explanation for this rather than being thoughtless or cruel…"*

This note about my point of view was recorded on December 8th, 2011. After each day in the field, I recorded my ideas about the interviews, the setting and my experiences. Later, I used these recordings to understand my thoughts, feelings and biases and how they changed and evolved during the research. This note develops

self-consciousness about my emotional reaction after the interviews which might affect my interpretations. Yet, after conducting more interviews and learning more about the specific motives behind their "irrational" behavior, I realized that my perspective was changing:

> *February 21ˢᵗ, 2012 – "Judging is easy, it is very easy. I was trying to stay away from judging people, and then I realized that I cannot judge anyone because none of us is different than the other. I am studying consumer behavior, I do research, I know very well the dynamics behind the system, how it rules masses…With all this knowledge, background, am I able to stay away or protect myself from the traps and tricks of the system? NO! Looking at what I have at hand, I can say that this is not about personality, this is not about education, it is innate, it is much more complex. However, I believe that this problem has a solution. But I don't have the answer yet."*

As I proceed with the interviews, I realized that I am changing as well. My perspective, my biases, my prejudices were changing. The accumulated knowledge started to change my pre-understanding. Honestly, I believe that after each interview, I became a different person with a different point of view, and this surely affected my interpretations as well. As also declared by Arnould and Fischer (1994), this continuous effort to understand myself as well as the other brings me one step closer to the "other", which erodes the dichotomies of modern thinking such as objectivism-relativism and subject-object.

These changes in my pre-understanding and interpretations required me to turn back to the previous interpretations and re-evaluate them with a new perspective. This cyclical effort for reaching new insights through different interpretations is described as the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle is a methodological process to reach an understanding on the qualitative data through iterative and continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of the data. As each new

insight changes the pre-understanding of the researcher, the new accumulated knowledge changes and causes new interpretations for the same data. To reach a holistic understanding on the data, we need to assess the data at hand continuously as through each interview, our pre-understanding changes. The revised understanding provides us with alternative assumptions or interpretations which will contribute in our understanding of the phenomena. As proposed by Ricoeur (1974), the interpretations are just moments of meaning creation in the process of understanding the world.

My efforts for gaining rich insights through interpreting and re-interpreting the text also explain my point of view towards reaching an ultimate, objective truth. Humanistic and naturalistic approaches depend on the idea that there is no objective truth (Arnould and Fischer 1994). Hirschman (1986) states that the research inquiry itself is shaped by the perspective of the researcher as the phenomena under investigation and the methodology used during the research is defined and determined through researcher's previous understandings, intellectual and cultural background. This gives a clear idea about the nonobjective nature of the understanding as well.

According to the proponents of the possibility of reaching an objective reality, explanation should be made through separating the subject from its environment to reach one generalizable reality. Yet, researchers try to describe the human experience, which is not meaningful when thought separately from the context in which it is lived. An experience can only be understood within its context;

therefore, such a separation may result in missing the interdependable nature of the experience.

My approach towards the nature of reality rests on the idea that there is no one true or objective understanding or interpretation of a text. Rather than a search for an ultimate understanding, multiple interpretations are possible as it depends on different perspectives of the interpreters or, even different perspectives of the same interpreter in different times.

4.2. Data Collection Techniques

The research for this dissertation was conducted through semi-structured individual in-depth interviews, observations, field notes and projective techniques used during the interviews. This study also employs ethnographic research techniques to collect data such as audio recordings and photography to provide a rich insight and understanding on the practices, experiences and the culture of the social group, namely, the low income consumers (Agofonoff, 2006)

Although not following a grounded theory approach fully, I believe that most of the research process is in compliance with the characteristics of the grounded theory practice. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.24), grounded theory is "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon." During the research process, I was involved in data collection and analysis at the same time. Starting the analysis during the research helped me to check the procedures and the semi-

structured interview protocol to evaluate its success in providing me rich data about my research questions. In addition, I tried to construct codes and categories out of the data rather than forming these categories through preconceived hypothesis. During the data analysis, I used different types of code comparisons, such as within codes, between codes and between cases, as stated in the grounded theory approach.

However, contrary to the grounded theory approach which suggests the literature review to take place after the theory is derived from the data, I did most of the review prior to the research and improved it further as codes and categories started to emerge. I searched previous literature before the research process begins in order to get an insight about the ideas emerged previously about the phenomena. Yet, the literature review process continued during the research as new dynamics started to emerge. This made me search for different literatures about those new dynamics and improve my overall understanding further. In addition, the emerging themes helped me to improve the research protocol continuously in order to collect additional data.

Actually, this may not be considered as a violation of the basic premise of grounded theory which is the theory's being emerged from the data but not from existing theories. I remained open to new concepts and themes emerging from the data in addition to not beginning the research with a preconceived theory in my mind. Similarly, Glaser and Holton (2004) suggest the literature review not to take place either before or after the research but should be included in the process through treating these theories as new data.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 60 participants (*please see Table 1*) from Izmir, Turkey. Low-income consumers from different settings within the city were interviewed between July, 2011 and May, 2012. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. The output of these interviews entails about 51 hours of recorded dialogue and 882 single-space pages of transcriptions. In addition to the interview data, written and visual field notes were taken to reflect the setting better. In consideration of time and financial constraints, the research setting was limited to one city. Rural areas of the city were not included as the exposure to consumer culture would differ tremendously between urban and rural areas. For the purpose of this research, I conducted the interviews in urban areas so that I could remove the effects of urban-rural differences.

Snowball sampling was used to reach participants, however, to minimize the effects of the drawbacks of this technique and to ensure data triangulation (Denzin 1978), I changed the research setting continuously through the research process. The research was conducted in 6 different settings, consisting of 3 neighborhoods in the suburbs and 3 work places. Further details about the research context are provided in the next section. Before entering to a new setting, I reached a contact person, an insider, so that it became easier for me to find new participants as well as not being treated as a stranger by the people in the neighborhood. After a certain period of time, I preferred to change the research setting, mainly to obtain rich and fruitful data through interviewing people from different cultural backgrounds. Participants of the study were provided a 50 TL gift check as an incentive. The participants were not informed about the incentive before the interview to ensure their willful participation without any financial concerns. However, after working for a while in a specific

setting, I witnessed that through word-of-mouth, this information was disseminated and I was no longer sure about the motive behind their participation, which is another reason for changing the research setting continuously.

4.3. The Research Context

The research was conducted in Izmir which is the third most populous city of the country with its population reaching nearly 3.8 billion. An important part of the city's population consists of people migrating to Izmir from different parts of the country, especially Eastern Turkey which can be regarded as relatively less developed compared to Western part. According to the data provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute[2], 455.076 people migrated to Izmir during the past 5 years with different motives such as finding jobs or better opportunities for their children's education. Most of the interviewees were people whose families migrated to Izmir from the Eastern part of the country and who are living in the suburban areas of the city. These immigrants are mostly uneducated people who are not able to find good jobs in the city which caused them to work mostly for minimum wage and to live below the poverty line.

The research was conducted in 6 different settings. First 3 settings of the research were different suburbs (namely Bayraklı, Kahramanlar and Mersinli) where most of the families were immigrants. During the interviews, it was stated by the participants that, families migrating to the city prefer to settle down in places close to their relatives or citizens who migrated previously. Through living in the same

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[2] http://www.tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?alt_id=38

neighborhood, they try to support each other to make the new life in the city easier. Yet, this revealed a threat for data collection as the participants who are migrated from the same region have similar background cultures. Therefore, the setting was changed after interviewing people from different ages, genders and educational and occupational backgrounds. First 3 settings were selected according to the information obtained through migration reports published by the municipality. I tried to include people who migrated from different regions of the country to ensure diversity in background cultures. I interviewed people migrated mostly from East and South East Turkey in Bayraklı, while people living in Kahramanlar and Mersinli were migrated from different regions of the country. In these settings, I conducted the interviews at interviewee's house. The participants in those settings were mostly women as a majority of them are not working and have no time constraints. Most of these women are married and not working as, in their culture, it is not acceptable for a woman to work after marriage. Men, on the other hand, are working even during the weekends and could not be found at home. Therefore, I needed to change the setting through conducting interviews at work places. The last 3 settings were different workplaces where women and men participants were interviewed in a silent room reserved for the interviews.

I stayed at each setting around one and a half month. A few neighborhoods in these areas were considered to be dangerous for me to enter alone therefore; I found a contact person in each region and gave them little gifts such as a box of chocolate or cookies for their help in the neighborhood. With the assistance of these insiders, it became much easier for me to reach the participants, as well as the ease to have experiences in their daily lives. In consideration of the time constraints, it was not

possible for me to engage in a complete participant-observer position during this research. Yet, through the help of the insiders, I was invited to participate their meetings, drank tea and chat with them for hours in order to be more close to them which helped me to obtain valuable insights about their lifestyles, cultural practices and values which could not be obtained only through interviewing. In addition, through warm and friendly conversations in these meetings, I tried to make them know me better. My aim was not to be accepted as an insider, or considered as one of them through fully immersing in the setting or adopting their language or behaviors, yet to be accepted as a friend who tries to be a part of their experiences for a while.

4.3.1. Before the Interviews

Although my aim was not fully immersing in the setting and acting like I am one of them (which is behaving like someone you are not and from my point of view, is a violation of ethics), I tried to be careful about my outfit, my behaviors and my language (specifically the words I used). I tried to remove all visible signs of belonging to another social class. I paid special attention to remove make-up, jewelery and tried to look casual with wearing a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. My aim was not looking like them, but to remove some of the visual barriers for an effective communication which might stem from the idea that I was belonging to a different social class. I avoided using my cell phone or computer with the idea that these products' symbolic meanings might create barriers.

After a few interviews, I started to learn about their traditions, values, culturally significant behaviors and even, their language. I tried to be as sensitive as I

can towards adhering to their ways of living. At this point, I'd like to give some examples about their traditions which I learnt and practiced. In Turkey, especially people from the same gender usually do kiss each other from both cheeks as a greeting. I was kissing all people in the house, yet I realized that they have a different tradition like kissing cheeks 3 times. This was completely new to me, yet I adopted this pattern quickly.

As a tradition, most of the women and men prefer sitting on the floor but not on the sofa, and leave the space on the sofa to the guests. I did not prefer to sit on the sofa, and I sat on the floor with them, drinking tea and chatting about their lives as well as mine. In addition to these cultural practices, one of the most important cues for an effective communication in our society, especially in rural areas, is not to call people Mr. or Mrs., but to use words like sister and brother instead. This can be considered as the first barrier to be removed in our communications. Therefore, with taking their permission, I called them sister/brother, and I strongly believe that the conversation benefited a lot from this intimacy. Another very important experience I had was about the importance of eating the food they offered together. Rejecting the food served (regardless of its reason) was considered as a move to hold them off and was heart-breaking for them. After such an experience, I realized its importance and paid special attention to eat together whatever served. I believe that this also helped in creating an emotional bond between me and them.

4.3.2. My Experiences during the Interviews

During the research process, I had the opportunity to meet very different people from different settings, be in places I've never been and had experiences I've never had. I was completely unfamiliar with the research settings. The neighborhoods and work places I visited were places that usually I wouldn't visit and I may even say that sometimes I felt scared because of the unfamiliar environment. People in all these settings were very friendly and kind, however, with their own words, they were "not used to seeing people like me" in their neighborhood. I went to each of these settings by my car and they were not used to a woman's driving a car. In addition, regardless of all my efforts, it was obvious from my appearance that I did not belong to that neighborhood. Yet, all the preconceptions between the two parties were removed after warm greetings and conversations which made me and them feel much more relaxed.

Another important problem was the accent of most of the participants who are originally from Eastern Turkey. I sometimes had difficulties in understanding them, yet I overcame that problem during the interviews, as, by time, I got used to their accent. In addition, I learnt the specific terminology they use in their daily lives. In some of the conversations, there were words or phrases which are completely unfamiliar, yet, I asked their meaning openly and the participants willfully explained. In addition, most of the participants were not familiar with devices such as a voice recorder therefore, at first, I felt that they hesitated. But after a while, they forgot about the device and it did not constitute a problem for me.

There were some difficulties I faced personally during the interviews. One of the hardest parts of doing these interviews was the difficulty of talking with people about their poverty, lack of financial resources to have a "good" life and how they cope with their feelings of "incapability." I sometimes had difficulties in asking these kinds of questions, especially if the participant was very emotional or if the participant was male. The Turkish society can be described as a paternalistic society, and men believe that their first and most important aim is to provide their family a good life. When the good life is associated with financial power, it became difficult for men to talk about their "weaknesses" or "failures". This perception sometimes caused the participants to blame themselves, leading to negative feelings and moods. Sometimes, during these kinds of moments, we kept silent and I did not start the conversation until he talks or made me understand through his mimics that he felt better. I tried to overcome this difficulty through relaxing the participant by mentioning about the financial difficulties being faced by everybody regardless of the income level.

One of the most challenging parts of this research for me, as a researcher, was the moments of emotional reactions of the participants (I may even call these the moments of catharsis). I witnessed participants (mostly women) cry during the interviews while talking about the difficulties they faced in life because of poverty. Sometimes the conversations wander off the subject and turned into their disappointments, failures, wrong decisions in life and their misery. I felt that they needed to talk about these issues as if they were talking to a psychologist. I even heard the rumors in the neighborhood or work place about me being a psychologist and that I went there to listen to their problems. This situation made me feel good

about the intimate relationship I could build with the participants. Although explaining them that I was not a psychologist, I believe it contributed to the research as participants were feeling free to talk about even their most confidential experiences.

Besides all these challenges I faced, the most difficult part of the research process for me was when people asked for help to improve their current situation such as asking me to find them a job, to find scholarships for their children who may not be able to continue their education unless they obtain required funds, or provide more gift checks for their children or neighbors. I did my best to help them, yet my ability to satisfy their demands was very limited. As a researcher, I can clearly state that this was the most challenging situation I faced during the research process.

4.4. Emerging Problems of Methodology and How I Tried to Resolve Them

The first problem emerged during the planning phase of the research. The operationalization of low-income was a major concern as there isn't any specific method in the poverty literature for the operationalization of poverty. Finding objective criteria to determine whether people are low-income or not was not possible. Income could be considered as a criterion, yet it is often hard for people to expose their income. In addition, many families have different sources of income which may not be official or even, legal. Therefore, people might not want to state their real income. For example, I was very surprised to learn that the doorkeepers in rich neighborhoods have at least one house and a car as they have different income sources such as tips and fringe benefits. Therefore, asking the participants about the

money they earn directly may not provide us valid information about their real income. In consideration of these difficulties in determining the low-income, I selected neighborhoods where only people with low-incomes will live in (not because of their preferences but because of obligations) and the workplaces paying minimum wage to their workers.

A second problem in the plan emerged after the first interviews. Before the field work, the planned methodology was to conduct individual in-depth interviews supported by projective techniques. The participants would be asked to make a collage to describe what a meaningful, beautiful and good life means for them. It was planned to provide the participants with several magazines and newspapers. In order to prevent biases due to directing participants to specific images, participants would be provided magazines and newspapers of different topics so that they could be able to find a picture of a sports car as well as a picture of a happy family. To provide them even with more choice for a better description, I planned to use auto-deriving through giving them a digital camera to take pictures. Participants would also have the opportunity to draw or write on the collage.

However, I was surprised to see that none of the interviewees wanted to make the collage. In the first two interviews, I insisted on using the collage technique. However, the participants preferred to write a letter about their ideas instead of making the collage. After facing the same situation in the following interviews, I started to ask participants the reasons behind their unwillingness to make the collage at the end of the interviews. Here are a few answers I got:

"These are (pictures in the magazines) are not for us."

"I am not good at drawing."

"I don't know how to use that camera."

"I cannot do it, I don't have such skills."

During these interviews, I realized that as soon as I show them the magazines, newspapers and the camera, they were hesitating, seizing the conversation and retreating. Therefore, I thought that they might not be familiar with magazines or newspapers as most of the participants do not read much, and/or do not have money to spend on magazines. In addition to that, regardless of the type or topic of the magazine or the newspapers, the lives represented in these printed media were far different from their lives. In today's mass media, there are no magazines targeting low-income people as audience. The bright, colorful, rich looking magazines seemed to disturb the participants. Though women were interested in women's magazines, their decisions and explanations did not change after looking at a few pages of the magazine shyly. In fact, after a while, I also felt ashamed to show them those magazines after all those conversations about their days of starving or extreme poverty. The magazines and newspapers were totally in contradiction with the whole conversation. In addition, none of these participants were used to deal with cartons, scissors, glues or cutting and pasting, which, I believe, might be another reason for their unwillingness. In consideration of all the drawbacks of this technique and its consequence of blocking the interviews through making the participants feel shy, ashamed or incapable, the use of the collage technique was stopped.

Instead of the collage where active involvement of the participants is required, I printed various pictures which are downloaded from the internet, including old and new models of cars, houses, huts, cell phones, computers, TV sets, clothes or jewelery, as well as the pictures of landscapes, nature, and pictures depicting specific lifestyles such as urban and rural (some of the pictures are presented in *Table 2*). I show those pictures to the participants and told them that they could benefit from the pictures in their verbal descriptions of a good life. The pictures were used just to stimulate the conversation, and can be evaluated as an effective projective technique considering the outcomes.

Table 2. *Participants of the study*

Age	Pseudonym	Gender	Literacy	Occupation	Marital Status
17	Selim	Male	Middle School-8th Grade	Not working	Single
18	Derya	Female	High School	Student	Single
18	Gülay	Female	Middle School-8th Grade	Not working	Single
19	Osman	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Single
20	Nilay	Female	High School	Not working	Married - Pregnant
20	Baybars	Male	Middle School	Cleaner	Single
23	Hayriye	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
23	Sinem	Female	High School	Cleaner	Divorced
24	Nurcan	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 1 child
25	Hatice	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married - Pregnant
25	Aysel	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 1 child
25	Ela	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Single
27	Suzan	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
27	Zihni	Male	High School	Cleaner	Single

27	Leyla	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Single
28	Banu	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 1 child
28	Fahriye	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
28	Mehmet	Male	Elementary School	Unemployed	Married with 1 child
28	Pelin	Female	No Formal Education	Not working	Married w/o child
28	Nisa	Female	High School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
29	Turgut	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
30	Selda	Female	High School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
30	Gül	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 2 children
30	Seda	Female	High School	Booking Clerk	Single
30	Kadri	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 1 child
31	Hakan	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 3 children
31	Kurtuluş	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
32	Şeyma	Female	Middle School	Clerk	Married with 3 children
32	Hasan	Male	High School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
32	Baran	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married w/o child
33	Sena	Female	High School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
33	Sabri	Male	Middle School	Cleaner	Single
33	Berrin	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
35	Nilgün	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 2 children
35	Ceylan	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 4 children
35	Ayla	Female	Elementary School	Waitress	Married with 2 children
35	Tülay	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 1 child
37	Tuncay	Male	High School	Cleaner	Married with 7 children
38	Salih	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 4 children

			Elementary		Married with 1
38	Ayfer	Female	School	Cleaner	child
38	Nuriye	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
40	Hale	Female	Elementary School	Not working	Married with 2 children
40	Rahmi	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
40	Yeliz	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
41	Büşra	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
42	Zehra	Female	No Formal Education	Not working	Married with 2 children
42	Filiz	Female	Elementary School	Waitress	Divorced with 2 children
42	Emine	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 3 children
45	Orhan	Male	Elementary School	Chief	Married with 1 child
46	Gonca	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
47	Fatma	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 3 children
47	Haydar	Male	Middle School	Chief	Married with 2 children
48	Yavuz	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
49	Hayat	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
49	Meltem	Female	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
49	Mahmut	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 6 children
50	Canan	Female	No Formal Education	Not working	Husband Died - 4 children
54	Muhlise	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 3 children
56	Yusuf	Male	Elementary School	Cleaner	Married with 2 children
56	Bellez	Female	No Formal Education	Cleaner	Married with 2 children

Figure 2. *Pictures presented to the participants*

4.5. Data Analysis

The process of analysis began with the data collection. I started analyzing the data during the interview stage in order to evaluate the interviews and field notes to realize the points that may need further probing in the future interviews. As suggested by Wolcott (2001), the inquiry underwent a continual inspection to grasp the effects of emerging variables on the topic of interest. In addition, I started to transcribe some of the interviews to have an idea on the general structure of the interview and to evaluate whether I was able to get participants' comments on the focal discussions. Once all the interviews and transcriptions are completed, I started the process of systematic coding and I tried to follow the steps of qualitative analysis as suggested in the literature (Spiggle 1994, Kvale 1996, Carson et al. 2001, Silverman 2005). In the first step of data analysis, I used Nvivo 8 software which provided me with flexibility and ease in storing and processing all the data (interviews, field notes, participant information) and make initial coding to gain a general impression of the responses.

After the initial coding, I started to make categorizations and I tried to pay special attention to not forcing the data to certain categorizations which are preordained and to bring out new categories and emerging themes out of the data which are of great importance for my interpretations. I split the data into categories and sub-categories, and at this stage, I pay attention to covering all the data and not leave the deviant cases behind. In the selective coding stage (Carson et al., 2001), I made comparisons and contrasts to discover the interplay within and between

categories in order to reach the similarities and differences and consequently to higher levels of categories and themes.

While interpreting the data, I tried to develop an understanding on my own self-biases and pre-understanding which could affect my interpretations. As the pre-understanding of the researcher changes through new accumulated knowledge, it may cause new interpretations for the same data. Knowing that this new pre-understanding could shape my future interpretations, I adopted the processes of hermeneutic circle, trying to reach an understanding on the data through iterative and continuous interpretation and reinterpretations. I did triangulations between my biases, quotations and interpretations as well as making continuous iterations between the data and the theory. Furthermore, I tried to pay attention especially to not reaching quick conclusions on what is being told by the participants but try to see the meanings behind their discourses. I did not eliminate any cases to be able to present the data and the interpretations in a comprehensive way that includes all dimensions of the topic of interest and to reach multiple realities rather than trying to reach a single reality or truth (Mick 1986).

The categories, themes, and interpretations reached through the data analysis are presented in the following findings chapter as four sections. The inquiry then continues with conclusion and implications chapters.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

In order to present the findings of the research in a more meaningful manner, this chapter is organized as four sections, starting from broad descriptions, and then narrowing down to the focus of the study. The first section presents a description of life in poverty, exhibiting poor people's lives in detail through discussions regarding how they live, how they earn money and manage their budget. In the second section, discussions get into the conceptual framework where objectifications of the desire and how these objectifications are affected by exposure will be elaborated in detail. Section three is organized to reveal the consequences of these objectifications in a low-income context and how low-income people cope with the negative consequences. In the final section, I discuss the redirection of desire under these circumstances, and how the redirected forms of desire lead to different types of consumption. To have a broader understanding of the low-income setting, the discussion starts here with a description of life in poor neighborhoods.

5.1. Life in Poverty

From my perspective, to be able to present the findings in a comprehensive way, I need to start with a portrayal of life in low-income neighborhoods. In addition

to making in-depth interviews, I spent a lot of time in these neighborhoods during the data collection process, in order to have a better and deeper understanding on life in poverty and the social and cultural factors which affect these lives. Not surprisingly, I came across very different and important dynamics which may not be reached without devoting time for making observations and getting into the details of the lives of people living in these areas. Therefore, I believe that it is important to make the reader more familiar with the context to make sure that the setting is understood in a better way through the perspectives of the participants. Only by presenting the details of their lives, I may be able to make the reader feel as if they witnessed these lives as I did, and help them interpret the further discussions in a much clearer way.

5.1.1. Life Experiences of the Poor

i. Migration to the City – Beginning of the Story

Before getting into further discussions regarding the life and consumption experiences of the low income consumers, first I want to draw a frame through explaining the beginning of the story. In this section, I will try to reveal how and why they are living in poverty, in addition to providing a brief explanation of the reasons of this poverty's persistency.

According to the migration statistics of Turkish Statistical Institute, 455.000 people have migrated to Izmir in the past 4 years, while the total population of the city is 3.965.000 (according to 2011 census). In line with these statistics, a great

majority of the participants are members of the families who migrated to Izmir from Eastern Turkey. 32 participants were either born or raised in the cities located in Eastern or South-Eastern Anatolia regions, although the period they have been living in Izmir varies from a few years to their whole life. A majority of the remaining participants were also born and raised in cities other than Izmir. Accordingly, we can infer that nearly all of the participants' families migrated to Izmir for different reasons. The reasons of migration are basically economic. Lack of economic support and investments from the government, uneducated population, and terrorism are among the most important causes of the economic underdevelopment of Eastern Turkey. Consequently, unemployment rates are much higher compared to the West, which is one of the main reasons of migration.

> *Mahmut (Participant 22): The reason is, basically, job opportunities, the struggle for livelihood. There are no jobs in the village. No jobs, but you can find some opportunities in the city. I have 6 children, one daughter and 5 sons. It is hard. My wife was working there, back in the village. We were growing, harvesting crops. But as you may know, our fields are very small, you grow and sell your crops but it is not enough to make a living.*

> *Bellez (Participant 58): I will not go back to my hometown even when I get retired. What can you do there? Who will take care of the field there, who will make those crops grow? I am old, my husband is blind, my son is ill, who will take care of them? I will never turn back. Life is very hard there. You take care of the field, carry and throw away the stones in the soil, use the harrow, these are hard jobs. But here, you collect garbage and you make a living. You don't have such a chance in the village. Whatever you grow, you will eat. You don't have money there. You grow grapes, you get grapes. You grow melons, you get melons. That's all. Here, at least you have the chance to find a piece of old bread and eat it… I earn some money by collecting bottles from the garbage here. It is not possible in Mardin. Taking care of the field, growing crops…I cannot turn back at this age.*

Even though some of the participants had small lands in their hometown, it was not possible for them to survive with the money they earned from agriculture,

considering that they have crowded families. As there is nearly no chance for them to find jobs in the village, they decided to migrate to cities where they can have the chance to find job opportunities. Bellez states that, even though that job is collecting garbage, it gives them at least a chance to make money somehow, which makes the city a better option compared to her hometown where they even face hunger because of poverty. In addition to that, some families don't have their own fields in their hometowns, which made them even more vulnerable as their only source of income was the seasonal jobs they find in agriculture sector. Moreover, as stated by some participants, men had to travel to different cities seasonally if they could find jobs in constructions or fields. Therefore, they were not able to live together as a family which caused further problems in their relationships. Considering all these reasons, the city becomes a better alternative compared to the village regardless of all the difficulties they faced after migration.

In addition to the unemployment as a fundamental reason of migration, some participants declared that they migrated mainly because they are worried about their children's future as they will not be able to get a proper education in their hometown:

> *Tuncay (Participant 23): I can hardly earn the money we need to make a living. I am facing a lot of difficulties. My brother is helping me. I am trying to make my 3 children get education here. They have many different expenses, you may have an idea. I migrated to Izmir from my hometown because of my children. I didn't want to stay there. It could have been better for me if I stayed though. I am from Raman, Batman (a city in south-east Turkey). I came here for their education. I came here for them; I am doing everything for them. If I became a taxi-driver, it is for them. I am very keen on my children having a good life.*

Related with the economic development, the education levels of the people living in Eastern Turkey are relatively low compared to the West. In addition, the

quality of education is also under question as the required infrastructure for a high quality education hasn't been built by the governments. This causes children to get education in overcapacity classes, and sometimes without teachers as it is harder for the government to find teachers to assign to these cities because of underdevelopment and threats like terrorism. Having known the importance of education in building a better future for their children, parents prefer them to be raised in a city where they can get a proper education.

In addition, the data suggests that the problem of unemployment is not just valid for Eastern Turkey but also for small villages located in the West as well. Considering the decreasing levels of agricultural production in Turkey, people living in villages who earn money mostly by working in agriculture sector are also facing problems of unemployment. As it becomes harder for them to find jobs in their hometown, they also prefer to take their chance in big cities like Izmir:

> *Tülay (Participant 50): We are from Manisa (a city which is 45 km. away from Izmir), both me and my husband. We were living in Manisa but he was not able to find a good job there. Therefore he came to Izmir as he found a job here as a driver. After a while, I came too. My mother-in-law was taking care of my child in Manisa. Then we took him too. We are trying to hang on in this city.*

Either they live in the East or West; many people migrate from their hometowns to Izmir, having known that they could have better job opportunities in big cities and with the expectation of building a better future for themselves and for their children. Yet, considering that all of the participants of the research are families living in poverty, it can be argued that the life in the city could not provide them an affluent life as well. Even though some of the participants state that they have a

better life in the city and they don't want to go back to their hometown, some declared that they had a big disappointment when they moved to Izmir:

> *Leyla (Participant 59): I really didn't like Izmir when we first moved. We moved to Basmane (a neighborhood where mostly very low-income families live in shanties), and I started crying when I first saw the place. I was coming from Mardin (a city located in South-eastern Turkey and is one of the most underdeveloped cities of the country) I asked to myself "is this a village?" Mardin is much better. This place is hilly, I really taught that we moved to a village. It was too weird. It was very different for me. Then I started smoking, I smoked for a year, asking myself "what kind of a place we moved to?"*

All of the participants are living in suburbs where buildings, infrastructure, view, people and as a summary, the lifestyle is very different from other parts of the city. As stated by Leyla, the clash between the representations of and expectations from a big Western city and the reality they face creates disappointment and sadness. In addition, even though they state that they have better job opportunities here, a majority of the participants revealed that they want to move back to their hometown when they get retired. The reasons of this desire to turn back will be investigated in detail in the future chapters.

Considering all these difficulties they face, they developed solutions for the problems they face through changing their lifestyles. A majority of the participants are living together as a whole family rather than living as a nuclear family. This is actually a traditional way of living among Turkish people as the traditional Turkish family consists of the nuclear family and grandparents. However, rather than being related to be attached to their traditions, this situation is mostly related to the rent costs, as some of the family members don't have enough income for renting a house

or even for buying food themselves. Therefore, they prefer to eat, live and sometimes even work together.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): We are living together with my mother-in-law. It has been so since I got married. It has been 20-30 years already. My oldest child is 28 years old. We are living all together; none of them have a separate house. Only one of my brides is living separately. Actually another one was also living separately, the younger one. I was supporting them, the one who left her husband. My son, her husband, is usually not working. Therefore I had to help them. I don't know if it is because of her husband's unemployment, or because of other things, she left him; she took my grandchild as well. If I work, we have the money to make a living as family, if I don't, then we have some serious problems.*

Usually, when their sons get married, the family brings the bride to the house where the new couple will have a separate bedroom, but live together with the rest of the family. Even though this is for supporting them in managing their budget, a majority of the participants state that living together with the parents as a newly married couple creates great problems such as dissension between the bride and husband's parents, which consequently affects the relationships of the couple. Unemployment, poverty and worries about their future deepen the problem as well. Unfortunately, the problems starting with these disagreements grow and even lead to divorce in some situations.

> *Hatice (Participant 8): I do not desire wealth. But if you are poor, it is like as if you are alone. Nobody supports you. Think about it, you leave your family behind and move here. You try to have a new family, but they exclude, alienate you. They despise you. We were living together. You may take something (to eat), you cannot take the second. They murmur…They wanted us to get married, they didn't oppose. But in their family, they make their sons get married with the girls the parents want. Then they could not get along, either got divorced, or some don't work and some even steal and go to jail. Women are usually doing cleaning jobs, and no one take care of the children. Their lives are like this usually, kids are unhappy. The reason they behave badly is that he got married to the girl he wanted. I am bearing all these things because I love my husband. What could he do in this situation, we moved to a separate*

house. I told him "if you cannot take care of me, I will leave you and turn back to my parents' house." He said "I won't leave you." We moved to a new house. He said that we love each other and I should bear for some time until we recover.

Hatice and her husband managed to rescue their relationship through moving to a new house even though this means that they will have difficulties to manage their budget. Yet, some participants argue contrarily that problems got bigger by time and may result in divorce or unhealthy relationships between family members, which in both cases cause a problematic family effecting its members, and most importantly, the children.

In addition to living as a whole family to support each other, another important way of supporting one another is the relationships between neighbors. Most of the time, I came across neighborhoods where families migrated from a certain city or region are gathered together. Sometimes they are relatives who followed the family previously migrated and be able to hang on in the city. Taking their survival in the city as a reference, other families (relatives or neighbors) also migrate to the same city, and move to a house which is in the same neighborhood to ensure the previous families' support either in getting used to the neighborhood or in finding jobs. Therefore, the neighborhoods become a replica of the village (or city) they migrated from as they carry their cultural practices and lifestyles to the city which may make them feel more comfortable and may reduce the emotional distress caused by moving to a new, unknown environment.

Fatma (Participant 4): We have very good relationships with our neighbors. We were together last night, for example. They made tea, we talked until 1 am. Thanks God, they are very nice people. We love each other, people from East…we visit each other frequently, we sit together, we eat together. We

consider them as family; the people from East are always like that. We are living here for a long time. We are like living in the same house, I go to their house, they come to my house, we eat drink together. If I need money, I prefer to borrow from my neighbors, not from my relatives. I bought some coal that day. I had no work during that time. I went to my neighbor, the ones from Kars (a city in Eastern Turkey). I borrowed 70 TL and paid my debt. I will work tomorrow and I will pay her money. I even don't ask to my relatives because I know that they won't help. Therefore my neighbors are better.

As they are close to each other culturally and passing through similar stages and experiencing similar problems after migration, they become like a family, sharing their happiness, problems and even, their food. In addition to helping each other to hang on during hard times which may make them feel more secure; these relationships may also provide them with the feeling of belongingness. As most of the families have different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds compared to the citizens of Izmir, they may feel themselves alienated (which will be discussed further) after migration, and their relationships in their neighborhoods may serve as a relief through this sense of belonging.

As mentioned above, one of the most important reasons for them to bare all these difficulties of migration is to provide their children a good education, which will consequently ensure them to have a better life in the future. Considering the importance of the topic and its effects on persistent poverty, the next section will focus on education and its effects on the lives of the low income consumers.

ii. Education, Literacy and Self-Improvement

As discussed in the previous paragraphs, most of the women as well as the majority of male participants were not able to get a proper education due to various reasons. In this part, I want to investigate those reasons further, as I believe that lacking the required education is one of the main reasons of their poverty and will turn their severe problems related to poverty into a vicious cycle unless their children are able to reach equal opportunities for education with the rest of the society. Unfortunately, in most cases, their children are also not able to get education because of various reasons which will be discussed in this chapter.

The data reveals that, usually the families have so many children that they could not take care of, or earn enough money to make their living and to provide them a good future. Considering the educational costs, the number of children per family, and their point of views about how important getting a formal education is, a great majority of the participants were not able to get a proper education which can provide them with a good job, or a decent life. Especially women, whose roles are usually limited to being caregivers, are not a priority in getting education. In some cases, as families didn't think that it is necessary for women to get education, they preferred to send their sons to school rather than their daughters.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): I have never get education, I quit going to school when I was 10. My father…you know the eastern people…We were in Ağrı, we had teachers in our school But my father didn't want her daughters going to school. Then we moved to Izmir. They told me that Izmir is a bad place; they kill people, kidnap them and cut into pieces. My father told that he didn't send us to school until that time, and he never would in such a city. I could not get any education. I got married at the age of 16, and gave birth to my first child when I was 19.*

Pelin (Participant 15): I didn't get education, they didn't let me. They told me that they would send me to school after migrating to Izmir, but they didn't keep their promise. My father told me that he could teach me writing and reading, but he didn't…I remember, I was in the first grade, I was about to read. Right before I pass the class, my mom and dad had this big fight. My mom left the house and she didn't come back for 2 months. I was about 8 or 9 years old. My mom didn't even ask about my brother. I took care of him. Ah my sister, why didn't you go to school, you were too young…I was cleaning, cooking, I was all alone. My father was coming home late. My mom didn't show up for 2 months. She is too stubborn and mean. I had to quit. Then my parents reunited. My mom told me that I didn't need to get education. She told "she will write love letter to her lover then, and run away from the house". Old minds! They didn't understand anything, they didn't let me. I wish I could.

Related to the traditional roles of women in the society, many parents, and especially fathers and brothers didn't let their daughters or sisters to get a proper education, either because they believe that it is unnecessary, or dangerous (basically any kind of interaction with strangers is prone to be considered as dangerous, as in the case of work places which will be discussed later). In addition, moving to a big city such as Izmir was a big threat for them as they feel themselves insecure in this big, crowded and unknown environment. Majority of the participants state that they were not able to get education after migrating to Izmir. Some of them had to work for contributing to their family's budget while some of them sacrificed themselves for their sisters and brothers' education as their parents couldn't afford all children's education.

Nilay (Participant 6): I am graduated from middle school. After middle school, I succeed in the exams of the Vocational School of Healthcare in Istanbul. But as my father was ill, I was not able to get education, I didn't want to. One of my brothers was studying Literacy Teaching, we were already too much of a burden on our father, and he wasn't able to work. According to me, one of us had to make a sacrifice. He was more successful than me. He was getting very good grades during the high school. I was successful too, but not as much as him. Therefore, I started working; I worked for 5-6 years. Thanks God, now my father is better, but because of the problems at that time, I wasn't able to…Now

I am trying to complete my education through open schools. I am trying to improve my skills.

Tuncay (Participant 23): My son helps me a lot in making our living. He was very successful at school as well. He is very considerate. One day I came home, and he told me that he was coming from work. I asked him why, he should have been at school. He told me that he was not going to school anymore. I told him that he had to go to school. He is smart, he gets very good grades. I learned the situation long after he quit. I asked him why he did such a thing, he was successful. He told me that we would not able to make our living, his sisters living with only my wage. He sacrificed himself, but I learned about it long after. If I had known that, I would have stopped him.

Even though the children were getting education in public schools which don't require any payments, the expenses of a student was too high for the family that they could not afford it. In addition to that, the alternative cost of education was high as the children who are not getting education starts working and contributes to the family's income. Therefore, some of the children (usually girls and less hardworking ones) sacrifice themselves or forced out of the school by the family to ensure that the other children could get a proper education. Whatever the case is, this worsens their situation further and sentence them to poverty as they will not be able to find good jobs in the future.

On the other hand, some of the participants stated that they quit going to school by themselves with different reasons. Working in order to help their family is one of the most important reasons. On the other hand, some participants stated that because of the problems of unemployment, their families had to move to different cities so frequently that they could not have a persistent educational life, which made them feel drifted apart. Another reason emerged as marriage as girls usually got married at early ages, right after adolescence:

Hayriye (Participant 31): I completed middle school. Then I quit. I am a victim of love. My sister, this is my second marriage. I got married at 17. That is the reason why I couldn't get education. My husband was an elementary school graduate. I was graduated from middle school. He didn't let me go to high school. I didn't go as I thought that he would feel like lower rank. I sacrificed my education for him. I regretted that, but I could not turn back the time.

Thanks to the effects of the paternalistic society and culture, women are not allowed to be more educated than men, which is basically the reason why Hayriye could not continue her education. She tells that she sacrificed her education for her husband to make sure that her husband was not get hurt with her wife's higher education level. Considering her situation, this sacrifice resulted in regret. In another case, Ceylan reveals the reasons of her willful withdrawn from school:

Ceylan (Participant 25): I had no formal education. I wish I had. We were 7 sisters and brothers, my father was not able to make all of us get education. I went to school, but…My father…Everybody had those beautiful pencils, but I couldn't. It was a matter of honor for me, I could not continue. Why do all of my friends have them but I don't? I was going to school with plastic shoes, torn. I took it as a matter of honor, that's why I quit. I wish I hadn't done so. Why can their fathers buy those pencils but my family can't? My late father, he was not working..My mom was. She was cleaning the houses of people, just to make money for food. Seeing all these, I lost my will. If I could have thought logically as now, I wouldn't take it like that and continue getting education.

Some participants told during the interviews that they quit school basically with no reason, the only explanation being their unwillingness. In Ceylan's quote, the possible reasons of this unwillingness are revealed openly. Not having the colorful pencils the other children have could be a painful experience for a child, and can be considered as a possible explanation of their unwillingness as they most probably could not find any reason for this unfairness and take it as "a matter of honor." Feelings of shame, alienation or incapability could be considered as powerful

motivators for withdrawing themselves and the unwillingness to get further education. On the other hand, regardless of the differences between the reasons of participants for not getting education, one of the most important points here to be elaborated further is the problem of guidance from families. In every case, lack of interest and insistence from the family to get further education - which may stem from not being aware of its importance- leads to an uneducated, low-income generation. This deepens the problem and contributes further to the vicious cycle of poverty.

In order to look at the issue from the bright side, we can now take a look at the participants' comments about their regrets about not getting education. Except for a few participants who criticize the educational system harshly, all of the participants state that if they had another chance, they would do whatever needed to complete their educations. In addition, some state that they are trying to improve themselves and complete their education either through open schools or by their own efforts such as reading books and newspapers.

Şeyma (Participant 37): I wanted to get education but I couldn't because of my family's poverty. We worked, and we provided money for our sisters' education. But we couldn't…We are 5 sisters and brothers. My father could not afford that. I could just enroll to elementary school. Now I am in the 4th grade in open school. Nowadays my only wish is to complete my education. I thought about it. I want to do something. My children are more educated than me. I cannot answer the questions they ask. That makes me feel bad. That's why now I am reading books all the time, the books of the open school courses.

Osman (Participant 34): I completed 4th grade, but I didn't keep on getting education after moving here. I was running away from school, I didn't want to. So I started working. My family was telling me to go to school; I told them that I want to work. My sisters, both of them are getting education. One of them is in middle school; the other is in 3rd grade. I want them to keep on getting education. One of them told me that she doesn't want to go to school. I told her

Osman is 19 years old which is a very young age to regret his decisions about quitting his education. However, since he needs to work now, he doesn't have the chance to continue his education. Therefore, he advises his sisters to keep on getting education which is, for him, much better than working. Contrary to Osman who gave this decision on his own, Şeyma was obliged to quit as she needed to work and earn money for her family's subsistence. She tries to get a diploma through open school and improve her skills to be able to guide her children better. They also state that, experiencing all the negative consequences of not being well-educated, they are trying to provide their children with everything they can give to make sure that they get a proper education. However, it is difficult for many of the participants to ensure this, as the Turkish education system and university exams require them to spend a huge amount of money for private courses, in addition to the usual expenses of the public schools. For the students to succeed in the university entrance exams, they need to enroll to a private course which is called "*dershane*" (lecture house) as the courses provided in schools are not enough to succeed in these exams. In addition, even if their children could succeed in the exam, this doesn't mean that they could get a university education as it is too costly for a low income family:

Nuriye (Participant 47): I couldn't make her get university education. I was fired; I could not find a job for a while. I couldn't make it. That makes me very sad. She wanted to get education so badly. It is all about money. I couldn't give her money for private courses, she did it all by herself. She succeeded, and then we told her that we could not afford a university education. People are spending a lot of money for their children to succeed, but they can't. My child succeeded, but I couldn't…We are paying rent. When I got fired, we had difficulties in finding money for buying bread. That's why I couldn't make it.

Now I am telling her that even if she couldn't go to university, she should keep on working.

Tuncay (Participant 23): I am telling them to complete their education. My daughter is going to one of the private courses. I paid them 1700 TL. I will make her get university education if she succeeds. I am working for them day and night. I tell them to get education. I tell them to think about their teachers. If they want, I would do everything. I am driving a taxi after work. I want to spend my nights at home with my family. But I work until 4 am in the taxi. Then I go home and sleep, and I wake up in 3 hours, and again go to work.

As stated by Nuriye and Tuncay, the efforts put by the parents for their children's education is of key importance in breaking the cycle of poverty. As it was stated by some participants' experiences, without the guidance of the family the children may not be able to understand the importance of education in their future lives. Therefore, to ensure an increase in the level of education among low-income children, the support and guidance of the family is of key importance.

Considering all these discussions regarding the importance of education in breaking the persistency of poverty, we may turn back to the reality which reminds us that most of the low income consumers have low levels of education. Consequently, they are not able to find good, well-paid jobs which make them lack the resources to be a part of the dominant consumer culture of the contemporary society. After revealing a part of the life in poverty, I want to direct the discussion onto how low income consumers earn and spend money and the consequences of their work and consumption practices on their lives.

5.1.2. Lacking Resources and Its Consequences

i. How Do They Earn Money

In order to define the life in the research context in a detailed way, we need to take a glance at how low income consumers earn money to make their living, considering their low levels of education. The data shows that, the current employment status of the low-income people, their jobs and how they make money contribute to their poverty, deepening its effects further. Most of the employed participants state that they don't have long-term jobs and they are doubtful about their future in their current occupation. The reason for this is either the nature of the job, as they work in seasonal or project-based jobs such as working in agriculture or construction sectors, or it is related to deeper, structural problems such as getting fired during the downturns in the economy or the difficulties they face when they work for a subcontractor company.

> *Selda (Participant 1): My husband works in constructions. He carries things, he has a car. He earns a good amount of money when he works but sometimes he doesn't work. He didn't work last winter, for example. We survive in winter through debt, and he pays the debt in summer while he is working. I have a regular income, I earn a monthly wage.*

> *Sena (Participant 21): I cannot think about the future. I cannot foresee it. We are not officers. I am working in a subcontractor company. They pay for our insurance, but they can fire us any time. They told us that a few people will be fired last month for example, but they stopped it. They will fire someone from here, we don't know and we are waiting. Maybe next month, and no one knows who will get fired. It's not the ones who were employed most recently. They asked the manager to give them names, they didn't as they don't want to broke anyone's heart. They told them that the company should decide who to fire…We are not sure about anything.*

As Sena describes, working in a subcontractor company means that you can get fired anytime as they frequently fire workers without any reason and employ new workers in order to be freed from the future payments of seniority indemnity. Keeping workers at most for 1 year in the company, this firing-hiring cycle keeps going on. Not being sure about their future and living with the threat of getting fired all the time, these workers are not able to make any decisions about their future, and are always in search for alternative jobs in case the unavoidable happens.

In addition to the threat of getting fired, some participants work in daily or weekly jobs which don't provide them a regular income. Selda is working as a cleaner in a private company and she has a monthly wage, but her husband, who is working in constructions, is not able to earn a regular income as he could not find any jobs during winter. This creates problems in managing their budget; therefore, they rely on borrowing money from friends or getting credits from banks to make their living during the times of unemployment. Considering that the bank credits require them to pay a certain amount of interest when paying back, it can be said that having no regular income may worsen their financial situations further. Similarly, being a seasonal worker in agriculture sector, Meltem lacks a regular source of income which drives her to the search for new job opportunities at the end of each season.

> *Meltem (Participant 13): I was working as a seasonal worker in agriculture, in tobacco fields. I worked in tobacco fields in the summer for 3 months. After the tobacco season, there are companies which are in fig business; I work for those companies seasonally. After that, I go to houses for cleaning. And I clean the stairs of some buildings on Saturdays. 3 days a week in total.*

As Meltem explains, there are deeper problems caused by not being able to have a regular income. Apart from earning a regular income, one of the most important reasons for demanding a long-term job is the social security insurance fee which should be paid by the employer and which is seen by most of the participants as a way to guarantee their future. Thanks to the insurance fees paid monthly, they obtain the right to be retired from the social security system. When they obtain this right, they get paid a certain amount of pension and they get a payment each month until their death. In addition, they are able to benefit from the public health services only if they have their insurance fees paid. Therefore, being a guarantee for their future, they give importance to insurance fee payments and they quit their jobs if the employer denies paying it (which is illegal).

> *Ayla (Participant 29): At least I have insurance here. They pay for my insurance. That is what I really want. No matter how much the wage is, I wanted to have insurance as we cannot get public health service otherwise. My husband had worked for years but he didn't have insurance, neither had we. Now he is not working. As he gets older, it is becoming harder for him to find a job. He is 47 but it hasn't been possible for him to find a job.*

> *Sena (Participant 21): I worked in a retailer for 6 years. I quit when I got pregnant to my little daughter. Then I had a break for one and a half, two years. Then I worked in a bank as a cleaner, I was working for the subcontractor company actually. They didn't pay my insurance fees which they had to pay, and because of that I quit. Then, my fate, I started to work here. It's been 7 years. I am ok here, not bad, we work for minimum wage. My husband works in BMC (a commercial vehicles manufacturer). He has a regular job now but when the crisis hits, it affects them as well. He was fired in the crisis in 2000. He worked here and there for 3 years; they employed him back in 2003.*

In addition, unexpected situations such as a decrease in total demand due to an economic crisis influence them in a very negative way as it poses a threat of losing their jobs. In each case, the low-income people become more vulnerable. Some of the participants who are lucky to have a regular income are struggling with

the long working hours without getting an extra payment for it, and most of the participants state that they have to work in more than one job to be able to earn enough money for a decent life. After the working hours of their regular job, they try to find other jobs to work at night, such as driving a taxi or collecting garbage to earn more money:

Tuncay (Participant 23): Working for minimum wage…the people who work for minimum wage faces the hardest of all. What can you do? I am working here because I think about my future. I have insurance here. I can get retired some day. Besides, I have other jobs as well. I do tiles and plaster works, I paint walls. As a side job…I am working here from 3 pm to 11 pm. If there is a job, I go and work there in the morning until 3 pm. I can do any kinds of job to make sure that my children are not dependant to anybody. I sometimes work as a taxi driver after working here, at nights. I am a driver as well. I work until the morning, I earn 20-30 TL, I earn the money for doing the grocery. Sometimes I come here sleepless as I work all night. I have to do that for my children. I am paying rent, I am paying electricity, water bills. If I don't work like this, what will happen to my children? They'll be beggars! God save us from that!

Working in more than one job, and working for long hours puts an additional burden especially on men both physically and psychologically. In addition to being exhausted by the hard work, being worried about the subsistence of the family and not being able to devote any time to either themselves or to their family may create a psychological tension and damage the relationships between the family members:

Hatice (Participant 8): What can you expect from a single person? He works for the whole week, he brings the money, pays the credit cards, rent…Rent is 350 TL, he earns 280 TL per week, what can you do with that money? How can you survive? My husband is not well psychologically, he smokes 3 packages of cigarettes in a day. He comes late at night, his clothes covered with dirt and oil. He comes home at night so exhausted that he never speaks. He sleeps on the armchair, sitting. Can you sleep sitting, he does as he is so tired.

Mehmet (Participant 14): I was working in a bakery and I worked there for 9 years. I quit 15-20 days ago, as I did not have any social life because of the job. I worked at nights, you start working as 12 am and stop at 5 pm, working

for 17 hours! You cannot devote anything to your family. You don't have a social life. You have to think about these kinds of things as well. They need attention, care, we all need it. No matter if it's your wife or yourself. That's why I quit that job, as I cannot devote any time to my family…I lost my first wife because of this. I don't want to lose my second wife for the same reason.

Haydar (Participant 45): I worked in extra jobs. I was working in a workshop producing leather goods. I got paid for the pieces I produced. I was working somewhere else and after the working hours, after 3 pm, I was working at the workshop. I remember once, I left home at the beginning of the week, with a shaved face. Then, after one week of long hours of work, I came home and my daughter didn't recognize me, told me that I am not his dad with that long beard, my hair in a mass. I worked really hard. I worked in extra jobs until mornings, 3 days 5 days per week. I worked a lot.

Being deeply involved in trying to earn more money for the well-being of his family, Haydar and Mehmet both worked in different jobs for days and nights, without even sleeping. Even though this results in being able to have more income which will eventually be beneficial for the family members, lack of personal relationships within the family creates problems between husband and wife, and between parents and children. In the case of Mehmet, the husband-wife relationship was damaged as he could not spend any time with his wife and could not show her attention, which eventually led to divorce. Now, in his second marriage, he quit his job to protect his family. In addition to this, family relationships are of key importance for the psychological development of the children. Lacking the attention and guidance of the parents may result in problems and misbehavior. As mentioned by the participants, the desire for social acceptance stemming from this lack of family support may cause the children to desire being a part of the youth groups in the low-income neighborhoods who do not get a proper education, escape from school and use addictive materials such as drugs and marijuana. Eventually, the

problems may become much severe than not having an adequate level of income to make their living.

Even though the parents (especially men) are usually working for long hours in different jobs, in most cases, having only one person working in the family is not enough to make a living as they are usually working for minimum wage, and even for less sometimes. Due to this, it is required that at least one more person in the family start working to be able to have a decent life. Yet, women are mostly not working either because they don't have education or they are not allowed to work by their husbands (which will be discussed in detail in the further sections). Having known that it will not be possible for them to make their living this way, most of the participants' children start working at an early age, even in the expense of quitting school and not being able to get further education. Regardless of how much they contribute to the family income, this deepens the problem of persistent poverty further as they may not be able to find a good job in the future because of lacking the required education.

> *Salih (Participant 26): One of my daughters has started working in textile, but textile business does not pay you good money. It has been one and a half, two months. Older one is staying at home, the younger one is working. It is very hard to find a good job for them. …The older one is not willing to work, she's 18, and she got married. My younger daughter is working. My son sometimes works as well, in a carpet washing company. He sometimes goes to work, on weekends, from Friday to Sunday.*

> *Ayla (Participant 29): My husband is not working now. Because of him, because he's not able to find a job, my older daughter has started working in a hairdresser. She is getting a weekly payment but it is not satisfactory. My younger daughter was going to high school. As her father is not working, she could not go to university; she is trying to complete her education through open university. She is working in a mall.*

Some of the participants, or their children are trying to complete their education through open schools (middle, high school or in a few cases, university education) which provide them the opportunity to study at home and complete their education just by passing the exams. With different degrees of awareness regarding the importance of education in their future lives, just a minority of the youth who quit their education with various reasons attend these open schools to get a diploma. Yet, being graduated from open middle or high schools is usually not providing them any opportunities for a better job in the future, as they are not able to get a specific knowledge or expertise on any profession through this education. In addition, as stated by a majority of the participants, they are working in various jobs in different sectors which have no relation with each other; therefore these jobs do not provide them the opportunity to excel on a profession.

Turgut (Participant 42): I started working as the age of 11 or 12. I have been working from that time on. I worked in various jobs. I worked in citrus business (agriculture), I worked in a carpenter. I worked in constructions; I did plasterboard, plaster, ceiling works. I worked in the textile sector. And finally, I am here (cleaning). It has been 3 years. I can say that I am kind of satisfied with the job for now. I am earning minimum wage, that's why I said "kind of."

Ela (Participant 48): I worked in a print shop. Then I worked in the textile sector. And then in a restaurant. But I was not able to have a profession. Here, as you know, I am working as a cleaner. That's all.

Rahmi (Participant 43): My real profession is cut glass business. The ones you have at your house, you got it? Shaping, cutting glass was our own profession. We had a small atelier, I started working there as a apprentice. After a while, we bought the machines, we were partners with my brother. We had a few employees as well. For a long time, we had our own job. We were young though; those were the times that we could not manage the money. We couldn't understand how we earned and lost it. Then, there was this economic crisis in 97-98. All of the small businesses went bankrupt in Turkey...After we went bankrupt; I worked in rifle manufacturing for 2 years. We were making it from scratch. That's the usual profession of my village's people. As I am a craftsman, I understood the job quickly and performed well. That's how I earned the money for building my house. Then I came here and I worked in a

workshop in Kemalpaşa for 2 years (Izmir). Then that workshop was closed too. One of my friends advised me this job and I've started working here (as a cleaner), it has been 10 years.

Working in many different occupations, they mostly lack the know-how and are not able to develop their skills or excel on a specific profession. Therefore, they are considered to be beginners in every new job they find. This makes them accept working for minimum wage or, in some cases, cause them to get fired easily as they are considered to be one of the many workers waiting desperately for a job opportunity. Because of this situation, we may argue that vocational education is of key importance to provide them with the required know-how on a profession, which might lead to better working conditions and an increase in wages as they become more experienced in their jobs over time.

On the other hand, as also stated by Rahmi above, some participants (who are all male) had entrepreneurial attempts to establish their own businesses in different sectors; such as small ateliers for cut glass, kiosks or even a bar. However, the data reveals that, unfortunately, all of these entrepreneurial attempts resulted in failure, leaving them with huge amounts of debt to be paid back which worsens their situation further. According to the participants, the reasons of these failures are either the economic crises which hit Turkish economy and make small businesses go bankrupt, or the problems emerged between the partners.

Turgut (Participant 42): I had some money that I saved before I started working here. I had a business; I forgot to tell you about that. I opened a bar, entertainment business. With my uncle, thanks to him, he made me went bankrupt. You know that Olympics Hotel here. There was my music hall. We were partners with my uncle for 2 years. Then we had some disagreements and we broke up. We were earning well but it was meaningless as it was too troublesome. Of course, you respect him since he is older and cannot say

anything. Then we decided to break up, for not hurting each other. Then I started working here, all the money I saved gone to waste. We are sinking day by day.

Starting their own businesses with the money they saved, and losing it all at the end of this hopeful journey, the participants became more vulnerable financially after these attempts. Even though the reasons for going bankrupt are stated as the economic crisis or problems with partners, another question arises here regarding the skills and knowledge of these entrepreneurs about how to manage a business. Considering that they lack the required education and know-how, these entrepreneurial moves worsen their situation further rather than being an alternative for overcoming poverty. From my perspective, this situation is very much related with the discussions in the literature regarding microcredit and poverty alleviation. In a majority of these studies, microcredit has been considered as one of the most important anti-poverty strategies currently available for empowering the poor (Barringer 1993; O'Regan and Conway 1993). However, there are also discussions and criticisms regarding the failure of these strategies as it is argued to be failing in considering different barriers such as the capabilities and knowledge of microcredit takers on complex issues such as marketing, competition and inventory control (Ehlers and Main, 1998). Lacking the required education and knowledge to manage a business, the low-income entrepreneurs may become even more vulnerable in case of a failure, and this deepens their problems further.

Having provided an explanation of the struggle of many low income participants to earn money for a decent life, I also need to present here the opposite case which tells us that sometimes poverty may not be related to finding good jobs,

but maybe related to not working at all. The next section will provide us with explanations of why some of the low income consumers are not working, as well as the consequences of this decision on their lives.

ii. Not Working – Voluntary or Involuntary Unemployment

In consideration of their level of income and life conditions which require them to earn more money to make their living, the data surprisingly shows us that many participants and/or their family members are unemployed either voluntarily or involuntarily. In some cases, women are the breadwinners while in other cases they are not working, leaving the responsibility to earn money to men. In both cases, there are different motivations behind this not working behavior, which can be classified as cultural, religious or, in some cases, psychological. In addition, there are some cases where participants mentioned that they stopped working as they could not get what they deserve, complaining about wages or the lack of insurance. Some of the participants state that men, who are considered to have the role of breadwinner in the traditional Turkish family, are not working either because they are not able to find a good job, or they could not get along with the boss or other employees. In addition to that, and more surprisingly, some men don't work basically for no reason. As their wives or relatives explain, they haven't been working for years, leaving all the responsibility to make their living to women or their children. The reason of these men's - who are a minority among the participants- not working can be explained by the traditional Central and Eastern Anatolian culture where women usually work in the fields to grow and harvest crops, and men basically do nothing more than guiding

them. This situation can be considered as an extension of this tradition to the urban setting. Yet, regardless of its reasons, it creates severe problems for the family members:

Nilay (Participant 6): I have friends living in Alsancak or Karşıyaka (rich neighborhoods), to be honest, they are really living good. But still, they are struggling to reach something. The people living here, they don't have that. Go to Cengizhan and you'll see that 90 % of the youth have no jobs. They are adults, 25-30 years old. Some are married, have children, still they don't work.

Interviewer: Is it because they could not find a job?

Nilay (Participant 6): No, it has nothing to do with that. It is because they are lazy. This is the truth, that's why they are sentenced to living here. That's why they don't make any improvement. Go and visit one of those coffee houses, they are full. It is Ramadan now, your wife is fastening, go and make an effort, do something! No, they don't. They sit in that coffee house until the evening. Usually their wives work, this is the truth.

Tülay (Participant 50): My husband usually doesn't work. We are trying to make our living by me working alone. He doesn't like working, I don't know, maybe he has some psychological problems, he gets bored. If he could not get his money, he quits. I mean, he doesn't have responsibility…He works 15 days. If he could work continuously…He has been like this from the time we got married…He doesn't like working, he says "I don't care if I have money or not." He once wanted money from the manager, and he said that he had to wait until the day they pay the wages. He said no and he quit. I told him that he needs to find another job but he said that he could find money somehow. He stays at home 3-4 months. Then he says "give me your credit card, I will but cigarettes."

As discussed before, the reason for this behavior might be the traditional roles of women and men in some regions of Turkey. Yet, looking at the dominant lifestyle in the country which shows that men are accepted to be the breadwinner, these findings are unexpected from my perspective. As Nilay explains, men in her neighborhood usually do not work and spend their time in the neighborhood coffee houses while their wives are working. From Nilay's perspective, the reason is the laziness of men who don't feel themselves obliged to work if a family member works

and earns money to make their living. As there are many men behaving similarly, this can be interpreted as a cultural effect. On the other hand, some participants (such as Tülay) state that their husbands are not working as they have problems basically in taking the responsibility of a family. In each case, we can say that men's not working create problems not only monetarily, but also psychologically for both the parents and the children. Not being able to or not preferring to work damages the psychologies of men, as they may feel incapable, spending all their time at home, smoking and sometimes drinking. As they cannot earn money, they rely on their wives' credit cards or debt they take from any resources in order to cover their personal expenses. This worsens their financial situation further:

> *Tülay (Participant 50): He smokes a lot. He smokes 2 packs per day. He plays computer games; he's on internet all the time. He plays games for hours, until midnight or 1-2 am. If I say anything, he beats me, or he insults. Therefore I don't say a word, and go to sleep…In addition, he is to careless in spending money. He borrows money, he don't pay back. Now he has a few execution of debt cases, he tries to pay those debts back…I am bearing all these for my children, I don't have any support from my family. I wait in patience. I look around and see people who live worse lives. At least I am working and I don't depend on anybody. I try to relief myself like that.*

The problems emerging due to not working reaches so far that sometimes women face violence (both physical and verbal). In addition to the problems between parents, there is no doubt that the children's psychologies are affected very negatively. These problems, mainly stemming from poverty and its side-effects, will be discussed in detail in the future chapters.

Another important issue which needs to be elaborated in detail is women's case, as, regardless of their level of income, many women participants are not working. There are basic motivations behind this behavior which could be inferred

easily such as taking care of the children and doing the housework, but in addition to that, no matter how difficult it is for them to make their living, many women don't work as their husbands' don't give permission:

> *Baran (Participant 49): My wife is not working. To be honest, I don't allow her to work. I can work harder, but she should stay at home. That's how I think; I don't know what other think. She worked during all her life, before getting married with me. But after that time, I will work and she will stay at home. She can go and visit her friends, her family. There's no problem in that. But I don't want her to work, she and her family is comfortable with that too. I mean, there are drawbacks of women to work. It is the same everywhere, in villages or in the city. I have witnessed, therefore I don't want her to work. I am working here, for me the women here are all like my sisters. I won't think anything bad about them, ever. Because if I had different plans, other people may think about my wife in the same manner too. But I know that there are people who think and act different. Therefore I try to preserve a distance in my relationships.*

> *Kurtuluş (Participant 52): I didn't let my mom work, my sisters as well. If she wants to work, then we will buy some beads and she can do beadwork at home. We have a bead store in the neighborhood; she can sell her work there. We don't let them work here and there. It is dangerous, I hope you don't misunderstand, but the environment is bad. She better stays at home, do the housework. I want it to be like that; she should take care of the children and do the housework*

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): My husband fell down from the 3rd floor of a construction. He broke his leg and he had some surgeries. He cannot work. God bless them, my mother-in-law and other help us....I worked in textile (sector) after my son was born. But my husband doesn't let me work now. As he doesn't trust...He trusts me of course, but he doesn't trust other people.*

As Baran stated, the reason for not allowing women to work may be the lack of trust to other men in the workplace, thinking that they might be a threat for their relationships. However, the first reason Baran mentions is the responsibility of men to provide a comfortable life to the women, as he wants her to have a more relaxed life after all the hard work she got involved before getting married. Even though this may not be the real reason, in both cases, there is a conflict between the traditional

gender roles in the Turkish culture described above, and the current situation. A possible explanation for the changing roles of men and women may be the effects of religion, and the roles that are defined for women in Islam. In most of the Islamist countries, women do not participate and take role in the daily life as much as men. Women's life domain is basically defined as the house, while men are the breadwinners and they are responsible for all the interactions with the outside world. The increasing effects of Islam on Turkish culture and daily life practices may be the reason for this sharp separation of roles attributed to women and men. In addition, rising conservatism may cause the lack of trust and unwillingness of men to let their wives work with other men in work places. As stated by Nurcan, regardless of how much they are in need of that extra money that will be earned by her, her husband doesn't let her work as he doesn't "trust" anybody.

From the perspective of women, the first important point to be elaborated is some of the female participants' willingly acceptance of this non-working situation. Through reasons such as minor health problems, or taking care of the children and house, they accept their situation and try to live with the money earned by their husbands and by other male family members.

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): I want to work if my husband lets me to, but I have a child. If he was a little bit older, maybe…but now he is following me everywhere I go. I really want to work as I had some experience in textile business but only if I can find a trustworthy job. Sometimes I go to houses for cleaning with my mother-in-law, I help her washing the carpets or curtains. They pay you a good amount of money, 80 TL. But I cannot do that. My mother-in-law works for many years but I cannot do that. Partly because I have low blood pressure, but mostly…I can clean my house but not other people's.*

> *Zehra (Participant 7): I am a house wife. I am not working; I don't even go to cleaning like others (in the neighborhood) do. I am illiterate; I don't know*

which bus to take. None of the people I know advised any jobs until now, I cannot trust.

Trust is a major reason mentioned by the female participants as well. On the one hand, they have the same expectations with their husbands, to work in a good work environment where no one (especially men) makes them feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, they are also in search for jobs that can provide them a good and fair income where they don't feel themselves exploited:

Nurcan (Participant 05): I worked at home…I was doing beadwork starting from the morning till the evening and they gave me 2 TL. I cannot make a living with that! You get night dresses for women and you do the beadwork all over the dress. It doesn't finish quickly. My eyes were hurting, really. It is not easy, it is handmade. Those people get the dresses from stores, for example I take them from stores and distribute them to women here and make the beadwork done. I give you 2 TL but I take 4 TL. They make good money out of this business. 2 TL, the money they give to others…They are not even getting tired.

As they are not allowed to work outside, some of the participants worked in alternative jobs which don't require them to go out of the house. Nurcan participated in a beadwork job which provides her 2 TL per dress although the job was very hard. She tells that the intermediaries get most of the money without actually doing anything and, feeling herself exploited, she quit the job and preferred not working. Considering their situation, working at their houses or inside the neighborhood may be a good alternative for making them participate in a productive activity, yet, until now, their experiences showed them that they may get exploited in those kinds of jobs. This explains the issue of trust further, as they want to work in jobs where people don't benefit from their work and pay them unfair wages in return.

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While some of the female participants don't have any problems with their husband's decisions, in some cases, this situation disturbs women as they want to take an active role and participate in the daily life outside the neighborhood. Some participants state that they want to work and earn their money at least in order to cover their personal expenses, and to be able to buy the things that they desire:

> *Gülay (Participant 17): No, I have never worked before. They don't let me. None of my sisters have ever worked. That's why they don't let me too. I really want to work, to have my own income, to cover my personal expenses. I'd really love to, but I know that they won't let me. My father is not working, he is retired. Only my brother works…I see things, I like them and want to buy them but as I don't have money to buy, and as I cannot work because of them…I cannot.*

Gülay is an 18 year old teenager who wants to get dressed like her friends, to be able to spend money on the things she desires, but this is not possible for her as they don't have a budget for personal expenses. As a solution to this problem, she wants to find a job however her father and brother don't let her work which results in the impossibility of reaching her desires. After her mother passed away, she became responsible for doing the housework and taking care of her father, which limits her role in life to the caregiver role and blocks the way to being productive and becoming an active participant of the social life.

In addition to contributing to their subsistence, and from my personal perspective, even more important than that, working and being able to earn their own money provides them a sense of self-confidence which affects their life deeply in a positive way. First of all, through working, they realize that they can take roles other than the caregiver and consumer such as being productive and participative in other domains of life. In addition, self-awareness about being able to make their living

without being dependant on anyone may provide them with self-confidence and they may feel themselves more powerful which further affects their relationships and social lives:

> *Hale (Participant 16): While I was working and bringing money to home, my husband was very satisfied with me, he was so glad that he was doing everything to make me comfortable. He was so pleased, just because I have an income. Sometimes I think about it, I wish I had a profession, a long-term income so that I would not feel like a loser. I would really love to do that. Sometimes I was going to houses for cleaning, earning 60-70 TL. I was paying the bills. I was the best, you know. It means that, your income…materialism…I mean, if I had a job, if my income was a higher…It also stems from my family, my family is not in a good situation. Maybe my relationship with my husband might be different if they were richer. That's why I say to my daughters that they have to get education, so that they can have a job when they grow up. Only then, they won't experience what I experienced. That's the reason of my entire struggle. I want them to reach a certain position; I want them to earn their own money so that they will not be dependants.*

Hale experienced the benefits of working even though it was for a short period. She states that working provided her with *"not feeling like a loser."* However, she could not make these good feelings sustainable as she doesn't have a profession. Having tasted its benefits, Hale now desires her two daughters to get a proper education and have their own professions. As she states, she wants to see them as powerful and independent women, which is the reason why she puts so much effort in trying to make them have a good education. This emphasizes the importance of developing educational strategies and policies for low income people, and especially for women, which will be discussed in the future sections.

Having provided brief explanations of how low income consumers earn money for making their living, I want to focus on how the money they earn is spent which will carry us to the discussions regarding their consumption practices and

habits. In the next chapter, the discussions will focus on the shopping behaviors and habits of the low income consumers.

5.1.3. Shopping Behavior – From Basics to Limited Spheres of Life

i. Shopping Habits

In the low-income context, I came across many unexpected discourses and habits in terms of shopping, consumption, and tactics for managing their budgets. Before starting the discussion about the objectifications of desire, this section briefly explains their shopping habits – basic expenses, where they shop, how they manage their budget and how they feel about / during shopping.

As the low-income people have a limited amount of money at hand (usually minimum wage earned by one family member), they usually spend their money basically on rent, food, paying the bills and credit card payments. In most of the cases, they state that they can rarely spend any money on clothing.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): First I pay the expenses of the house. I pay the rent, electricity and water bills, internet and telephone bills. Then I look what I have left. If I have some cash money at hand, I prefer to do my shopping with that money. Buying everything with the credit card is not good. Then paying it back is becomes really painful. I make payments for the credit cards, that is the first thing I pay. As I said, I do the shopping with the rest of the money that remains.*

> *Meltem (Participant 13): My husband gets a monthly pension. He is smoking a lot; I spend 300 TL for this. The rest is for electricity, water, gas, detergents, food and things like that. There is no money left for myself or for the house. Spending on clothing, spending money outside, going on a holiday, buying what I desire…I have never experienced that. Very rarely, maybe twice a year, I buy a few clothes. The money we earn is not even enough for buying food.*

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As they have difficulties in covering their basic expenses, some of the participants use credit cards while some participants, such as Hayat, try to stay away from making their payments through credit cards as it becomes harder for them to pay back in the future. Since their income is hardly enough for covering the basic expenses, they usually cannot spend any money on personal expenses such as clothing or holidays. For a majority of the participants, the most important expense is rent (which is usually half of their monthly income) as not being able to pay it is a huge problem for them:

> *Kadri (Participant 33): I spend a majority of my income on rent. It is 500 TL. We live in Balçova (a middle income neighborhood, which is close to his job). Electricity and water bills make 100 TL. It makes 600...Rent is really a big pressure on us. I spend nearly all the money I earned on rent. If I didn't have to pay rent, I would have faced less difficulty in making a living. I can spend money on other expenses easily. I can spend more on my child. If I don't pay rent, maybe the expenses can rise but I know how to stop myself in consumption.*

Rent payments are mentioned by a majority of the participants to be the most important expenses and they want to get rid of this burden as quick as possible through owning their own house. However, considering that they hardly make their living, it is very hard for them to save any money in order to make investments. Therefore, the only possible solution to this problem is taking mortgage credits which make them have much difficulty in managing their budgets.

As one of the most important changes in their life cycle, getting married affects the way they spend money deeply. Considering that they have new responsibilities and roles which require them to adopt new consumption patterns, most of the participants state that they stopped spending money on their personal

expenses and try to spend everything remaining from the rent and bills on their house's expenses:

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): I will be honest to you. Rent, electricity and water bills…rent is 300 TL. Maybe it is not much but we perceive it as a huge expense. Thanks God. We buy food from the convenience shop on tick which we can pay months later as we usually don't have the money to pay it back. We try to cover the expenses of the house someway…Let's say that I have 5 TL. You think I have 5 TL; I need to pay the rent, bills, this and that. You say "let's forget about what you desire and spend that money first on your house's expenses. Because they are the priority.*

In most cases, getting married requires people to change their consumption habits. In addition to that, families who have children usually become less considerate about what they need or desire, but mostly focus on buying whatever the children desire. Children's needs and their educational expenses are stated to be among the major expenses. Most of the parents state that they sacrifice their own needs in order to make sure that their children reach whatever they desire as in the other case they have the fear of damaging their children's psychologies.

> *Gül (Participant 20): But I think about the needs of my family. Always. Since I have children, I don't give any importance to my desires, but to theirs. Sometimes when I go to the open bazaar I like stuff but I can't buy them. I stop myself, I say "no", I first need to spend for my children, and then, if any money left, for myself.*

> *Rahmi (Participant 43): There are a lot of expenses if your children are going to school. He comes and says they have this and that activities and asks for 3-4 TL for buying cartons etc. They have those activities each day. It is really a heavy burden. The schools ask for money for everything. Why don't they provide these things to students? It is another major expense. I have 300 TL to spend on clothing, heating, education, food…I cannot manage them all. What can I do then? You may cope with your needs somehow but you have to buy what the kids want. You cannot stop them getting education. Therefore I take credits from here and there. Not here and there actually, just from banks.*

> *Sena (Participant 21): One of my daughters is going to Gazi Elementary School in Alsancak (a high income neighborhood). I don't buy anything for*

myself. But we try hard to make them get education and satisfy their needs. We are wearing shoes which are sold for 20 TL, but they don't want to wear those shoes. My older daughter doesn't. She is a young girl and her school is in a very rich neighborhood. Therefore I spend a lot on her needs rather than spending on my needs.

As stated previously, even though having an education in public schools and universities does not require parents to pay high fees, it is not totally free. In addition, since the educational system is based on exams and the education provided by public schools do not aim success in these exams; nearly all of the students need to take private courses which are very costly. Especially in the case of low-income, parents may not be able to pay for this extra educational expense. However, with the fear of not being able to secure their children's feature, they find money either through borrowing or through taking credits. In addition, with the effects of exposure to consumer culture and with motivations such as conformity and avoiding alienation, children usually desire things which their families cannot afford such as cell phones or clothing. Even though this issue will be investigated in detail in the future chapters, it is important to state here that as parents don't want their children to face the negative feelings of unhappiness or incapability because of lacking the desired, they push their limits to somehow afford buying whatever the children desires.

Taking the issue from another point of view, in addition to events which require them to take more responsibility such as getting married or having children, spending their money more carefully may also be related with an increasing awareness about the difficulty of earning that money. Becoming more mature and

taking the responsibility to earn one's own money may also change the way they consume:

> *Osman (Participant 34): 2 or 3 years ago, I was not giving any money to my family. Even 100 TL, I didn't give them even 100 TL for 4 years. We were going to Antalya or Bodrum. I travelled a lot. We were renting motorcycles or cars. I travelled a lot, I wish I hadn't. I might have spent 20.000 TL through doing these things. I couldn't save it. Now I am working for 850 TL per month. I spent 20.000, now I work for 850 TL wage.*

Osman, who is 19 years old, had worked in many different jobs yet he neither saved the money he earned nor contributed to his family's income. He regrets the days he spent his money carelessly as he has to work for minimum wage now. He claims that he stopped spending money on things like cell phones or travelling as he becomes more mature, faces the facts of life and gets more responsibility. In addition, according to his discourses, religion also affected the way he thinks as, according to Islam, spending money on hedonic needs is sinful, which will be discussed in great detail in the forthcoming chapters. Through these deep changes in his perspective, he claims that he became more careful about his consumption.

As stated above, most of the parents state that they sacrifice their own needs for the sake of their children's desires. However, some female participants claim that their husbands are spending money very carelessly; disregarding their income level and their families' needs which damages their relationships:

> *Tülay (Participant 50): My husband has started working 15 days ago. If he could work continuously…He earns money and spends it all on paying his debts. He is so wasteful. He takes credits, and wants me to pay them. He has 2 executions for debt payments; he is trying to manage them. We usually cannot pay the rent. He shops with credit cards. He pays for the credit card. We spend on food, and on transportation. That's all, the wage is gone. It's been like that for the past 2-3 months. It's because my husband doesn't work. If he could*

work for 3-4 months, then we will be able to breathe again. Child's expenses, transportation, his pocket money. My wage is gone the next day I take it.

Nilgün (Participant 19): My husband is drinking alcohol. We don't even see the money he earns. He gives us 5 TL or 10 TL per day. I try to spend it in 2-3 days. After getting employed in his new job, it became worse. He sometimes drinks outside, sometimes brings it home. He has a lot of debt; he took credits from the bank and spent. It is all because of his friends, he became worse in this new job. He sometimes gives money and tells me "go to Tansaş (a supermarket) and do whatever you want with this money". What can you buy with 50 TL? I have kids; they need a lot of things. It is because of the alcohol.

In these cases, the burden on women are much heavier as they have to manage all the expenses with the limited amount of money that is given by their husbands, or with the money they earn without the contribution of their husbands. This, for sure, creates problems within the family. The reasons and consequences of these kinds of problems will be discussed further in the forthcoming sections. In addition, there are statements in participants' discourses related to how women may spend money for hedonic needs or for needs which may not be considered to be priorities in their income level. Therefore, taking the discussion to a point about gender differences in the way money is spent on "needs" or "unnecessary items" may not lead us to a meaningful explanation of the phenomena. For example, in Pelin's interview (Participant 15), I came across contradicting statements which reveal that even though they may become more considerate about the expenses of the family after getting married, women also may keep spending money on their desires:

Pelin (Participant 15): When I get some money, I spend it on the house, what we lack. When I was single, I was spending a lot but after getting married, things are changing. You want to buy things for yourself when you are single, but when you got married, you spend on the needs of the family. When I was single, I was spending my money on contact lenses. I was dyeing my hair blond or red. I was very well-groomed. Usually I was spending 70 TL per month on contact lenses. But after getting married, you start thinking about your house, your family…I am not taking care of myself after getting married. I rather

spend my money for my family… Thanks God, I never become destitute of anything. It was like this when I was single, and it still is. I can make my husband by whatever I want. For example, I love make-up. Clothing…I buy the things I like no matter what. If needed, I save money but I attain it somehow even though it is expensive. I have never felt destitute of anything. I don't want to feel that pain when you cannot attain.

These contradicted statements about becoming more careful about how to spend money after marriage, and spending carelessly on whatever she wants shows us that the urge for spending money on the desired commodities is there no matter what happens. However, investigating the discourses further on this issue, it can be argued that the participants (especially female participants) became more careful about their consumption if they have children, whose desires become more important than theirs.

ii. Where They Shop

Considering that the participants have low levels of income, how and where they shop becomes a focal decision in managing their budget. Usually the first and most important determinant of this decision is thought to be the price, yet, investigating the issue further, I came across different factors which become more important in their case. First of all, as already discussed in the previous literature (Prahalad, 2004), they usually shop from the stores in the neighborhood and do not prefer to shop from shopping malls or stores that cannot be accessed easily. Proximity is very important as they don't want to spend money on public transportation. Before the emergence of the small neighborhood store formats of big retailers such as Tesco, Carrefour, A101 or Bim (market leader Turkish company,

hard discounter), they were shopping from convenience stores called *bakkals*, which usually make them buy products with a much higher price compared to big retailers. With the developments in the organized retail sector in Turkey, the actors in the Turkish retail sector developed a new strategy which is to serve low-income consumers through small neighborhood store formats. Thanks to the rise in the number of stores and these small retail formats, the competition increased which leads to a remarkable decrease in the prices. Therefore, low-income consumers are no more prone to the problems associated with lacking alternatives and competition. All of the participants state that they usually shop from these neighborhood retailers, comparing the prices to find the best price available. In addition, they continue shopping from open bazaars in the neighborhood, which provide the consumers competitive prices.

Selda (Participant 1): We shop from A101, Tansaş, Diasa and Pehlivanoğlu (small neighborhood retail formats of big retail companies). We try to shop from the store which has the best prices. We were shopping from Kipa Express (neighborhood store of Tesco) previously. If we have a few things to buy, we buy them from a market on our street. We cannot go to those big shopping malls. We sometimes buy snacks for 3-5 TL from a store in the shopping mall, that's all. We have never shopped; we cannot shop from those malls. We sometimes go to the open bazaar in Buca which is close to our neighborhood. I cannot go to the open bazaar on Saturday as I am working on Saturdays. But I go to Şirinyer open bazaar (a middle income neighborhood close to their house) on Sundays to do the grocery shopping. For other needs, we usually go to Tansaş.

Mehmet (Participant 14): 3-5 years ago there were no such stores. Now there is Migros, Barış Gross and Kipa. As I said before, it is good to consume carefully. For example, when you go to little stores, they say that a kg of sugar is 2.25 TL. In Kipa it is for 2 TL, and in Tansaş 1.80 TL. You look at the prices and do the shopping accordingly. In addition, they give you discount cards or bonus cards. You adjust your shopping accordingly. Usually Kipa has the best prices. And now they have a membership card as well, you collect points. There are good things. They don't let the cruel to chain you (meaning bakkals - convenience stores).

As the participants state, these new retail formats are becoming much popular thanks to their low-price policies and assortment. In addition, as the awareness regarding the average market prices, qualities of products and competition increase, they started to criticize *bakkals* which sold low quality products for much higher prices for years. The small store formats of the big retailers also provide them with advantages such as membership or discount cards which help them get more benefits. Therefore, they don't prefer to shop from the convenience stores, which started to force some of these businesses out of the market. To be able to survive, they try to keep their prices high. However, some of the participants declared that they have to shop from the convenience stores as they are the only alternative to shop without having cash or credit cards:

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): Now all these convenience stores are dying. Why? It's because Kipa, Tansaş and Migros (organized retailers). Before they emerge, we had to buy from those convenience stores. Some people are still buying from them in spite of high prices. Why? You can buy from Kipa and Migros only if you have a credit card. You cannot tell them that you're going to pay at the end of the month. Before, when there were no retailers, we had to buy from bakkals. He would say 5 TL and you would buy. But the bakkal in your neighborhood knows you. You can buy on credit. Even though he says 3 TL…say that you have a guest at your home, you don't have tea or sugar and you have no money in your pocket, what would you do? "Uncle Hasan, give me 2 kgs of sugar and a kg of tea." Even though he says 10 TL, you won't care about it. And these are the reasons why people go bankrupt.*

As discussed previously, low income consumers usually don't have much cash at hand because of having a little amount of money left after paying the rent and bills. Therefore, to cover the daily expenses such as grocery shopping, they usually need to borrow money, use credit cards or buy things on credit. This is a way of postponing the expenses and this cycle keeps going on as the next month's wage will

be spent for paying back the debts. A majority of the participants reveal that they don't either have or want to use credit cards; therefore, they cannot shop from the new retailers in the neighborhood. Regardless of how high the prices are, they have to shop from the convenience stores as the owner of these stores let them buy whatever they want on credit. This is called "*veresiye*" in Turkish which means "will be paid later" and most of the convenience stores survive thanks to this ease of buying without having cash. In addition to "*veresiye*", some of the stores in these neighborhoods which are selling durable goods are still using debentures as a way of payment which is the only way for the participants to buy high priced items such as white goods, computers or cell phones without having credit cards. Moreover, even though there are shopping malls which are close to the neighborhood which provide them with goods for cheaper prices, they still buy those goods from the stores in the neighborhood as they lack access to those places in addition to lacking the information about their prices. The data also reveals that there are alternative ways of shopping in these neighborhoods such as door to door selling (which is not a common way of shopping anymore) or buying from the wholesalers.

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): We have a neighbor living close to my house. She brings some products and sells them on credit. As we cannot go to and shop from the stores which are distant, she brings them to us. Look, I bought the clothes I wear from her. She has different alternatives as well, we select and buy.*

> *Nilay (Participant 6): I usually do my grocery shopping monthly. In Çaymahalle, the downside neighborhoods, there is this wholesaler where I usually shop from. It is much cheaper. In bakkals, a kg of rice is for 3 TL while at the wholesaler it is 2 TL. There is a big difference; goods become too expensive until they reach us.*

In addition to the neighborhood stores, another way of shopping is to buy products (especially clothing for women) from people who are selling door to door. As they don't want to travel for shopping and prefer to stay in the neighborhood, these door to door sellers are good alternatives for the boutiques in their neighborhoods. Furthermore, having known that each party in the supply chain adds a certain profit margin on top of the goods to reach the final consumer price, Nilay found a new way to reach cheaper products which is shopping from the wholesalers. Through these kinds of alternatives, they try to reach products with higher quality and lower prices.

In a few cases, participants state that they go out of the neighborhood for buying clothes and do shopping for items other than grocery products. There are certain places in Izmir who directly target low income consumers with their lower prices and middle to high quality products. For clothing, they prefer to go to the old, traditional bazaar of Izmir, Kemeraltı, where there are little shops which sell low to medium quality goods with cheaper prices. Especially low income women prefer to buy their clothes from Kemeraltı where they can find a wide variety of goods with affordable prices.

> *Nilay (Participant 6): I usually shop from either Bayraklı or Kemeraltı. There are lots of alternatives with suitable prices. But most of the time I prefer to go to Kemeraltı. I can buy the same t-shirt which is 20 TL in Bayraklı for 10 TL in Kemeraltı. Therefore I usually prefer Kemeraltı. I shop from the shops in Bayraklı only if there is urgency.*

Contrary to the previous arguments regarding the importance of proximity, some of the participants who are more knowledgeable about prices state that they may prefer to go out of the neighborhoods if they are going to buy items with higher

economic value. In that case, they search for the best quality-price alternative. However, nearly all of the participants also claim that they don't go to big shopping malls even though they are located nearby their neighborhoods. They usually avoid going to these shopping malls as they cannot afford buying most of the goods sold there. They reveal that they want to avoid both the disappointment they feel because of not being able to attain those commodities, and for avoiding the possibility that they cannot stop themselves from shopping.

Hatice (Participant 8): We are not going to those shopping malls. It is not because they are far away. You can take the bus. Or if you have a car, you can go. Let's say that you go there, do you have the money to buy anything? You desire things as a human being. What will you do there without any money? Of course I feel bad, disappointed. My husband may desire something; he will feel bad if he cannot afford it. Therefore I never say "let's go". I only go to the open bazaar, I buy half a kg, or one kg like everyone else does. We are living close to Tesco Kipa; they have discounts two times a week. They sell stuff for 1 TL. Detergents etc. I buy those things. That's all.

Derya (Participant 3): I don't like them very much but I go when I am bored. Since I am living here all the time, I get bored sometimes. I go to shopping malls to make a difference. My friends are living close to Agora (a big shopping mall), I sometimes go there and meet them. They have a/c. It is cold during the summer and hot during the winter. You are not affected by the rain. Transportation is easy. These are the positive sides. And in addition to that, you don't feel alienated; there is every type of person there. There is variety. It's something good for me.

Contrary to the older participants, some young participants state that they like going to the shopping malls and they don't feel disturbed as they see that there are different types of people from different levels of income there. Derya has been living in a rich neighborhood for a long time as her parents are doorkeepers in an apartment. She states that she sometimes feels "different" in her neighborhood. Therefore, with many different types of people inside, shopping malls provide her an environment where she doesn't feel alienated. However, they also state that they try

to stop themselves from shopping in these malls; therefore we can infer that the main reason for avoidance can be the urge for protecting themselves from exposure to desire inducing commodities with the fear that they will follow their desires and shop through debt or credit cards.

This avoidance behavior, which may occur both willingly and unwillingly, plays a focal role on the lives of the low income consumers, shaping their social relationships and their exposure to the consumer culture. Considering its importance, I want to get into deeper discussions regarding the effects of having different spheres of lives and how these spheres may affect the consumption behavior and, in general, the lives of the low income consumers.

5.1.4. Different Spheres of Life

As discussed above, having different spheres of life may deeply affect the perceptions, behaviors and relationships of consumers. Considering the low income context, we may claim that most of the participants have limited life spheres. A majority of the female, non-working participants state that they live inside their neighborhood (and in some cases, inside the house) and don't have much interaction with the world outside. Usually they spend their time doing the housework and taking care of the children. They sometimes go to their neighbors' or relatives' houses to chat with them, drink tea and wait for the day to end. In addition, working women are also not able to have different spheres of life other than their neighborhood and the work place as they also have the caregiver role and they neither have time, nor the money to spend some time in different places.

Nilay (Participant 6): We have a very monotonous life. We got married…You wake up, your husband goes to work, you watch TV, cook, then the day ends, you cook again, watch TV. That's all. That is life. We sometimes go out with my husband during weekends. We go to Kemeraltı (a place where there are many little shops, selling clothes, accessories, and shoes etc. which target low income people), we eat something. That's it; we don't have a life like…Because my husband works at night. Because of that he comes home and sleeps during the day, and goes to work at night. That's why I don't have a very good life now.

Aysel (Participant 18): We get up late on weekends, around 9-10 am. I tidy rooms; we make breakfast with my husband. Then I do the housework, whatever I can in one day, cleaning. If I can find time, I visit my daughter, and my grandchildren. I don't have any more time, and I don't have anywhere to go. If I am too bored, I go to Sevgiyolu (a little street in the neighborhood where little shops are located). I wander around. I go to markets. There is no place else to go. I don't go to those shopping malls. I don't know the other places in Izmir, as nobody is taking me out. I just know Bayraklı (her neighborhood), I don't know other places.

As Nilay and Aysel state, they don't go out of the neighborhood frequently as they are doing the housework in their spare time, and as they cannot go to other places without company (their husbands). Aysel doesn't know many places in Izmir even though she has been living in Izmir for years and she works and gets out of the neighborhood frequently to go to work. Due to their different roles like earning money and taking care of the house, working women cannot find time to go out even on weekends.

In addition, usually women and the children can go outside the neighborhoods only if men take them out. They expect their husbands to take them out at weekends but, in most cases, men only have spare time during the weekend and they don't want to spend their time with their families but with friends. Therefore, the only chance for the family to have some kind of interaction with the

world outside disappears. Some female participants and Hakan (being the only male participant to mention about this) criticizes this situation:

> *Hakan (Participant 24): I take my children out if I have spare time. I don't like going to coffee houses. There are some people I see; I am feeling sorry for them. They are playing card games from morning till evening; they spend all their time playing games. This is wrong, it shouldn't be like that. Their children stay at home. You need to take them out, they should breath, relief. They leave their wives at home; women are staying at home during the whole week. You have one day as holiday, they kill time in the coffee houses. Otherwise I don't like going out. I want to spend time at home, with my children. I take them out when the weather is good.*

As women and children have a very limited life within the neighborhood, they have less interaction with other people and different life spheres which creates dissatisfaction and boredom. In addition, even if they go outside the neighborhood, they prefer to go to places such as seaside or forests. A great majority of the participants state that they don't prefer to go to shopping malls (unlike the rest of the society). This diminishes the level of exposure to consumer culture. On the other hand, non-working women and children usually have interactions with and get exposed to the world outside through the mass media, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Although non-working women can be considered to be the participants who have the least interaction, working men are more or less in the same situation as they have a big obstacle in having different experiences in different life spheres; which is money. Regardless of the activities they are involved, going out of the house means spending money on unexpected and unplanned expenses. Therefore, they try to avoid places such as stores or shopping malls. Visiting those places will trigger the desire through exposure to consumption objects and cause them to either spend money on

what they desire (which leads to spending their limited budget on "non-necessary" items) or unhappiness if they cannot afford it.

> *Baran (Participant 49): We don't have such bad habits like leaving our neighborhood. Maybe we should, but we can't. From work to home, from home to work. Going outside disturbs you. If it was 3 years ago, it wouldn't be that hard but for the last two years, I had many monetary difficulties. Therefore we don't have such…For us; going to the cinema is luxury. Just going to the cinema…Even if you go to a cinema, it worsens your situation. I earn 850 TL per month, lacking money really sucks, what can you do with 850 TL? Nothing! Maybe it can be enough for a single person but when you got married, even 1500 TL won't be enough.*

> *Yusuf (Participant 57): We cannot do that. We cannot. For example, once we decided to go to a seaside place in a holiday. The hostels were so expensive. I hardly afford one week with the money I had at hand. We took consumer loan for that. For one week…I paid it back in 12 months! I mean, one-week holiday's cost was one year. Would I go on a holiday again?*

Baran explains that before getting married, he was able to spend the little amount of money he earned on his personal expenses. However, marriage affected the way he lives and consumes deeply. Having the responsibility of a family on his shoulders, he needs to be much more careful in spending money. Other participants also stated that they had a more active life before getting married, but now they have constraints and therefore they avoid those different spheres of life to be able to manage their budgets. In addition, considering their income levels, Baran and Yusuf explain that activities such as going to cinema or going on a holiday are neither possible nor preferable for them. To afford a one-week holiday, Yusuf took loans from the bank which resulted in problems in managing his budget for a whole year. All these constraints keep them away from having different life spheres. Therefore, most of the time they prefer to stay inside the neighborhood and even inside their houses.

Considering the difficulties they face in allocating their limited resources onto necessities, we need to look deeper into the ways they manage their budgets. The next section will focus on the strategies developed by low income consumer to be able to manage their money in the best possible way.

5.1.5. How They Manage Their Budget

Looking at the data, we can infer that the low-income consumers developed some tactics for managing their limited budget with the best possible way. After discussing from where and with which motivations they shop, this section will focus on the strategies they adopt for managing their budgets.

As they have a very limited income, every kuruş (1/100 of 1 TL) makes a difference for them and needs to be taken into consideration. Some participants state that they need to check all the prices and buy from the supermarket with most competitive prices as each TL they save contributes to their budget in their future purchases.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): I wander around a lot to know which product is sold where at which price. Even it is 10 kuruş lower, it is important for me. This much cheaper, 10 kuruş, 50 kuruş...I do this, I cannot lie to you. I search for the best price, I walk around. Sometimes I go to 3 or 4 supermarkets. Otherwise it is too hard for me to make our living. It is not possible to survive with a pension.*

> *Hasan (Participant 41): I know about the big retailers as well, they all have different price policies. Tesco Kipa is different than Kipa Express (small store formats). Bim is different than Carrefour. I have the membership card of Tesco Kipa, for example. I follow the discounts. I am working with minimum wage, even 10 kuruş is important for me.*

As a retired woman who is not working, Hayat spends most of her time wandering around in the neighborhood to find the best prices. As Hayat and Hakan states, every kuruş is important for them to manage their budget. Participants state that they usually try to follow the discount days of the retailers to benefit from the price reductions. Usually retailers, especially hard discounters are not broadcasting TV ads about the discounts due to its high cost. In addition, the retailers which target low income consumers usually don't publish ads in newspapers as they don't buy or read newspapers frequently. Therefore, they prefer distributing flyers in the low income neighborhoods to make sure that they reach the target consumers. Participants state that they become aware of the discounts either through these flyers or through word-of –mouth:

> *Muhlise (Participant 36): I shop from wherever they have discounts. From supermarkets, from open bazaars. I buy detergents, food, and meat from discounts. I buy fruits and vegetables from open bazaars. I am always following the discounts. I stop by after work and I look at the promotions. They have these cards showing the discounted products. I hear about the discounts from my friends usually...You know about women, we talk about these things a lot. I go to places I hear, and I wander around a lot. I try to understand which supermarket has the best discount. If that detergent is 15 TL and decreased to 10 in discount time, I never miss it. That's the way I make my living.*

As expected, Muhlise states that she follows the discounts and she wander around to find the best offering. However, in contradiction with this statement, some participants tell that they are not able to benefit from the discounts as the limited amount of money left at their hand will be spent on the necessities rather than the discounted products:

> *Nilay (Participant 6): It is not possible for me to follow the discounts as I don't know if I'll have money to spend on those items or not. If I have money, as I said before, I go and shop from that wholesaler. I don't have a chance to*

search for or benefit from the discounts. Because we have a monthly income and we calculate every expense at the beginning of the month. This is for rent, this is for water and electricity, and this is what remains. It depends on the amount of the money we'll pay for bills.

As the amount of cash left after paying the rent and bills is barely enough for daily expenses, they cannot spend it on items that are not needed at that time period. Considering these, it is not very possible to say that low income consumers can benefit from the discounts unless they have the need and the discount at the same time. However, a few participants who have higher education levels and who connect to Internet mentioned about internet shopping as they could find better quality products such as shoes and home appliances for cheaper prices in web stores. In addition to being very price sensitive, the low income consumer is also quality conscious as a majority of the participants believe and state that low priced goods are of worse quality. They believe that through buying expensive and high quality goods, they behave in a more rational manner as low quality products are not durable and damage their budget in the long run.

Haydar (Participant 45): My son usually buys shoes from Barçın (a local retailer which sells Adidas or Nike shoes and sportswear). He is buying his sports shoes from Barçın. Why do we shop from Barçın? If you buy from the open bazaar, you buy a pair of shoe for 40 TL and he wears it for 15 days. Then it is torn. But he wears the ones we bought from Barçın for one and a half or even 2 years.

Considering their low levels of income, one may not expect them to prefer high quality-high price items. However, low income consumers state that their experiences show that in the long run, buying cheaper and low quality products is damaging their budgets. Therefore, in their search for the best option, they consider

not only price, but also the quality, regardless of the product category. In order to reach the best price-quality option, they also use their personal relationships which is a common practice in exchanges. As the previous research suggests, social capital and relational dynamics are very important for the low income consumers as they provide them with marketplace knowledge and assistance (Viswanathan et al. 2010). Developing personal relationships with the personnel in the stores, shop owners or even the house owners provide them an advantage for getting the best possible option and as well as being able to delay the payments. In addition to that, thanks to these personal relationships, they are able to bargain and lower down the prices especially in the neighborhood stores.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): I go to open bazaars but I also go to greengrocery in the neighborhood. If the prices are not too expensive...But they usually give me fair prices as everybody knows me now. They know us very well, thanks to my late husband's previous purchases (her husband was a doorkeeper; he was shopping from the neighborhood stores). They lower down the prices for us. Therefore I usually don't feel the necessity to go to open bazaars (where they can buy vegetables and fruits for cheaper prices). I even don't buy fish from here. I go to Kemeraltı; I buy from the store that I've been buying for years. They know me, they give me the freshest fish for a lower price... I've been shopping from some stores more than 10 years. They know me; they know what I will buy. They don't even put my name on the debt list; I have such s good reputation. They know that I'll be paying as soon as possible.*

> *Nisa (Participant 39): We were living in a detached house when I got married. Our house owners were very nice people. Whenever we had difficulty in paying the rent, they were saying "it's ok." They were older therefore they were understanding. I was pleased with our relationship.*

Having close personal relationships which provide the consumer with better quality goods, lower prices and the opportunity to buy on credit is usually not common in today's markets. However, we may claim that in the Turkish market, these transactions between people are still based on trust relationships in some cases.

For example, Nisa states that the owner of their house postpones the rent payment if they don't have money, even though this is a rare case. In addition, as Hayat declares, some of the neighborhood shops give them the opportunity to buy on tick. They have a notebook which includes the list of the names of people who buy on credit and the total cost of the goods they bought. Through this way, low-income people who don't have cash are able to buy products with the promise that they will be paying the debt as soon as possible. They can buy on credit from local stores without needing credit cards which is the most important reason for shopping from these stores even though their prices are higher. Usually, these notebooks are for tracking the debt, yet Hayat states that being so trustworthy, she is not needed to be included in the list. These personal relationships that make them manage their budgets easier can only be established with small neighborhood stores. Though, these relationships are very rare considering the current market where there is not much credibility paid to trust in trade relationships. Therefore, we may argue that one of the reasons of the survival of these stores is their personal relationships with their customers which create a win-win situation for both parties.

In addition, especially women try to manage their expenses through minimizing waste of food and bringing food from their hometowns as they can find natural and high quality products to cheaper prices in their villages. Usually their family members who are still living there are helping them through sending the crops they grew or food which they produce such as cheese or butter. As most of the male participants state, how well the budget and expenses are managed depends on the woman in the house. This means that, even if they don't earn money, women are also responsible for managing their family's income.

Even though low income consumers develop many different strategies to manage their budgets, most of the participants have to take credits to be able to make their living. Some of these participants stated that they try to avoid debt because of the disturbance it creates and because of their bad experiences about it. They claim that they either had or witnessed bad experiences such as financial downfalls and families devastated because of not being able to pay back their debts.

> *Zihni (Participant 54): I am not using credit cards and I don't want to. I hate it. My father went bankrupt because of them. He had 11 credit cards. I really hate it. From 2001 to 2011, he paid 380.000 TL for credit card payments. I was 27 years old, my future was lost... I don't like being indebted, it is not only because of my father. Even if I am in a bad situation, I won't use it. I am against it. I buy if I have money, if not, I will wait and work until I reach what I want.*

Having witnessed the negative consequences of credit cards, Zihni developed a negative attitude towards their use which is the main reason for him to stay away from having one. There is a fear of the debt spiral; therefore some participants prefer to stay away from credit cards intentionally. They state that they are afraid of the uncontrollable nature of the desire for consumption and they may not be able to stop themselves and lose control if they had a credit card.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): I don't trust myself. Why don't I? I want to go and buy things, but what if I cannot pay it back and they start the execution of debt procedures? I desire things I see on TV; on the radio...There are discounts in washing machines, refrigerators, TVs. You want to go and buy those things but then you think, "Will I be able to pay for it?" Therefore I cannot. It makes me scared, I am afraid of not being able to pay for it. I don't use credit cards as well. Because I don't have enough budget. I will buy and buy and buy. I will buy whatever I see. What if I cannot pay back? They will sentence you to imprisonment, you will become rotten. That's why I don't use those cards.*

> *Orhan (Participant 38): I use credit cards. Many banks...Garanti, HSBC, Finans and Akbank. They are necessary. They are like medicines if you need money. But they are like snakes in your pocket as well. Because they make you*

move immediately, you take the card and take credit. What about afterwards? I pay this one's debt through the cash I withdraw from the other...then I make that one's payment with another one. I make the minimum payments. Sometimes you cannot stop yourself. Sometimes you like something so much that you don't think about its price. But sometimes I give up just in front of the cashier; I stop myself and give it back. Because if I buy it, I will be crying later. And that will be the real pain.

Orhan states that people may have troubles in stopping themselves from buying what they desire. He claims that if you use your credit card in such a case to avoid the pain of not attaining the desired, you will face a worse pain on the day of payment. He describes credit cards as being a medicine and a snake at the same time, stressing further the possible consequences of using them without backing it by financial power. Therefore, owing to their bad experiences related to the consequences of taking credits from banks, or using their credit cards, many people are cautious in their relationships with these institutions. Some participants even criticized the way banks give credit cards. They claim that they give credit cards with high limits very easily and regardless of the applicant's level of income, without knowing whether these people are capable of paying it back. In some cases, they state that they send the credit cards without any application.

Ayla (Participant 29):   I have just one. It happened by force actually. They send the credit card, I didn't accept. They send it again and I refused to take it again. One day when I wasn't at home, they made my husband accept it and signed him the form. Compulsorily I use it now when I don't have any money provided that I don't spend more than 200 TL. I don't know, I am scared....I cannot deal with the banks. I am scared as I watched it a lot on TV. Dealing with a person is different than dealing with a bank or the government. Let's say that I borrowed some money from you, I will come to you and say that I cannot pay this month, and I pay in next month. But you cannot say that to a bank. They don't even realize if you exist or not.

As they always feel the pressure of not being able to pay back the debt, Ayla states that it is much better to borrow money from a person as it is impossible to deal with an institution as an individual. She wants to stay away from having a debtor-creditor relationship with a bank and, as far as she told, she did everything to avoid it. According to Ayla, banks force people to get their credit cards but then, ironically, they become the merciless creditor which ignores individual's lives. Moreover, some banks send messages explaining their credit options and encourage them to take credits. Some participants state that these strategies of financial institutions are harmful for low-income people as they may not be able to pay the credits back due to problems such as unemployment.

However, a majority of the participants are indebted because of using credit cards, or especially because of their mortgage credits. As stated previously, one of the most important problems for them in managing their budget are the rent payments and to be able to free themselves from this, they take mortgage credits to buy their own house which will be paid back in more than 15 years in some cases. In addition, even though some participants avoid credit cards, a majority of the participants have even more than one and are using them routinely. Credit cards are used whenever they don't have cash, therefore, rather than overspending via those credit cards, they use them as instruments to postpone their regular expenses to forthcoming months. This need for postponing payments either stems from an unexpected expense realized in previous months, or from a period when they could not earn a regular income because of unemployment.

Credit cards and bank credits are the common ways they use, however debt sometimes takes different forms in their transactions. As some participants try to avoid using credit cards, the stores in their neighborhoods are still using debentures to make them be able to buy commodities.

> *Banu (Participant 9): No, we bought it by debentures. We don't want to get involved with credit cards. We may not be able to manage it, because debt accumulates. We experienced it once. We had more than 1000 TL of debt when we got married. If you cannot pay it, there is interest. Forgive me for saying that but I sold 2 gold bracelets for it. We come to our senses. We are not depending on credit cards. We only buy groceries with the card. We pay it next month. It is such a thing that becomes like a habit for a person. It is like you are not spending money out of your pocket. Let's buy this and that and pay with credit card. At the end of the month when you face the statement you say "What did we do?" Thanks God, we don't have such a problem now. We are trying to avoid it.*

As Banu states, some of the neighborhood stores provide them with the opportunity to pay through debentures as they are aware that low-income people try to avoid credit cards. Banu talks about the habitual nature of using these cards as they remove the barriers to the desired. However, like many participants, she also had bad experiences with credit card usage, therefore she prefers to stay away from them even though they accept other forms of taking credit. This preference may stem from a similar attitude to Ayla's as they believe that taking credits from banks is much more risky then borrowing money from or making payments of debentures to a person.

Whatever the reason is, credit cards can be considered as a risky way of managing the budget as they usually deepen the problems further.

> *Aysel (Participant 18): We bought the LCD TV through debt. Each installment is 450 TL. Our furniture and other things cost 13.000 TL. When we could not*

pay that 450 TL, they added the interests and the debt became bigger and bigger. Instead of paying 13000 TL, we paid 20000 in total. I was pregnant when the bank confiscated our house. They told us "you bought this and that; you couldn't pay it, now we're going to take away your possessions." I felt very bad. They told me that they would tell the lawyers that the debtor's wife was pregnant and she fainted, therefore they hadn't taken our good. That happened 2 or 3 times. They were coming; I was crying and so on...But thanks God, we managed to pay it all.

Rahmi (Participant 43): The limits of the credit cards are not that high. But they are high considering our wages. Say that it is 2000 TL, according to our wage; you cannot pay it in 3 months. I have 30.000 TL debts in total. I am going to sink. My wage is spent for bank payments. Installment payments are rising... I you cannot pay, they start the legal procedure and if they do that, it means your life has come to an end...Most of the people here are in the same situation. There is no other way, you know that one day you're going to explode but you try to postpone it as much as you can. Of course it creates anxiety. I am a kind of person who doesn't think about these things much, but I know that I am not in a good way.

Aysel and Rahmi reveal openly the negative consequences of using credit cards on their lives. Aysel states that they faced even confiscation because of not being able to make the payments of the debt they took for buying an LCD TV and furniture for their house. Considering their level of income, spending 13.000 TL on their house is a huge expense which could not be realized unless they have a credit card. This quote reveals that having a credit card or taking credit from banks for spending on commodities can have destructive effects on low income people as the desire for consumption may drive them to act inconsiderately. Furthermore, Rahmi states that many people are facing the problem of the debt spiral and they are struggling to find a way out. However, considering that they earn barely enough for their basic expenses, it may not be possible for them to afford paying back this accumulated debt. Considering the severity of the problem, we may claim that the

current financial system and lacking required marketplace and financial literacy poses a big threat to the low income consumer.

Having entered into the discussions regarding the uncontrolled nature of desire and its consequences, we need to take a closer look to the objectifications of the desire in the low income context and how these objectifications are shaped or directed through the effects of different consumer culture agents.

5.1.6. Summary

This chapter aims to make the reader more familiar with the context to make sure that the setting is understood in a better way through the perspectives of the participants.

Migration to the City – Beginning of the Story

Majority of the participants of this study are the members of the families who migrated to Izmir from Eastern Turkey. 32 participants were either born or raised in the cities located in Eastern or South-Eastern Anatolia regions. A majority of the remaining participants were also born and raised in cities other than Izmir. The reasons of migration are basically economic. Lack of economic support and investments from the government, uneducated population and terrorism are among the most important causes of the economic underdevelopment of Eastern Turkey. Consequently, unemployment rates are much higher compared to the West, which is one of the main reasons of migration. In addition, some of the participants revealed

that they migrated to Western cities to be able to provide their children a good education and future.

Education, Literacy and Self-Improvement

Considering the educational costs, the number of children per family, and their point of views about how important getting a formal education is, a great majority of the participants were not able to get a proper education which can provide them with a good job, or a decent life. Especially women, whose roles are usually limited to being caregivers, are not a priority in getting education. Some of them had to work for contributing to their family's budget while some of them sacrificed themselves for their sisters and brothers' education as their parents couldn't afford all children's education. This worsens their situation further and sentences them to poverty as they will not be able to find good jobs in the future. In every case, lack of interest and insistence from the family to get further education - which may stem from not being aware of its importance- leads to an uneducated, low-income generation. This deepens the problem and contributes further to the vicious cycle of poverty.

How Do They Earn Money

Most of the employed participants state that they don't have long-term jobs and they are doubtful about their future in their current occupation. The reason for this is either the nature of the job, as they work in seasonal or project-based jobs such as working in agriculture or construction sectors, or it is related to deeper, structural problems such as getting fired during the terms of economic crisis or the difficulties they face when they work for a subcontractor company. Some of the participants

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who are lucky to have a regular income are struggling with the long working hours without getting an extra payment for it, and most of the participants state that they have to work in more than one job to be able to earn enough money for a decent life. Most of the participants' children start working at an early age, even in the expense of quitting school and not being able to get further education. Working in many different occupations, they mostly lack the know-how and are not able to develop their skills or excel on a specific profession. On the other hand, some participants (who are all male) had entrepreneurial attempts to establish their own businesses. However, the data reveals that unfortunately, all of these entrepreneurial attempts resulted in failure, leaving them with huge amounts of debt to be paid back which worsens their situation further. This situation is related with the discussions in the literature regarding microcredit and poverty alleviation. Lacking the required education and knowledge to manage a business, the low-income entrepreneurs may become even more vulnerable in case of a failure, and this deepens their problems further.

Not Working

The data surprisingly shows us that many participants and/or their family members are unemployed either voluntarily or involuntarily. In some cases, women are the breadwinners while in other cases they are not working, leaving the responsibility to earn money to men. In both cases, there are different motivations behind this not working behavior, which can be classified as cultural, religious or, in some cases, psychological. Some of the participants state that men, who are considered to have the role of breadwinner in the traditional Turkish family, are not

working either because they are not able to find a good job, or they could not get along with the boss or other employees. In addition to that, and more surprisingly, some men don't work basically for no reason. As their wives or relatives explain, they haven't been working for years, leaving all the responsibility to make their living to women or their children. The problems emerging due to not working reaches so far that sometimes women face violence (both physical and verbal). In addition to the problems between parents, there is no doubt that the children's psychologies are affected very negatively. Regardless of their level of income, many women participants are not working. Basic reasons for not working are taking care of the children and doing the housework, but in addition to that, many women don't work as their husbands' don't give permission. Some female participants' willingly accept this non-working situation. However, working and having their economic freedom is of utmost importance for women. Through working, they realize that they can take roles other than the caregiver and consumer such as being productive and participative in other domains of life.

Shopping Habits

Low income consumers usually spend their money basically on rent, food, paying the bills and credit card payments. Since their income is hardly covering the basic expenses, they usually cannot spend any money on personal expenses such as clothing or holidays. For a majority of the participants, the most important expense is rent as not being able to pay the rent is a big problem and burden on them, and as it is nearly half of their monthly income. In most cases, getting married requires people to change their consumption habits. In addition to that, families who have children

usually become less considerate about what they need or desire, but mostly focus on buying whatever the children desire. Most of the parents state that they sacrifice their own needs in order to make sure that their children reach whatever they desire as in the other case they have the fear of damaging their children's psychologies.

Where They Shop From

They usually shop from the stores in the neighborhood and do not prefer to shop from shopping malls or stores that cannot be accessed easily. Proximity is very important as they don't want to spend money on public transportation. Before the emergence of the small neighborhood store formats of big retailers such as Tesco, Carrefour, A101 or Bim (market leader Turkish company, hard discounter), they were shopping from convenience stores called *bakkals*, which usually make them buy products with a much higher price compared to big retailers. With the developments in the organized retail sector in Turkey, the actors in the Turkish retail sector developed a new strategy which is to serve low-income consumers through small neighborhood store formats. Consequently, the competition increased which leads to a remarkable decrease in the prices. Therefore, low-income consumers are no more prone to the problems associated with lacking alternatives and competition. However, some of the participants declared that they have to shop from the convenience stores as they are the only alternative to shop without having cash or credit cards. They usually avoid going to shopping malls as they cannot afford buying most of the goods sold there and also with the aim of protecting themselves from the disappointment they feel because of not being able to attain those commodities.

Different Spheres of Life

As women and children have a very limited life within the neighborhood, they have less interaction with other people and different life spheres which creates dissatisfaction and boredom. In addition, even if they go outside the neighborhood, they prefer to go to places such as seaside or forests. A great majority of the participants state that they don't prefer to go to shopping malls or the city center in their spare time (unlike the rest of the society). This diminishes the level of exposure to consumer culture. On the other hand, non-working women and children are exposed to the world outside the neighborhood through the mass media even though they don't have an actual contact with these spheres.

How They Manage Their Budgets

As Hayat and Hakan states, every kuruş is important for them to manage their budget. Participants state that they usually try to follow the discount days of the retailers to benefit from the price reductions. In addition to being very price sensitive, the low income consumer is also quality conscious as they believe that through buying expensive and high quality goods, they behave in a more rational manner as low quality products are not durable and damage their budget in the long run. In order to reach the best price-quality option, they also use their personal relationships, which is a common practice in exchanges. Social capital and relational dynamics are very important for the low income consumers as they provide them with marketplace knowledge and assistance. Owing to their bad experiences related to the consequences of taking credits from banks, or using their credit cards, many people are cautious about using them. However, a majority of the participants are

indebted because of using credit cards (even more than one), and especially because of their mortgage credits. Having a credit card or taking credit from banks for spending on commodities can have destructive effects on low income people as the desire for consumption may drive them to act inconsiderately. Furthermore, many people are facing the problem of the debt spiral and they are struggling to find a way out.

5.2. Exposure and Objectification of Desire

In the previous chapter, I aimed to present a detailed explanation of low income consumers' lives: their backgrounds, how they earn and spend money, their experiences of shopping and the reasons of their poverty to become a continuous cycle through joblessness and lack of education. After providing these explanations, I hope that the reader will be able to have a better perspective to look through deeper issues. In this chapter, I will try to take a closer look at the construct of desire from the perspective of the low income consumer, and delve deeper into understanding how they objectify the desire under the influence of the consumer culture. To examine these objectifications, I believe that we need to understand what the desired commodities are, what they really want to own or attain, how they define happiness and most importantly, the importance of commodities in their definitions of a happy life. In addition, we need to take into consideration the broader forces that shape these objectifications. To be able to understand the effects of different consumer socialization agents (Ward, 1974) on their objectifications of desire, I will try to explain the role of these agents on their objectifications through examining the cases

of low and high exposure as well as the demographic characteristics which may affect these objectifications.

5.2.1. The Objectified Form of Desire – What is Desired and What is the Motivation Behind

To be able to reach the reality behind what have been said or done, I preferred to start the conversation about their desires through asking them a very broad question: "What is a happy life?" In a majority of the interviews, this question took us on a journey from their desires for a peaceful state of mind to the desire for consuming luxury products. Therefore, this chapter is constructed in a way that will lead the reader to have an understanding on the meandering nature of desire and how desire can be objectified in many different forms under the effect of different socialization agents.

i. Descriptions of a Happy Life

In order to reach participants' descriptions of a happy life, I started by asking a very broad and basic question to make sure that their answers lead the conversation. In a majority of the cases, participants started by mentioning their materialistic needs that have to be satisfied for a decent life. After talking about their "basic necessities," the amount of money required for covering their expenses for a decent life, and briefly mentioning health and peace, the conversation got into a new direction by the discussions on their deeper desires which are, in most cases, related

to having a "better" life, or being able to reach "the other life." "The other life" is basically, the representation of a more affluent life in their minds, which is very subjective, yet, has many commonalities in their discourses.

In most of the cases, participants started the conversation by talking about peacefulness, which is considered to be the first rule of a happy life. Yet, a majority of the participants also reveal that they don't have peace in their lives because of various reasons (which are mostly related to poverty) such as having a bad relationship with their partners, being jobless and having worries about their family's future. Furthermore, they claim that all these barriers to having a peaceful life is related to lacking a certain amount of money (no more, no less) for a decent life and this amount of money is not only needed for making their living, but also for having peace and good relationships with significant others: their husbands /wives, children or friends.

> *Kadri (Participant 33): It (not having enough money) damages peacefulness. If you were a man, you would understand the pain one feels when he is not able to buy a basic necessity for his family. We need to change roles, so that you can understand that. When his wife asks about why he didn't buy the things she had ordered and when he replies that he couldn't...that is too painful. And if your wife is not an understanding person, then you the arguments begin.*

> *Orhan (Participant 38): Poverty damages happiness, richness damages it as well. Why? Because when people start earning a lot of money...you know some say "sonradan görme gavurdan dönme (meaning that a person who earns a lot suddenly will become worse than a villain). He loses his way. He says "ok, this money is endless." He starts doing things that he never did before because of his confidence in that money. He does every kind of crap. He forgets about his children...If someone from the family objects, he will say "here is the money, are you hungry or thirsty?" Hey man...The only thing that woman desires is happiness even when you were poor.*

> *Nuriye (Participant 47): If you don't have money, you cannot have either peace or love. Everything depends on money...You need to have a persistent job, an income. The rest is unimportant. You need to earn as much as an officer. If my husband has had such a wage, we could have had a house, or a*

car by now, we could have had savings as well. If you don't have money, that will make you think a lot. You say "we lack this, we lack that, what will we do tomorrow, how can we send the child to school?" You are always restless. If you feel so, this affects a person in every way, it affects the sexuality, it affects the relationships. Your brain is always busy with these things and nothing gives you pleasure. But there are some people who have a lot of money but no peace as well. I don't want my daughter to get married to a rich man, this is the reason. If the man is very rich, he will throw a bunch of money to her and leave the house. There will be no peace at that house. You need to love your partner, and you need an income to ensure that you're not dependant on anyone.

Sinem (Participant 60): I am not searching for richness. If I have peace, that will be enough for me. Everybody wants to be rich, but I just want to have a peaceful life. You cannot be peaceful without money. If you don't have money, this means that you're restless. Money is everything. Let's think, if my husband provides me with comfort, then we will be happy. But in the other case, I won't be peaceful. I will say that he cannot take care of me, he cannot manage. To have a peaceful life, the money you earn should be enough for Tansaş (a retailer – means grocery shopping), for open bazaars, for children...Then you will have a comfortable life...Money brings peacefulness. But if you have a lot of money, then your husband we'll look outside (means having relationships with other women), or you will become wasteful, you cannot appreciate anything. Therefore, you need the optimum of everything.

Most of the participants state that money is not enough for happiness but not having enough money for making a minimally decent life (Sen, 1999) is a major source of problems, unhappiness and stress. Therefore, according to them, peacefulness is directly related to earning a certain amount of money. However, most of the participants also believe that as the level of income increases, other problems may emerge such as wastefulness, being inconsiderate about the family members or even, cheating. Furthermore, they believe that people having more money than the amount to cover the basic expenses will become wicked or unhappy because of the power they'll have. This can be interpreted as a justification for living in poverty or a self-defense mechanism for coping with stress as they may think that they will not be

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able to earn that much money anytime during their lives. This topic will be covered in the future sections regarding coping strategies.

In addition, as the quotes reveal, both men and women state that earning money to ensure peacefulness and good family relationships is the responsibility of men. Still having the dominant, bread-winner role in the house (Holt and Thompson, 2004), this responsibility becomes a huge pressure for men. Considering the patriarchal characteristics of the Turkish culture (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits, 2008), not being able to earn good enough for a decent life may lead to feelings of incapability which can be expressed as alienation, anger or carelessness. These negative feelings affect the relationships further which may be one of the reasons why many female participants state that a good husband-wife relationship is of utmost importance for having a happy life:

> *Ayla (Participant 29): If he loves you, trusts you and if he is faithful, even the minimum (possessions) can make me happy. But we don't have these. A little love, affection will be enough, he even doesn't need to work then. He doesn't have a job, money, but he murmurs all the time. You should at least show some affection to your daughters. He has always been that cold hearted. He acts as if he works and we don't, do you understand? Just love, a little affection and mercy will be enough for me. That can make me happy.*

> *Tülay (Participant 50): There should be peace, and my husband should work. I am happy when he's working. After work when I go back home, I usually feel distressed and worried about him. I wonder whether he went to work and turned back home. If he doesn't work he becomes quick tempered and careless. He lies down at home all the day, and I work. Then I serve him at home, this disappoints me. It has been like this for years. He works for 3 months and stays at home for 5 months then. I cook, I make tea...he doesn't say "thank you, I appreciate it, we survive thanks to you" and this makes me disappointed....I get happy when he starts working but he quits too quickly. I sometimes think that he quits for making me unhappy. I want both of us working, to come back home together in the evening. I want him to help me. What else do we need? We*

should pay back the debts. We have a child; we should take care of him. That's all I want but it never happens.

Kadri (Participant 33): You know some say "God don't give us much so we don't go to wrong ways, don't give us less so that other people won't talk about us." The middle point is always the best. To be happy, you need to have your economic freedom. You should be able to act bravely when you put your hands into your pocket (through feeling the money in the pocket). You shouldn't be living with fear. You need to have a good income. Of course, not everybody can be successful in that. Some say this is the way you're born, some say it's because of laziness but this is what life is about...There are poor people as well as the rich.

Considering the roles of men in the Turkish society, it is not very surprising to see that men who cannot earn enough may develop negative feelings such as fear or anger towards life, their families or themselves. As Kadri states, not being able to behave bravely may make them feel incapable which can ultimately lead to negative feelings. For example, just like the majority of female participants, Ayla complains about lack of love, affection and support from her husband. Similarly, Tülay mentions about the irresponsible behaviors of her husband and states that she lacks the happiness she desires because of not being respected and appreciated. Even though none of her desires are materialistic, we can infer that the reason why she cannot reach her desires is very much related to the materialist mindset. This patriarchal and materialist point of view which is dominant in the Turkish culture leads to the conception that if a man is not earning enough, then he is not man enough (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits, 2008). This perspective is at the core of many problems faced in the low income context as it leads to problems between family members which affects and deepens the problem of poverty further. The effects of these negative feelings and bad relationships on poverty will be discussed further in the future sections.

The topics we discussed until this point are closely related to having a good level of income which can only be provided through a good job. Therefore, some participants state that having a good job is the key to happiness as it ensures you a certain level of income which helps you to have a decent life and eventually, happy and satisfactory relationships. Some of the participants even reveal that health is one of the key factors for a happy life, as you will not be able to work in a good job if you're unhealthy.

> *Meltem (Participant 13): Health is very important for a person to be happy. And, material possessions. If you're healthy, you can work. If you work, you can own everything. Of course, if you are unhealthy, it doesn't matter even if the world is yours.*

> *Büşra (Participant 56): You need to have a good job. First health and then a good job. Having a job is very important. If you're working, you even don't have to own a house. You can rent one if your job is guaranteed...As we know, materiality is very important at this era. Not much but just enough for making a living....If you lack that, you will have unrest, you face some problems with your husband. But if you work, it becomes completely different. I realized that after I started working, I regained my self-confidence. Even my husband behaves differently.*

From the perspective of Meltem and Büşra, it is important to have a good job to make sure that they earn the required amount of money for a peaceful life. However, unlike the previous cases, Meltem and Büşra claims that women's participation to the work force is also of key importance as this participation provides them with more than an income. It provides them with the opportunity to reach their material desires and gives a sense of self-confidence and power as they overcome the barriers of exclusion (Lukes, 1974). In addition to having this desire to work and participate in the productive work force, some participants (all of whom are female) state that they want to establish their own businesses through opening a hairdresser

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or buying a carpet weaving machine. As a summary, we may state that regardless of the demographic characteristics such as gender or age, a majority of the participants mentioned about the need for having a good job to earn money and to have a peaceful life, especially in the case of married participants. The data reveals that being married and especially having children changes the definitions of low income consumers regarding a happy life as their focus shifts to their children's happiness rather than their own. Being worried about children's education and future, their priority becomes reaching what the children desire to ensure that they don't face the challenges that their parents have been facing.

Related to their search for a happy and peaceful life and in consideration of the problems they face about material possessions, most of the participants have the inclination towards spiritual development as they have very strong religious beliefs. Reasons and effects of this religious orientation will be discussed in great detail in the final chapter. However, it is useful to discuss here that, their beliefs about the importance of being blessed by God to have a good life leads them to different types of consumption behavior such as charity. Interestingly, a majority of the participants talk about their desires to donate money to "poor" people as soon as they have a certain amount of disposable income. Even though most of the participants state that they are in a very bad situation financially, they also claim that the first thing they will do when they have some money to spend will be helping other people. An important motivation for having such a desire is religion and being blessed by God on the one hand, while, on the other hand, it can be related to the relief due to the thought that there are people in worse conditions compared to them. As it will be discussed in detail later, most of the participants continuously thank God for what

they have and demand his justice for the people who are in worse situation. In addition, they strongly believe in the "material benefits" of goodwill and charity as they think that they will be blessed by God and God will give whatever they desire in return.

> *Zehra (Participant 7): If I have some extra money, the first thing I would do is to buy clothes to an orphan child. I will take her/him to a store, I will buy everything he needs, I will buy him food, and then, I can spend money on what I desire. I have thought about that a lot, first I will make him happy so that God will make me happy in return. That is the thing that will make me happiest. I think about this during nights. If I had some money to do this…That's my dream, and I know that then God will give me. God says "You do the move, I do bless you." If I do such a thing, he will give me back in return.*

At some point, charity can be considered as a justification and self-protection mechanism as it provides them with the feeling that they need to be thankful for their current situation as there are many people living in much worse conditions. In addition, as indicated by Zehra, it is a way to attain God's blessing so that they will be provided with what they desire. For the same reason, some of the participants tell that they want to go to Hajj or build mosques. These issues will be covered in detail in the final chapter which is about the effects of religion on the lives of the low income consumers.

Looking more from a non-materialist perspective, the question asked to get their definitions of a happy life mostly lead us to discussions regarding peacefulness and good family relationships as well as a certain amount of money needed to ensure these. Moreover, after revealing their first ideas, the discussions usually directed us to commodified forms of desire and how these desires are formed and triggered. Therefore, the next discussion will be focusing on the objectification and

commodification of desire and different factors which affect these commodifications in various ways.

5.2.2. The Commodified Forms of Desire – Why and How?

This section will focus on the objectification of desire. It is of key importance to understand the deeper motivations and factors which direct the desire to certain types of consumption behavior. Therefore, I tried to search for alternative means of understanding the real motives behind the scene, which led me realizing deeper social and psychological dynamics. Even though the discussion seems to be focusing on commodities, the real meanings behind the desire for consuming those commodities tell us much more about the effects of consumer culture on people living in poverty.

In this section, I will try to explain, compare and contrast the objectifications of desire in terms of the level of exposure to consumer culture agents. In addition to that, although it has not been planned previously, the data suggests that there is a need for classification in terms of demographic characteristics such as life stage and gender to understand the reasons of these objectifications through the different perspectives of the participants. Therefore, this section is structured to first explain the effects of demographic characteristics such as life stage and gender on consumption. After revealing the differences emerged under the effects of demographic characteristics, I will try to explain the effects of different levels of exposure to consumer culture on directing the desires of low income consumers. In addition to these, the data suggests that other characteristics such as political

ideology, religion and culture may also affect and direct the desire onto different forms of consumption which will be discussed in future chapters. A summary of the factors affecting the objectification and redirection of desire are shown in *Figure 3* and will be discussed consequently.
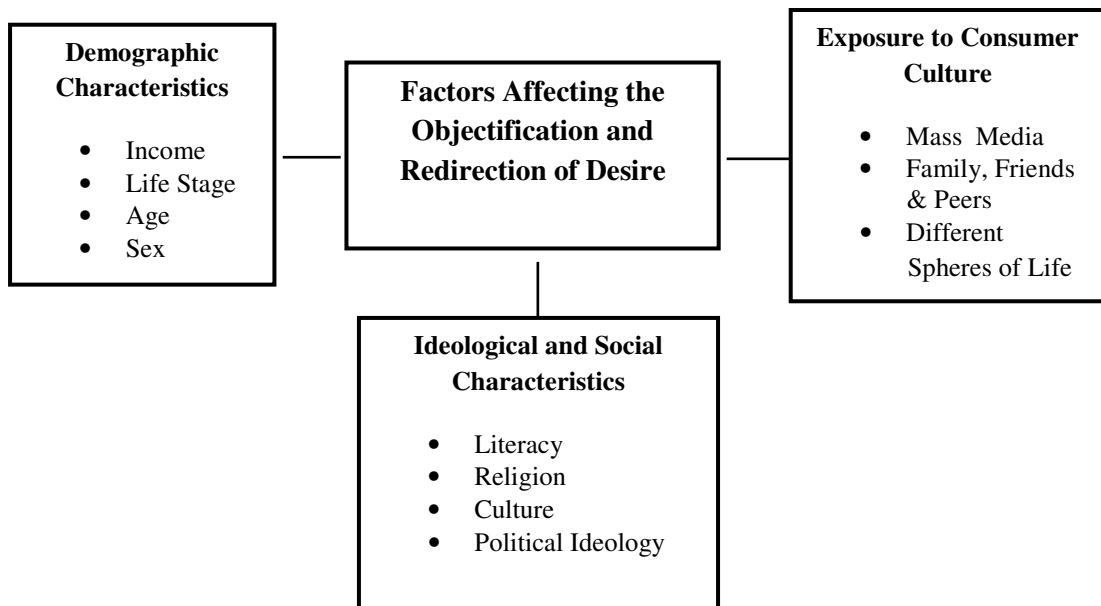
Figure 3. Factors affecting the objectification and redirection of desire

5.2.3. Effects of Demographics on the Objectification of Desire

During data collection, different demographic characteristics such as sex, income, education level, literacy level, age and background culture were collected (please check the participant table at the end of the methodology section to reach all variables). However, the analysis showed that only a few of these demographic

characteristics affect the objectifications of desire in a meaningful way. These characteristics are life stage, age and sex. Rather than making the categorization solely on these bases, I aim to present how life stage, age and gender may affect these objectifications.

i. Life Stage

According to the findings of the research, one of the most prominent differences between the participants' discourses about their objectifications is related to their life stages. Getting married and having children affects the objectifications of desire deeply. Family life brings the burden of giving priority to the expenses of the family rather than one's own desires, considering that their limited income will not be enough for covering both:

> *Pelin (Participant 15): When I get some money, I spend it on the house, what we lack. When I was single, I was spending a lot but after getting married, things have changed. You want to buy things for yourself when you are single, but when you got married, you spend on the needs of the family. When I was single, I was spending my money on contact lenses. I was dyeing my hair blond or red. I was very well-groomed. Usually I was spending 70 TL per month on contact lenses. But after getting married, you start thinking about your house, your family…I am not taking care of myself anymore. I'd rather spend my money on my family's needs.*

A majority of the female participants state that, after getting married, they've decreased the amount of money they spend on clothing, make-up or self-care products as they prefer to spend that money on the needs of the family instead. As this new life stage brings in new expenses which they were not familiar with

previously, low income consumers find themselves in a situation of making a trade-off between the family's needs and their own desires.

As already discussed in the first chapter, there are some issues which are mentioned by all of the married participants regardless of all the differences they have in terms of demographics, culture or level of exposure to consumer culture. One of the most important and most frequently named objects that the participants want to attain is a house. Even though a house can be considered as a basic necessity for the need of security, basically the reason is high rents in these neighborhoods in spite of the houses' being very small and in bad condition. Considering that they usually earn a minimum wage which is 770 TL while they are spending at least 300 TL for rent, nearly half of their income is spent on the rent. This puts a huge burden on them as it is very hard to make a living with the rest of the money and as they cannot save any money for their future to reach a better life. In addition to that, they are afraid of not being able to pay the rent as they don't have a persistent source of income. However, more important than these, one of the main motivations for them to desire owning a house is to be freed from the fear of humiliation:

> *Hakan (Participant 24): It's a kind of assurance. Let's say that it's the beginning of the month and they fired you out, or you could not work for some reason…Even though you're hungry, you'll have your own house. But if you are paying rent, you have to work somehow. As you have to pay the rent. At the beginning of the month the owner of the house will knock your door. He will ask for the payment, and you'll be humiliated.*

> *Emine (Participant 46): We had a house. We bought it by mortgage credit two years ago while my husband was working at the refinery. We had to sell it when the credit payments got bigger. I felt very sad when we sold it, I felt very happy when we bought it. Because when you have a house you know that no one will come to your door and humiliate you. The stress caused by the house owner will no more be experienced. You will not worry when the payment date*

comes closer, you will feel relaxed. I want to own a place which I can call "mine."

The participants reveal that, considering that they may not be able to pay the rent on time, they feel stressful as the payment date approaches. They have the fear that the house owner will knock the door, ask for the rent, and start a fight unless they pay it. As some of the participants state, these fights and the humiliation they face because of having that fight heard by the neighbors is one of the most important reasons of the stress they feel. Therefore, to be freed from this stressful situation, participants who have more than one person working in the family and who have consistent jobs are usually taking credits from banks to buy their own houses. Regardless of the size or location of the house, they want to own a place which they can call "mine." While telling about their dreams, they are mentioning about houses which look alike the house they had in their hometowns: a house with a garden in which they can grow their own crops and which can make them have a self-sufficient life with their families. This desire for self-sufficiency will be investigated later. However, as we may infer, some of the participants whose dreams came true and who have their own houses are now searching for better or bigger houses, or ways to make their house look better, which makes us think about the endless cycle of desire (Belk et al. 1997, Belk et al. 2003, Bouchet 2011) as they are not satisfied with their old dreams anymore:

> *Selda (Participant 1): I have a house now, thanks God. But I am not satisfied with the neighborhood we are living in right now. I am not satisfied but I cannot do anything. You cannot go anywhere in the night, I don't know anybody here. It's hilly, there is no place where you can walk easily….To be honest, I want to live in a better neighborhood. I want my house to look better;*

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I want my furniture to be good looking. They are not disturbing me much, but I would be happier if I could have the money to buy these things.

As Selda states, reaching one's dreams doesn't assure that person's satisfaction as the process turns into a new search for different alternatives to make their situation better. One of the major sources of this dissatisfaction is the messages of the marketing institution (Atik and Fırat, 2012) which creates an imbalance between the current situation and the "ideal state" of being or living. Conveyed through the consumer culture agents such as the mass media, family members, peers or friends, these messages affect the level of satisfaction and diminishes it to a level which makes a person require another action to be taken to make the current situation better such as buying a house in a better neighborhood or trying to make the house look better:

> *Sena (Participant 21): I want a better house which has separate rooms for my children. Why can't I have a beautiful house? For example, we watch TV shows for women. This show called "Yemekteyiz" (a TV show which makes people cook at their houses and their guests rate the food and hospitality)…How beautiful those kitchens, the houses we see on that show are. They are perfect. I desire such kind of a house…but since I will not be able to have it, I don't want to dream about it. If you have a good house, you can have a good life….Poverty is such a bad thing.*

The mass media and especially TV have profound effects on the low-income people as most of them pass their spare time by watching TV (Gerbner et al. 1980). The representations of desirable lives, houses, or other commodities make them feel dissatisfied with their current situation. Yet, as also stated by Sena, they lack the resources to attain those ideal representations of the good life, therefore they don't want to dream about reaching them as it creates tension and negative feelings.

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In addition to above stated reasons of having a house, one of the major motivations for this desire is to make sure that they leave their children a better life in the future, when they pass away. Most of the parents state that they want to leave them at least a house to ensure that they are not facing the same problems and stress they faced during a majority of their lives. Having children, which is the next life stage after getting married, affects the way they objectify their desires deeply. A majority of the participant who has children claim that they give up reaching their own desires, but they keep on struggling to make their children reach whatever they want. The desire of the parents became making their children reach their desires which may help them "fulfill the lack".

> *Banu (Participant 09): My first wish is to save some money and ensure that my daughter has a good life in the future. For me, her future is more important than everything. I want to make sure that she has a good education, she has a good life…She may not reach whatever she desires, but I want to save money to make sure some of these desires are attained. That's my dream…I haven't been thinking about my own desires for quite a while; you'll understand what I mean when you have a child. You'll see that life is built on her.*

> *Baran (Participant 49): What can I do for the future? I can do everything for my children's future. I don't want anything else for myself. Why don't I? Because we've come to this world and we'll be going soon (he is 32 years old). From now on, what matters is my children's future. They may ask me "dad, mom, why haven't you done anything for us?"I'll do everything I can to ensure that they are not alienated from the rest of the society. That's the reason of my struggle.*

As the low-income consumers have very limited resources for spending on reaching their desires, most of the participants prefer to spend those resources on their children's desires. Even though they have different motivations for making sure that they can attain whatever they desire, one of the most frequently stated reason is

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to protect their children from facing the problems of poverty such as alienation, stress, disappointment and misbehavior:

> *Haydar (Participant 45): One of my children is at university; the other is at high school. I cannot tell my children that I don't have money. You had university education, right? I have my own life experiences. You cannot send a girl to university without money. A boy as well... I may starve but I'll give money to my children. Because I know that some students come to university with the best cars. My child eats her lunch for 1.75 TL while others eat for 8-10 TL. If I don't give her money, she may go to a wrong direction. To prevent that, I have never sent them to school without money from primary school until now. I can even steal, but I'll take good care of them. Why? To prevent them do wrong things. If they don't have money they can emulate to other people and do wrong things, even go to jail...My daughter may emulate and prefer...I don't know...different things to experience those lives...We are old now, we may or may not have things, it doesn't matter. I can wear patched clothes but I don't want my children to be ashamed. Our life conditions require this...I try to teach them what is right and what is wrong. We say that "ok, now we are trying to buy and pay as much as we can but tomorrow, you will have your own life." Now my daughter knows how to spend money and shop even better than me and her mother. Though my son is not like that, we are trying to teach him as well...*

The data reveals that young people are especially open to be affected by the messages of the consumer culture in a negative sense. High level of exposure to affluent lives and marketing messages through various consumer culture agents such as TV, internet and especially peers, they become more vulnerable to negative feelings and misbehavior (Ozanne et al., 1998). Taking this and their previous experiences about this vulnerability into consideration, parents try to protect their children through providing them as much money as they can and through teaching them the facts of poverty and life. As Haydar states, they try to teach their children that they have a certain level of income which needs to be spent carefully (can be considered as a type of marketplace literacy), and they may not be able to reach everything that they desire. Providing them this information and telling them about their own experience, they want to create awareness and they try to make sure that

they don't get affected in a negative way by unattained objectifications of desire. However, regardless of the information or the literacy the parents' try to provide, the data also shows that young participants, as well as older participants, have a tendency towards conspicuous consumption and using branded products.

ii. Age

Even though it is not possible to make a clear and direct distinction, it can be stated that some of the differences in objectifications of desire are attributable to age, as well as the life stage as important demographic factors. In addition to some of these desires which are common among most of the participants and which can be observed in every life stage or age (such as the desire for branded products, cars, cell phones and clothing) some of their desires differ by age.

Looking at the discourses of the participants who are older than 30, related with the life stage, the data suggests that most of these participants' desires are usually focusing on having a house and ensuring their children reach their own desires, which were discussed previously. This may stem from accepting their own situation which may also lead to the idea that they should be focusing on their children's desires, so that they would not feel the pain and incapability. Furthermore, a majority of these participants state that they want to guarantee their future so that they can have a retirement period without the suffering and struggle they faced in the earlier stages of their lives. This can be ensured through having a pension (which requires them to make their social security system payments regularly) or through

saving as much as they can for making investments (such as a house or a piece of land) for their future lives.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): I paid my own insurance payments to make sure that I will earn the right for being retired from the system and to get my monthly pension. I cut from every expense. I had never travelled to any place, never did what I desired to make those payments. It is the most important thing for me now, look I am making a living with that pension. That's why it's my most important possession.*

Having made her own payments to the insurance system (which must have been paid by the companies/people she worked for), Hayat has deserved getting her pension each month which is her only source of income. Considering the importance of savings for their future lives and having this motivation in mind, people over 30 try to cut from their current expenses which leads to being less involved in hedonic or luxury consumption. In addition to these desires, most of these participants reveal their desires for escape, which is usually demonstrated as escaping from the city and turning back to their hometown. They have the desire and dream of escaping from their life in the city in which they depend on many people and institutions for survival, such as the house owner or the banks. Rather than living dependently, they desire to build themselves a self-sufficient life in which they can be independent, having their own land and house and growing their own crops. Consequently, they won't have any economic interaction with anyone. This desire for escape will be investigated in detail in the next chapter.

On the other hand, participants who are below 30 usually reveal their desires for an active life in which they can travel to different places, go for holidays and do exciting activities such as riding motorbikes, or even, paragliding (as one of the

participants stated). They have the desire to be freed from their routine lives and experience different lifestyles, or "the other life", before getting older:

> *Seda (Participant 28): What is the meaning of being retired at the age of 50? I may not be able to travel; life will have no meaning then. For example, I want to make paragliding. Can you imagine that excitement? But we don't have money and time for that now. You cannot create any opportunities for that. Maybe after retirement I can have the money and time to do such things, but I will be 60. I may have heart attack!*

Complaining about having a boring and inactive life, Seda states that she wants to have more money and time for doing whatever she wants before turning into 50. A majority of the participants state that they have limited life spheres for a young person and this disturbs them as they feel that they are missing the life and their youth. Therefore, they state that they want to live as they imagine: going for holidays, having a good time with their partners like other people and enjoying youth before it's too late. In addition, according to the data, participants who are below 30 are usually more prone to the desire for hedonic and luxury consumption such as buying home cinema systems, LED TV's or having not the luxury car itself maybe, but at least, the experience of driving it:

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): I desire having a car. But not a luxury one. Just for transportation purposes. Some desire a BMW or Porsche; I mean the most luxury cars. You need to have a gas station to be able to drive those cars...Till this time; I have never reached what I desire. I just had one strong desire in this life, and it's funny that it's again about work. I've always wanted to be the driver of a rich man. Do you know why? Because that is the only way I can drive one of those (luxury) cars. Just to be able to get into that car with him...As I said, I have no desires for myself now.*

> *Osman (Participant 34): I had this sound system; I bought it for 1500 TL! 7+1 home theatre, black and huge. It was a Sony product. I saw it first at my friend's house in Antalya. He bought it from Germany. I wanted to buy exactly the same one. It has lightning, a cabin system, CD player. Led lights shine*

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everywhere when the music starts. I saved the money to buy it for 4 months; I spent all my wages on that.

Through his contradictory statements, Mehmet reveals his desire for driving a luxury car even if he is not the owner but the driver. On the contrary to his hopelessness about reaching what he desires, Osman, who is 19 and single, tells how he attained his desire through saving all the money he earned for 4 months to buy a home theatre system. This hedonic desire could be achieved in his case as he could spend all his earnings on what he desires. However, participants who are married are not able to save any money for their desires because of their responsibilities of making the living of the family. Therefore, even though we may argue that younger participants are more prone to having desires for hedonic consumption, the life stage is a more relevant factor in determining whether there will be any opportunities for attaining one's own desires.

In addition to hedonic consumption, we may state that younger people are more inclined to consume branded products compared to people over 30, as the desire for conformity can be more intense in these ages. This issue will be investigated in the forthcoming section about the consumption of brands.

iii. Sex

In addition to life stage and age, sex is found to be another demographic dimension which affects the objectifications of desire. Even though in many cases there found to be no sex differences in terms of the desired objects (houses, cars, cell

phones, branded products, clothing, desire for escape, etc.), it can be stated that female participants have different consumption habits which needs to be elaborated further.

While interpreting the data, I came across with many cases in which women describe certain types of consumption in similar ways. Their experiences of consumption and their desires for commodities are usually targeted at reaching the "ideal beauty" (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982, Thompson and Haytko 1997). Therefore some of their consumption practices show similarities which indicate that the ideal beauty image affects and triggers their desires for consumption regardless of their age and income.

Canan (Participant 11): Everybody have their husbands near them (feeling sad about her late husband who passes away 6 months ago). If he was alive, I would buy bracelets, rings, earrings…I love those kinds of things. It is not for the purpose of investment, I like to wear them to look more beautiful. I buy and wear rings and earrings for 1 TL. My son collects garbage. If he finds rings or necklaces, he brings them to me. I wash them with cologne (alcohol) and wear them.

Gül (Participant 20): I pay attention to personal care, grooming. I produce my own face creams. I don't buy skincare products. I've never bought any. I produce my own stuff at home through using herbs. I use herbal oils to produce them.

Having no money to buy things she needs to look and feel more beautiful, Canan (who is 50) searches for and buys rings for 1 TL and wears the ones that her son finds in garbage. Regardless of how much money they have, or how old they are, women desire to reach the ideal beauty through creating their own strategies. As she doesn't have the money to buy cosmetics, Gül produces her own creams and skincare products at home, using some herbs. In addition to these examples, some participants state that they try to find money to look more fashionable, or to take care of

themselves as they "worth it" (just like the slogan of the famous cosmetics brand, Loreal):

> *Leyla (Participant 59): Avon, my sister's friend is an Avon representative. She gives us products for the cost. Avon is good but Oriflame is better as their products are made of herbs….But Avon is cheaper so I prefer Avon. I don't think that that money I spent on beauty is unnecessary as I am not buying those things frequently. I don't buy a lot. I think that, as I work, I worth spending some money on myself. I bought a few things for myself, I worth it. It's my right. I sometimes think "Am I not human?" I sometimes need to think about myself. I cannot think about the others all the time. I am human too, I deserve having a life.*

> *Sinem (Participant 60): I like those kinds of things a lot. Who doesn't? Which woman doesn't like those kinds of things? I don't think that there is any woman who doesn't like shopping or gold…I pay a lot of attention to look good. Are my shoes or my bag matching the clothes I wear? I pay attention to those things, I look at the magazines. Or on TV…I look at what other people wear.*

As stated clearly by Leyla and Sinem, the marketing system is all around us and it affects each and every member of the society regardless of the social class. Sinem says that she tries to look fashionable in the sense that the TV and magazines guide her. She tries to match her clothes with her shoes and bags and she pays attention to other people's styles. In addition, Leyla states that she deserves spending money on self-care products as she works very hard. All of these statements reveal that no matter if they have enough income to keep up with the Joneses or not, low income consumers are affected by the marketing activities of the fashion and cosmetics industries, as they believe that they need to be rewarded with products which will help them reach the "ideal beauty."

However, as discussed in the previous sections, getting married and having children changes the priorities of women and most of these women state that they started to spend less on clothing or cosmetics after getting married. Therefore, it is

possible to say that usually younger women are giving more importance on spending money on self-care products and cosmetics; however, clothing remains an important category for a majority of the women.

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): Maybe you have seen them, have you seen how those covered women are getting dressed? (Nurcan is wearing a turban as well) Don't get me wrong, even though it is not perfect, you still want to get dressed as good as them. But our situation, thanks God, not good, thanks God, but what can I do? I cannot go shopping. As I said, you have this emulation inside, yes, but without being able to buy, it hurts you...I want to buy a ring (she doesn't have a wedding ring). Not too expensive but...If I had some clothes suitable for covered women, I would be very happy. But I don't. I don't mean to ask for a perfect wardrobe but if I had 3 or 4 pairs of clothes, it would be good. But I don't have them and you desire what you don't have. A few days ago we went to Kemeraltı (a big bazaar full of little shops –especially clothing-targeting low income consumers) with my husband and my sister-in-law. She bought herself a pair of those baggy trousers. 35 TL! One pair, 35 TL! How can I buy that, spend that money on a piece of cloth?*

None of these women are producing their own clothes at home. Therefore, for them, clothing is a category which usually stays out of reach, considering their level of income. Especially in the case of women who are covered, the expenses for clothing become higher as religion requires them to get dressed according to a certain code (wearing turban and long coats on top of the clothes they have inside etc.). As the religious fashion brands become more popular day by day (Sandıkçı and Ger, 2001) a new market emerges and low-income consumers also desire to be a part of this new form of consumption.

In addition to clothing, a majority of the female participants talked about the importance of jewellery for them, not because of the monetary value, but mostly focusing on the symbolic meanings they communicate. Especially the importance of

the jewellery they get from their husband's family as presents, and the wedding rings are mentioned frequently as lacking those presents caused them to feel worthless.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): I got no presents when we got married. My father-in-law gave me a ring as a present on our wedding day, and then he took it back the next morning. They told that my husband could buy me one later. The stone on the ring he gave me was fake, years after, I managed to buy myself a real one....I waited for a long time to be able to buy it as I had other priorities such as raising my children...It's not about the ring, really. It is about, I don't know, I was the bride...People buy presents even for the brides who got married and divorced before. They gave me the ring and took it back. They didn't do anything for me. Everything I have now is bought by my own work, my money.*

> *Hale (Participant 16): I got sick one time, a serious one. We had no health insurance. I sold my wedding ring to see a doctor. I went to a jewellery shop and asked the owner of the shop "Brother, don't sell my ring for 5 days, wait for 5 days and I will buy it back from you." I couldn't find the money in 5 days, so my ring was gone. I couldn't buy a new one as well. It's been 10-12 years since I don't have a wedding ring.*

According to Turkish traditions, gold jewelry that are given to the bride as a present on the wedding day are thought to reflect the love and respect paid to the bride by the groom's family. Therefore, it has an important symbolic meaning for the participants. However, since most of them got married to men with low income levels, it was not possible for most of these families to buy presents for the bride, which eventually made the brides feel themselves worthless. In Hayat's case, she tells that she felt even more worthless than a woman getting married for the second time. In traditional Turkish culture, if the bride is getting married for the second time, usually the respect paid to her will be much less compared to a girl getting married for the first time. Therefore, Hayat states that she could not get any presents, even less than a girl getting married for the second time, which made her feel worthless. In addition, these wedding rituals have different implications in terms of consumption practices which will be elaborated in the next section. Furthermore, there are

situations which require them to sell their possessions including jewelry and even their wedding rings. Hale had to sell her wedding ring for a treatment and couldn't get it back which makes the ring keep its place as an object of desire for many years.

In addition to their desires for commodities, some of the female participants also stated that they are dreaming of establishing their own businesses, which is surprising as none of the male participants mentioned about such a desire. Considering the discussions regarding how frequently they get fired from their jobs, having their own jobs can be beneficial for them to have a long term, persistent source of income. Yet, the reason why only female participants mention about having their own business might be the limitations they face about working, such as their husbands' banning them to work outside the neighborhood. In addition, these participants also have the will to improve their level of education through enrolling to free courses or open schools which again is a topic only mentioned by female participants. One of the possible explanations for this desire for improvement can be the care-giving role of women which drive them to guarantee their families' and children's future.

In addition to these demographic factors, exposure to consumer culture may also differentiate the way consumers direct their desires to certain objects. Considering the important effects of the consumer culture on our consumption behavior, next chapter focuses on how different levels of exposure to consumer culture may affect the objectifications of desire in the low income context.

5.2.4. Effects of Exposure to Consumer Culture Agents

Even though stating that low income consumers have disposable incomes which are barely enough for covering their basic expenses, the data reveals that regardless of all demographic characteristics, they spend money in order to reach the commodified forms of desire. In many cases, this consumption behavior is shaped under the effects of the consumer culture agents as the global consumer culture affects not only the target markets of companies but also the people who lack the resources to reach those commodities. Furthermore, not having enough income for spending on commodities which cannot be considered as essential for survival does not mean that the low income consumers just spend on basic necessities. Even though I don't think that making a clear definition of necessity and luxury, or functional and hedonic is possible (as these definitions vary greatly according to the perspective), I can state that I came across with unexpected patterns of consumption, which will be discussed in detail in this section.

During the research process, I witnessed different types of conspicuous and hedonic consumption behavior in the research setting as well as the participants' discourses which openly reveal that the consumer culture deeply affects each of us, regardless of our demographic, cultural or personal differences. In this section, I want to discuss how low income consumers' consumption behavior is shaped by the mass media and through having different spheres of life and social interactions.

i. Exposure to Mass Media

Before entering into the discussions regarding the objectifications of desire further, we need to take a look at the media consumption habits of low income consumers and their personal relationships with the people and with their environment in different life spheres.

As part of this research, I asked low income consumers about their media consumption habits, specifically TV, printed media and Internet. As also suggested in the previous literature, a majority of the participants are watching TV (especially soap operas) addictively. Either the reason for this is TV's being the cheapest alternative for entertainment, or their need for a connection to the outside world as some of them are living inside the neighborhood, addictive consumption of media affects their objectifications of desire deeply. Some of the participants state that they have different soap operas they watch each night. Considering that these soap operas are usually 3 hours long, watching a soap opera every night means that they spend all of their time watching TV, leaving no space for communication with the members of the family or doing any other activity. As revealed by the participants, main motivations for this addictive consumption (of media) can be classified as identification and catharsis, forgetting their problems, finding what they lack and cure for loneliness.

Watching TV, and specifically soap operas, gives them the opportunity to express their feelings freely, which may usually tried to be controlled, providing them a feeling of catharsis. Many participants reveal that if they identify themselves with the characters of the soap operas because of having similar life experiences, the

intensity of the emotions increase and the level of pleasure they get become higher. Some female participants identify the evil character with their husbands, while others identify their own life experiences with the touching story of a family in the soap opera who migrated to Istanbul.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): I don't know, they are like us, Eastern people. I feel close to them. Sometimes they show their homesickness...I really love that soap opera, I didn't miss a single episode. Now it ended, but sometimes they show it during the day. I watch it sometimes for the second time, while I am working for example. I like the dad most, he is a nice person, and he struggles a lot. I don't know why, but I really like them.*

Fatma and her family migrated from Eastern Turkey to Izmir years ago. Yet, in many of her discourses she stated that she misses her hometown and want to go back. Considering her longing for her hometown, she identifies herself with this soap opera characters and she says that she sometimes cry while watching their bad experiences in the city of Istanbul, maybe remembering of her own experiences. The Turkish soap operas are usually dramas that are depicting touchy stories. Getting emotional by other people's problems and struggles, they forget about their own problems, or at least, take a break from the mundane. In addition to that, I came across with many cases which gave me the idea that the participants like soap operas which provide them with what they lack in their real lives (such as soap operas mainly related to power, control and action for men, and love for women). In addition, their political and religious views sometimes affect the type of channels or programs they watch.

In addition to the addictive TV watching habits, a minority of the participants are listening to radio, connecting to Internet and reading newspapers. Therefore, it

can be stated that the major medium for exposure is TV. Radio is listened by a limited number of participants thanks to the Internet. None of the participants replied positively to the question about whether they hear any advertisements on the radio or bought anything after hearing about it. Again, a limited number of participants (who are of higher education) state that they read newspapers and books, and some of them revealed that they prefer to read books with religious contents, or Kuran. Other participants stated different reasons for not reading such as illiteracy and newspapers' prices. Therefore, these media will not be elaborated in detail.

On the other hand, even though the number of participants who connect to the Internet is low, and most of them do not have a computer or connection at home, its importance can be understood through the discourses of these participants. Some of the participants state that they connect to the internet just for playing games or connecting to Facebook, and they want to stay away from the internet because of its addictive nature. On the other hand, some of the young participants claim that they use internet for acquiring knowledge about cooking recipes, horoscopes and, as suggested by two participants, to learn about the trends in fashion by looking at who wears what and how to combine clothes. In addition, two participants stated that they shopped online. Nilay (Participant 6) tells that she used online shopping to order a pair of shoes and her brother bought them as a present, while Kadri (Participant 33) states that he tries to benefit from online discounts in order to reach cheaper products such as a bathroom scale he bought for more than half price off. Thinking about the increasing penetration rates, internet can be considered as another major source of exposure in the near future.

As all of the participants are watching TV, which is the major medium for exposure, it is possible to say that the level of exposure to mass media, in general, is not showing great variations from person to person. As TV is a very powerful medium, I will focus here on how the low income consumers' objectifications of desire are affected by the televised representations of the real life, by soap operas, products and brand placements and by advertisements.

As discussed above, Turkish television programs are dominated by soap operas that are broadcasted in different channels each night during prime time. A majority of the Turkish population (including all social classes) are watching these soap operas addictively, identifying themselves with the characters of the soap operas. Thanks to this media consumption behavior, soap operas became an important channel for product placements. However, in addition to branded products which create emulation, other products such as clothes or shoes without any brands are also becoming popular among both men and women:

> *Nilay (Participant 6): I like many of the clothes I saw on soap operas. The clothes they wear in Ask-ı Memnu (a very popular soap opera telling the story of a very rich family)…Once, they (the shop owners) showed me one of the dresses of Bihter (the leading character in Ask-I Memnu) in Bayraklı. They were selling her dresses…and a blouse, a black one which she wore in an episode. They are usually not for us as they are low cut. They told me that it was her dress and her ring.*

> *Suzan (Participant 53): Hürrem's ring and necklace. I love them. My sister's husband is doing silverwork. I told him to make me one and send it as soon as possible." Lately they showed it on the news, girls who are going to be engaged are searching for clothes looking like Hürrem's. So they produced those clothes especially in red color and all the girls are buying it…and her crown as well (Hürrem is the wife of the Ottoman Emperor Süleyman the Magnificient).*

As the soap operas are watched addictively by a majority of the population, a new sector –producing copies of the goods displayed in soap operas - emerged from the desires of the audience to look alike their favorite characters in the soap operas. Especially in the clothing and fashion industries, the manufacturers started to design and produce goods copied from the objects that the characters used during the episodes such as dresses or jewelry. Benefiting from the need for self-identification, they introduced the market goods that are named with the soap opera characters such as Bihter boots and Hürrem rings (Bihter and Hürrem being the very popular and liked leading characters of two soap operas). The desire for emulation and identification makes these products desired by the society and created a new industry.

As stated previously in the literature review section, usually the mass media shows representations of the rich minority and their desirable lives in the soap operas rather than representing the majority (Lichter et al. 1994, O'Guinn and Shrum 1997). Providing them with the enthusiasm and joy of experiencing (even fictionally) "the other life", these soap operas are watched and liked by a majority of the low income consumers. Yet, because of the great contradiction between the televised representations of "the ideal life" and their current situation, questions arise in their minds regarding these lifestyles.

Hatice (Participant 8): Look how those people are living! I sometimes ask my husband whether we'll have that kind of a life ever. My husband replies that it is not real, it is a game. He says that they play their roles and go. But he says "don't mind, maybe you'll have such a house one day." He says if God lets him, he may be able to buy me such a nice house.

Banu (Participant 9): I sometimes really ask myself if there are these kinds of lifestyles in the world. We sometimes talk with my friends. Is there really such

kind of lives, so comfortable and careless? They go to stores and buy whatever they want, without even asking the price! Pack this and this and that…send this to my address…Is there really such a thing? When I watch them, I think as if it is a dream. You look at their houses; they have servants who take care of everything. They bring breakfasts to their bedrooms. One really thinks, is there such kind of a life?

For Banu, it is hard to believe that people can have such affluent and comfortable lives as she is just exposed to these lives through TV. Some participants believe that these are fictional stories which cannot be real as they have no or limited experiences with or exposure to these kinds of lives. As mentioned earlier, mass media exposes them to "the other life" which creates surprise and curiosity, and in most of the cases, negative feelings which will be discussed further in the next sections. On the other hand, most of the participants' discourses reveal that, the effects of television and mass media on low income consumers are much more intense than being surprised by what they see. Their desires are triggered and directed towards commodities through mass media. Exposure to the lives of the wealthy media figures, celebrities, soap opera characters and brands affect the way they objectify their desires deeply. If this exposure is backed by the experiences in their real lives, which make them understand that those affluent lives are not fictional but real, the role played by the exposure becomes even stronger.

> *Haydar (Participant 45): I myself, desire a lot of things at this age. I want to have a car, a luxury car, I want my servants to serve me at home, so I don't do any work, I want to own my own company. I am affected by those things, I want to have them, and children will surely be affected more. Those soap operas are really attractive. Because you see the luxury lives of those people. You can do whatever you want. Think about it, nearly 80% of our population is poor, they don't even have money for buying a bicycle but everybody has good cars. We have emulation for everything.*

> *Ceylan (Participant 25): I see those lives on TV and ask why we can't live like that. Why can't I provide my children with those things? I think about my own*

desires, yes. But mostly I think about my children. Clothes, computers, cell phones..They ask me, they want this and that when they see things around. I tell them that I can't afford them, they don't say anything. They are aware of our situation now.

According to Haydar and Ceylan, TV triggers their desires directed towards commodities. They also state that children are affected by these desire-inducing representations of life in a deeper sense, even more intensely compared to adults who are aware of the impossibility of reaching those objects. Therefore, as Ceylan states, they try to make their children become aware of and understand their economic situation and try to control their desires accordingly. However, suppressing or muting the desire may not be possible (which will be discussed later).

Nilay (Participant 6): Mini Cooper. It is like my childhood dream. I have seen it the first day it was launched. It has been so many years; I was literally a child those days. ..I don't think that my desire for that car will fade away because I have been thinking about it for so long. Do you know, it was the car of the blonde girl in Adını Feriha Koydum (a popular soap opera)? She has the red one! You stay for a moment and look at the car, saying "I wish I was the one who's driving that car." What does it change in the universe? Nothing. Just me on the driver seat.

Sometimes, product placements on TV shows, and especially soap operas directly create desires for the displayed products regardless of the possibility of reaching those commodities. As in the case of Nilay, products such as luxury cars, high-tech cell phones or the dresses of the top fashion brands worn by soap opera characters lead to the desire for purchasing these products not only for the ones who can afford them, but also for people who may not be able to attain them during their whole lives. Although these soap opera characters and their lives are known to be fictional, most of the time the audience is not aware of this or thinking on it as they

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are in a passive state while watching TV (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). In addition to the effects of soap operas, which are shows that the Turkish society is highly exposed to, advertisements are also triggering the desire for commodities, even though their effects are not as strong as soap operas because of their low levels of reliability.

> *Sinem (Participant 60): I desired to buy this one very much (her cell phone). I saw it's ad on TV, and in the morning, I went to a shop and bought it. I was my off day; I directly went and bought it. I had had a cell phone but I desired to have one of those touch-screen ones so much. I was searching for a product and when I saw it, I said "Yes, here it is." I am the only person to have a touch-screen cell phone among my friends. But I bought it on credit.*

Cell phones are among the major products which are used as status symbols in the Turkish society. Consequently, I came across with many different situations which surprisingly demonstrate its importance for low income consumers as they use it to show people that they can afford it. Sinem, who states her desire to buy a touch-screen phone for a long time, bought a cell phone right after sawing its ad on TV, which means that advertisements can still be considered as an effective way to reaching low income consumers. In addition, some of the mostly watched and liked soap operas include product placements such as iPhone and Mercedes cars. As these soap operas are considered to be unreal, it is possible that the consumers may not perceive them as real lives or the placements as real products. Consequently, just two of the participants remembered the product placements in their favorite soap operas when asked, which means that they are mostly not aware of either the products or the strategy of placing products for the purpose of advertising. However, in the case of paparazzi shows which are frequently watched and liked especially by female participants, the audience knows that these are reality shows which are the representations of the real life rather than being fictional. This situation triggers their

desires directed towards commodities even further as they become aware that some people are actually living those wealthy, affluent and "smooth" lives.

> *Hayriye (Participant 31): I've always wanted to be famous. Their lives are so good; smooth…I believe that they are just luckier than us. We could have been one of them. But as we have no luck, we have to stay away from everything. I wish we had such nice and beautiful cars, houses. I would lie if I say that I don't emulate. Maybe they have problems as well; they are just showing us the good sides of their lives. But their lives are too good and luxurious compared to ours.*

> *Derya (Participant 3): I am not watching the paparazzi shows but they usually share their (celebrities') pictures on Facebook, on social networks. I take a look at them when I come across. I think that those lives are attractive and you need to stay away from them. But they are, really attractive. They are having fun; they have fun and nice lives. I don't know, for example, they are not staying at home all the time like me; they are always living at the core of life. Their jobs are fun as well. Of course they like it; otherwise they have the choice to quit their jobs unlike us.*

Celebrities are important sources of information regarding "the other life" for low income consumers as they know that contrary to the lives represented in soap operas; these are real which are good, affluent and smooth. In addition, some participants stated that they have attractive and fun lives which may make other people emulate to those lives. Furthermore, these lives' attractiveness also stems from the freedom they have: spending money as they wish, working in jobs which they want to work and have fun doing those jobs unlike the rest of the society.

Although this emulation and desire for commodities and affluent lives triggered by soap operas, advertisements, celebrities and other forms or agents of mass media affect their consumption behavior directly, in contradiction with themselves, most of the participants also criticize this emulation harshly. In addition, some state that the mass media is a powerful but dangerous tool for directing people

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towards certain types of behavior which benefits the "powerful". These critics about the mass media and emulation, and the factors which cause the difference between participants who are criticizing or not questioning these effects of mass media will be investigated in detail in the next chapter.

ii. Different Spheres of Life

As discussed in the previous chapter, usually low income consumers' life spheres are limited with their neighborhoods especially for non-working women. For working women and men, workplace and the neighborhood are the major domains, which affect their level of exposure to the consumer culture agents. Having different life spheres means that the consumer can get exposed to different commodities, brands, new fashions and trends as well as "the other life" more than the consumers who are living inside the neighborhood. Therefore, as the level of exposure increases, consumers are exposed to more stimuli which may trigger the desire for commodities. Even though mass media, specifically TV, make the people living in their neighborhoods get exposed to the other life as well, their effects on low income consumers may be limited compared to the real life experiences as they may not be perceived as reality. Furthermore, just being exposed to the lives of the people living in the same neighborhood or who have similar income levels and lifestyles may make some of the less-exposed consumers believe that this is the dominant way of living.

> *Hatice (Participant 8): Lately we went to Bornova. My husband and his friend gave me a ride when they were going to work. You may know it, there is a place called Küçükpark there (a little neighborhood where there are cafes*

preferred by mostly university students from low to middle income families). I saw those people there. How they eat, how they drink, how they spend money…I stayed there for a moment, my eyes full with tears. "Our life is not a life" I said, "look at all these people." We cannot know those lives since we are not living in it. If you don't have such a life, you would never know. It's weird for us. I feel bad whenever it comes to my mind. I told my husband "Look at these people, they have everything." He said "We cannot do anything, they are like that, and we are like this." I am not angry at my husband. But I am angry at them. I wish I was like them. I am a human too; I deserve a good life too. I want to hang around with my husband, sit in a café, and drink tea. We always go to parks. Kids are playing in the empty park and we stare at them…I wish we could sit in a nice café, drink some tea and talk with my husband…become one of those people…

Hatice is a housewife and she states that she doesn't go out of the neighborhood frequently. This experience of her clearly explains what happens when a person living inside the neighborhood, or even inside her house, gets out of the usual life domain and get exposed to the lives of the rest of the society. The place described by her is not a luxurious place, it is a small place famous with its cafes, where university students with middle incomes get together, drink tea, eat sandwiches and chat with their friends. Even though not being exposed to a very rich or luxury life style, Hatice tells this experience as a bad and disturbing one as she could not even imagine such lives. Her husband, who has experiences in different life spheres because of his job, was not affected by this scene as much as her, as he most probably gets used to seeing different, more affluent lives around him. Therefore, we can infer that, having different life spheres may ensure that they get used to and accept their situation as well as other people's lifestyles, which prevent him to overreact by time. However, Hatice tells that she was about to cry and states that she is angry at the people living such lives. She wishes that she will become one of them, being able to drink a cup of tea in a café with her husband one day.

In addition to that, some of the female participants are working as cleaners in different people's houses located in affluent neighborhoods. In Turkey, especially in big cities, this is a popular way of earning money among low income people. They usually visit and clean the houses of families with high incomes in periods such as a week or two weeks. However, these jobs are not official jobs, which means that people working in these jobs are not officially registered. Consequently, they are also not registered in the social security system. Cleaning different houses each day, they earn approximately 80-100 TL daily. While going to and working in those houses, they get exposed to affluent lives and commodities that are, most probably, out of their reach which may trigger their desires for these commodities further.

> *Hale (Participant 16): I like jewelry, but I have never had one. For example, I go to a lady's house for cleaning, she has a lot of them. I wish them to earn even more than that, but she has so many of them…Once when I went there for cleaning, I saw that they placed the necklaces, earrings and bracelets on a lay figure. I suddenly started to wear them on, all the necklaces, jewellery on my neck, my ears and wrists… Then I stopped and asked myself "What the hell are you doing?!", and then I took them off…I don't even have a wedding ring, you know…Of course I wish I had some jewellery. You desire those kinds of things if you're a woman.*

Just like Hatice's case, exposure to the affluent lives and desired objects triggers the desire further and made her lose control (as she states) and wore all of the jewelries on, to be able to experience wearing and having them at least for a few seconds. Going to wealthy people's houses for cleaning, and being exposed to many different kinds of desire inducing commodities (like jewelries in this case), it becomes harder for low income consumers to control their desires and the negative feelings emerging because of not being able to attain those desired objects. These negative feelings such as incapability, powerlessness or anger may damage their

psychologies, the satisfaction they get from their lives, and also their self-esteem (Hill and Gaines, 2007, Sen 1992). To protect themselves from these negative effects of exposure, a majority of the consumers reveal that they are trying to stay away from any kind of media for exposure as much as they can. For sure, it will not be possible for Hale to quit her job for such a reason. Therefore, most of the participants state that they prefer to have limited spheres of life, such as workplace and the neighborhood, to make sure that they don't suffer from exposure. Consequently, they don't prefer going to shopping malls or the city center in their spare times. Rather than that, they stay inside the neighborhood.

> *Zehra (Participant 7): We don't have such habits (going outside the neighborhood). Let's say that you go to "Sevgi Yolu" in Bayraklı (Sevgi Yolu is a street full of little shops, usually selling clothes, shoes etc.).To go there, you need to have some money in your pocket, you cannot just walk around. You cannot stop yourself from buying stuff. You cannot even eat a sandwich if you don't have any money. Are you going to look at what others eat? Not going there, not seeing others is much better. If you don't see, you don't think about it. You know that they are there, but if you don't see, you don't feel the desire inside. If you go and cannot buy what you desire, you feel bad. So it's better not seeing those things, those lives. Look around, everybody stays at home here. But "the others" are going here and there, buying what they want. You better stay here. If you go to Bayraklı and see what they have...You want to eat, drink, wander around...you desire, and you cannot attain.*

As clearly stated by Zehra, most of the low income consumers prefer to stay inside the neighborhood to protect themselves from the pain of exposure to affluent lives and desired objects that they will not be able to attain. This planned / preferred alienation limits their lives and social interactions, but it also prevents them to have negative feelings towards themselves, their lives or towards "the other."

iii. Social Comparison and the Frames of Reference

As it has been discussed intensely in the previous consumer research literature, family and peers are among the most important consumer socialization agents who shape and direct our consumption behavior (Chaffee et al, 1966 and 1971; McLeod and Chaffee 1972, Moschis and Moore 1979, Belk et al. 1982, Bachmann et al. 1993, Elliot and Leonard 2004). The desires for social conformity, being acceptable and likable by the peers are among the most important social drives that direct our consumption towards certain commodities and brands. Similarly, in many of the participants' discourses, desire for conformity and social likability come forward as the main factors behind their consumption behavior. In addition, I came across with very surprising and unexpected consumption behaviors which are usually adopted with the purpose of gaining respect of other people and feeling powerful and in control of their lives.

> *Orhan (Participant 38): Clothing…I believe is the mirror for oneself. I prefer clothes of best quality. We don't have a house, or a car. All we have is our clothes, at least let the clothes be as good as we are. You know the story…They ask you "where did you steel these from" if you look poor. If you look poor, you will be slandered. But if you look rich, even if you've really stolen something, you won't be suspected…Why am I always talking about these clothes? I won't give up buying clothes if I have 1000 TL or 1 TL in my pocket. Because it is very important. You are exposed to a lot of bad behavior if you look poor. But if you wear good clothes, they think that you have a good job, you're a good person. They treat you in a completely different way. Even the policeman for example. If you look good, they call you Sir. But if you look poor they say "come here, tell me who you are, what you're doing here" etc…It's all about the look. The society forces you to behave like this. Therefore, my only luxury expenditure is clothing.*

According to Orhan, wearing nice clothes and looking good is directly related to the respect paid to you by the society. He claims that if one looks poor, he will be

the usual suspect. To be able to gain the respect of other people, and to be freed from the accusations he faced in his past, he has this strategy of spending on buying good, rich-looking clothes. He adds that the contemporary society forces people to pay a lot of attention to the looks as it is considered to be reflecting who you are. He is, in a way, criticizing this, but he also makes sure that he dresses up accordingly to prevent further problems.

In addition to respect, consumers also buy and use products because of emulation and with conspicuous motivations such as being able to say "I can afford it". Some product categories are coming forward in these discussions such as cars, cell phones and jewellery. These categories of products are the ones which will be used in the social domain rather than the private domain; therefore it is possible to say that the motivation behind these consumption behaviors is conspicuousness:

> *Fatma (Participant 4): I sometimes wear my golden bracelets when we go to weddings. If you go to a wedding you just say "ooh look at all these people, their arms are full of bracelets." You desire having them, wearing all of them and go to weddings your arms full. I love bracelets most. I want to buy one or two but I have never been able to…If my husband had worked, I would also have my arm full of bracelets. Who won't desire such a thing? As Mardin people (a city in Eastern Turkey), we have a special desire for those golden chains, earrings...We desire having those kinds of things.*

> *Fahriye (Participant 10): My husband bought this cell phone for me in mother's day… I had an old one. My sister-in-law has one of these touch screen phone. I loved it so much. That's why he decided to buy me this one. I told him that I love the touch screen phones, but when he told me that he would buy me one, I said they would be broken easily and I could not use. But in mother's day, he bought it and gave it to me as a present. It is used, but it is in good condition. It's Samsung.*

Neighbors and peers have an important effect on the consumption behavior of low income people as they usually compare themselves with the people living in

their own life spheres. Considering the case of Fatma, the main motivation for her desire for jewellery is conspicuousness as it is a way of communicating her wealth to be able to say "I can afford it." Similarly, Fahriye talks about her husband's gift, which is a touch-screen phone. She states that she saw the touch-screen phones through her sister-in-law which triggered her desire to have one. Fahriye cleans the toilets of a wedding saloon and her husband is working in the same saloon, baking wedding cakes. He also collects garbage during the nights to make more money for their living. Even though they are in such a bad situation financially, her husband bought one of the latest technology cell phones of a famous brand as a present for her in mother's day through debenture. They will be paying for the cell phone for 10 months. Considering her previous discourses about not having enough money to buy bread, this case shows us clearly how emulation affects them and how the market system shapes their desires and direct them towards consuming the popular, trendy and fashionable products which "everyone else" uses.

Considering the participants' discourses, one may argue that emulation is a source of distress if the desired object cannot be reached through the resources they have. In that case, debt and credit cards are the tools they use for relief, yet, eventually these efforts for creating resources to attain desired objects creates a debt spiral and sentence them to their current life conditions for a longer period, which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In addition to certain product categories with social visibility, emulation and the desire for conformity also affect the desire for consuming branded products. The data especially suggests that the effects of friends and peers on the branded product

consumption are more prominent. Branded products are usually desired for gaining social likability, respect and desirability in addition to the perceived quality they provide. Some participants state that they prefer to buy branded products as other products are not durable and cost even more than buying a non-branded product in the long term. Clothing, cell phones and other technological products are the product categories which are mentioned most frequently in terms of branded product preference.

According to the analysis, as having different life spheres will increase the level of exposure to brands, attention to and information about different brands increases. Having social interactions with different people who have different lifestyles, and being exposed to more marketing messages and word-of-mouth communication about the brands lead to an inclination for using branded products. In addition, younger participants are found to be more inclined to the desire for branded products. However, as they may not be able to afford them, they find alternative ways to benefit from brands:

> *Nilgün (Participant 19): My daughter doesn't ask for branded products. She wears the shoes I buy for 15-20 TL. But my son doesn't want to wear them; he says that he wants Adidas or Nike. He is going to middle school; he is a little bit quick tempered. And he is a jealous person. During the summer he stays with his grandparents in Alanya (a popular seaside place in South Turkey), I don't know whether they buy those kinds of products to him. He also sees those branded products on his friends. I don't know, maybe it's because he never attained what he desires. My daughter understands our situation but my son says that he doesn't want shoes of 30 TL, he says he wants the ones which are at least for 80 TL. I say, "Go talk to your father, he may stop spending all his money on alcohol and buy you what you want."*

> *Selim (Participant 12): I will not give that much money for an Adidas t-shirt. Look, this is an imitation, a fake one (showing the t-shirt he wears). It's exactly identical with the original one. But sometimes people understand and they ask me where I bought it from. We sometimes go to Yalı Spor (a local retail chain*

which sells sportswear, famous brands such as Adidas, Nike, New Balance, etc.), my friends buy stuff, and I help them. They ask me what to buy. I also bought from that store once. A pair of shoes and a workout suit. They were all Nike. Just once. You can wear the original ones for a long time. Fakes get torn easily. And of course, originals take the attention of the girls. I like it. You become a cool guy.

As stated by both Nilgün and Selim, exposure to branded products through their peers triggers the desire to attain those products especially for young consumers. It can be discussed that youth is more prone to consuming branded products as they require these commodities for self-verification and for conformity. Even if they cannot find the resources to attain the original ones, they try to cover this incapability through using fake products which look more or less the same as the original ones. But some of these younger participants also stated that they are afraid of the humiliation they will face if their friends understand that the product is not original, but a fake one. Therefore, they try to attain originals as much as they can, and they sometimes force their families to make them buy what they desire, which increases the burden on families even further:

Şeyma (Participant 37): I don't want my child to be humiliated. But sometimes I just cannot afford it. They need a lot of things. For example, they don't like the ordinary shoes; they want the branded ones, pants as well. Nowadays their focus is brands. First I was saying that I would buy later. But then I started telling them that they shouldn't push me that hard. I cannot afford them. I can buy 3-4 pairs of shoes for that money. My daughter sometimes says that they make fun of her, saying that "Let me look, is it original?" She tells me that her peers are doing these kinds of things all the time. Making fun of them, calling them, saying "Look at those; they cannot afford even a pair of original shoes. Look these are fake…", etc. They are kids; they do those kinds of things to each other. Lately there was a meeting in the school. The teacher told us to be careful about those things so that our children don't fall into emulation. She told us that we shouldn't buy a lot of things to them and trigger their desires for brands. We try to teach them these things, but eventually, the school is the place that they are exposed to the brands. Really, they don't go to places that

they can come across with those branded products, school is the only place that they can see them.

In order to protect their children from the consequences of the humiliation (such as consumer misbehavior), parents are trying hard to make sure that they can buy at least a few branded products for their children. Yet, this motivation increases the possibility of other children's exposure to these branded products, which turns the situation into a vicious cycle. In spite of the warnings of the teachers, the school and their peers are still the major force that drives them to consume branded products. As most of these families don't have enough resources for buying these very expensive branded products (a pair of Nike or Adidas shoes are usually 150 TL - approx. 80 USD - in the Turkish market), they rely on using credit cards for protecting their children from humiliation, and making them reach what they desire.

In addition to younger participants, a majority of the participants who are over 30 also mention their desires for branded products, which means that there is no significant difference in terms of the desire for branded products. However, some of these older participants reveal that they let go of their desires because of their limited budgets, while a minority tells that they try to buy branded products as much as they can because of the benefits they provide such as self-esteem, respect and likability:

> *Sabri (Participant 32): I buy them through my credit card. I try to buy the best as much as possible. For example, I buy my jeans usually from Mavi, my shoes from Adidas, t-shirts as well. Not monthly, but I can shop from these brands 3 or 4 times per year. Sometimes I buy cheaper (non-branded) products as well. But there is such a big difference between them... You can buy a pair of trousers from the open bazaar for 20 TL. But the ones you buy from the stores look completely different, they look good on you. When a lady looks at you, she might say "look at that guy, he doesn't even know how to dress up." You get a foul at the beginning of the game, you know. But when your clothes are good looking and you take care of yourself, people like you more…My friends in the*

neighborhood are all buying their clothes from these stores. One buys from Diesel, other from Mavi. In my neighborhood there are lots of immigrants (from Eastern Europe). They pay a lot of attention to their clothing. Therefore, I like dressing up nice clothes and wander around, showing off.

Sabri, who is 33 years old, buys the branded products through his credit cards just like the majority of the participants. As the monetary value of the products is high, they can only afford buying these products a few times per year and pay the installments during the rest of the year. In addition to perceiving branded products as of higher quality, participants reveal that the most important value created by these products is social acceptance and likability, regardless of age and gender. Sabri thinks that he become more likable and respected by women when he dresses up his branded clothes that are looking much better on him compared to non-branded ones. In addition to caring about what women might think about him, he also may adopt such a behavior for social acceptance and conformity as his friends also prefer branded products.

As a conclusion, we may state that regardless of the demographic characteristics such as income level, age, life stage or gender, consumers are getting exposed to the messages of the consumer culture about the brands, and these messages have a more intense affect in the case of higher exposure. Even though it is stated that the branded products are of better quality and therefore, more economical in the long run, the major motivations behind consuming these products are social conformity and likability. In addition, some of the cultural practices inherent in the research context surprisingly emerged to be important motivators for conspicuous consumption for low income consumers such as the wedding rituals which are

among the mostly mentioned cultural practices. Even though the semi-structured interviews include no questions regarding these rituals, a majority of the participants, and specifically women who are directly affected by these practices, mentioned about their importance in shaping their consumption behavior. Therefore, the next part of this section will be about wedding rituals and cultural practices in general, as a major drive for conspicuous consumption.

5.2.5. Wedding Rituals - Effects of Culture on Conspicuous Consumption Behavior

Previous research about wedding rituals has already mentioned the importance of these cultural practices in people's lives in terms of shaping their consumption behavior (Belk et al. 1982, Üstüner et al. 2000, Nguyen and Belk 2012). Usually, wedding rituals and the consumption activities required for these rituals are considered to be adopted with motivations such as social comparison, conformity, and likability. However, the data reveals that there is more than that and these rituals have become a theatre of conspicuous consumption. This conspicuous consumption sometimes goes so far that some of the low income families spend thousands of Turkish liras for these weddings, which account for all their investments. On the one hand, these rituals are of key importance for the groom's family as it is considered to be a status symbol, reflecting the capabilities of the family. On the other hand, they are also of highest importance for the brides and their families as the money spent on the wedding ceremony and the gifts are accepted to

be an indicator of the respect and love shown to the bride by the groom and his family.

> *Meltem (Participant 13): I paid for everything. The wedding ceremony took place in a saloon, I paid for it. I bought a wedding gown for the bride. I gave her 8 golden bracelets; they are not 10 grams, not cheap, each of them is 24 grams. I have never spent anything on myself and saved all the money I earned. I was earning good in tobacco business, 900 TL per month. I was working overtime and getting extra payments too. I haven't had good experiences but now my children are having them. Just to make sure that they have a good life…I bought a complete set of jewelleries, 22 carats. Now they are asking me "what did you do for us?" I don't know, that is all that I could offer. I paid for the wedding; I bought everything for their house. I have no more money. Zero.*

> *Kurtuluş (Participant 52): A wedding cost us 10.000 TL. The previous one cost 10.000 and this one cost 12.000 (talking about his sister's and his weddings). We served dinner in the second one, that's why it cost higher. We bought 4 bracelets, and a big gold. And there are small golds as well; we keep them at the bank. The bride's family asked us to buy 2 bracelets in my wedding, we bought 6…We took credit from the bank for the weddings, two times. One is for my sister's wedding, and the other is for mine. We took 18.000 TL in total. My dad has a high retirement wage, that's how we were able to get such big amounts of credit from the bank.*

From the perspective of the groom's family, weddings are one of the major expenses of their life time which make them spend all their investments. Rather than spending these investments on buying a house, or buying the commodities which are needed for a decent life, they willfully spend them on wedding ceremonies and on the bride's desires to make sure that their children are happy and that their family has a good reputation in the neighborhood. Furthermore, most of the families are taking credits to be able to cover all the expenses, which deepen the financial problems they have further.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): If you want to take a girl, you better have a good amount of money at hand. They will ask for bracelets (golden). In East, our conditions are very hard. They ask for dowry payment. My son and my younger daughter-in-law ran away together. Her father asked me to pay 5000 TL. I said*

that I could not pay it; I send some of our friends as peacemakers. Then he said I at least had to pay 1000 TL. I had no money, so I borrowed and collected it from my friends. I completed 1000 TL and paid to him. Our conditions are really hard. Our people, Eastern people pay a lot of attention to this. The girl that my youngest son loves asks me to buy her 2 meters of golden chain, a big gold, 8 bracelets and 4 rings. And they say that all the expenses of the house are on us. In engagement ceremony, you take the girl to bazaars and you buy everything she and her family desires. In the weddings, you buy the food, henna, you pay for the musicians. The day the bride comes to your house, you have to organize a dinner…Of course you do everything by debt. If you have money, you will be careless of course. But I have a lot of debt because of these weddings. I paid 1000 dowry payment, but then the bride's mom said that she would take all the presents that are given to her.

In the weddings, guests bring money or gold as gifts for the new couple and give them either to the bride or the groom. These gifts are either kept by the couple, to be sold for covering their expenses, or the families take them to cover their expenses for the wedding. In addition to the expenses of the wedding ceremonies, brides' families (especially families from Eastern Turkey, and specifically from Mardin-a city located in Southeastern Turkey) are usually very demanding for gifts which are usually golden jewellery and they don't give permission to the wedding unless kilograms of gold they ask from the groom's family is given to them as gifts prior to the wedding. There are two types of money that the groom's family needs to pay to get the permissions for marriage. One is called "başlık parası – dowry payment" and the other is "süt parası – milk payment"; dowry payment referring to the money paid to bride's father for growing her, and the milk payment referring to the mother's sacrifice (feeding her with breast milk) for raising the child. In some regions, traditions require them to pay only the dowry payment, while in other regions, both the dowry and milk payments should be done to get the required permissions. In addition to all of the expenses of organizing weddings, and buying

furniture, white goods etc. for the house, groom's family has to make these payments which sometimes account for thousands of TL. Considering that most of the families are low income families, it usually becomes impossible for man's family to make these payments. Therefore, a great majority of the female participants stated that they ran away with their lovers to force the family giving permission to marriage without the payment. According to the Turkish traditions, if the girl runs away and stays out of the house at night with her lover, she has to marry him to save her reputation. This forces the girl's family to give permission to marriage and they usually settle for a much less dowry payment.

> *Pelin (Participant 15): I have never wanted anything for myself. Just...I received no gifts in my wedding. That's kind of...hurting. They didn't buy anything but my husband bought me everything after we got married. My mom pushed him to arrange a wedding ceremony. I wanted him to not to spend money but since my mother is a little bit...you know...bitchy...she pushed him so hard that he arranged a wedding in 2 months. We didn't invite many people because my father passed away before the wedding...My wedding gown was beautiful. We had our photographs taken but they are still at the photographer because we couldn't pay his money. And I had no gifts, just 500 TL in cash. Some brides get golden jewellery as gifts you know? I didn't receive any; therefore I still have that desire in me. His family is not in a good situation financially. And since I ran away, my family could not demand anything.*

> *Ceylan (Participant 25): I received no gifts in my wedding. I still have that pain inside me. As they didn't buy anything, I felt so bad that it is still like a wound inside me. Neither their family, nor mine was rich. It's still a cause of suffering for me. I was young too. Everybody has lots of gifts, jewellery, why hadn't I? It was a desire inside me, and it stayed in until that time. I wanted to have them.*

As stated by Pelin, the runaway bride's family loses their right to demand dowry or milk payments as they also lose the right to say no to the marriage since they have to think about their daughter's and their family's reputation. Therefore, they settle down for a much less payment. However, from the bride's side, these

payments and gifts are considered to be major signs of the love, respect and attention paid to her by the groom and his family. Unless these payments are made or gifts are given to the bride, she feels herself not valuable enough in the eyes of the family. Pelin and Ceylan state that not getting any gifts like other brides hurt them and they still feel that pain inside. This pain may also cause the triggering of their desire for having things of high monetary value further as claimed by some participants. Unless these gifts or payments are compensated in a way, it may damage their relationships and sometimes even cause the couple to break up.

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): It is much harder back in the village. It is our tradition. You have to buy gifts for the girl in addition to all other expenses. Totally it accounts for 16-17 thousand TL today. If you cannot afford that, how can you explain it to your girl friend? Because of that, I was suggesting my friends to save money, saying that "how will you say such a thing to your girl friends?" I have seen many couples broken up because of that. I have seen that marriages end because of that.*

> *Turgut (Participant 42): I had a girl friend I met before doing my military service. We decided to get married. They told me that I should first do my military service. Two days after this talk, they called me. She told me to come to talk with her family. Her mom was there when I arrived, we sat down. Her mother turned to us and said "I want a kilogram of gold."I stayed silent for a while. She kept talking, listing the things she wants. She told me that we should have a separate house. I said ok, but I told that I could not buy a kg of gold; I am not Sabancı (the richest family of Turkey). I told her that she couldn't even see a kg of gold in her dreams. Of course, we broke up.*

Taking into consideration above quotes, we may infer that as well as the monetary value of the gifts and dowry payments, the symbolic meanings of these gifts are also very important for both the bride and her family. The traditions are pushing the families so far that they take huge debts to cover those expenses for building a good future for their children. In addition, the social visibility of these gifts are high as significant others such as the relatives, friends and neighbors will be

present in the ceremony. This puts an additional burden on families as the conspicuousness becomes an important motive to be taken into consideration. Therefore, a very interesting alternative has been developed by low income families who will not be able to buy gifts for the bride:

> *Bellez (Participant 58): I told the girl that I had no money, no gold, no silver, nothing at all. The girl told me that he loved my son and she wanted to get married even though I had no money. I explained this to the girl's family, and they told me to bring it as "emanet" and it would be acceptable for them. All of their relatives, friends would come to the wedding. If she had no bracelets, no gifts, it would be shameful. So we decided to bring it as "emanet", give her the gifts and take it back later. I have a relative; I asked her if she had any gold for giving to us as "emanet". She is my aunt's daughter. I took the "emanet" from her, gave them to the bride as gifts at the wedding ceremony and I took them back after the wedding. My aunt's daughter gave me 4 golden bracelets and one meter of golden chain. The gifts stayed with the bride 5 days, and on the 6th day, I took them back to my relative.*

For the sake of conspicuousness, the wedding ceremony becomes a theater stage. As the reputation of the bride is closely related to the quantity and quality of the gifts she receives, the bride's family demands the groom's family (who are not able to buy gifts) to take *emanet* from their friends or relatives. With those borrowed jewellery, the groom's family acts as if they bought them, and they give the gifts to the bride in front of the guests in the wedding ceremony. After the ceremony, the bride is allowed to keep the gifts for a few days for her to satisfy her desire for jewelleries at least for a while. Then the groom's family takes them back from the bride, and brings them back to the people who lend them the jewelleries. Developing such a strategy for the bride's reputation can be considered as a prominent evidence of the importance of materialism and conspicuousness in the wedding rituals, cultural practices and, in general, the lives of the low income consumers.

5.2.6. A Taste of the Good Life

Considering all of the topics covered in this chapter, I believe that there is one more point to emphasize to shed light on the desires of low income consumers for certain products or lifestyles. In a sense, we may say that most of the low income consumers are sentenced to live this way for the rest of their lives as their practices deepen their problems even further, such as the problem of the debt spiral most of them are facing. From this perspective, the data shows that sometimes one of the major motivations for them to engage in luxury, hedonic or conspicuous consumption activities can be experiencing "the other life" at least for a few times in their lives. Since "the other life" seems to be out of reach and will be so in their future as well, they sometimes act with the motivation of rewarding themselves with whatever they won't experience during the rest of their lives:

> *Selda (Participant 1): Sometimes the very high prices we come across in restaurants or shops disturb us. But we went to those restaurants a few times with my husband. Maybe it disturbed us because we are not used to. We sometimes do a favor to ourselves, but of course, not that often. But you get used to not desiring those kinds of activities. However, as I said, we sometimes reward ourselves. We say "let's do it at least once."*
>
> *Hayat (Participant 2): When I got bored and feel suffocated by life, I sometimes go to a café and drink a cup of tea or coffee, even though I cannot eat something. I do that carelessness sometimes to reward myself. I say "Come on Hayat, let go." I do it sometimes and I feel much better. But still, I am thanking God as I know that there are people living in much worse conditions than us.*

As Selda and Hayat state, they sometimes reward themselves through engaging in activities that they usually cannot afford such as eating outside or sitting in a café and drinking a cup of tea. This may be considered as a contemporary escape from their own life to the other life that is beyond their reach. Either in the form of

shopping from a store, buying commodities or going to places that are usually out of their reach, they may feel a sense of freedom and escape from their constraints at least for a while. Considering all of the consumption behavior that has been explained in this chapter, this feeling of escape can be considered as an important motivation.

Discussing how the low income consumers' desires are directed to certain objectifications under the effects of the consumer culture agents, we may reach a conclusion that, regardless of the possibility to attain these objects, the desire for commodities prevail and keep affecting us in various ways. In most of the cases, it is not possible for low income consumers to attain these objects with their current resources, which lead them to create different strategies for either attaining it, or coping with the stress of unattained objectifications. The next chapter will focus on these strategies to reach a deeper understanding on the consequences of the objectifications of desire in the contemporary consumer culture.

5.2.7. Summary

Descriptions of a Happy Life

In a majority of the cases, participants started with mentioning about their materialistic needs that have to be satisfied for a decent life. After talking about their "basic necessities", the amount of money required for covering their expenses for a decent life, and briefly mentioning health and peace, the conversation got into a new direction by the discussions on their deeper desires which are, in most cases, related

to having a "better" life, or being able to reach "the other life." In most of the cases, participants started the conversation by talking about peacefulness, which is considered to be the first rule of a happy life. Yet, a majority of the participants also reveal that they don't have peace in their lives because of various reasons (which are mostly related to poverty) such as having a bad relationship with their partners, being jobless and having worries about their family's future. Furthermore, they claim that all these barriers to having a peaceful life are related to lacking a certain amount of money (no more, no less) for a decent life. However, most of the participants also believe that as the level of income increases, other problems may emerge such as wastefulness, being inconsiderate about the family members or even, cheating. Furthermore, they believe that people having more money than the amount to cover the basic expenses will become wicked or unhappy because of being the slaves of their materialist desires. The data reveals that being married and especially having children changes the definitions of low income consumers regarding a happy life as their focus shifts to their children's happiness rather than their own. Interestingly, a majority of the participants talk about their desires to donate money to "poor" people as soon as they have a certain amount of disposable income. An important motivation for having such a desire is religion and being blessed by God on the one hand, while, on the other hand, it can be related to the relief due to the thought that there are people in worse conditions compared to them. In addition, they strongly believe in the "material benefits" of goodwill and charity as they think that they will be blessed by God and God will give whatever they desire in return.

Effects of Demographics on the Objectification of Desire

Life Stage

Getting married and having children affects the objectifications of desire deeply. Family life brings the burden of giving priority to the expenses of the family rather than one's own desires, considering that their limited income will not be enough for covering both. One of the most important and most frequently named objects that the participants want to attain is a house. They are afraid of not being able to pay the rent as they don't have a persistent source of income. One of the main motivations for them to desire owning a house is to be freed from the fear of humiliation they will face if they fail in paying the rent. However, as we may infer, some of the participants whose dreams came true and who have their own houses are now searching for better or bigger houses, or ways to make their house look better, which makes us think about the endless cycle of desire. On the other hand, a majority of the participant who has children claim that they give up reaching their own desires, but they keep on struggling to make their children reach whatever they want. The desire of the parents became making their children reach their desires which may help them "fulfill the lack".

Age

Participants who are over 30 are trying to cut from their current expenses which lead to being less involved in hedonic or luxury consumption. In addition, most of these participants reveal their desires for escape, which is usually demonstrated as escaping from the city and turning back to their hometown. They have the desire and dream of escaping from their life in the city in which they depend

on many people and institutions for survival, such as the house owner or the banks. Rather than living dependently, they desire to build themselves a self-sufficient life in which they can be independent, having their own land and house and growing their own crops. On the other hand, participants who are below 30 usually reveal their desires for an active life in which they can travel to different places, go for holidays and do exciting activities such as riding motorbikes, or even, paragliding (as one of the participants stated). They have the desire to be freed from their routine lives and experience different lifestyles, or "the other life", before getting older. . In addition, according to the data, participants who are below 30 are usually more prone to the desire for hedonic and luxury consumption such as buying home cinema systems, LED TV's or having not the luxury car itself maybe, but at least, the experience of driving it. Even though we may argue that younger participants are more prone to having desires for hedonic consumption, the life stage is a more relevant factor in determining whether there will be any opportunities for attaining one's own desires. In addition to hedonic consumption, we may state that younger people are more inclined to consume branded products compared to people over 30, as the desire for conformity can be more intense in these ages.

Gender

Women's desires for commodities are usually targeted at reaching the "ideal beauty". Therefore some of their consumption practices show similarities which indicate that the ideal beauty image affects and triggers their desires for consumption regardless of their age and income. However, as discussed in the previous sections, getting married and having children changes the priorities of women and most of

these women state that they started to spend less on clothing or cosmetics after getting married. Therefore, it is possible to say that usually younger women are giving more importance on spending money on self-care products and cosmetics, however, clothing remains an important category for a majority of the women. In addition to clothing, a majority of the female participants talked about the importance of jewellery for them, not because of the monetary value, but mostly focusing on the symbolic meanings they communicate. In addition to their desires for commodities, some of the female participants also stated that they are dreaming of establishing their own businesses, which is surprising as none of the male participants mentioned about such a desire.

Effects of Exposure to Consumer Culture Agents

Mass Media

A majority of the participants are watching TV (especially soap operas) addictively. Either the reason for this is TV's being the cheapest alternative for entertainment, or their need for a connection to the outside world as some of them are living inside the neighborhood, addictive consumption of media affects their objectifications of desire deeply. In addition to the addictive TV watching habits, a minority of the participants are listening to radio, connecting to Internet and reading newspapers. Thinking about the increasing penetration rates, internet can be considered as another major source of exposure in the near future. We can state that the major medium for exposure is TV. Soap operas are watched addictively by a majority of the population. Providing them with the enthusiasm and joy of experiencing (even fictionally) "the other life", these soap operas are watched and

liked by a majority of the low income consumers. As the soap operas are watched addictively by a majority of the population, a new sector –producing the copies of the goods displayed in soap operas - emerged from the desires of the audience to look alike their favorite characters in the soap operas. Especially in the clothing and fashion industries, the manufacturers started to design and produce goods copied from the objects that the characters used during the episodes such as dresses or jewellery. Exposure to the lives of the wealthy media figures, celebrities, soap opera characters and brands affect the way they objectify their desires in a strong way. As these soap operas are considered to be unreal, it is possible that the consumers may not perceive them as real lives or the placements as real products. Consequently, just two of the participants remembered the product placements in their favorite soap operas when asked. However, in the case of paparazzi shows which are frequently watched and liked especially by female participants, the audience knows that these are reality shows which are the representations of the real life rather than being fictional. This situation triggers their desires directed towards commodities even further as they become aware that some people are actually living those wealthy, affluent and "smooth" lives.

Effects of Different Spheres of Life

Having different life spheres means that the consumer can get exposed to different commodities, brands, new fashions and trends as well as "the other life" more than the consumers who are living inside the neighborhood. Consequently, it becomes harder for low income consumers to control their desires and the negative feelings emerging because of not being able to attain those desired objects. These

negative feelings such as incapability, powerlessness or anger may damage their psychologies, the satisfaction they get from their lives, and also their self-esteem To protect themselves from these negative effects of exposure, a majority of the consumers reveal that they are trying to stay away from any kind of media for exposure as much as they can. This planned / preferred alienation limits their lives and social interactions, but it also prevents them to have negative feelings towards themselves, their lives or towards "the other."

Effects of Social Comparison and the Frames of Reference

In many of the participants' discourses, desire for conformity and social likability come forward as the main factors behind their consumption behavior. Emulation has an important role in shaping their desires and in directing them towards consuming the popular, trendy and fashionable products which "everyone else" uses. The data especially suggests that the effects of friends and peers on the branded product consumption are more prominent. Having social interactions with different people who have different lifestyles, and being exposed to more marketing messages and word-of-mouth communication about the brands lead to an inclination for using branded products. In addition, younger participants are found to be more inclined to the desire for branded products. It can be discussed that youth is more prone to consuming branded products as they require these commodities for self-verification and for conformity. Even if they cannot find the resources to attain the original ones, they try to cover this incapability through using fake products which look more or less the same as the original ones. But some of these younger participants also stated that they are afraid of the humiliation they will face if their

friends understand that the product is not original, but a fake one. Therefore, they try to attain originals as much as they can, and they sometimes force their families to make them buy what they desire, which increases the burden on families even further.

Wedding Rituals - Effects of Culture on Conspicuous Consumption Behavior

Usually, wedding rituals and the consumption activities required for these rituals are considered to be adopted with motivations such as social comparison, conformity, and likability. However, the data reveals that there is more than that and these rituals have become a theatre of conspicuous consumption. Weddings are one of the major expenses of their life time which make them spend all their investments. Rather than spending these investments on buying a house, or buying the commodities which are needed for a decent life, they willfully spend them on wedding ceremonies and on the bride's desires to make sure that their children are happy and that their family has a good reputation in the neighborhood. In addition, the social visibility of the gift-giving ceremonies are high as significant others such as the relatives, friends and neighbors will be present in the ceremony. This puts an additional burden on families as the conspicuousness becomes an important motive.

A Taste of the Good life

The data shows that sometimes one of the major motivations for the low income consumers to engage in luxury, hedonic or conspicuous consumption activities can be experiencing "the other life" at least for a few times in their lives. Since "the other life" seems to be out of reach and will be so in their future as well, they sometimes act with the motivation of rewarding themselves with whatever they

won't experience during the rest of their lives. This may be considered as a contemporary escape from their own life to the other life that is beyond their reach.

5.3. Consequences of the Objectification of Desire

As it is explained in detail in the previous chapter, low income consumers' desires are shaped and directed towards commodities through the intense effects of the consumer culture agents just like consumers with higher incomes who are exposed to the messages of the consumer culture. Yet, in the case of low-income consumers, it is usually not possible to attain these objectifications because of their limited incomes which are expected to be spent on basic necessities such as food and clothing. However, as discussed before, consumers are not fully rational in their consumption behavior due to the desires which direct us towards certain behaviors. These desires are usually not controllable by ourselves, but interestingly, even though we are not able to control our desires most of the time, we witness that some institutions or people (within the context of this research, the consumer socialization agents) are able to direct and channel our desires towards certain types of objectifications. The influences of these consumer socialization agents direct the desire towards certain consumption behaviors (Belk et al., 2003), and the individuals try to develop alternatives to be able to reach these commodified forms of desire. On the other hand, in case these objectifications cannot be attained, most of the time, negative feelings may emerge because of the feelings of incapability and pain. In this chapter, I will focus on the consequences of the objectifications of desire in the low-income context, which is directed towards commodities by the consumer

socialization agents. I will discuss how these desires affect the feelings, thoughts and in general, the lives of the low income consumers. The chapter starts with a brief description of what low income consumers do to attain the desired objects and how these efforts affect their lives. Then, the discussion will focus on the situation of not attaining the desired object, delving deeper into its consequences. The chapter will conclude with the examination of the strategies developed by the low income consumer to cope with these consequences.

5.3.1. The Hopeful State - Efforts for Attaining the Desired

As discussed previously, the uncontrolled nature of desire directs individuals to search for alternatives to make sure that the journey to the desired object ends with satisfaction. Especially in the case of low income consumers, desire for commodities makes them search for ways to overcome the financial barriers of poverty if they have hope for attaining the desired objects (Belk et al. 2003). Previous research shed light on hope's effect on consumers' responses to the market related information, the intensity of their desires towards consumption objects and their beliefs about the possibility of a positive outcome, which is, reaching the desired (MacInnis and de Mello 2005, Rosa et al. 2012). Being hopeful about attaining the desired object or the desired lifestyle directs people towards focusing their resources and efforts on the desired because of the expectation of a positive outcome. Even though it may not be possible to reach it immediately, the contemporary inaccessibility of the object intensifies the desire even further (Belk et al. 2003) until a certain point. This means that waiting and struggling for reaching the desires can also be pleasurable. In most

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of the cases, the low income consumers do not have the financial resources to reach the desired; therefore, they need to work harder, wait longer, and reallocate their resources through using financial tools such as taking credit or using credit cards. Most of the participants reveal that they cannot re-allocate their resources to save money for reaching the desired as they spend most of their disposable income on basic necessities such as food.

> *Şeyma (Participant 37): I don't have any expenses that I can cut because we are already living a very limited life. As we have a certain level of income, we need to limit all our expenditures, we cannot be extravagant. Let's say that I'll try to save some money by cutting my expenses such as clothing. I am already not buying any clothes, I cannot shop frequently. Food is the basic necessity, you cannot limit it. If you don't eat, you cannot work and cannot earn even that little income. That's why I cannot cut any expenses and cannot save any money. I cannot because I am already living at the lower bound.*

As Şeyma expresses openly, in most of the cases, it is not possible for them to cut any expenses for saving money, as they are living at the lower boundary in terms of the money spent on even the basic necessities. Therefore, one of the most prominent and frequently used ways for reaching their desires is accepting credit or using their credit cards. The triggered desire directed towards commodities sometimes leads to going into debt for consumption items which may not be considered as necessary for a decent living, such as branded products, clothing, and cell phones or in some cases, even jewelry. Even though some of the participants claim that they try to stay away from using debts or credit cards because of its consequences such as the debt spiral, a majority of the participants use these tools as they are the only way to reaching the desired object:

> *Sabri (Participant 32): I buy those branded products by my credit cards. I try to buy goods of high quality. I shop from Adidas for shoes and Mavi for jeans.*

3-4 pieces costs around 500-600 TL, shoes, pants, t-shirts…Thanks to the credit cards, I pay them in 6 months. I want to cancel all my cards after paying all my debts. The cards don't have high limits; one of them has 1400 TL and the other 2000 TL. But I sometimes cannot stop myself from buying things. I failed recently in paying all those accumulated debt. I've recovered recently and I am paying it back now.

Orhan (Participant 38): I use credit cards. Many banks...Garanti, HSBC, Finans and Akbank. They are necessary. They are like medicines if you need money. But they are like snakes in your pocket as well. Because they make you move immediately, you take the card and take credit. What about afterwards? I pay this one's debt through the cash I withdraw from the other...then I make that one's payment with another one. I make the minimum payments. Sometimes you cannot stop yourself. Sometimes you like something so much that you don't think about its price. But sometimes I give up just in front of the cashier; I stop myself and give it back. Because if I buy it, I will be crying later. And that will be the real pain.

As described by the participants, a major way for reaching the desired object is to use their credit cards even though they are aware of the negative consequences of using them. However, having experienced the endless cycle of desire which make people direct their desires onto new objectifications as soon as they reached jouissance (Lacan 1977), the use of credit cards seems to be troublesome for most of the participants. For example, Orhan claims that if one uses her/his credit card in order to avoid the pain of not attaining, s/he will face the real pain later when s/he comes face to face with the problems in paying back. He describes credit cards as being both the medicine and the snake in one's pocket, stressing further the possible consequences of using them without being backed by the financial power. Furthermore, some participants state that they buy some commodities on tick and they keep paying for those items for a long time, not because they are basic necessities, but because they are items of desire which they searched for a long time and lacking those items would be more disturbing than the burden of debt:

Hayat (Participant 2): I got no presents when we got married. My father-in-law gave me a ring as a present on our wedding day, and then he took it back the next morning. They told that my husband could buy me one later. The stone on the ring he gave to me was fake, years after, I managed to buy myself a real one....I waited for a long time to be able to buy it because I had other priorities such as raising my children...But then, one day I went to the jewellery store and saw a ring there. I got inside the store; I told the store owner "I am buying this." I bought it and went back home. Of course, I bought it on tick and I paid it back by the money I earned by myself.

Considering the case of Hayat, it took years for her to reach what she desired. She waited for a long time and she bought a ring with a real diamond on tick. Even though she was able to pay it back in several months, the pleasure she gets from reaching the desired may, in a sense, overcomes the burden of debt. Considering that the desire is the driving force for the individual and for the marketplace (Wilk 1997), individuals may prefer to diminish the discomfort felt by not attaining the desired in any possible way. In addition, as the goods that are not yet acquired but thought to have the magical meaning or happiness embedded in them (Belk et al.,2003) creates this unstoppable urge for reaching them, individuals find and try different ways to reach their desires:

Nilay (Participant 6): I am not disappointed or sad. For example, I can wait until I have more money or I can force myself to work overtime for a whole week, but I can rent the car that I desire (Mini Cooper) at least for two days, and I will satisfy my desire. I can reach it somehow. But just dreaming about it is, I don't know…Accepting that you cannot reach it is much harder for me. Dreaming is good enough; you know that your dream will stay inside you forever. I like that hope, that way of thinking.

Şeyma (Participant 37): I desired to have a cell phone, I desired it a lot. It hankers after that for a long time and I decided to whatever I can to buy it. But I couldn't buy it at the time I desired; I collected the money in 4 months. My dad supported me as well; he knew that I had that desire for a long time. I finally bought it; it was a Nokia, one of the latest models. It was beautiful! Those touch screen cell phones were barely found in the market at those times. It cost around 700 – 750 TL. Now it's cheaper but it was very expensive when it was first launched. It was much more than my monthly salary.

Nilay's quote reveals that her hope keeps her desires alive and makes her search for alternatives to reach it (Rosa et al. 2012). Even though she may not be able to possess the desired, she says that experiencing the desired object (or life) for a while can also provide her a sense of satisfaction through "a taste of the other life" which is normally out of reach. In addition to these strategies, participants who have side incomes mention that they can wait for a long time and save money for reaching the desired in order to be freed from the pain of envy or not attaining it. As revealed by Şeyma's quote, it is possible for some of the participants to take support from the family, or save their income for months to reach the desired, especially if they are not married and can spend on their own desires freely. As it is clearly stated, this consumption behavior can be considered as being luxury or hedonic as the highest technology cell phone of a leading brand cost more than her monthly income. Either through investing all of their money on desired commodities, or through using their credit cards, low income consumers try to reach the desired objects to protect themselves from the negative consequences of not attaining it, such as stress, emulation or pain. The question that arises here is about the limit to be drawn in their efforts for reaching the desired object as the reproduction of desire is itself desirable (Bouchet 2011). In some of the participants' discourses, I came across with cases which indicate that they can even sacrifice their basic necessities in the name of the desired objects. In some cases, consumers state that they face difficulties in managing their payments which sometimes make them confront much difficult situations compared to the stress they'll face in case of not attaining the desired:

> *Aysel (Participant 18): We bought this LCD TV on credit. We have to pay 450 TL each month. Once we could not pay it, so the debt became much higher because of the interest. We had 13000 TL debts, but it became 20000 TL. Once,*

when I was pregnant, we were sustained to confiscation. The officers told me that we bought them, couldn't make the payments on time so that they would take away everything we have in return for the debt. I started crying, I felt very bad. They pity me, do they said that they would tell the lawyer that I fainted, so that they didn't execute the process. It happened 2 or 3 times. Thanks God, we managed to pay it back later. I sold 2 of my golden bracelets for paying it back. Usually women don't do such things you know. Some even asked me why I sold them, telling that my husband should take care of it.

Aysel tells that her husband desired a big LCD TV and she desired nice living room furniture for their house when they got married. Adding the other expenses of the house on top of the costs of these items, their debt accumulated to 13000 TL in total. Having reached what they desire through such a big amount of debt, they faced difficulties in making the payments which resulted in interest that leads the debt to become 20000 TL, and consequently it resulted in confiscation. In order to recover from that situation, she sold her bracelets, sacrificing another object of desire. According to the participants' discourses, we may argue that both tangible and intangible assets can be sacrificed to reach the desired object. Some cases indicate that they sacrifice the functional assets in the name of reaching the objects with symbolic meanings, while in other cases; they sacrifice the symbolic for the functional:

Fahriye (Participant 10): I remember, one day we had just 16 TL at our hand. I asked my daughter to buy some food from Sevgi Yolu (a street in their neighborhood where little stores are located). Those pants with flower figures were popular those days. She had seen one of them in a store, and she had bought it for 15 TL. She came back home with 1 TL and no food. I asked her "Where is the food?" My husband told me to calm down; he said that it is enough for him to see her child happy. But we had no food. We ate whatever we have at home. I baked the old pieces of bread first. I made a soup and put those breads into it. That was our dinner that night. I create things; you need to be creative if you lack things.

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This quote reveals that, sometimes it is possible to sacrifice even the basic necessities in order to reach the desired object as the desire is a powerful drive which cannot be resisted in many circumstances. In this case, the symbolic meanings embedded in a fashion item attracted Fahriye's daughter in such an intense way that she sacrificed food (the functional) in the name of reaching her desire. On the other hand, sometimes it is possible for them to sacrifice the objects with symbolic meanings for reaching the functional, tangible assets. Sometimes intangible assets such as the time spent with one's family can be sacrificed to earn enough money for covering the basic expenses, while in other cases; tangible assets with important symbolic meanings can also be sacrificed:

> *Haydar (Participant 45): We had a lot of difficulty during the times we get married. We had 4-5 types of monthly payments for the commodities we bought for the house. It was winter, and we didn't have the money to buy my wife a coat. I sold my wedding ring and I bought her a coat with that money. I haven't been able to buy a new wedding ring for myself till then, but I desire to buy one very much. One day…*

In addition to the objects of desire which are sacrificed for necessities and the basic necessities sacrificed for reaching the objects of desire, some of the participants state that there are assets (both tangible and intangible assets) which cannot be sacrificed no matter what the situation is. Usually basic necessities such as food and the desires of the children are stated as the objects which cannot be substituted for or sacrificed in the name of other objects. On the other hand, some participants focus on intangible assets such as having fun from life, or peacefulness, which are the assets that cannot be sacrificed:

> *Hayat (Participant 2): I have never sacrificed food for anything. If I had done so, I could have bought 2 or 3 houses at least. I cannot sacrifice my children's*

desires such as clothing. Maybe I cannot buy what they want immediately but later, I will. As I said, if I sacrificed from those things to save money, I could have bought 2 houses at least. You know, some of the doorkeepers living here have many houses. I couldn't do that, because I didn't need to. We have one life. What is the reason of putting yourself, or your children into trouble? I have never sacrificed from what we eat. If I want to drink a cup of tea in a café, I'll do it. What is the point in making too much sacrifice from the life itself?

This quote surprisingly reveals that, some doorkeepers Hayat knows have houses bought by the money they saved through sacrificing their hedonic needs. Hayat states that pushing one's limits too far for saving money or spending it solely on possessions such as a house may not be reasonable if one is missing the fun and amusement in life through doing so. Therefore, she believes that people shouldn't sacrifice their hedonic needs for the sake of the functional possessions to be able to enjoy their lives. In addition to these discussions regarding what can and cannot be sacrificed for reaching the desired, some participants revealed that it is not necessary to sacrifice things for reaching the desired objects as it will lose its essence after attaining it. Surprisingly, some of the participants disclose that they are aware of the endless cycle of desire and impossibility of reaching a satisfaction through possessions. This awareness may help them stop themselves from spending money on the objects of desire, or, just in the case of other consumers, awareness may not be enough for resistance to the commodification of desire. The next section focuses on the discussions about the endless cycle of desire and how it is affected by the feelings of attaining and not attaining in the low income context.

5.3.2. The Endless Cycle in the Discourses of the Participants

Even though a majority of the participants state that they feel intense desires for commodities especially before reaching them, they also revealed that desire has

an endless nature as it is not possible to reach the satisfaction even though the desired object is attained. In some of the discourses, the tension and intense desire towards commodities felt before attaining them was revealed openly. However, these discourses were usually followed by statements which make us understand that they start searching for new objectifications right after they reached the jouissance through attaining the desired:

> *Zihni (Participant 54): Waiting for reaching it. It's such an intense feeling…You desire to reach it as soon as possible. As I told before, my desire is for a new clavier. I am waiting for it now. I had one already but I sold it. Now I am saving money to buy a better one. I remember how I bought my first clavier. I begged my father to buy me one but we had no resources to spend on that. I cried for days, telling him that everyone had it except for me, asking him why we could not afford. Then he bought me a little one. Then, after earning my own money, I changed it and bought a better one. It's like that all the time. You desire the better one as soon as you reach it.*

> *Hakan (Participant 24): Actually I don't have any money right now. Because I've taken credit from the bank and I bought a house. I dreamed of a house for a long time. Thanks God, I was able to buy it, now we're paying the credit. We will have its burden on us for 5 years. I will try to make our living while paying for the credit. But now, when I look inside the house, I realize that we lack many things. For example, we don't have a nice sofa. We don't have a plasma TV, we have an old TV. We have an old carpet. Actually I desire buying a plasma TV, you know, one of those wide ones, you hang it on the wall…I want it to be either Samsung or Sony. Sony is more preferable actually.*

As revealed by Zihni, the time until reaching the desired object can be described as an "enjoyable discomfort" (Belk et al. 2003) which is an intense feeling that is directing people in their search for satisfaction. However, as the desire is not searching for an end, but it searches for the desire itself, the endless cycle starts right after the jouissance, directing the individual to new objectifications (Lacan 1977, Bouchet 2011). As stated by Zihni and Hakan, reaching the desired object is not an end, but the beginning of a new journey towards a new objectification such as a

better clavier or a better house decorated with nice furniture. Bauman (Rojek 2004) declares that desire has an infinite potential for expansion which leads the individual to new ventures for seeking more pleasure and exploring the unexplored, which can be considered as the focal dynamic behind the never-ending cycle of consumption.

> *Seda (Participant 28): I believe that everybody feels the same. I bought this one (showing her cell phone), now there is a better one and I have it in my mind now. Isn't it the same for everybody? I believe that we are all like this. No one can say "it's enough." We love consuming. It's never enough, never. I desire the better, I desire what others have, I desire to be unique. I guess it's because of our ego. I also desire many things. Maybe it's selfishness, desiring to have the best. I don't know.*

Some of the participants' discourses show us that they are aware of the endless cycle of desire and consumption. Seda (whose education and literacy levels are higher compared to the other participants) interprets people's desires for commodities in a very clear and intellectual way. However, despite having known the impossibility of reaching a satisfaction through consumption, she states that this knowledge is not meaningful as it doesn't necessarily create a difference in her behavior. The individuals keep following the cyclical path and develop new objectifications after each jouissance.

In the case of low income consumers, this longing and search for reaching the desired entails hope and a sense of power for struggling and working harder to overcome the obstacles in their ways to reaching the desired (Belk et al. 2003). Therefore, in this case, consumers may not feel themselves as powerless, victimized and hopeless which may encourage them in their journey towards the desired objects. These efforts, in a sense, keep the cyclical path on its way. However, it also entails the negative consequences such as the financial problems faced by many low income

families because of the debt spiral, or non-financial problems such as over working which, in some cases, lead to deterioration of family relationships, children's lacking parental interest and so on. These consequences will be discussed in detail later.

In addition to the hopeful state where people try to reach the desired object through developing their own strategies, hope may not be sustained in many cases if the desired object is thought to be out of reach. In many cases, severe problems such as unemployment or worsening financial situation may make the low income consumers lose their hopes for attaining the desired. Even though not attaining may intensify the desire, at a certain point, the hope will diminish which may lead the individual to pass to the hopeless stage where they feel themselves powerless. Next section will discuss the hopeless stage in detail, which will be followed by the section where discussions on the consequences of both hopeful and hopeless stages will be presented.

5.3.3. Hopelessness and Powerlessness: Not Attaining the Desired

In contrast to the previous discussions about hopefulness and its effects on directing one's resources and efforts on reaching the desired object, sometimes it may not be possible for consumers to sustain their hopes due to recurrent negative outcomes. Hopelessness about reaching the desired object and, in general, the possibility of change, may create negative feelings and thoughts about their current situation as well as their futures. The data suggests that, in many of the participants' discourses, hopelessness and its effects on their perspectives are clearly revealed. On the other hand, some participants have a pessimist perspective in terms of the

possibility of reaching what they desire, or reaching a better life. Surprisingly, participants with higher education levels, backed by higher exposure levels to consumer culture agents are found to be more inclined to hopelessness even though they have higher chances for self-improvement.

> *Selda (Participant 1): I don't believe that my daughter will have a good life. We have been working since we were little children. After I give birth to my child, I will keep on working. Our life will pass in a rush; I don't think that I can provide her a good future… I don't desire anything because I know that I have to think within the limits of my budget. You start thinking within that limit. It's like a habit you learn, we look at the shop windows and we pass by. You may desire to have those commodities, but as you are aware that you can't, it doesn't bother you that much after a while. By time, you desire less. As you know that you won't reach it, your hope diminishes. That's why there is nothing that I want badly. That's how your desires become dull, become less, you even stop desiring.*

Selda clearly reveals the reasons of her hopelessness and state that she needs to think and act within her limits as there is no hope for extending those limits. Even though she is a high school graduate, which means that she may be able to develop her skills further and have a better job, she doesn't leave any place for this hope. As she states, she have never witnessed any change in her life (working from childhood to death) which, according to her, means that even her child will be living in similar life conditions. Hill and Stephens (1997) discusses that this is a form of learned helplessness which stems from adapting to deprivation (which will be discussed later).

> *Nuriye (Participant 47): I don't have a desire. For example my husband talks about what he wants to do all the time: let's get retired and then move back to our hometown, buy a house there…I don't have any emulation. I don't even name things like that, I want to have this or that…I live the day. If I am alive, that's enough. God knows what will happen tomorrow. I don't have a house for example, I am paying rent. I desired to buy a house a lot, but it didn't happen. I don't care if I reach my dreams or not anymore. As I don't have any*

hope for reaching those things, I don't want to dream and watch my dream world fall down. There are so many things to dream of…

Yusuf (Participant 57): I don't have desires for the future. Because it is not possible to reach them with my current resources. How could you reach them? If you aim to reach something, you should have money. Because this system works with money. You cannot do anything without it. Even if you're the smartest person in Turkey, it is meaningless if you don't have money. My son has aims, he will get education, he wants to be successful but to ensure that, he has to go to those private courses. He needs help, assistance in his courses. How can you provide your children with that assistance if you don't have money? This is the way, it is all about money. Without money, it is not possible to reach your destination. That's why neither me, nor my son desire anything. I don't have any desire because desire means materiality. I have never benefited from desires until now. I had many desires when I was a child. I was looking at other people's children, they were holding their mothers' hands, their fathers driving them to somewhere with their cars. I cannot reach my desires, I have never witnessed that therefore I am a pessimist now.

Participants' quotes reveal that hopelessness is related to previous disappointments in reaching the desire. Unattained objectifications lead to learned helplessness and this state is more than a mere inclination to being rational, but, as stated by the participants, it is also about being pessimist towards their future. As the path for reaching the objectified forms of desire has been interrupted many times, the desires are no more directed onto commodities. Belk et al. (2003) discusses that in the case of continuous disappointments in reaching the desire, it is either directed to more attainable objects or it is muted. Moreover, they claim that it may be redirected to a distinct cycle of desire (Belk et al., 2003). The discussions about redirecting the desire will be presented in the forthcoming chapter.

Even though hopelessness about not being able to reach the desired seems to direct the individual to negative feelings such as pessimism or carelessness, the data reveals that in the case of low income consumers either state (being hopeful or hopeless about reaching the desired) may entail some negative consequences. Living

under the heavy influence of the consumer culture agents with very limited resources force individuals to sacrifice both tangible and intangible assets in their attempts to reach the desired objects. Considering the possible negative effects of these attempts, next section will focus on low income consumers' experiences and feelings about the unattained objectifications and how this situation affects them on the individual level, family and communal level and eventually on the social level.

5.3.4. Consequences of the Attempts to Reach the Objectifications of Desire

As revealed previously, most of the time it is not possible for low income consumers to attain the desired objects, which results in disappointment and lead to adopting different strategies. In the case of having hopes about the possibility of reaching the object, consumers may prefer to make new attempts, which all require them to sacrifice either material or non-material assets such as their money, investments, time and effort. Sacrificing these assets in the name of reaching the desired has many consequences on the individual and family level. On the other hand, if these attempts results in failure for a long time, different experiences and feelings are triggered most of which have negative consequences on different levels. In either case, there are many consequences of these struggles, which can be classified as the effects of non-attaining on individual, family-communal and finally, social levels.

i. Individual Level

Previous studies in the literature focused on the consequences of the consumer culture on low income consumers whose resources are limiting them from an active participation to the mainstream society. Blocker et al. (2013 - forthcoming) define these consequences as felt deprivation which is "the beliefs, emotions, and experiences that arise when individuals see themselves as unable to fulfill the consumption needs of a minimally decent life." Felt deprivation includes experiences and feelings such as separation and alienation from the mainstream consumer society (Alwitt 1995), loss of control (Hill and Stephens 1997), anger, feelings of incapability (Sen 1992), obsession, pain, learned helplessness (Rabow et al. 1983), escapist behaviors, emotional distress, addictive behaviors and even severe mental illness (Hill 1991). In a similar vein with these studies, the data revealed that the consequences of not being able to attain the desired object include disappointment, anger, obsessive behaviors, pain, feelings of incapability and regret, pessimism, hopelessness and acceptance (of their situation).

In most of the cases, the participants reveal that the unattained objectifications of desire trigger feelings of anger which can be directed towards themselves, their families, or even, the society and the system (meaning capitalistic system). Considering that the responsibility of this incapability is on themselves, some of the participants state that they are angry at themselves or their families because of not working and earning enough money to be able to consume as they wish:

Fatma (Participant 4): Of course I am angry. If my husband or son was working, I would buy anything I want and take it to my house. My son will get married soon, I am telling them all the time but…I am angry at my family. I am telling them that if they had worked, we could have lived in a much better house. We could have built a good house for ourselves, a house with a deed. We are human, we desire everything. I desire new furniture…If you don't have the money for it, you buy through debt. Then if you cannot pay the debt, you have the problem of confiscation. They come to your house and take everything you have. That's why I am afraid, and angry.

Yavuz (Participant 27): Not being able to reach makes you sad, and you keep that in your mind all the time. We know that it will never happen. We have that idea in our mind, we say "it's impossible" and we move on. I ask to myself and feel sad, why didn't I get an education? We see things around us…I wish I was like him, I wish I had such nice clothes; I wish I was able to have a nice dinner out with my wife. You feel depressed. I look back into the past, but there is nothing I can do now. I try to not to think about it much. It just comes to my mind and then goes. I took the university exams twice, but I could not pass. Then I did my military service and never tried again. I regret that.

In Fatma's discourse, the anger stemming from not attaining is directed to family members who are not working and not contributing to her efforts of reaching the desired objects, or a better life. She blames her husband and son for the situation, which may affect the relationships between the family members. On the other hand, after stating his hopelessness, Yavuz reveals his regret for not getting a university education which will ensure him to have a better job with a higher income so that he could reach what he desires (clothes, having a dinner outside). This regret also directs him to hopelessness and learned helplessness (Hill and Stephens 1997) which makes him think that there is nothing he can do to make his situation better. Furthermore, some participants state that even though they don't have any hopes for attaining the desired, they become obsessed with some objects of desire if they got exposed to them. As these obsessions make them feel weak, they try to avoid getting

exposed to those objects of desire. They prefer to turn their faces away from those objects and lives, as otherwise they are afraid of facing obsession and pain:

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): I become obsessed with those things. I won't lie to you. For example, a couple of days ago, one of my husband's relatives was showing me the shoes, and other stuff she bought, telling me "Look, I bought this, I bought that." I saw those things, someone else has them, but I don't…Then you start desiring, you start wishing that you had more money to be able to buy them. Don't get me wrong, those shoes cost at most 25 TL, it's not much. But if I had that money, I would spend it on my house's expenses…You show me some magazines. That's fine. But I prefer talking. What happens if I look at those magazines? Let's say that I liked some of the things I saw there. Then what will happen? Those clothes in the magazines, they are adorable, of course everybody likes them. But see…then it sticks to your mind, you become obsessed as you are not, and will never be, able buy it.*

At the beginning of the research, I was asking the participants to make a collage which represents their ideas about a happy life. As discussed in the methodology section, I provided them with some materials such as magazines, newspapers, pencils and papers for them to use while making their collage. However, a great majority of the participants didn't even want to look at the magazines as they feel stress when they get exposed to the images of clothes, houses etc. As clearly stated by Nurcan, exposure to the desired objects which are out of reach leads to a feeling like obsession as they constantly keep occupying her mind. Therefore, to be freed from the pain and obsession, she prefers to stay away from the media of exposure. On the other hand, as many other participants claim, she has no hope to reach the desired, which is another reason of the obsession like feeling in her mind.

In addition to the experiences they had with their desired objects which made them feel stress or pain, another situation which makes them feel even worse is not being able to make their children reach their desires. Feelings of incapability rises to

the maximum level in those cases, which makes them blame themselves for not being able to provide a good life for their children.

Yusuf (Participant 57): It makes you feel so sad…I guess this feeling is more or less the same for everybody. Not being able to get what you want, or not being able to provide your son what he wants. Sometimes when I get my salary, we spend it on bank credit, on this and that so that I am left with 25 kuruş (quarter of 1 TL) in my pocket. He is young, he desires things. Lately he asked me to give him 20 TL; I had 5 in my pocket. To me, that's shameful. Next day I came here and borrowed some money from my friends, so that I could give him that money. That's really hard…it's the hardest part of all. Is there anything worse that your incapability to provide your children what they want? As I said, we are trying to manage it some way, even though it is too hard.

As Yusuf and many other participants state, they are able to manage their feelings to a certain point if the case is about not attaining their own desires. However, if the case is their children's desires, they feel shameful and incapable because of not being able to make them reach the desired things, or objects. Yusuf calls it as "the hardest part of all" which means that taking into consideration all the difficulties he faces because of being poor; the felt deprivation reaches to the maximum level in the case of not attaining children's desires.

Considering all these negative cases, the consumers usually state that they get used to these kinds of disappointing experiences and they are not hurting them after a while. Being related to the learned helplessness and hopelessness which were discussed above, they claim that they are becoming reckless day by day towards these experiences and they let themselves go with the flow.

Ela (Participant 48): Sometimes I get excited again. But when I see that nothing is changing, I draw myself away. I say, let's watch it as far as it can go. I don't insist on anything to happen anymore. I prefer going with the flow and see what happens. Maybe if I had been a different person, I don't know…an ambitious person; my life could have been different. But I really

don't want anything. I have never reached what I desire for myself, I know that it will never happen too, therefore, I let it go. I am not dreaming of anything, there is nothing to be hopeful about. Looking at my life, I see that everything is the same, and even it become worse day by day. If I desire something, I am sure that I will face disappointment.

Filiz (Participant 30): I keep on dreaming, that's my personality but I don't insist on anything. I want this; I want that…I have never asked that much from life. I became like this by time. Maybe it is because I am getting older and mature. You start thinking differently. I don't know, your point of view becomes different. The painful experiences you went through makes you estranged from everything. You come to a point where you stop desiring. I am about 40; life is not changing a bit. I guess it will continue like this.

As stated very clearly by the participants, the painful experiences they had in the past led them to a hopeless state as they don't expect any change in their lives in the future. This hopeless state prevents them from even dreaming of their desires as, in the light of their previous experiences, they believe that they will not be able to succeed in their future attempts. To protect themselves from the feelings of disappointment, incapability, and powerlessness, they prefer not dreaming of the reaching the desired objects. Belk et al. (2003) interpret this situation as "muting the desire", however, this statement is open to discussion as desire is uncontrollable by its nature (Lacan 1977, Bouchet 2011). Therefore, it may not be possible for any individual to have such a control over her/his desires, like muting it when one faces disappointment and increase its intensity if it is more possible to attain. In that case, we may claim that the individual is not able to mute their desires, or control it in any other way, but it can be possible to redirect the desires onto new representations which are not necessarily commodities or objects. This discussion will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

In addition to all the discussions above regarding the effects of failure in reaching the desired, participants also state that reaching the desired object may also have severe consequences both on the individual and family level, depending on the sacrifices made in the way to attain it. For low income consumers, reaching the desired objects require them to create additional financial resources, as in most of the cases their income is barely enough for covering the basic necessities. In that case, as discussed earlier, they need to find extra jobs for working after the regular working hours to earn more money. Furthermore, as one of the most popular ways of creating additional financial resources, they take credits from the banks or use their credit cards which contribute to their financial problems. Working even harder to cover these expenses means that they are making sacrifices from their time, their relationships, or in some situations, even their physical and mental health as these financial burdens create emotional distress:

> *Rahmi (Participant 43): I get my salary and I give it totally to the banks. Credits…many people here are just like me, we are working for paying the credits we took. What can you do? You take credit, 5000-6000 TL, and you cover the debts of the credit cards. Then you start paying both for the credit and for the usual expenses like food etc. Then you start buying the things you desire with the credit card, again…I have 30.000 TL debts in total. I am getting closer and closer to my downfall. Each month, I use my whole salary to pay the debts. If you are not able to pay it, they start the legal process which means that your life is over! It is such a big burden on you, it creates distress…You know that one day you will be devastated financially, but you try to postpone it as much as you can. You don't know at which point it will happen, so it creates a huge stress on you. I know that someday I will…anyway, I try not to think about it.*

Unfortunately, the debt spiral is a common problem for the low income consumers and most of them are facing this problem in some part of their lives (Hamilton, 2009). Rahmi states that his salary is reserved for paying the debts;

therefore, they do their grocery shopping or other payments through their credit cards. Even though they are aware of the risks of using credit cards or taking credits, at some point, they use them for reaching the desired objects which worsen their situation further. As stated by a majority of the participants who are facing the problem of debt spiral, it is a major source of stress which affects both their emotional states and their relationships deeply. Rahmi states that one day he will face the inevitable financial downfall, and that day "his life will be over." Even though he states that he tries to not to think about it, the emotional distress he is facing can be understood clearly from his discourses. In addition to its effects on the personal level, the consequences of this problem on their relationships will be investigated in the next section.

As a summary, we may claim that the failure in the attempts to reach the desired object has severe consequences at the individual level, as the deprivation felt may result in negative feelings and experiences such as emotional distress, feelings of incapability, hopelessness, anger, shame, regret and powerlessness. The next discussion will focus on these consequences on a broader level, to shed light onto the effects of these attempts on the family and on the community they live in.

ii. Family & Communal Level

As stated previously, the attempts to reach the desired object may have severe effects on the family relationships of the low income consumers. The problems on the individual level, which were discussed in the previous section, are affecting the relationships of the individuals with their spouses, children, other family members

and friends deeply because of their effects on the psychologies of the people facing those problems. The data reveals that powerlessness, hopelessness, alienation, incapability and other feelings stemming mainly from lacking the required financial resources lead to negative outcomes in terms of personal relationships.

> *Şeyma (Participant 37): It causes a lot of problems and quarrels. I feel myself depressed if I am not able to buy something that my children desire. And of course, I reflect that depressed mood and we start having quarrels with my husband. Or, when I ask him to buy something, and he couldn't, I know that he feels bad, incapable. He usually tries to buy whatever we want. He struggles. But sometimes he cannot and that affects our relationship.*

> *Osman (Participant 34): What is the reason for getting married? I am witnessing the married people's situation. They have quarrels; they are fighting each and every day. I sometimes tell my married friends to go home and take care of their wives. But they say that there is no reason for going home as there is no peace but fighting all the time. They tell me they fight because of the problems of subsistence, because their wives think that they are not earning well enough for a decent living. One of them says that her wife is not satisfied even if he gave her 1000 TL. He says that it is not possible to make them satisfied. That's why I am afraid of getting married.*

As the participants discuss, the emotional distress caused by financial problems is one of the major sources of the controversies and quarrels between the parents. Feelings of powerlessness and incapability may have a deeper effect on men, as they still have the role of the bread-winner in the Turkish culture and not being able to provide their family with what they want can be regarded as humiliating. These feelings may lead to even more negative feelings such as anger or shame, and with the reactions they get from their wives or other family members, the relationships may get damaged because of the quarrels. In addition to lacking money which will cover the expenses of the family, some of the participants also claim that because of overtime working or hard working conditions, they also lack the time to

be devoted to the family members or the physical power to have some activities with them, which lead to further problems in their relationships:

> *Hasan (Participant 41): The children ask for branded products or many other things that you cannot afford. Then you start having arguments with your wife because of that stress. You keep silent, and it accumulates and accumulates and boom! It explodes, everything you keep inside spills out. In my social circle, there are many people getting divorced because of these quarrels. Man get married at an early age, he works and works for hours. He comes home and sees that her wife who is staying at home all the time didn't cook, she sleeps all day. Woman wants to have fun, excitement, going here and there. Then the quarrels begin. Everybody wants to hang around, have a nice time, dining out. But you have responsibilities, your budget is limited. For example, I wake up early in the morning and I work hard, get tired. And I fell asleep early. There is nothing I can do. I cannot satisfy her.*

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): I was working in a bakery and I worked there for 9 years. I quit 15-20 days ago, as I did not have any social life because of the job. I worked at nights; you start working as 12 am and stop at 5 pm, working for 17 hours! You cannot devote anything to your family. You don't have a social life. You have to think about these kinds of things as well. They need attention, care, we all need it. No matter if it's your wife or yourself. That's why I quit that job, as I cannot devote any time to my family…I lost my first wife because of this. I don't want to lose my second wife for the same reason.*

As can be derived from above quotations, some participants are working with the highest performance possible to be able to provide their families with their desires. However, as most of these participants are blue-collar workers who usually work for a minimum wage, they have to work overtime, or do extra jobs to ensure a better life. Yet, as Hasan and Mehmet states, this diminishes the time and attention they can give to their families which results in problems in their relationships. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, a majority of the female participants are complaining about the lack of attention from their husbands to themselves and to their children, which is another important reason of their arguments. Some of the male participants state that their minds are always busy with the financial problems

which prevent them from feeling happy even when they are with the beloved ones. Not having an active social life or time to spend with their families, or lacking even the will and/or physical power to deal with them creates further problems. Having this unrest inside the family affects its members, and especially women and children, who are in a more vulnerable state, deeply. Furthermore, the data reveals that poverty's effects on women can be more severe compared to men, as women are more vulnerable to different social pressures because of the gender roles coded in the roots of the culture. Being considered as the care-giver and the backbone of the family, they need to cope with different problems, which will be discussed in the next section.

a. Women's Struggle with Poverty and More

According to the data, women may be more prone to problems accompanied by poverty mainly due to the role of women in the Turkish culture. We can state that, starting from their childhood to each stage in their life cycle, women are disadvantaged as they have to face different problems which are specific to their gender and which are stemming from the cultural practices and point of views towards women. To mention about these problems briefly, we can state that they start facing these problems during their childhood as they are not allowed to get a proper education. As women are not considered to be bread-winners, many families are not thinking that they need to get a formal education and parents are not sending their daughters to school as they will be freed from the financial burden of the educational costs as well. They prefer them to work at home, helping their mothers or other

family members and waiting for a man to get married. Not having education limits their future roles to being care givers, as many of them are not able to find jobs because of not having a proper education. In addition, they become more vulnerable to having problems in their relationships because of the feelings of powerlessness stemming from lacking economic freedom.

Another important problem which is related to the traditions of the Turkish culture and family is marriage. Being a very important stage in their life cycle, the decisions regarding the marriage are usually given by woman's family especially in the families from Eastern Turkey, sometimes without even asking her thoughts. According to their traditions, women could get married to men who are approved and sometimes dictated by their families. Some participants state that they married men they don't love by force, which is be the focal source of problems they face in their families.

> *Bellez (Participant 58): I never had a life. We were in my hometown. One day, when I came back from milking the goats, I saw a sheep in front of the house. I asked my brother and he told me that it was mine (as a gift from the groom). This man, who is my husband, was very old, looking like my father. They told me that he had 4 children and his wife passed away. He was rich, and he wanted to get married with me. My brother accepted his offer. I told him that I didn't want to get married to him. I told him "Kill me and leave my body as trash, but don't give me to that man." He was at the age of my father. They beat me as I told them that I don't want to marry him. Then I got married, and he started beating me. Not only him, even his children who were older than me were beating me. I had so much pain during my life, you could not imagine. Now no one believes that I am 56. I look much older because of all my suffering.*

> *Nuriye (Participant 47): Do you really want to know what I desire? Well, I need to find love. Someone who loves me. I have never been loved. I loved, but could not get love in return. I got married to him by force. My family forced me, I couldn't love him, I just pretended as if I love him, that's all. My life will end like this, I know. I dye my hair, he doesn't even notice. I buy clothes, he*

doesn't notice. They forced me to get married, and this is the outcome. I desire love. I need to find love.

As stated before, some women are forced to get married with men and have unhappy marriages which sometimes create severe problems such as violence. However, most of these participants also state that they have to accept their situation and do nothing barely because they have neither their economic freedom to build their own lives, nor their families support. Bellez is one of these women. She is 56, but as she tells, she looks much older than her age most probably because of the problems she faced during all her life. Her family forced her; even beat her to get married to a rich, old stranger who eventually ends up being poor. Having faced all the problems associated with poverty and a bad marriage, she feels herself as if she had never lived. On the other hand, Nuriye's family forces her to get married to a man she didn't love, which caused her to name one thing when asked what she desires: love. Even though she got married without loving her husband, her discourses reveals that she desired to take his attention through dying her hair or buying new clothes, however, none of these attempts helped her to create interest in her husband. She desperately believes that her life will pass like this, without the love she desires

On the other hand, a great majority of the female participants also indicate that they ran away from their houses with their lovers to be able to get married to the man they love. Although this issue was discussed previously, it can be beneficial to state here that, women who left their families to get married with their lovers are usually not accepted or loved by their own families anymore as their behavior is

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considered to be shameful and unacceptable according to the society's norms. This is one of the most important reasons of their feelings of loneliness:

> *Hatice (Participant 8): I don't want to be rich. But if you are poor, it means that you are alone. No one is supporting you. Think about it, you left your family, came here with the man you love, you try to have new people as family but they alienate you. I cannot go to the doctor. No one is helping me. I have pain. I am a stranger here, I don't know this place. I will give birth to their son's child, but no one is helping. I don't know anybody here, my door is locked. I stay inside the house for weeks. Sometimes my husband comes from work late, around 1 AM. I get scared; I sit and cry, all alone.*

> *Aysel (Participant 18): He is hanging around here and there, but he doesn't take me out. He doesn't spend time with me. He has time for his friends, but not for me. I sometimes ask him whether he loves me or not. He says he does, but I am unfortunate. Anyone wants to go out with her husband, to a restaurant, eat something, walk around hand in hand. I am young, we are newly married. Maybe years after getting married, people may become bored. But I am young, I am just 21. I desire doing those things. He goes to the coffee house, play some games with his friends, he spends his time. Then he comes home and tells me to make the beds, and he sleeps. I get angry at him; I ask him why he doesn't spend any time with me, use the house as if it is a hotel. He plays with his son, and tells that he will wake up early. That's all we have.*

Hatice, who is just one of the many female participants having the same experiences, faces the consequences of her decision to get married to the man she loves. She states that, as she is poor, she was not accepted by her husband's family as well, which is the reason of her alienation. Even though she is pregnant, she could not get her own family's support. These feelings of loneliness are revealed by a majority of the female participants as they could not get support or attention from their husbands too. On the other hand, Aysel, who has her family's approval before the wedding complains about her husbands' disinterest which is the core reason of the problems they face in their relationships. Whether this disinterest stems from the problems her husband faces, or it is rooted in their cultural practices (not devoting

time to his wife but spending time with his friends), the outcome is unrest within the family which may deeply affect children's psychologies and behavior.

Furthermore, some of the female participants declared that they have problems mainly because of their husbands' bad habits such as drinking alcohol which can be interpreted as an escape from the problems they face in life. However, drinking alcohol makes their situation much worse both economically and also in terms of their relationships:

> *Nilgün (Participant 19): My husband is drinking alcohol. Therefore we cannot benefit from his salary. He gives me 5 TL daily, or sometimes he gives 10 and we make our living with that money for 2-3 days. He became worse after he started to work in this job. He drinks with his friends from work, and sometimes he brings home and drinks here. I even don't know how much money he ears. He has debts, he took credits from the bank and spent it on his own expenses…It's all because of his friends, the situation became much worse in this job. My father-in-law was helping us, but then he got fed up. He helped a few times but then he understood that there is no hope…We sometimes have quarrels with my husband in front of the kids. He tells me that I didn't show my love to him. And I told him that it is not possible to show love to a person who's drinking all the time. My son once told me that his father was drinking because of me! Can you believe that!?*

> *Muhlise (Participant 36): I feel exhausted because of my life conditions. My husband's neglecting me, dealing with him, with the social pressures. And if your husband is not working, that's like hell. I love him, that is the only reason I bear. If he had worked, maybe we could…But no, if he had worked, I am sure that we would have much worse problems because of his drinking problem. We cannot be happy as long as he drinks. If he had earned more money, he would have drunken a lot more. We would be unhappy because he would prefer to drink outside with his friends, and I would be waiting for him at home, devastated. He told me that he has been drinking since he was 13. At least, he is drinking at home now, so that I can control him. At least I can allocate some money for our expenses now.*

Nilgün and Muhlise are both suffering from their husbands' drinking problems which they could not stop or control. Nilgün states the importance of her husband's friends in his drinking habits. Some of the participants also state that they

don't want their husbands to have friends from the neighborhood as most of these people have bad habits and they are afraid that their husbands would adopt those habits as well. Drinking becomes a major source of problems in some of these families as it damages both the economic situation and their relationships within or outside the family. Considering that her husband would spend more on alcohol if he had earned more money, Muhlise even states that, for the sake of the family, it is better that he is not working. Most of the times, women tell that they are bearing these difficulties either because of loving their husbands and children, or because they don't have an income to build their own lives from the scratch.

> *Hale (Participant 16): I faced so many problems during my life, most of which are related with my husband. I loved him and we got married. Then he started drinking, hanging around with his friends in bars. I struggled for years just because of my children. I have never had happiness in my relationship. But for my children, I bear. Just to make sure that they have a good education, so that they will earn their own money and don't suffer like me. I am not divorcing because I don't want my children's psychologies and consequently, their education to get affected…You need to share something with your husband. You need to feel love and respect towards each other. My husband has neither. I suffered a lot. I have never reached what I desired in life, even if it is just love and respect.*

In most of the cases, poverty creates problems which affect the people's whole lives, starting from their childhood to death. Hale was born in Erzurum, a city located in Eastern Turkey. Because of both economical and cultural barriers, most of the girls born in Eastern Turkey could not get a proper education which eventually leads to unemployment. However, having their own economic freedom is of key importance especially for women in the Turkish culture, as it is the only way to struggle with the problems they face in life rather than trying to tolerate the problems they have with their husbands. In Hale's case, being aware of the reason behind her

dependence on her husband, she tries to face and manage the problems she faces in her relationship for the sake of her daughter's education. She knows that they need to have a good education for having their own income, so that they will not suffer from the same problems that their mother's had.   In addition to problems related with women's not working, another major source of problems is men's unemployment which deeply affects the family relationships:

> *Tülay (Participant 50): I am happy when he works. Otherwise I am not. If he is not working, he becomes quick tempered, careless. He lays down at home all the day, I work and come back home and serve him food, tea etc. It has been like this for many years. He works for 3 months, and then he quits and stays at home for 5 months. I work, earn money, and serve him food, everything…I spite of doing all these, I am not appreciated, the never thanks. His unemployment affects me, and my child deeply. Sometimes he goes to meet with some people for job opportunities. In the evening when I ask what happened, we usually have a fight. He tells me that I am humiliating him in front of the child. He tells me that his son is not respectful to him because of me. He is so quick tempered. Sometimes he says "enough" and leaves home. Or sometimes he slaps me in the face. My face becomes bruised. I have to work, people here ask what happened to my face and I feel ashamed. That's why I try to not to talk to him. He is so irresponsible. I wish my son won't be like him in the future.*

Tülay states that her husband gets bored of working and quits the jobs he found easily, leaving all the burden of making their living on her shoulders. He defines her husband as a reckless and quick tempered person, which may be related to his unemployment as it may create feelings such as powerlessness and incapability. Sometimes the problems become so severe that women even face violence from their husbands, which means that they have unhealthy relationships which most probably will affect their children's psychologies deeply.

In addition to all these discussions, there is one more point which needs to be emphasized in terms of the family relationships. Some of the participants points out

the dangers inherent in the low income neighborhood which may have negative effects on children. Especially if there is a lack of parental control, attention or support, children may become more open to these threats which may lead them to damage their lives and their futures through different types of misbehavior.

> *Salih (Participant 26): Well, they are not very successful in terms of education. They are escaping from school. The teachers call us and inform that Muharrem (his son) is escaping from school with his friends. They advise me to either warn him for being serious in his education or searching a job for him. He doesn't want to get education. It's because of the environment. Our neighborhood is not a good environment for a child. There are kids at the age of 12 or 13 and they are smoking. They use marihuana, heroin, things like that. Now my child started smoking. Because his friends are smoking. They are escaping from school; they walk around without any aim.*

As Salih states, there are some threats posed to children in the low income neighborhoods especially stemming from the need for affiliation and conformity. Due to lack of education, time or simply because of their struggles with poverty and being very busy with making a life, parents may not provide the children with the required attention, love or control. This may result in misbehavior and, as stated before, it may not be possible for the next generation to overcome the barriers of poverty because of lacking the required education or skills. Yusuf's story is one of the most interesting stories about the importance of the family on the future of a child in the low income context:

> *Yusuf (Participant 57): I left home when I was 13. I was going to school and working at the same time. I was working in a coffee house during the summer. For a couple of weeks, I went to a cinema and watched some movies with the money I earned. A few days later, my mom asked me about my weekly wage. I told her that I spent it. And she closed the door to my face! I left home and became one of those homeless people. Think about a child at the age of 13, sleeping outside. No parental love, no affection. I ate the things I found in garbage cans. I was scared to death. There was this little train inside Izmir Fair. I slept there for a while. I slept behind the theater building, in between*

the bushes so that no one could see me. Then after a month, I started feeling more secure, I found some homeless friends. We were going to Çankaya (a neighborhood in the city center), eating the leftovers of the restaurants. That's how I spent my childhood. Then I started to live with my brother. After a while, I started working in a bakery. You may know, they give you a place to stay there (as they wake up in the middle of the night and bake bread). And then I got married…and so on. I was addicted to alcohol. I spent a lot of money on it. I was very unhappy in my first marriage. As I told before, it is all about the woman. If there is unrest in the house with their wives, men run away. Some go and find another woman; others go to coffee houses and spend all day there. I was drinking. And I had these habits because of my previous life. I was addicted for a while but then, thanks God, I quit. It is very much related to your environment. It is appealing. Let's say that you hang out with some homeless people out there, you cannot give up going there. Drinking, the conversation going on there, these are appealing.

I have never lived my life, my childhood. I remember I was beaten, and fight to death. But thanks God, I was able to survive and build a life for myself. I hear about my old friends. One of them is selling drugs. One of them is in jail, he is a thief. Some got shot and died. We survived, just 3 of us. That life usually leads you to death. You use marihuana, drugs. If you enjoy using them, then there is no chance for you to survive. Thanks God, I didn't enjoy using them, I just got addicted to alcohol. And I quit thanks to my second wife. I respect mothers and fathers. But if you are not able to take care of a child, if you are not able to serve him some food, and more, don't give birth to that child! They say "I carried you inside me for 9 months." Don't, because that doesn't mean anything. I asked my mom, told her that "Did you ask me before giving birth to me? Did you promise me that you will give me a good life? You closed that door onto my face and made me a homeless. Do you have the right to create such a life for me?" If I had the chance to see this poverty, I would turn back to my mom's stomach. If you are giving birth to a child, you should be able to give him a good life. Otherwise, just don't do it.

Of course, Yusuf's discourses are reflecting an extreme experience. However, this does not necessarily mean that the consequences of living in poverty without the parental support will lead to less severe problems. Considering my experiences and participants' discourses, I may claim that the family relationships are of utmost importance in the efforts for poverty alleviation as these relationships are one of the main determinants of persistent poverty. Children who are raised in families with problematic relationships are more prone to misbehavior such as escaping from

school or adopting the bad habits they see in their environment because of their desires for conformity to peers' groups and the need for affiliation. These behaviors lead them to experience poverty related problems in their future as they may not be able to get a good education and find a good job for earning enough money for a decent living.

After providing insights on the individual and family level consequences of living with poverty, discussions will focus in the next section on the strategies developed by the low income consumers to cope with these consequences.

iii. Coping with the Consequences: Strategies for Protecting the Self and the Family

After presenting the consequences of living in poverty, I aim to present here the coping strategies that are developed by low income consumers to manage the felt deprivation. In the previous discussions regarding the coping strategies adopted by the poor, cognitive and emotional strategies such as detaching, distancing, fantasy, escape and resistance were discussed (Peñaloza 1995, Hamilton 2009). The data reveals that low income consumers may find many different ways to deal with the emotional distress and the felt deprivation, as well as the strategies they develop to reduce the level of the deprivation for their families and children. Some of these strategies which will be discussed below are hope, minimizing expectations, avoidance, learning and teaching about markets, justifications for not being rich, and hopes for escape.

Even though some of the participants reveal that they don't have hopes in reaching the desired, a majority claims that hope never dies and it is the driving force that keeps one alive. Sustainability of hopes and dreaming may provide the individual with a sense of powerfulness as they believe that not reaching their desires until now is not necessarily a failure and one needs to keep having those attempts as life is worse without their hopes:

> *Nilay (Participant 6): I really love Mini Cooper. But I can just dream of it. I keep on dreaming, you may hear me say all the time that if I had money, I would buy Mini Cooper, a red one. I have never given up dreaming. I always have hope. Otherwise it is not possible for a person to survive. I really believe that it is true.*

> *Ayla (Participant 29): You have hope as long as you breathe. I hope, I say "maybe one day". For example, they renovated the places in our neighborhood and they are building big apartments there. There are 2 of them, looking very nice. Their colors, design, they are identical and they look very nice. I was praying "God, give me an apartment from one of these buildings." Now it is completed and all apartments were bought by people. No space left for me. I pass through those buildings and I say "One day…" I hope so. One cannot survive without hope.*

As suggested by Ayla and Nilay, hope is a powerful feeling which resides inside regardless of the difficulties one faces in life. Ayla states that hope prevails as long as one is alive, which may also refer to the never ending cycle of desire. Not being able to reach the desired object does not diminish the desire, as long as there is hope for attaining it. Similarly, in the case of Nilay, her desire for having a Mini Coopers is not affected by the possibility of having it now. She believes that it is worth waiting for it. Thinking that one day they will have the chance to attain the desired may provide them a sense of relief from the stress of accepting the failure. However, in some cases, participants state that dreams of reaching the desired may harm them psychologically as not attaining and waiting for it can be painful.

Therefore, they claim that they are not dreaming of the desired, but they are minimizing their expectations and try to be satisfied with what they have. Some consumers even state that, being demanding is dangerous as there is no limit to desiring therefore one need to minimize expectations from life:

> *Kadri (Participant 33): I want a simple and modest life. You won't forget who you are in such kind of a life. You may reach these kinds of things (an expensive, big house) by time of course, but we have a long way to reach them considering our situation. But if I had lived in such a house, most probably it would have not been enough for me, or satisfy me. Because this is the human desire. Our desires are always in search for the utopia. After you reach something, you want more. We say "I have this shoe but I desire a white one. I have this car but I desire that one." For me, this little house is enough. Because I don't have a house.*

> *Yeliz (Participant 55): You need to be determined and hardworking. But hopes…you shouldn't desire a lot. You have to be satisfied with what you have. Our people don't know this. If you desire more, God gives you more. But one day he takes them all and you caught in the middle without anything. Just like me. I have never had such intense desires. I believe that desiring a lot is dangerous. One of my sister-in-laws was like that, she was saying "I want this, I want that, you cannot afford." Then they got divorced. Is it good? Well, I am ok like this; you need to control your expectations.*

Being aware of the nature of the never satisfying human desire, Kadri states that one needs to prefer a modest and simple life as there is no limit for the desires. On the other hand, Yeliz believes that desiring can be dangerous as it may be troublesome, therefore she tries to be satisfied with what she has. Even though they attempt to minimize their expectations as reaching the desire may not lead to satisfaction or happiness, in most of the cases, participants' such discourses are followed by their statements about their intense desires. In spite of claiming that they diminished, or muted their desires (Belk et al. 2003), or get used to the "not desiring" situation, a majority of the participants disproof themselves in their statements, leading us to the discussion on whether it is possible to mute the desire.

Selda (Participant 1): I don't desire anything. You start thinking within the limits of your budget. You get used to it. When I saw something on the show window, I just look at it and pass by. You desire having all those things but as you know that you cannot reach them, you are aware of your situation. It doesn't bother you. By time, your desires are diminished. As you know that you cannot buy them, your hope…your hopes dry up. Therefore I don't desire anything badly. You have a certain amount of money and there are expensed that you have to spend that money on…You need to make your living with that money till the end of month. Therefore your desires die down by time; you even start not desiring anything. You mute it by yourself as you are aware of your situation…Usually I get angry with them but I also like it, that prosperity, comfort and peace, maybe it is something that everybody should have. You want such kind of a life for yourself, for your partner, family. Or you want to get dressed well, you want to have jewelleries and wear them on…That way, you satisfy your needs, you believe that those clothes will look good on you, or just because you enjoy eating, wearing, travelling. Those kinds of things give you the love of life. You desire to live in a better neighborhood, have good furniture, and work in a better job. I want to live in Seferihisar (a county of Izmir), nearby the sea. Go and shop in a mall whenever I want. You see things there that would look good on you, beautiful, attractive clothes that make you look more beautiful. So you desire having them, buying them all. I would like to look beautiful and everything beautiful is there.

Although there are many participants who first state that they gave up dreaming or they muted their desires, Selda's quote is among the ones that very openly reveals the contradiction between what they say and what they really want. Even though she says that she muted her desire because of getting used to the disappointments in reaching the desired object and that she did not desire anything anymore, later she discloses the objectifications of desire very clearly. Therefore, we may argue that it is not possible for an individual to either have control over this powerful drive or mute it. In addition to that, it may not be possible for the individual to direct it onto more attainable alternatives as, in most of the cases, participants state that no matter what, the desire survives. As stated previously by Ayla, "you have hope as long as you breathe." Considering these cases, we may argue that regardless of the possibility of attaining the desires, the desire cannot be muted or controlled by

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the individual. However, it may be possible to redirect it onto different forms or objectifications, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Discussions about the issue of control raises the question about whether it can be possible for a person to acquire some knowledge which may lead them to have more control at least on their consumption behavior and its possible consequences. Considering that the low income consumers are facing many difficulties in their consumptionscapes, they need to acquire some knowledge about how to manage their budgets in a more efficient way which will lead to a guided consumption behavior. This knowledge, which is called marketplace literacy, can be helpful for them to reduce their vulnerability. In addition to marketplace literacy, some parents mentioned about the importance of providing their children with awareness about their financial situation and with the knowledge that it is not possible for them to reach whatever they desire.

> *Hayat (Participant 2): This awareness developed accordingly. When my children wanted something, I would surely buy it if I had money. But I also told them that sometimes I might not have any money and could not buy them the things they wanted. I told them that this is a fact that they need to accept. They need to know about poverty, they need to learn that that may not reach many things they want during their lives. After repeating these a few times, they came to understand the situation. They were telling me "Mom, I want this, but we will buy it whenever you have money, right?" You know some children cry and yell until they reach what they want. My children are not like that, they know how to stop themselves.*

Considering their financial situation and the possible experiences that these children might have in the near future, creating this awareness and knowledge can be very important in their psychological development. Knowing that they cannot reach whatever they desire because of some constraints may prevent them to get damaged

now and in the future, as well as preventing the development of possible consumer misbehavior habits. Parents are, in a way, protecting them from the future disappointments as well. However, this rational knowledge may not necessarily lead to having more control on their consumption behavior. To be able to provide both themselves and their children with a justification for not being able to reach the desired, some participants prefer to mention about the consequences of materialism and being rich. A surprisingly high number of participants claim that they don't want to have a lot of possessions and money, and they don't want to be rich as it will bring unhappiness to one's life. Some participant believe that it is not possible for anyone to earn a lot of money and become rich by working hard, therefore, they believe that rich people earn money through illegal or unethical ways.

> *Yusuf (Participant 57): I get mad! They have everything without doing anything. They are not working like us, and earn money through having difficulties. Businessmen usually don't make the insurance payments of the workers. They steal money from people; they buy properties with the money they earned through exploiting laborers. If you say "rich people", that's the first thing that comes to my mind. This is the reality. They steal from me, from you and from the government and then enjoy the money as they wish, just like a lord.*

As Yusuf states, many participants believe that the affluent lives are sinful as the money spent to reach that life is "dirty" as they earn it through exploiting other people. A majority of the participants state that they don't have negative feelings towards people who worked hard and reached that affluent life, but they are angry at the people who are inheritors and who do nothing to earn the money that they easily spend. In addition to criticizing rich people with earning a lot of money through illegal or unethical ways, some participants state that the negative consequences of

having that much of money is indeed a lot more than its positive consequences. They believe that as money will provide people with whatever they desire, they can become the slaves of their uncontrolled desires and have wicked lives:

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): I witness some of those luxury lives, I have some rich friends. Believe me; their lives are more terrible than mine. Why terrible? Yes, they have money. But as I said before, money is not everything. They have money but they spend it on heroin, cocaine, alcohol, libertinism, and sex, all of them. This is not a good life. I hope God gives me some money which will be barely enough for a decent life. I don't want much. Just to make my living. I hope he'll not give a lot, that much of money turn people on. People who have a lot of money are always directed towards having a life outside (outside home). We witnessed those kinds of incidents. Big city life is also wicked. Some of my rich friends are going to those bars. They met women there, they have relationships. But you are married, you have kids. They have fun and enjoy their lives, they spend the night outside, they don't go home. But their wives are waiting for them to come back home. This is not a life, do you understand? I don't want that much money.*

As many other participants also indicate, Mehmet claims that having a lot of money will trigger different desires and make people develop unfavorable habits such as cheating on their wives or ignoring their families. This emphasis on unethical romantic or sexual relationships which will be experienced in case of having a lot of money was given as an example by a majority of the participants. Therefore, we may infer that participants have an association between affluence and disclosure of desires in their minds. Whether these desires are objectified as commodities or as persons, there is a close relationship between being affluent and attaining the desired. Believing that earning more money and reaching an affluent life will make a person more vulnerable to her/his own desires, they state that they would prefer to have less money but have a more peaceful life. On the other hand, some participants also claim

that even though rich people are blessed with God's offerings, they don't know thanking to God, which is, for them, another reason for their unhappiness in life:

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): I don't want to be rich, no, never. Because God gave us this life, he said that "Man, I gave you this affluent life, now let me see how you live it." And he told the poor "I am giving you a poor life; let's see if you still thank me for what I give." Look at what all those rich people do. They eat and drink and enjoy life, but they don't even have the word "Thanks" in their language. God gave us poverty, but he also gave us şükür (being thankful).This is why he created us this way; we have the mission to teach being thankful to the rich people.*

For me, Nurcan's statement is very interesting as she believes that the mission she has in life is to show others the meaning of being thankful. According to her, the misery of the rich stems from their dissatisfaction. She believes that rich people do not know the value of the things that are given to them by God, which is the reason why they don't thank and can't find peace in their lives. This discussion is closely related to the religious beliefs of the participants as those beliefs affect their perspectives in a deep way, which will be investigated in a detailed way in the next chapter.

In addition to these justifications and strategies developed by low income consumers to cope with felt deprivation, another important strategy is to simply try to avoid the exposure to prevent the desires to be triggered by the consumer culture agents. A great majority claims that they prefer to stay away from the media of exposure to consumer culture, and specifically the places where they are exposed to commodities, such as shopping malls. Being exposed to the consumer culture agents may trigger their desire which eventually causes emotional distress and felt deprivation. This avoidance causes them to prefer spending their spare time inside

the neighborhood, or go to places outside the city, such as the seaside. Therefore, they may become alienated from the mainstream society; however, this alienation is planned and preferred by the alienated.

> *Tülay (Participant 50): When I go shopping, and see all those nice things around…I feel so bad because of not being able to buy it that I depressed. Then I swear that I'll never go shopping. I have some daily purchases; I should just go and buy them. If I go to the section where they sell clothes in the open bazaar, I feel disappointed. I get angry at myself, "Why did you go there, you should have bought the food and turned back!"*

> *Zehra (Participant 7): We don't have such habits (going outside the neighborhood). Let's say that you go to "Sevgi Yolu" in Bayraklı (Sevgi Yolu is a street full of little shops, usually selling clothes, shoes etc.).To go there, you need to have some money in your pocket, you cannot just walk around. You cannot stop yourself from buying stuff. You cannot even eat a sandwich if you don't have any money. Are you going to look at what others eat? Not going there, not seeing others is much better. If you don't see, you don't think about it. You know that they are there, but if you don't see, you don't feel the desire inside. If you go and cannot buy what you desire, you feel bad. So it's better not seeing those things, those lives. Look around, everybody stays at home here. But "the others" are going here and there, buying what they want. You better stay here. If you go to Bayraklı and see what they have…You want to eat, drink, wander around…you desire, and you cannot attain.*

Going outside the neighborhood means being exposed to stimuli which will trigger the desire and the triggered desire may cause them to suffer either they succeed or fail in their attempts to reach the desired. Going to shopping malls means that they will be exposed to many desire inducing, attractive objects and commodities but without being able to reach them. Consequently felt deprivation's effects will increase and cause them to develop negative feelings and/or behaviors. To avoid this, they prefer staying in the neighborhood and even at their houses, alienating themselves from the consumer society. However, this alienation is a kind of escape from the cruel reality; therefore it provides relief and peace.

On the other hand, another important form of escape which is frequently mentioned by the participants is the desires for going back to their hometown. A majority of the participants (who are mostly older than 30) state that they want to go back to their hometown to establish a new, self-sufficient life for themselves and their families. Having faced the bitter realities of poverty and migrating to a big city from their hometowns, and experiencing many disappointments in terms of realizing their dreams and hopes, they might have developed the feelings of incapability and powerlessness. In case the hope for attaining the desired objects or lives is diminished by time, they may want to escape from the big city which is the venue of stressful and disappointing experiences to the hometown where they may establish a brand new life in which they won't be dependent on any person or institution:

Hakan (Participant 24): Actually there is only one reason for me to live in this city: my children. I sometimes think about going back but there is no school or no job opportunities there. I live here for my children; otherwise I would go back even if I don't have a job. You can search and find peace and "rızk" (things needed for making one's living) in my hometown. There is peace there. I compare my previous life and my life here; I had a peaceful life in my hometown. It was very peaceful. Here you have to worry about your wage, electricity bills, water bills, money for this, money for that…But think about the life in my hometown, freed from all these burdens, constraints, a peaceful life…

Yavuz (Participant 27): I am thinking about going back to my hometown when I get retired. We have a little house there. We have a piece of land, a very small one but that will be enough for us to make our living. I like planting, I like animals. I was grown up in a village. You can grow your own crops, vegetables and fruits. You will be sure that they are healthy. You can produce cheese, butter. Even though you don't earn any money, you can make your living there. Land will give you whatever you need. That's such a life. When I get retired, I will have my retirement payments each month. You can buy and sell animals with that money. You can sell your products. I mean, you can earn money as well. We are not used to living in cities. It's been many years but I still don't like it here. I want to go back. I want to have a life freed from the burdens of the city.

Hakan and Yavuz state their desires for living in their hometown in order to be freed from the problems they face in the city such as the payments they need to make, or the jobs they have to work unwillingly. Belk et al. (2003) state that in developing countries, there is a desire towards a freer, modern and civilized life, fostering the will to join modernization and Westernization basically by material objects and through consumption, which will provide a transformation to a better and meaningful life. Contrary to their statement, some of the participants revealed their desires for escaping from the urban, Westernized way of living as they could not become a part of this "better and meaningful life". As that life requires material prosperity which they lack, they could not become a part of the desired lifestyle which may trigger the desire for escape. Furthermore, the participants emphasize their desires for having a self-sufficient life in which they can grow their own crops, produce and sell products such as cheese or butter, describing more or less a communal life where they are not just consumers, but also producers. That lifestyle may provide them with the freedom from the constraints they faced in the city, and consequently, with the power to manage their own lives. The motivation behind this desire may also be the desire to be freed from the feeling of powerlessness associated with being dependent on other people or institutions to make their living. As a summary, we may claim that this desire for going back to the hometown may not just stem from the desire to run away from the difficulties and felt deprivation they faced in the city, but also from their desires to build their own lives without being dependent on people or on institutions such as the market.

Considering these discussions, we may state that low income consumers are affected by the individual and family-communal level outcomes of the attempts for

reaching the desired intensely, which direct them to develop coping strategies that will help them to reduce the effects of the negative consequences. On the other hand, we also need to look at the bigger picture to be able to understand how the unattained objectifications of desire followed by these consequences affect their views towards the society, markets and, in general, the economic system.

iiii. Social Level

In this section, I want to evaluate the discourses of the participants in three groups. According to the data, the social level consequences of the objectifications of desire are usually discussed by the participants who are of higher education group and who have either a political or religious stance. These participants are more inclined to have a critical perspective towards the issue and they criticize the markets, marketers, capitalist system and the consumer society for directing the desires onto commodities that are out of their reach and consequently cause them to suffer. On the other hand, some participants state that not being able to be a part of the mainstream society is their mistake as they are not ambitious or hardworking enough to make enough money to reach their desires. Furthermore, there is a group of participants who neither blame the system, nor themselves as they believe that poverty is their fate.

a. Criticizing the System – "It's Their Mistake"

As stated above, a majority of the participants who think that their situation is associated with problems in the current market system are of higher education group (high school and middle school graduates). In addition to the education level, a very few number of participants who show their interests towards certain political ideologies are also among the participants who were inclined to criticize the system and its problems. Participants who think that their problems are mainly stemming from the dysfunction of the market economy and consumer culture mainly criticized the inequality in income distribution, the institutions of marketing and media, and the consumer culture.

> *Selda (Participant 1): There are people who cannot afford these things, we have constraints. Life is too hard. Not being able to buy your child's needs…I don't have a child now but I witness these problems in my environment. Lacking the required resources causes emulation. People who haven't yet developed a mature personality can prefer wrong ways because of that emulation. Or the children may become a source of misery when they blame their parents for not being able to buy what they want. In that case, the children may develop some misbehavior, can prefer different ways to reach their desires, however they see from their friends or the environment. I believe that advertisements also trigger these behaviors. You know, there is a big gap between people. There is a caste system which creates problems for people with lower income levels. Their lives are fragile, they are easily devastated, they may face the downfall. We hear about those kinds of things, and, to be honest, we get angry. This lack of required financial resources, the unequal income distribution limits us from everything.*

Selda explains that there is a big gap between different social classes which is an evidence for the income inequality. According to her, the class distinction is so clear that it is just like a caste system where social mobility is either limited or impossible. She also states that this income inequality caused by "the system" makes some people (low income people) more vulnerable to financial or social devastation

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or with her own words to "downfall". Her experiences and the situations she faced in her environment cause her to develop a feeling of anger towards the system and its cruel realities. Selda is one of the 3 participants who reveal her interest and belief in a certain political ideology, which is the leftist ideology in her case. She and her husband are active members of a workers' union and they are also working voluntarily for a leftist newspaper. Therefore, she was a prominent example for me to see the differences between people's interpretations of poverty who do have political ideologies and those who don't. The data suggests that having a political or religious ideology, or somehow thinking about the reasons of their situation critically affects the way they interpret poverty, the role of the system and society on their situation, and the consequences of poverty which affect their lives deeply. Having adopted a leftist political ideology, Selda tells that she is reading books and newspapers in the fields of her interest and she is very knowledgeable about different economic systems and their effects on the society and on different social classes. This knowledge she acquired provides her with the skills to think critically and she criticizes the capitalist market system in many different ways during her discourses. From my perspective, this knowledge is of key importance for them to get close to interpreting and understanding the reasons of poverty which surely will affect their reactions to the situation.

Another statement from Selda reveals that she has already thought deeply on the effects of the consumer culture and the marketing institution on people, on their identity formation processes and their relationships with their environments.

Selda (Participant 1): It's just like a competition, this consumption madness, and I really hate it. This culture brought by the system is very disturbing for us.

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This is cheaper, this is better, let's do this, let's buy that…everything is related to this. Everything pulls you to consumption. You are what you consume; they want us to believe in that. That's the model shaped by the system. But if you don't have the resources, then you cannot consume. Then you face the incapability, regret. You start asking "Why don't we have them, we are working too, we are human too, are we from another planet or do we live in another country?"…This consumption is crazy. It's very unbalanced. That's of course a part of the current system, people's inclination to consumption. Of course it should be more balanced. If we have to consume, then we should be able to consume equally. In some stores they sell dresses which's price is more than our monthly salary. This is the indicator of a deep imbalance. It's not good, this system is inadequate.

In her statement, Selda explains the effects of the consumer culture and the institution of marketing on low income consumers very clearly. Thanks to her knowledge about the topic, she has the ability to interpret the situation from a completely different perspective compared to other participants. She believes that "the system" provides people with the image of an ideal life in which consumption plays the focal role. Consequently, people who lack the resources are put into the situation of facing the problems of incapability, regret and alienation from the mainstream society as she states that she sometimes feels like they are from "another planet." In addition to Selda, other participants who are again of higher education and/or who had different life spheres and experiences which let them acquire different perspectives; also criticize the system in different ways. Some of these participants are criticizing the governments which permits the exploitation of labor by the subcontractor companies who are not making the insurance payments and don't provide the employees with their legal rights. They think that governments are also contributing to persistent poverty. In addition, a majority of these participants who have a critical stance towards issues related to poverty and its consequences criticize the media for creating emulation by advertisements and soap operas, and not

representing the reality as they underrepresent the poor who are indeed the majority

of the world population (Lichter et al. 1994).

> *Ela (Participant 48): Celebrities, singers, photos and videos of them, and on the other side there are homeless, poor people living under very hard life conditions. There are many people like them, but rather than showing their lives, the media prefers to show the affluent, rich lives without any problems. I believe that people need to draw a lesson from them. The rich people should see and understand how the poor live to find peace in their own lives. They should ask themselves "Why are we living this way, should we also help others?" You know, when someone rich dies, the media is there, broadcasting it for hours but when a poor guy dies in the street, no one is interested. He even won't have value more than a dog. This is terrible. Therefore I don't watch magazines and I don't like watching the news either.*

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): They are showing that Petek Dinçöz (a singer) bought a shoe for herself for 1000 Euros etc. But my shoe is 50 TL; it is Adidas but a fake one. I see many people who have emulation to those lives, but I see how they actually live as well. I got angry at the media and celebrities. Why am I getting angry? Because they arouse people. That singer is most probably earning billions per one concert. I am working for a whole month to earn 630 TL, minimum wage which means that I have to work for 10 years to get the money she earns by giving just one concert. So they are showing these people's live…Let's say that they showed some of the celebrities wearing an Adidas shoe for example. And that shoe's price becomes 300 TL. It's all because of these celebrities. By the way, you can come across with many people here who are wearing Adidas shoes. But they are all stolen goods. They are buying from people who stole them from stores. Go and find yourself a job. And don't buy those. Where is the logic in buying a shoe for 300 TL? They are arousing our people. It is dangerous especially for women. They become even more aroused. They are creating the emulation to live a rich, affluent life. Do you understand what I mean? As I said before, they start asking "She has N96 (a model of Nokia), why don't I?" It's all because of this emulation. They are triggering the desires of our people. And they start engaging in wrong behaviors. I am totally against it. I even thought about banning watching TV at home.*

Ela criticizes the media about underrepresenting the lives of the poor people

and prefer to show the rich, glamorous lives of the celebrities instead. For her, this is

revealing the value they attach to people according their social classes. She claims

that even the death of a poor person on the streets has no value for the media. She

also believes that if the poor is also represented on media, rich people may have the

chance to compare their lives to those with living in poverty which will increase the level of satisfaction they get from their own lives as well as creating the idea of making charity. On the other hand, as many other participants state, Mehmet criticizes the media, paparazzi shows, soap operas and advertisements for triggering the desires for commodities which may cause negative effects such as consumer misbehavior for people living in poverty. He also states that as they are exposed to the lives of the rich, they become thinking about consumption from their perspective, though the income gap between the two classes openly reveals that it can never be possible for a low income consumer to engage in such consumption behaviors.

In addition to these critics about the system, some of the participants blame the members of the society who are ignorant towards poverty related issues and income inequality. In addition, they blame the people who are giving too much credibility on objects and appearance rather than paying attention to people's personalities, as they believe that they are also contributing to the negative effects of the consumer culture. Furthermore, some of participants who think that income inequality is the source of their problems are blaming the rich people, and they are angry at them for being a part of this unjust system and contributing to its sustainability with their activities. On the other hand, some participants reveal that they are not angry with rich people who have become rich by their own efforts, but they don't like and approve people who are doing nothing but spending their families' resources to have an affluent life. These participants claim that they have respect in people who were able to achieve affluent lives through their own efforts. Not surprisingly, a majority of these participants state that they are blaming themselves or their families for being poor.

b. Criticizing Themselves – "It's My Mistake"

Contrary to participants' discourses discussed above, a few participants indicate that they blame themselves for not being capable of having an affluent life and reaching their desires. They state that they don't have feelings such as anger or envy as they believe that some (not all) rich people deserve to be rich due to their hard work and their poverty has nothing to do with their richness. They also declare that they don't like people who are rich by birth as they believe that this is the real injustice in the world. However, they blame themselves for their poverty as they believe that they haven't struggled enough to change their lives.

> *Fatma (Participant 4): I am not angry at those people at all. If they have money, they will surely go and buy whatever they want. What is the point of getting angry? The ones with the ability to earn money have good incomes which they spend easily. The ones like me earn what they deserve. I get up early in the morning and I struggle for my children. Why are you working this hard? I have a neighbor. They have 3 houses. They are working hard. If we had worked like them, we would have a house too. If my husband or son was working, I would buy anything I want and take it to my house. I am angry at my family, myself. I am telling them that if they had worked, we could have lived in a much better house.*

> *Nilay (Participant 6): I am not feeling disturbed. They worked hard and they achieved what they desired. The ones who struggle are able to reach a certain level. The only reason for us to live here is our mistakes. We are paying for our mistakes. There is a different lifestyle here. Let's say that one of my friends is escaping from school, but I try to get my education. Then she affects me and I also start doing the same things. This is what I did. Therefore I deserve living here. Those people are very ambitious, they are struggling. I have friends in Karşıyaka, they have good incomes. But they are still struggling to reach a better life. The people living here are not like them. 90% of the youth is not working. We deserve this life.*

Both Fatma and Nilay states that having an affluent life is related to hard work and ambition. Accept for the cases of the natural born rich, they don't mention about the inequalities and injustice inherent in the current economic system.

Therefore, they claim that they don't have negative feelings for people who are able to reach their desires as long as they put their efforts. On the other hand, they blame themselves for not being ambitious enough and not striving to reach their desires. According to these discourses, we may infer that compared to the case of blaming others, the self-blamers may have a more hopeful stance as they believe that hard work will pay and they can reach a better life through putting their efforts. This may create the feelings of hopefulness and powerfulness which have a close relationship with the cycle of desire. Consequently, these participants may be more open to making new attempts in reaching the desired and in making new objectifications in case of not attaining.

Contrary to this hopeful stance, some of the participants have completely different interpretations who are blaming neither the system, nor themselves but their fate for living in poverty.

c. No one to Blame – "It is Fate"

According to some of the participants who have strong religious beliefs, one's life is preordained and there is not much that they can do to change or improve it. Being rich or being poor is all related to what is written in their fate, therefore personal effort or hard work will not contribute to their life. They are not blaming themselves or others, or the inequalities in the system for their situation and they accept is as given.

Hale (Participant 16): As I am covered, I want to get dressed from Alvina, Medine or Saray (popular religious fashion brands). I would love to shop from

those brands' stores. But to be able to buy them I need a lot of money, and as I don't have it I just look at the shop windows and walk away. Or sometimes I go inside the stores, I look at the clothes and their prices and again, I walk away. Before this winter, I went to Alvina with one of my friends. She said that she would buy a tunic for herself; she asked if I would like to come too. We went to the store. She had her husband's credit card; she bought this and that and that. I just stared at her. And for a moment, I felt this anger inside for not having money. I looked at my clothes, and then at hers. Of course I felt bad for a moment, but then I told myself that this is her fate, to eat, to drink, to wear and travel. And my fate is not having them.

Pelin (Participant 15): You live whatever written in your fate. Sometimes my mom hurts me by saying that I ruined my life as I didn't want to get married to the rich men who wanted to marry me. One of my sisters got married to a poor guy. My mom says "Look at your sister's life; at least you should save yours." But I loved a poor guy, and I got married with him. Now I am living in poverty. My mom is mad at me. It is fate, you will face whatever written there. There is no point in saying you have control. This is true. Therefore, you need to thank God. No matter how fast you run, your fate will catch you. But if you be thankful to God whatever you experience, then God may help you, you never know it.

According to the discourses of Hale and Pelin, their poverty has nothing to do with their decisions or personal efforts for reaching a better life. Furthermore, Pelin claims that one's plans or personal efforts are totally useless as s/he will face the inevitable, which is the preordained life. Therefore, they believe that they need to show *tevekkül* (resigning oneself to one's faith), accepting their situation and still thanking God for what they have as this is the only way they can get God's blessing. Putting the blame on other forces which are out of their control may provide them with a sense of relief. In addition, it can be easier for them to manage the emotional distress they face because of not attaining the desired objects or lives as they believe that God will reward them for accepting whatever he gives and not rebelling against him. Therefore, the strength of religious beliefs and belief in fate is closely related and this belief can be considered as a coping strategy as it makes it easier for the low

income consumers to manage the felt-deprivation. In line with above discussions, we may infer that religion may have deep effects on the interpretations and reactions of the low income people regarding their situation. Furthermore, the intensity of the religious discussions in the participants' discourses also shows us that the impact of religion on their lives is deep and needs further and detailed elaborations. The next chapter will focus on the discussions about religion and its impacts on the lives of the low income consumers as well as its affects on redirecting the desire.

5.3.5. Summary

The Hopeful State - Efforts for Attaining the Desired

Being hopeful about attaining the desired object or the desired lifestyle directs people towards focusing their resources and efforts on the desired because of the expectation of a positive outcome. Most of the participants reveal that they cannot re-allocate their resources to save money for reaching the desired as they spend most of their disposable income on basic necessities such as food. The triggered desire directed towards commodities sometimes lead them to taking debt for consumption items which may not be considered as necessary for a decent living, such as branded products, clothing, cell phones or in some cases, even jewellery. As described by the participants, a major way for reaching the desired object is to use their credit cards even though they are aware of the negative consequences of using them. According to the participants' discourses, we may argue that both tangible and intangible assets can be sacrificed to reach the desired object. Some participants indicate that they sacrifice the functional assets in the name of reaching the objects

with symbolic meanings, while in other cases; they sacrifice the symbolic for the functional. In addition, some of the participants state that there are assets (both tangible and intangible assets) which cannot be sacrificed no matter what the situation is. Usually basic necessities such as food and the desires of the children are stated as the objects which cannot be substituted for or sacrificed in the name of other objects. On the other hand, some participants focus on intangible assets such as having fun from life, or peacefulness, which are the assets that cannot be sacrificed.

The Endless Cycle in the Discourses of the Participants

Some participants revealed that it is not necessary to sacrifice things for reaching the desired objects as it will lose its essence after attaining it. Surprisingly, they disclose that they are aware of the endless cycle of desire and impossibility of reaching a satisfaction through possessions. However, despite having known the impossibility of reaching a satisfaction through consumption, they state that this knowledge is not meaningful as it doesn't necessarily create a difference in their behaviors.

In the case of low income consumers, the longing and search for reaching the desired entails hope and a sense of power for struggling and working harder to overcome the obstacles in their ways to reaching the desired. Therefore, consumers may not feel themselves as powerless, victimized and hopeless which may encourage them in their journey towards the desired objects. These efforts, in a sense, keep the cyclical path on its way. However, it also entails the negative consequences such as the financial problems faced by many low income families because of the debt spiral,

or non-financial problems such as over working which, in some cases, lead to deterioration of family relationships, children's lacking parental interest and so on.

Hopelessness and Powerlessness: Not Attaining the Desired

Hopelessness about reaching the desired object and, in general, the possibility of change, may create negative feelings and thoughts about their current situation as well as their futures. Surprisingly, participants with higher education levels, backed by higher exposure levels to consumer culture agents are found to be more inclined to hopelessness even though they have higher chances for self-improvement. Participants' quotes reveal that hopelessness is related to previous disappointments in reaching the desire. Unattained objectifications lead to learned helplessness and this state is more than a mere inclination to being rational, but, as stated by the participants, it is also about being pessimist towards their future. Even though hopelessness about not being able to reach the desired seems to direct the individual to negative feelings such as pessimism or carelessness, the data reveals that in the case of low income consumers either state (being hopeful or hopeless about reaching the desired) may entail some negative consequences.

Consequences of the Attempts to Reach the Objectifications of Desire

Individual Level

In most of the cases, the participants reveal that the unattained objectifications of desire trigger feelings of anger which can be directed towards themselves, their families, or even, the society and the system (meaning capitalistic system). Furthermore, some participants state that even though they don't have any

hopes for attaining the desired, they become obsessed with some objects of desire if they got exposed to them which make them feel weak. Therefore, they prefer to avoid those objects and lives, as otherwise they are afraid of facing obsession and pain. Another situation which makes them feel even worse is not being able to make their children reach their desires. Feelings of incapability rises to the maximum level in those cases, which made them blame themselves for not being able to provide a good life to their children. Considering all these negative cases, the consumers usually state that they get used to these kinds of disappointing experiences and they are not hurting them after a while. Being related to the learned helplessness and hopelessness, they claim that they are becoming reckless day by day towards these experiences and they let themselves go with the flow. In addition, to protect themselves from the feelings of disappointment, incapability, and powerlessness, they prefer not dreaming of the reaching the desired objects.

Family & Communal Level

The data reveals that powerlessness, hopelessness, alienation, incapability and other feelings stemming mainly from lacking the required financial resources lead to negative outcomes in terms of personal relationships. Feelings of powerlessness and incapability may have a deeper effect on men, as they still have the role of the bread-winner in the Turkish culture and not being able to provide their family with what they want can be regarded as humiliating. These feelings may lead to even more negative feelings such as anger or shame. In addition, most of these have to work overtime, or do extra jobs to ensure a better life. This diminishes the time and attention they can give to their families which results in problems in their

relationships. Some of the participants state that their minds are always busy with the financial problems which prevent them from feeling happy even when they are with the beloved ones. Not having an active social life or time to spend with their families, or lacking even the will and/or physical power to deal with them creates further problems especially for children who are in a more vulnerable state.

Women's Struggle with Poverty and More

Starting from their childhood to each stage in their life cycle, women are disadvantaged as they have to face different problems which are specific to their gender and which are stemming from the cultural practices and point of views towards women. They start facing these problems during their childhood as they are not allowed to get a proper education. As women are not considered to be bread-winners, many families are not thinking that they need to get a formal education and parents are not sending their daughters to school as they will be freed from the financial burden of the educational costs as well. Not having education limits their future roles to being care givers, as many of them are not able to find jobs because of not having a proper education. In addition, they become more vulnerable to having problems in their relationships because of the feelings of powerlessness stemming from lacking economic freedom. In addition, according to their traditions, women could get married to men who are approved and sometimes dictated by their families. Participants also state that they have to accept their situation and do nothing barely because they have neither their economic freedom to build their own lives, nor their families support. Furthermore, some of the female participants declared that they have problems mainly because of their husbands' bad habits such as drinking alcohol

which makes their situation much worse both economically and also in terms of their relationships. Considering my experiences and participants' discourses, I may claim that the family relationships are of utmost importance in the efforts for poverty alleviation as these relationships are one of the main determinants of persistent poverty. Children who are raised in families with problematic relationships are more prone to misbehavior such as escaping from school or adopting the bad habits they see in their environment because of their desires for conformity to peers' groups and the need for affiliation. These behaviors lead them to experience poverty related problems in their future as they may not be able to get a good education and find a good job for earning enough money for a decent living.

Coping with the Consequences – The Strategies for Protecting the Self and the Family

Some of the coping strategies developed by the participants can be stated as hopefulness, minimizing expectations, avoidance, learning and teaching about markets, justifications for not being rich, and hopes for escape. Sustainability of hopes and dreaming may provide the individual with a sense of powerfulness as they believe that not reaching their desires until now is not necessarily a failure and one needs to keep having those attempts as life is worse without their hopes: Thinking that one day they will have the chance to attain the desired may provide them a sense of relief from the stress of accepting the failure. On the other hand, some participants state that dreams of reaching the desired may harm them psychologically as not attaining and waiting for it can be painful. Therefore, they claim that they are not dreaming of the desired, but they are minimizing their expectations and try to be

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satisfied with what they have. Even though they attempt to minimize their expectations as reaching the desire may not lead to satisfaction or happiness, in most of the cases, participants' such discourses are followed by their statements about their intense desires. In spite of claiming that they diminished, or muted their desires, or get used to the "not desiring" situation, a majority of the participants disproof themselves in their statements, leading us to the discussion on whether it is possible to mute the desire. In addition, some participants claim that marketplace literacy can be helpful for them to reduce their vulnerability. Some parents mentioned about the importance of providing their children with awareness about their financial situation and with the knowledge that it is not possible for them to reach whatever they desire. To be able to provide both themselves and their children with a justification for not being able to reach the desired, some participants prefer to mention about the consequences of materialism and being rich. A surprisingly high number of participants claim that they don't want to have a lot of possessions and money, and they don't want to be rich as it will bring unhappiness to one's life. They believe that as money will provide people with whatever they desire, they can become the slaves of their uncontrolled desires and have wicked lives. On the other hand, some participants also claim that even though rich people are blessed with God's offerings, they don't know thanking to God, which is, for them, another reason for their unhappiness in life.

Another important strategy is to simply try to avoid the exposure to prevent the desires to be triggered by the consumer culture agents. A great majority claims that they prefer to stay away from the media of exposure to consumer culture, and specifically the places where they are exposed to commodities, such as shopping

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malls. Therefore, they may become alienated from the mainstream society, however, this alienation is planned and preferred by the alienated. On the other hand, another important form of escape which is frequently mentioned by the participants is the desires for going back to their hometown. A majority of the participants (who are mostly older than 30) state that they want to go back to their hometown to establish a new, self-sufficient life for themselves and their families. Contrary to the idea that they may desire to be a part of the modern and Westernized world (Belk et al. 2003), some of the participants revealed their desires for escaping from that world which requires people to have material prosperity to be a part of it.

Social Level

Criticizing the System – It's their mistake

Participants who think that their problems are mainly stemming from the dysfunction of the market economy and consumer culture mainly criticized the inequality in income distribution, the institutions of marketing and media, and the consumer culture. Some participants state that the income inequality and injustice caused by "the system" makes some people (low income people) more vulnerable to financial or social devastation or with her own words to "downfall". Some of these participants are criticizing the governments which permits the exploitation of labor by the subcontractor companies who are not making the insurance payments and don't provide the employees with their legal rightsIn addition. Furthermore, a majority of these participants who have a critical stance towards issues related to poverty and its consequences criticize the media for creating emulation by advertisements and soap operas, and not representing the reality as they

underrepresent the poor who are indeed the majority of the world population. In addition to these critics about the system, some of the participants blame the members of the society who are ignorant towards poverty related issues and income inequality.

Criticizing Themselves – It's My Mistake

A few participants reveal that they are blaming themselves for not being capable of having an affluent life and reaching their desires. They state that they don't have feelings such as anger or envy as they believe that some (not all) rich people deserve to be rich due to their hard work and their poverty has nothing to do with their richness. They also declare that they don't like people who are rich by birth as they believe that this is the real injustice in the world. However, they blame themselves for their poverty as they believe that they haven't struggled enough to change their lives. Accept for the cases of the natural born rich, they don't mention about the inequalities and injustice inherent in the current economic system.

No one to Blame – It is Fate

According to some of the participants who have strong religious beliefs, one's life is preordained and there is not much that they can do to change or improve it. Being rich or being poor is all related to what is written in their fate, therefore personal effort or hard work will not contribute to their life. They are not blaming themselves or others, or the inequalities in the system for their situation and they accept is as given. Therefore, they believe that they need to show *tevekkül* (resigning oneself to one's faith), accepting their situation and still thanking God for what they have as this is the only way they can get God's blessing. Putting the blame on other

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forces which are out of their control may provide them with a sense of relief. In addition, it can be easier for them to manage the emotional distress they face because of not attaining the desired objects or lives as they believe that God will reward them for accepting whatever he gives and not rebelling against him.

5.4. Redirecting the Desire – Religion and the Market

Prior to data collection, the conceptual framework of this study was developed to cover the factors that may affect the objectifications of desire such as the consumer culture agents like media, peers, friends and family. In addition to that, religion was a concept in my mind to discuss briefly, yet it was not considered as the focal point of the discussions. However, the presence and importance of religion in the data was so strong that, it became an important topic of discussion during the interviews. Without being asked, a great majority of the participants started talking about religion, their religious beliefs and how these beliefs affect their ideas and feelings about materialism, consumption and desire. Therefore, in this chapter, I aim to discuss the effects of religion on low income consumers' desires and their consumption practices. However, most importantly, I aim to discuss how religion can turn into a strategy for coping, relief and control for low income consumers.

5.4.1. The Relationship between Desire and Religion

As discussed in the previous studies and the literature review chapter, religion has an important effect on our understanding of desire and how we interpret it (Belk

et al. 2003, Bouchet 2011). In addition, desire was mentioned in all religions to be the driving force of the human being which should be controlled for the social order. For example, in Christianity, desire was accepted to be an expression of evil and a diversion from God, and it was considered to be related with sin and uncontrollable instincts which may pose a threat to the individual and social control (Belk et al. 2000 & 2003, Bouchet 2011). Therefore, to prevent the desire drag a person to guilt, sin, and unwanted behaviors, religions suggest that this irrational drive ought to be rationalized and controlled. This requires the reconstruction of the expressions of the desire. Therefore, different religious discourses suggest the control of the desire for objects, people, commodities or any other material representations of it and redirecting it to non-material assets such as the love of God, prayer, worship, and most importantly, to the idea of the other world and heaven. Therefore, in a sense, religious discourse delays reaching the desire and promises people a better life full of possibilities for reaching their desires in the other world in exchange for their controlled lives in this world.

Considering the close relationship between religion and desire, we need to take a look at the Islamic perspective on desire in order to clarify the effects of Islam and religious discourse on Muslim people's understanding and interpretations of desire.

i. Desire in Islam

According to Islam, a person consists of the mind, the heart and "*nefs*". *Nefs* refers to a person's desires, and it is considered to be evil. The only exception for this

is the *nefs* of the prophets, which is considered to be "clean." *Nefs* is considered to be the enemy of the individual and of the society as it means diversion from and rebelling against God, therefore it is the servant of the Evil. The evil tries to persuade people to follow their *nefs* (desires) through showing them the pleasures they will get through following it. If the person does not obey the evil and refuses to follow her/his *nefs,* then the evil suggests them another pleasure which can be more appealing (this can be associated with the cyclical path of desire). *Nefs* makes a person follow the way to "the pleasures of the temporary world" and it makes people disobey the rules of the religion. In addition, it will never leave a person until the death therefore a good Muslim should learn how to protect herself/himself from this diabolic part of her/his existence. According to Islam, the ones who cannot control their *nefs* are incapable people. Therefore, the Islamic discourse suggests two ways for controlling it: one is empowering the mind through reading about religion, and the other is empowering the heart through obeying the rules of God. This is the only way for a person to control her/his *nefs*, which will ensure them to be rewarded with heaven in the other world.

In Islam, all material desires are considered to be a part of the *nefs*, therefore a good Muslim should stop herself/himself from chasing money and material objects of the temporary world. Materialism is sinful; therefore one should not search for more materials after satisfying their basic needs. The ones who become addicted to objects will become the servants of the evil. Their focus will be on the earthly pleasures and therefore, they will forget about the real life (which is the one they'll have in the other world). In addition, *nefs* directs people to misbehavior as it will just

search for ways to reaching the desired and pay no importance to whether those ways are ethical or not.

As discussed, Islam bans obeying *nefs* (desires) and consequently, it suggests people to stay away from the pleasures of this world which will direct them to different bodily desires. However, as stated previously, it is not possible for an individual to mute or suppress the desire as the desires are uncontrollable by its nature. Therefore, to make sure that people stay away from the pleasures of the temporary world, the desire needs to be reconstructed or redirected towards different non-material assets. As explained above, religion redirects the desire towards non-material things such as the love of God, but the most prominent example of this redirection is the other world and heaven where people who obey the rules of the religion are promised to be rewarded with whatever they lack in this world. This means that, "controlling" one's desires in this temporary world will be rewarded with reaching whatever one desires in the other world. The definitions of heaven in Kuran may give us a clear idea about what is promised in return for sacrificing the desired in this world (the words and numbers inside the brackets are referring to different parts of Kuran where these quotes are located):

> *God promises the eternal heaven to the people who believe in him and who obey his will. The gardens of heaven are all green (Kaf, 50/35). Rivers run through these green gardens (Rahman, 55/54). There are palaces and mansions (Ra'd, 13/35). There are trees, fruits, flowers with different colors in the gardens of these palaces (Tevbe, 9/72). In heaven, Muslims wear clothes made of silk, with pearl and golden ornaments (Rahman, 55/48), they sit on thrones (Hac, 22/23). They eat fruits from the trees with big shades (Kehf, 18/31). Servants serve them juice, fruit and bird's meat (İnsan, 76/14; Saffat 37/45-46; Vakı'a 56/17-21). But they know that reaching God's love is much worthy than these blessings (Tevbe, 9/72).*

Considering these descriptions of heaven, it can be argued that it is depicted as "the lost object of desire" and the place where one reaches the worldly pleasures (Jafari and Süerdem, 2012). Consequently, there is a contradiction between the two discourses as the things promised to be reached in heaven are actually the pleasure-inducing, material things which are banned to be desired in this life. On the one hand, religion suggests people to control their desires, and especially the desires towards objects and commodities. On the other hand, the reward for this control is said to be these material things as well. Wearing clothes made of silk, sitting on thrones and having servants may be considered to reflect materialist desires which are banned by the religious discourse as paying importance to these material things desired by *nefs* is sinful. In addition, these discourses are not inherent just in Islam, but also in other mainstream religions such as Christianity:

> *Heaven will have a beauty beyond our imagination. The best John could do to describe heaven was to say it was like an entire city of transparent gold. He says: The walls of the new city are precious jewels. The gates are twelve single pearls. The city itself and its streets are pure gold, yet like transparent glass. (Revelation 21:18, 19, 21)*

The descriptions of heaven in Christianity also mention about cities made of gold, jewels and pearls which also reflect a materialist perspective. Considering that heaven is made of the banned materialist desires, we may say that to reach the desired, one needs to give up desiring them in this world but maybe postpone her/his desires to the eternal life.

One may infer from these discourses that religion may have deep effects on people's interpretations and understandings of the desire. This relationship between the desire and religion will be investigated in detail through participants' discourses

in the forthcoming sections. In addition to these explanations, I believe that it would be beneficial to discuss here how the religion and religious discourses are spread and diffused in the low income neighborhoods, and specifically in the research context.

ii. Religious Networks and Diffusion

Even though detailed discussions will take place in the final chapter of the thesis, I want to present here a brief explanation about how religion is diffused and become so effective in the low income neighborhoods, which may shed light onto our understanding of their religious practices. Before getting into the field, I acquired information about the different religious orders (*tarikats*) and networks which aim the diffusion of Islam especially in the low income neighborhoods and suburbs of the big cities such as Izmir or Istanbul. However, the picture was different and more serious than I imagine, as these religious networks are playing a huge role on their beliefs, lives and practices. I had the chance to discuss these religious networks especially with 2 participants, Hakan and Osman, who told me about the educational institutions and houses which they call "the house" or "*dergah*" and which are owned by different *tarikats* (religious orders) where they get together each week and discuss religious issues, pray and worship.

> *Osman (Participant 34): Of course, I go to the "readings" (events organized for getting together once a week to read religious books, pray and worship). We read books; I go there during the week as well, to read the religious books. Once in a week they organize these readings. There are two "dergah"s. One is the dergah for the blessed leader in Konya; the other is the dergah of the one in Menzil. They have readings on Thursdays and Saturdays. They rent those houses (dergahs) and everybody contributes to the rent. I like those readings a lot. My mind becomes empty; my heart feels relieved after the readings. I learn my religion. We learn the life of our prophet Muhammed; we learn the rules of*

our God. When we get out of the house, we keep saying God's name all the time. That house is peaceful, it is quiet, it smells good. I usually go there every day. We get together with my friends, we talk. Sometimes we read books. We have the key of the dergah. They don't give it to everybody but the ones who ask for one can get a key.

In his discourses, Osman explains the functions of these *dergah*s in a detailed way and he states that in addition to their roles in his religious education, *dergahs* also helps him find peace in life. Although these houses are usually used for the gatherings which are called "the readings" (weekly meetings organized for reading Kuran and praying together), the youth of the neighborhood can also use the house as a library, or as a place to get together with their friends which lead to an increase in their interest in religion. A majority of the participants living in this neighborhood also state that they are participating in these meetings frequently. Even though it was not mentioned by the participants, I also learnt during the off-the-record talks that the people who are responsible for renting these houses and organizing these events in the neighborhoods are also responsible for taking care of the people in the neighborhood, dealing with their problems and helping them in case they need support. Osman's case can be taken as an example for the positive effects of these *dergahs* on the lives of the low income people:

Osman (Participant 34): During those times, I was not going to the dergah. I knew about it, but I was not caring about it. I was saying "you will become a dead body when you die, so what is the reason?" I was younger, and I was uneducated during those times. I was asking whether I'd spend all my time praying, whether I'd make charity if I earned some money. I was not caring about these things. I used to have very different friends. Some of them were using marihuana or cocaine. They were all evil. After I started to go to the dergah, I stopped seeing them. I started to devote my time to my family. My life is much better now. I have a simple and peaceful life now.

Investigating the issue from both perspectives, we need to take into consideration the positive sides of these religious networks as well. On the one hand, some participants claim that these networks make their lives easier through the solidarity between its members. On the other hand, especially younger participants reveal that thanks to these dergahs and events such as readings, they alienated themselves from the youth groups engaging in different misbehaviors which led them to have a more peaceful life. They start building themselves a new social environment which provides them with help, solidarity and social acceptance. In addition, Hakan revealed that these networks are not limited with the houses, as these tarikats (religious orders) also have their own institutions and education systems aimed at teaching the discourses of Islam and Kuran as well as teaching Arabic to be able to read it.

> *Hakan (Participant 24): Maybe you may find it weird but I don't want girls to get education. Maybe I can let them complete the elementary school education but I don't want any further education. Because I see and know about the context. I work in a train station. I see boys and girls at the age of 12 or 13, they are hand in hand, kissing, hugging...This is unacceptable for me. That's why I don't want my daughters or sisters to get education... For example, my sister became a teacher in a medrese after completing her education there. It is a boarding school, it has been 8 years and she completed her education now. Just girls can attend that school. I am so proud of her. She knows about science, she knows about Islam and Kuran. She knows Arabic so she can read the Kuran. She is very well educated. When I look around, I see many people who are dragged by their "nefs". But my sister says that for her, nothing is important. This world is not important. Sometimes we talk with her, she says "whatever I do is in the name of God, I hope I can deserve his blessing and nothing else is important for me." I am so proud to have such a well-educated sister.*

Hakan's sister (who is 18 years old) is going to a school which they call medrese, where she gets not a formal education, but a kind of religious education.

Before talking to Hakan, I haven't even heard of the existence of such schools, as medrese was a type of educational institution in the times of the Ottoman Empire which provides both religious and scientific education to the students and which no longer exists. Although there are no such kind of schools in the modern Turkish education system, during my interviews I learnt that these schools are a part of the underground religious networks which are structured after 1980's through certain political forces to spread the fundamentalist religious movements. Having a religious education and even becoming a "teacher" in the medrese, Hakan's sister devotes herself totally to God and she sacrifices all her materialist desires. This sacrifice may provide the low income consumers with a sense of relief and happiness considering that they are not able to reach these materialist desires due to their poverty. Therefore, having a justification for not being able to consume, or possess material things may be a way to reach the peacefulness they seek in their tough lives.

Taking into consideration the diffusion of religion in the low income neighborhoods through these wide networks, it can be easier for us to understand the effects of religion on the lives and practices of low income consumers. The data clearly reveals the relationships between religion and participants' objectifications of desire as well as their interpretations of poverty, materialism, consumption and markets. The effects of these interpretations will be discussed on the individual and social level in the next section.

5.4.2. Religious Practices and Their Consequences on Individual and Social Level

After providing brief explanations regarding the relationship between desire and religion and the importance of religion on their lives, I want to present here the ideas and practices of low income consumers shaped under the effects of the religious discourse. As discussed above, a majority of the participants who have strong religious believes think that materialism and consuming more than "the basic necessities" is sinful, as waste is considered to be a sin.

> *Hakan (Participant 24): Materialism is a part of the human nature. This love for objects, dreaming about being rich...But of course, people who follow the way of God are not paying that much importance to objects. Let me give an example from my life. I don't pay attention to objects, commodities. I don't have any desire for being rich etc. I just want to have my faith, and deserve the blessing of God before I die. That's all I want....When I look around, I see many people who are dragged by their "nefs". You need to control it.*

> *Osman (Participant 34): Being poor is the best. You need to have just enough amounts of things to survive, to make your living. The rest is unnecessary. That's how I think. On the other hand, when I think from the religious perspective, how could you give the explanation of having that much of wealth to God? You cannot explain it. Let's say that I earn 10.000 TL. Out of that ten thousand, one thousand is enough for you to make a living. God lets you find that job because he wants that money to be spent on something. But when you earn it, it becomes difficult to give it away because money is sweet. You start saying "rather than sharing it, I should keep it and enjoy it." Now, this is sinful. You start going out at nights, drinking at bars. Enjoying that money with women. Here, as you see, it is sinful.*

According to the participants, giving too much importance on money and materialism is sinful as it leads you to greed and misbehavior. Hakan explains that controlling one's desires for materialism is of key importance to reach the blessing of God. Similarly, Osman states that one's possessions are not actually belong to that person but they belong to God. Therefore, rather than keeping them for themselves, people need to share it with others so that they can deserve God's blessing. Osman

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further reveals that keeping all the money you earn for yourself will make you turn into a sinful person as that money will be spent on hedonism and on reaching the desires, which are all sinful. On the other hand, all these explanations and statements against materialism may also provide them with a sense of relief as these statements can be considered as justifications for their poverty.

Another important point to be emphasized here is that, a majority of the participants with strong religious beliefs claim that what they experience in this life is an examination for them to prove that they are good people. Consequently, their good behaviors will be rewarded with God's blessing and heaven where they will live a prosperous and happy life eternally. Therefore, according to them, this world is temporary and their experiences here are unimportant. They may suffer in this life because of not being able to reach their desires, lacking both material and nonmaterial assets to have a happy life. However, they believe that "the real life" is the afterlife which will provide them everything that they lack here.

> *Hakan (Participant 24): This life is temporary. As it is temporary, you need to think about the afterlife and be faithful. I don't give importance to this world. This world is temporary for me; it is just a little part of our whole life. But after death, you have an eternal life beyond; I am talking about our lives in the other world. The afterlife is eternal, so how can you sacrifice the eternal life for the sake of living good in this temporary life? As an average, you have 60 years here to live. 60 years is a short time when you think about eternity. So what is the reason of sacrificing a good eternal life for these 60 years? God will bring you to account, and ask for your explanations for doing so. Only God knows who deserves heaven and who deserves hell.*

> *Mehmet (Participant 14): We all emulate, don't we? And we all have a level (meaning income level). Won't I want to live in Karşıyaka Kuğulu (a rich neighborhood in Izmir)? The price of a single house in those apartment buildings is one billion TL. Won't I want to have such a life in the most luxury place? Of course I will. Why am I living in a place like Gürçeşme or Bayraklı, the suburbs? Some live in those luxury places, but no one knows how! Do they*

live in "halal" or "haram", who knows? Some live a good life in this world, and some in the afterlife. This world, my sister, is an exam for everyone.

As stated by Hakan and Mehmet, they believe that this world is temporary, therefore people should not focus on the life they have here as it will last for a very short time compared to the life they will have in the afterlife, which is eternal. Hakan declares that living according to your desires and trying to get pleasure from this life is senseless as, in that case, you will waste your chance to live in heaven in the eternal life. Therefore, he believes that one needs to be rational, and should not sacrifice the happiness in eternal life for the sake of living good in this temporary life. Similarly, Mehmet states that the ones who are having a good life here are most probably living it through "*haram*", and as they disobey the rules of God, they will not be rewarded in the eternal life. As this life is an exam, people are suggested to live according to the rules of God to get his blessing and reach the "good life" (heaven) that they are not able to reach in this life. These statements can be considered as good justifications for the suppressed desire (suppressed not because of their own will but mostly because of their inability to reach). Given this justification, they may feel themselves relieved and peaceful as they believe that they don't give up, but just postpone all their desires and dreams to come true in the afterlife. Consequently, one should accept the given in this life as it is a part of the exam. Most of the participants believe that the life conditions they have is the exam itself, and God is trying to understand whether they will rebel against him or not when they face difficulties in their lives. Considering the severity of their conditions, rebellion is possible. However, since they believe that rebelling against God and one's fate is sinful and they have to show *tevekkül* (resigning oneself to one's faith), accepting

their situation and still thanking God for what they have. This is the only way they can get God's blessing.

> *Nurcan (Participant 5): I don't want to be rich, no, never. Because God gave us this life, he said that "Man, I gave you this affluent life, now let me see how you live it." And he told the poor "I am giving you a poor life; let's see if you still thank me for what I give." Look at what all those rich people do. They eat and drink and enjoy life, but they don't even have the word "Thanks" in their language. God gave us poverty, but he also gave us şükür (being thankful).This is why he created us this way; we have the mission to teach being thankful to the rich people.*

> *Hale (Participant 16): I mean, I thank God whatever happens my dear. Don't we face problems, difficulties, of course we do, a lot…But everyone is facing difficulties. Go and ask a rich family and you will get the same answer. I have this problem and that problem…I go to a house for cleaning. The ladies tell me their problems and cry. They have jobs, money, but they cry a lot while I don't. Actually I am the one who should cry right? But I am not, because I thank God for what I have. Taking them into account, I thank God all the time. The most important thing in life is being healthy. The rest is unimportant and it is useless to cry. If you cry for lacking something this means rebellion and God takes back even the things that you have. You need to thank God for whatever you have. Thank God for not being dependant on anyone for making a living.*

Nurcan and Hale believe that no matter what they face in life, they need to be thankful to God in order to make sure that they get his blessing. Interestingly, both of the participants state that wealthy people are not thanking God and they cry and rebel for what they lack, which is the reason of them to have restless lives and lose even the things they have. They believe that the ones who rebel will be the ones who fail the exam and they will be punished with losing what they have in this life as well as being punished with hell in the afterlife. Therefore, as discussed before, resignation, accepting their fate and not rebelling when they face difficulties is the hard part and it is the exam itself which will carry them to either heaven or hell. The ones who are able to thank God whatever they face, will be the ones to be blessed by God.

Consequently, thanking God may also have a deeper meaning for the search for relief.

Being related to this search for relief, one of the most important religious practices inherent in the low income people's lives is charity. Surprisingly, participants state that they want to make charity for vulnerable people as soon as they find have some disposable income. Considering that most of these participants are earning barely enough for making their living, I was not expecting to get this answer when I asked them to dream about the things they would do if they unexpectedly earn some money. Some of them declared charity as the first thing to be done in such a case, while others state they would first spend on their needs and then they would help the vulnerable.

Banu (Participant 9): If I had a rich life, I would help the vulnerable people. For example, we buy lottery tickets in the New Year. I tell my husband that if we won, we should help other people, old people in nursing homes. This is what I want most, to help those nursing homes. To go there and visit old people, to make them happy...Now we need to give "fitre" (alms required to be given to the poor at the end of Ramadan). If we calculate it as 10 TL per person, it makes 30. Let's say that we put an extra 20 on top of that. I want to send that money to people in Somali. I want that a lot. I wish we had more money and we could send more. I sometimes cry while watching the news, I feel sorry for those children. I hope God won't give such a life even to my enemies.

Osman (Participant 34): I would buy a house for myself in this neighborhood. And maybe I would open a little place for myself to make my living. I would spend all the rest on helping the poor. There are many homeless people; they don't even have a piece of bread to eat. Seeing them, I thank God for my life. We have a house, a shelter. We can eat a hot meal. But those people are staying out, under the rain. They sleep outside during winter in that cold weather. Some even cannot find a piece of old bread.

Nurcan (Participant 5): I cannot fast because my blood pressure is very low. It makes me feels like I will faint. They will criticize me for not fastening, I know. They say that I need to donate some money for each day I couldn't fast. They say that is should be at least 300 TL. How can I give that much of money? I asked the hodja (a person teaching Kuran and religious doctrines to people)

and he told me that I could buy pasta, salt etc. and give someone who needs food. I thought that it is ok, I will buy some food and give it to a poor person. There are people whose life conditions are even worse than me. I say "şükür" when I see them. I'll do it at the end of Ramadan.

Making charity and giving alms to people in need is an important practice in Islam. Therefore, many participants reveal that they want to make charity and help "the vulnerable" as much as they can even though they barely have the resources to make their own living. In addition to the feeling of fulfilling their religious responsibilities, charity may also be considered as a way to remind them that there are people living in much worse life conditions compared to their lives. This may lead them to the idea that they need to be thankful for their situation. Furthermore, it may also lead to a feeling of relief and may increase the satisfaction they get from their lives.

In addition to these religious practices, another important practice which affects people's (especially women's) lives and which has been a topic of interest in the socio-political domain in Turkey for the past 20 years is the issue of *hijab* and the Islamic dress code. In accordance with their strong religious beliefs, some of the participants are wearing Hijab and dressing according to the Islamic dress code, however, in some cases, this practice cause them to be in a dilemma between their desires and the rules of Islam. Especially younger participants are hesitating between applying the dress code and getting dressed according to their desires. They reveal that comparing themselves with other women, they feel themselves less attractive with Hijab and they want to get dressed in a way that makes them look more beautiful and attractive. However, getting dressed the way they want and putting on

makeup is thought to induce sexual desires in men, therefore these practices are banned by Islam. On the other hand, as the low income neighborhoods can be described as conservative neighborhoods because of most of the residents' strong religious beliefs, social pressure on women to apply the rules of Islamic dress code can be considered as an important motive behind their adoption of this practice. Furthermore, considering the research context, these practices usually have no political meanings behind, therefore, rather than taking Hijab as a symbol of political Islam, it should be considered as a cultural and religious practice.

Nurcan (Participant 5): It has been one month since I started wearing Hijab. My husband wants me to do so. I was not covering my head; I was wearing t-shirts and pants as well. My husband told me a lot of times that I need to get dressed accordingly. I am also going to "the readings", you know, women get together and read Kuran. We went there, one of closest friends – she is also covered – gave me a headscarf. I covered my head and they said that it looks very good. Then my husband started to force me for getting covered. They even talked to my father. I told them I just uncovered my head, it is not a game, you cover, and then uncover. I had worn Hijab for 4 years. But you see other people, women, wearing leggings etc. I like wearing those kinds of clothes, they look good on you. But sometimes I like getting dressed according to the religion, getting covered…You wear long coats; you wear shoes and take a bag with the same color so that they match. Maybe you have seen that, it looks good as well. When I am not covered, I wear pants, t-shirts, my hair looks nice. I usually put on makeup as well. I use mascara and eye shadows. I do it even when I wear Hijab. I know that it is a sin, but as we are young, we desire those things. Usually if you pray, you cannot use makeup.

Pelin (Participant 15): After getting married, suddenly I had this feeling inside me. I told my husband that I want to get covered if he accepts. He says that I shouldn't get covered because he wants, but I should get covered with my own will. Now I am praying, learning prayers. I am newly married. People around me are asking why I get covered rather than enjoying it. I told them that I desired to do so. I am living in Buca and all the people living there is very religious. They told me that even if one strand of my hair is open, it is just like adultery. And I thought about it, am I being sinful because of not covering my head? It has been 2 weeks that I started wearing Hijab. I am wearing a long coat.

Nurcan and Pelin reveal that a conservative neighborhood and environment may become a pressure on them to engage in religious practices. Both in the cases of Nurcan and Pelin, they are advised to cover their heads with Hijab as keeping it open means that they are sinful. Some participants state that their husbands and/or families also forced them to get covered, while one of the participants told her experience about getting covered at the age of 7, even before puberty. In addition to the social pressure aspect, the decision of getting covered or not also reveals a deep tension between desire and religion. As stated by Nurcan, she has the desire to look beautiful and attractive through opening her hair, wearing good looking clothes as other women do and putting on makeup which is considered to be sinful as it is thought to draw the male gaze. This creates a tension between her desires and her religious beliefs. Since she cannot decide on what to do, she gets covered and uncovered frequently, trying to find a way to manage this tension. On the other hand, she states that she puts on makeup even when she wears hijab, which can be considered as a transformation of the strict Islamic codes and rules for the purposes of beautification and aesthetics (Sandıkçı and Ger, 2005).

After examining the effects of religion on low income people's experiences and interpretations of desire, I aim to present here the discussions about its broader effects on markets and on society. In the previous section, I mentioned that it may not be possible to suppress or mute the desire, but it can be possible to redirect it. In the case of low income consumers, it is not possible to say that the desire will be directed onto another commodity in case of a failure, as it is obvious that this new attempt will bring the same results. Therefore, rather than searching for a more attainable object, it can be possible to redirect the desire onto non-material things

such as religion, love of God, prayer and the heaven. If this is possible, then redirecting the desire onto non-material assets may lead to a diversion and may create an alternative for the current market system as people will no longer desire objects, or commodities. This can be interpreted as a form of consumer resistance (Penaloza and Price 1993) as people will willfully withdraw themselves from having materialist desires for the sake of their religion and they may stop searching for satisfaction through market's offerings.

This point of view leads us back to the question of whether the religion is an alternative or an extension of the market (Belk et al., 2003). Here, I want to touch on two main points which I will back by the participants' quotes, while the main arguments will take place in the discussion chapter. In order to find answers for this inquiry, we should first look at how religion actually affects the consumption practices of low income people, and whether it causes the outcomes that are discussed above.

Contrary to the statements that religion can be an alternative for redirection of desire, the data suggests that religion itself can be a domain for consumption. Rather than having a tension between Islam and consumerism, "some" of the participants reveal that just as the religious people with high incomes, they are also engaging in religious consumption activities such as the desire for luxury religious fashion. In addition, religious practices may turn into industries such as the Hajj tourism sector. Even charity may become a medium for competition as donating the highest amount of money may mean for some that you are a better Muslim. Even though the religious beliefs are not commodities, religious practices can sometimes be turned

into domains of the market, of religious commercialism (Sandıkçı and Ger 2001, Ger 2005). Therefore, the redirected desires may also turn into new commodifications which again contribute to the market system rather than being an alternative for it.

Mehmet (Participant 14): Do you know what I will do if I have a lot of money? I will either open a place to give Kuran courses, or I will build a mosque. That's what I ask from God. I hope that he will let me make my dream come to one day. I told my wife that I am going to save money, and I believe that I will save as much money as I can to make it possible. I will have it done in my village. I pray for this every night before going to sleep. Please God, let me achieve this. Do you know why? Because millions of people will pray there; and they will pray for you. Sevap (rewards of doing a good thing) they get by praying will be yours. Your name will be mentioned as the big donator. They will go to secde (putting one's forehead on the ground during the prayer) for you. You know, mosques are God's houses.

Hale (Participant 16): As I am covered, I want to get dressed from Alvina, Medine or Saray (popular religious fashion brands). I would love to shop from those brands' stores. But to be able to buy them I need a lot of money, and as I don't have it I just look at the shop windows and walk away. Or sometimes I go inside the stores, I look at the clothes and their prices and again, I walk away. Before this winter, I went to Alvina with one of my friends. She said that she would buy a tunic for herself; she asked if I would like to come too. We went to the store. She had her husband's credit card; she bought this and that and that. I just stared at her. And for a moment, I felt this anger inside for not having money. I looked at my clothes, and then at hers. Of course I felt bad for a moment, but then I told myself that this is her fate, to eat, to drink, to wear and travel. And my fate is not having them. Thanks God, I like my being contented. But I felt bad that day. The lady in the store asked me whether I need anything. I whispered to myself, "of course I need them, I need them badly", but I told her that I need nothing. That day, I felt the pain of emulating and not being able to shop as she did.

Mehmet tries to save as much as he can from his limited income in order to be able to make a mosque built in his village. He claims that he aims to deserve God's blessing through doing so. However, later in his statement, he mentions about his desire to make his name known as the "big donator." The charity itself has become a market-like domain as the one with the highest amount of money will be appreciated accordingly. On the other hand, as discussed in the previous literature

(Delener 1994, Sandıkçı and Ger 2001), another religious practice, namely the religious dressing code, has turned into a new market domain. As stated by Hale, religious fashion brands are not only popular among urban, upper-class covered women anymore but are also desire inducing for low income people who lack the resources to attain them. Just like other commodities, the materials used for religious practices are turned into objects of desire through the fashion system. These brands create emulation and trigger the desire not for the religious practice, but for the object that symbolizes it. Therefore, even though the low income consumer tries to find relief in religion through its discourses against materialism, religious commercialism appear on the stage as a counterforce, turning the redirected desire back onto commodities.

Even though above discussions are focusing on the commodification of the re-directed desire, it is not possible to say that this is the dominant case. Another important point to be emphasized is that religion sustains its power as a way to redirect the desire from objects and commodities onto non-materialist assets, especially in the low income context. A majority of the participants have neither the resources nor the hope to be a part of this religious commercialism. The hope for attaining the materialist desires (the desire for commodities) is already constrained by the market system as they lack the resources to reach the desired objects. As discussed before, in this case religion can be considered as an alternative way to redirect the desire onto non-materialistic things as it suggests people control their materialist desires for being blessed by God. This may provide them with a justification for the constraints put by the market system, which are limiting their ability to reach the materialist desires. In that case, they may think that they are

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alienated from the consumer society and the market not because of their incapability, but with their own will in order to obey the religious rules, to be a good person and to deserve God's blessing. This may also provide them with a sense of relief, reducing the felt-deprivation caused by the feelings of incapability and powerlessness, just like resignation to fate. Furthermore, this psychological relief may prevent them from asking questions about their poverty, the system, unequal income distribution, and so on, diminishing the possibility of the poor to rebel against or to resist the system.

Thinking about two different aspects of the issue (religious commercialism and resistance), further discussions on poverty, religion, markets, power and governance will be revealed in the discussions chapter.

5.4.3. Summary

Prior to data collection, religion was a concept I considered discussing briefly, yet not as the focal point of the discussions. However, the presence and importance of religion in the data was so strong that, it became an important topic of discussion during the interviews. Without being asked, a great majority of the participants started talking about religion, their religious beliefs and how these beliefs affect their ideas and feelings about materialism, consumption and desire.

The Relationship between Desire and Religion

Religion has an important effect on our understanding of desire and how we interpret it. Desire was mentioned in all religions to be the driving force of the human being which should be controlled for the social order. Desire was accepted to

be an expression of evil and a diversion from God, and it was considered to be related with sin and uncontrollable instincts which may pose a threat to the individual and social control. Therefore, to prevent the desire drag a person to guilt, sin, and unwanted behaviors, religions suggest that this irrational drive ought to be rationalized and controlled. This requires the *reconstruction of the expressions of the desire*. Therefore, different religious discourses suggest the control of the desire for objects, people, commodities or any other material representations of it and redirecting it to non-material assets such as the love of God, prayer, worship, and most importantly, to the idea of the other world and heaven.

Desire in Islam

In Islam, all material desires are considered to be a part of the *nefs*, therefore a good Muslim should stop herself/himself from chasing money and material objects of the temporary world. Materialism is sinful; therefore one should not search for more materials after satisfying their basic needs. The ones who become addicted to objects will become the servants of the evil. Their focus will be on the earthly pleasures and therefore, they will forget about the real life (which is the one they'll have in the other world). In addition, *nefs* directs people to misbehavior as it will just search for ways to reaching the desired and pay no importance to whether that way is ethical or not.

Islam bans obeying nefs (desires) and consequently, it suggests people to stay away from the pleasures of this world which will direct them to different bodily desires. However, as stated previously, it is not possible for an individual to mute or suppress the desire as the desires are uncontrollable by its nature. Therefore, to make

sure that people stay away from the pleasures of the temporary world, the desire needs to be reconstructed or redirected towards different non-material assets. Religion redirects the desire towards non-material things such as the love of God, but the most prominent example of this redirection is the other world and heaven where people who obey the rules of the religion are promised to be rewarded with whatever they lack in this world. This means that, "controlling" one's desires in this temporary world will be rewarded with reaching whatever what one desires in the other world.

Religious Networks and Diffusion

Before getting into the field, I acquired information about the different religious orders (tarikats) and networks which aim the diffusion of Islam especially in the low income neighborhoods and suburbs of the big cities such as Izmir or Istanbul. However, the picture was different and more serious than I imagine, as these religious networks are playing a huge role on their beliefs, lives and practices. I had the chance to discuss these religious networks especially with two participants, who told me about the educational institutions and houses which they call "the house" or "dergah" and which are owned by different tarikats (religious orders) where they get together each week and discuss religious issues, pray and worship. Being a part of this community (tarikats), meeting in their houses or even having a religious education becoming a "teacher" in their schools, they state that they become better Muslims who are obeying the rules of the God and who sacrifice all their materialist desires to get his blessing. This sacrifice may provide the low income consumers with a sense of relief and happiness considering that they are not able to reach these materialist desires due to their poverty. Therefore, having a

justification for not being able to consume, or possess material things may be a way to reach the peacefulness they seek in their tough lives.

Religious Practices and Their Consequences on Individual and Social Level

According to the participants, giving too much importance on money and materialism is sinful as it leads you to greed and misbehavior. They explain that controlling one's desires for materialism is of key importance to reach the blessing of God. In addition, a majority of the participants with strong religious beliefs claim that what they experience in this life is an examination for them to prove that they are good people. Consequently, their good behaviors will be rewarded with God's blessing and heaven where they will live a prosperous and happy life eternally. Most of the participants believe that the life conditions they have is the exam itself, and God is trying to understand whether they will rebel against him or not when they face difficulties in their lives. Considering the severity of their conditions, rebellion is possible. However, since they believe that rebelling against God and one's fate is sinful and they have to show tevekkül (resigning oneself to one's faith), accepting their situation and still thanking God for what they have. This is the only way they can get God's blessing. In addition, some participants reveal that they want to make charity and help "the vulnerable" as much as they can even though they barely have the resources to make their own living. In addition to the feeling of fulfilling their religious responsibilities, charity may also be considered as a way to remind them that there are people living in much worse life conditions compared to their lives. In accordance with their strong religious beliefs, some of the participants are wearing Hijab and dressing according to the Islamic dress code, however, in some cases, this

practice cause them to be in a dilemma between their desires and the rules of Islam. Especially younger participants are hesitating between applying the dress code and getting dressed according to their desires.

Contrary to the statements that religion can be an alternative for redirection of desire, the data suggests that religion itself can be a domain for consumption. Rather than having a tension between Islam and consumerism, "some" of the participants reveal that just as the religious people with high incomes, they are also engaging in religious consumption activities such as the desire for luxury religious fashion. In addition, religious practices may turn into industries such as the Hajj tourism sector. Even charity may become a medium for competition as donating the highest amount of money may mean for some that you are a better Muslim. Even though the religious beliefs are not commodities, religious practices can sometimes be turned into domains of the market, of religious commercialism.

In addition, the data suggests that religion sustains its power as a way to redirect the desire from objects and commodities onto non-materialist assets, especially in the low income context. A majority of the participants have neither the resources nor the hope to be a part of this religious commercialism. The hope for attaining the materialist desires (the desire for commodities) is already constrained by the market system as they lack the resources to reach the desired objects. In this case religion can be considered as an alternative way to redirect the desire onto non-materialistic things which may provide them with a justification for the constraints put by the market system. In that case, they may feel that they are withdrawn from the market system by their own will in order to obey the religious rules. This may

also provide them with a sense of powerfulness which may diminish the possibility

of the poor to rebel against or to resist the system.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION AND SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

As presented in the previous chapters, this thesis investigates the desires, which are shaped and directed by consumer culture in the low income context. From a broader perspective, the focal construct, desire, is studied in consideration of the larger societal forces that affect, shape and redirect them. Consequently, the contributions of the study to the current literature are not limited to the debates on desire, but it also sheds light on macro level discussions regarding the institutions' roles on persistent poverty and the societal implications of the phenomena.

These macro level contributions come from the discussions on the roles of economic, educational and financial institutions on the persistency of poverty, which will be elaborated further in the below section. Another major contribution especially to the consumer research literature comes from the findings about the objectification and commodification of desire in the low income context, which is a prominent gap except for a few studies (Belk and Ger 1993, Belk et al. 2003, Rosa et al. 2012). The low income consumers hope to reach the commodified representations of desire for a better life, which is shaped by the consumer culture agents, especially television and social interactions. The findings point at critical issues concerning the media consumption of low income consumers, such as the addictive soap opera watching habits, and show how these shape and direct the desire (specifically for commodities

and affluent lives). Not for last, the study reveals the effects of life stage, age, gender, literacy, political ideology and religious beliefs on the objectifications of desire which fulfills further gap in literature.

The thesis also investigates the consequences of the objectifications of desire in the low income context. Some of the previous scholarly work in consumer research discuss the consumption practices and coping strategies of low income consumers (Hill 1991, Ozanne et al. 1998, Hill 2001, Elliot and Leonard 2004, Chakravarti 2006, Üstüner and Holt 2007, Hamilton and Catteral 2008, Martin and Hill 2012). However, this study goes beyond the explanations of the consequences on the individual level and extends the discussions to the family and communal level, and finally, to the social level. For instance, with a feminist perspective, it shows the struggles of poor women who can be considered even more vulnerable as they lack opportunities for getting education, working and having economic freedom due to cultural and social pressures.

At the societal level, the findings reveal that their education level, ideologies, and religious beliefs change the way low income people interpret their situation. While some of the participants criticize the system (institutions such as the government, media and the consumer society) for their vulnerability, others criticize themselves for not struggling enough to reach a better life. On the other hand, some participants with strong religious beliefs think that poverty is not a problem caused neither by the system nor by the people, but it's their fate as one's life is preordained, and there is not much that they can do to change or improve it.

Furthermore, the research also makes contributions by investigating the relationships between hope and feelings of powerfulness/powerlessness, especially regarding the coping strategies adopted by low income consumers. Beyond previously provided explanations such as increasing tendency for rational consumption as a coping strategy (Hamilton 2009), this study shows that these strategies can be constructed through deeper and complex psychological and social processes, such as willing to escape from the institutionalized world to a self-sufficient life.

A major contribution of this thesis comes by demonstrating how desire is constructed, shaped and directed through the effects of different institutions of the market system. First of all, it reveals that the desire, the driving force and the essence of the human being, is considered to be sinful and evil in the contemporary society as it is accepted to be a threat to the individual and the social order. Consequently, the current market system attempts to rationalize and control the desire through the reconstruction of its expressions. The desire is directed to commodities and consumption by the market system to keep the capitalist machine in operation. The study also challenges the findings of the previous studies about how desire is shaped and "controlled" by the individual in case of a failure in attaining the desired object. Belk et al.'s (2003) study, which is among the few studies on desire in the low income context, suggests that the desire is either muted or intensified in such a case. However, this is challenged here as it is not possible to control or mute the desire, but it may be possible to redirect it.

Being one of the few studies to investigate the transformation of desire, another major contribution comes from the discussions on the redirection of desire in case there is no hope for attaining the desired object. Religion redirects the desire from commodified expressions to non-material assets such as love of God or the heaven. However, paradoxically, these religious practices are also commodified by the market system through religious commercialism. Religion provides low income consumers with justifications for giving up their materialist desires in this world which may lead to a false sense of powerfulness and relief. This diminishes the possibility of questioning and rebelling against their situation especially through the religious discourses on faith, tevekkül (resigning oneself to one's faith) and heaven. Then, the question arises on religion's role in the capitalist market system and whether it can be considered as an extension of or an alternative for it. The findings endorse that religion can be considered as an institution of the capitalist market system, contributing to its sustainability and being an extension of it rather than becoming an alternative. At last, but not the least, this study also contributes to the literature by investigating the interplay between desire, religion, feelings of powerfulness and governance.

The discussions in this chapter will be presented in a way that first leads the reader to macro-level discussions on poverty and the effects of different institutions on its persistency, and then narrow down to the micro level issues which are about the objectification and redirection of desire in the low income context.

6.1. Effects of the Institutions of the Capitalist Market System on Persistent Poverty and the Objectifications of Desire

In this part, I discuss the effects of the institutions of contemporary society on poverty, on the lives of the poor and their objectifications of desire. The discussions are aimed at investigating the issue with a broader perspective to understand the reasons of persistent poverty and to be able to create possible alternatives for the solution to the problem. In addition, as presented in previous chapters, these institutions of the current market system play an important role also in directing the desire towards certain material or non-material assets. Therefore, I also aim to discuss here the effects of these institutions on desire, how it is shaped, directed and redirected (*please see Figure 4*).

6.1.1. Effects of Institutions on Persistent Poverty

i. The Economic System and Enterprises

As stated in previous chapters, nearly all of the participants' families migrated to Izmir due to various reasons most of which are economic. Considering that they have severe life conditions in the city, it was beneficial to investigate the dynamics which force them to migration in order to understand whether migration can be considered as a source for the problem of persistent poverty.

Persistent Poverty

Directing / Re-directing Desire

Economic System

Migration
Short-term Jobs
Subcontractor System
Minimum Wage
Child Workforce
Not Having a Profession
Entrepreneurial Attempts
(Microcredits)
Voluntary and Involuntary
Unemployment

Mass Media

False Representations of Reality
Overrepresenting Affluence
Underrepresenting the Poor
Creating Emulation
(Advertisements & Soap Operas)

THE MARKET SYSTEM

Education System

Inequality in Opportunities
Education Costs
Child Workforce
Vocational Education

The Consumer Society

Materialism
Disregarding the Poor
Emulation
Prejudice
Alienating the Poor

Financial Institutions

Ease of Getting Credits and Credit
Cards
Disregarding the Capability of
Payment
Debt Spiral

Religion

Illusory Sense of Powerfulness
Postponing the Desire
Diminish the Possibility of
Questioning and Rebellion
Religious Commercialism

Figure 4. Institutions affecting persistent poverty and objectifications of desire

A majority of the participants' families migrated to Izmir from Eastern Turkey -which is less developed economically compared to the West- due to reasons such as less economic support and investments from the government, lack of interest from private companies for investment in spite of incentives provided by the government, uneducated population, and terrorism around the Southeast border which has been a major problem faced for over 30 years. Consequently, unemployment rates are much higher compared to the West, which is one of the main reasons of migration. In addition, changes in government's agriculture policies which resulted in decreasing levels of agricultural production caused people living in villages face severe problems of unemployment. As the industrial development could not diffuse to these regions, people have almost no opportunities for finding jobs in the village. Consequently, an important part of the population living in Eastern Turkey migrated to cities where they could have a chance to find a job.

Another important reason of migration is their worry about their children who may not be able to get a proper education in their hometown and future problems which may emerge due to this situation. Related to the economic underdevelopment of the region, the required infrastructure for a high quality education has not been built by the government. In consequence, children get education in overcapacity classes, sometimes without teachers as it is hard for the government to find teachers to assign to these cities for the underdevelopment and threats like terrorism.

Considering their situation, many families decided to migrate to Western Turkey with the hope that they will be provided with better job opportunities and a better future for their children. However, participants' discourses reveal that

migration did not provide many with the benefits they imagined. They face poor life conditions because of the difficulties in finding jobs and earning enough money for a decent life in the city. Considering their low levels of income and their lifestyles in the suburbs of the city, some of them state that they faced a big disappointment which mainly stems from the inconsistency between the representations of and expectations from a big Western city and the reality they faced. In addition to the economic problems, some of the participants state that they also faced a culture clash and felt alienated. To minimize the economic and cultural problems they face and to support each other, they preferred to build their lives in the city together with other families and they formed neighborhoods which became a replica of their villages as they carry their cultural practices and lifestyles to the city. This provided them with a sense of relief and reduced the emotional distress they face, but more importantly, contributed to their alienation further as they could not blend with the city culture in these isolated neighborhoods.

As a summary, it can be stated that many people are migrating to Western Turkey with similar reasons and facing similar problems in their new lives which, in most of the cases, sentence them to a life in poverty. Therefore, it is of highest importance for the government to search for deeper reasons of this migration, build up policies to ensure the development of Eastern Turkey and to empower the population living in this region. First of all, government needs to improve the agricultural and industrial production in these regions to fight against the problem of unemployment and poverty. New employment opportunities can be created through giving incentives to private companies for establishing distributed production

networks (Achrol and Kotler 2012) or new investments in both agriculture and manufacturing sector.

In addition, strategies can be developed to provide the population living in Eastern Turkey with equal access to country's resources as well as to governmental services such as health and education. Actions such as building the required infrastructure and assigning personnel to the region should be taken to overcome the problems in the education system and to make sure that all children are provided with equal opportunities for education to be able to prevent persistent poverty.

a. Enterprises: Working Conditions and the Subcontractor System

In many cases, it can be seen clearly that low income people's vulnerability is intensified further because of not being able to have long-term, permanent jobs. Working in seasonal or project-based jobs especially in agriculture and construction sectors is one of the main reasons of this vulnerability. These short-term jobs do not guarantee a long-term and sufficient income for them to make their living.

In addition, another major problem is the subcontractor system which does not provide workers with either a fair income or basic workers' rights. Not controlled strictly by the government, most of the subcontractor companies are after less skilled labor for which they pay minimum wage. In addition, people working for these companies can get fired anytime as they frequently fire workers without any reason in order to be freed from the future payments of seniority indemnity. On the other hand, some companies refuse paying insurance fees which they have to pay for each

employee. These insurance fees are seen by most of the low income people as a way to guarantee their future. If the employers pay their insurance fees regularly, they can benefit from the public health services and be retired from the social security system in the future which makes them get a certain amount of pension and a monthly payment until their death. Considering the importance of the social security system membership, it is very important for these companies to make the required payments for their workers which should be controlled strictly by the government. In addition, these companies should also be controlled in terms of regulating their relationships with the workers, and they should be banned from firing their workers for their financial benefits. Workers should be protected from these kinds of illegal acts through strict governmental control. Another important way of protecting workers' rights is establishing unions which has been a problematic issue between the private companies, government and the workers for many years. However, it can also be discussed that some of these unions are already institutionalized and became a part of the capitalist system with their economic and political motivations. In this case, their role in improving working conditions and protecting workers' rights is controversial.

On the other hand, in this study, nearly all of the working participants were earning a minimum wage which is not enough for a decent life especially if they have dependants. The minimum wage is determined by the government as 773 TL (approx. 420 USD) for 2013 while the hunger limit for a family of 4 has been determined as 985 TL (approx. 535 USD). This clearly reveals that the minimum wage should be increased in order to make sure that low income people earning a minimum wage can supply their families at least with food and very basic necessities. Considering the situation, most of the people earning minimum wages

have to work in more than one job to be able to earn enough money for a decent life. Furthermore, some of the participants are struggling with long working hours without getting an extra payment for it but could not object to this situation with the fear of losing their jobs. In addition to economic problems, these severe working conditions also make them face health problems both physically and psychologically. In addition to being exhausted by the hard work, being worried about the subsistence of the family and not being able to devote any time to either themselves or to their family may create a psychological tension and damage the relationships between family members. In some cases, I observed that lacking the attention and guidance of the parents may result in problems and misbehavior in children. Considering these outcomes, it is possible to claim that the problems associated with earning minimum wage, which is not enough for a decent life, is much more severe than just having economic problems as they are also affecting the family and their future in many other ways.

In addition, another major problem which needs to be discussed here is child work force. Children start working at an early age even in the expense of quitting school and not being able to get further education. Regardless of how much they contribute to the family income, this deepens the problem of persistent poverty further as they may not be able to find a good job in the future because of lacking the required education. Therefore, child work force should be controlled by the government strictly. In addition to that, families should be informed about the possible consequences of making their children work instead of having them get education. They can be informed through the media, or through meetings which can

be held by the municipalities or the ministry of education on the importance of education for building a better future for their children.

Another severe problem which causes them to suffer from short-term jobs and not being able to earn enough money for their subsistence is lacking a profession or an area of expertise. Working in many unrelated jobs in different sectors, they mostly lack the know-how about a particular occupation and they are not able to develop their skills or excel on a specific profession. Consequently, they are not considered to be skilled laborers or craftsman, which cause them to earn less money and get fired easily. This makes them accept working for minimum wage or, in some cases, cause them to get fired easily as it is easy for the companies to find substitutes. Because of this situation, I may argue that learning or adopting the required skills and know-how for a specific profession or craft is of great benefit for the low income people. This can be ensured through vocational education, which eventually may lead to better working conditions and an increase in wages and other benefits.

Considering the working conditions and different job opportunities they have, we should also discuss entrepreneurship which was considered to be an effective strategy for poverty alleviation especially through empowering the poor by microcredits. Some of the participants stated that they had entrepreneurial attempts all of which resulted with failure. These entrepreneurial moves even worsen their situation further rather than helping them to overcome poverty. As stated in previous studies (Ehlers and Main, 1998), lacking the required education and knowledge to manage a business may result in failure of sustaining a business. It can be argued that microcredit and entrepreneurship can be considered as a way to overcome the

problems of poverty. However, the prerequisite for these entrepreneurial attempts to succeed and be considered as a viable poverty alleviation strategy is to empower the entrepreneurs with the required education and guidance about how to manage their businesses not only at the introduction stage but also through their entire journey. The support of governmental institutions, municipalities, NGO's or angel investors are needed to put these strategies into practice

In addition, another important problem related to low income people's work lives and their effects on poverty is women's not working, which is actually not a context-specific problem. According to World Development Indicators 2012 report of the World Bank, the rate of Turkish women participating in the paid work force is 28%, while the percentage of non-agricultural wage employment is 24%. These percentages are very low compared to EU countries and other members of OECD. Having known that lack of income is a major reason of poverty, the importance of participation of women in the work force is of key importance for poverty alleviation. In addition, this lack of participation in the productive domain results in social exclusion of women from the mainstream society, limiting their roles to consumption rather than engaging in activities for meaningful production. Some of the major reasons behind this problem can be stated as the patriarchal culture which limits their roles to being caregivers. A majority of the participants revealed that they do not and cannot work even if they have the will, as their husbands prohibited them working. Here, we observe that the role of breadwinner is still dominantly attributed to men in accordance with the traditional and patriarchal mindset inherent in the Turkish culture (Gunduz-Hosgor and Smits, 2008). The reasons behind this prohibition might be attributed to the need for preserving the role of the breadwinner,

protecting the "vulnerable" women from the threats of the world or because of distrust in institutions (Lamont and Small, 2008) or people (especially men) in the work place. This behavior is in contradiction with the traditional roles of women in the Anatolian culture as they are used to work especially in agriculture sector as well as other sectors to contribute to their family's income. Consequently, it may be related to other forces which may influence their ideas about the roles of men and women in society, such as the religion. Increasing effects of Islam on Turkish culture and daily life practices may be the leading reason for this decision of men, as in most of the Islamist countries women do not participate and take role in the daily life as much as men due to their limited roles in the social life. In addition, rising conservatism may cause the lack of trust and unwillingness of men to let their wives work with other men in work places.

Furthermore, most of the participants indicated that their basic motivation for staying at home is taking care of the children as well as doing housework. In accordance with the care-giver role attributed to women, high fertility rates eventually result in low rates of employment. In addition, a majority of the participants indicated that because of their illiteracy, low levels of education and lack of required skills, employers try to exploit them through low wages, forcing them to work overtime in addition to lacking their insurance premiums. Some participants stated they sometimes get jobs to be done at home such as sewing or doing embroidery. However, they also state that having known their vulnerability, the employers pay very little amounts of money per piece even though the job requires a lot of effort and time. Therefore, distrust in the employers and the thought that their hard work will not pay off are other reasons for not working.

These limitations about the roles of women in the social life is also related to parents' unwillingness to send their daughters to school as they believe that they should not work but instead take care of their children and family in the future. However, it is of utmost importance for the women to get education and stand on their own feet to establish healthy relationships with their husbands and within their families. In addition to contributing to their subsistence, and from my personal perspective, even more important than that, working and being able to earn their own money provides them a sense of self-confidence which affects their lives deeply in a positive way. First of all, through working, they realize that they can have different roles other than the caregiver and consumer roles, such as being productive and participative in other domains of life. In addition, self-awareness about their ability to make their living without being dependant on anyone else may provide them with self-confidence. They may feel themselves more powerful which further affects their relationships and social lives. Having suffered from being uneducated and unemployed, many women state that they want their daughters to get education and become powerful and independent women who are able to stand on their own feet. This emphasizes the importance of developing educational strategies for low income people, especially for women. Educational policies and projects should focus more on women to ensure that they overcome the barriers to getting a proper education and finding jobs. In addition to developing governmental strategies, non-governmental organizations or private companies may also establish social responsibility campaigns aimed at increasing the education levels of women or provide them with job opportunities, maybe even inside their neighborhoods. During the previous years, joint efforts of one of the leading telecommunication companies in Turkey and an

important non-governmental organization resulted in a successful project named "Kardelenler", which aims to increase the education levels of girls especially living in Eastern Turkey. The success achieved through this project helped many people to escape from the vicious cycle of poverty and become productive participants in society. Future efforts put not only by the government, but also by other parties in society may help people to improve their lives through getting a proper education.

Furthermore, another important barrier for women to take an active role in society is their husbands' attitudes which are hard to change because of being constructed by cultural and religious beliefs and traditions. Therefore, a possible solution for ensuring women's participation in society through becoming productive individuals and active participants can be providing them with job opportunities inside their neighborhoods. Achrol and Kotler's distributed production-consumption model (Achrol and Kotler 2012) can be an alternative solution for the problem through the establishment of ateliers or small production facilities in these neighborhoods.

ii. The Education System

In addition to previously mentioned problems of the educational institutions in Eastern Turkey, there are more severe and structural problems which require government's attention. Lacking a proper education is one of the main reasons of persistent poverty and turn low income people's severe problems into a vicious cycle unless their children are able to reach equal opportunities for education with the rest of the society.

Even though all of the low income participants' children are having education in public schools, they mention that the educational costs (including the costs of books, or other materials required etc.) are so high that they cannot afford sending all their children to school. In this case, some children have to sacrifice their education for their sisters or brothers' and unfortunately, girls, whose future roles are usually limited to being caregivers, are not a priority in getting education. In addition, even though providing their children with good opportunities for education is a basic motivation for migration, most of the participants state that they do not want their daughters to go to school in the city as they believe that it may be dangerous (if they are going out of the neighborhood) or simply unnecessary for girls to get further education.

Furthermore, some of these children had to work for contributing to their family's budget. Starting to work at an early age, they quit school and could not complete their education which usually causes them to have limited job opportunities in the future, contributing further to the problem of persistent poverty. In addition, some participants told that they quit school basically with no reason with their unwillingness stemming from the feelings of shame and humiliation they face as a child because of being poor.

Considering the importance of education in overcoming the problem of persistent poverty, two points needs to be emphasized here; the first being the importance of having a well-established education system which provides all children with equal opportunities for education. The other one is to create awareness about education's role in improving their future lives. First of all, the government

should have strict regulations on child work force to prevent families from making their children work instead of getting education. In addition, compulsory education (which is 12 years in Turkey) should be controlled and students' attendance should be ensured through rules and regulations. Another major issue which needs further interest is the vocational education which is of utmost importance to especially low income people. Most of the participants state that they will not be able to make their children get university education because of the costs of getting prepared to the university entrance exams and the costs which occurs during the university education. In consideration of the very limited chances to get a scholarship for university education, vocational education can be a good alternative to help them get better jobs in the future. Furthermore, as well as government's support for increasing the educational funds, private companies and NGOs should also get involved into social responsibility campaigns which provide assistance and funds for supporting low income children's education. Finally, as discussed previously, guidance and assistance from the families is of highest importance for the low income children to get a proper education and consequently, break the vicious cycle of poverty.

iii. Financial Institutions

In many cases, low income people do not have the resources to attain the objectifications of desire which lead them to using bank credits or credit cards as a common way to attain them. However, pushing their limits to reach what they desire have much severe consequences in the low income context as these credits are not backed by a persistent income or the required financial resources to pay back. The

desire for consumption and commodities triggered by higher levels of exposure to consumer culture leads to impulsive buying or acting inconsiderately about using credit cards. Therefore, a majority of the participants state that they try to avoid both the exposure and the use of credit cards to protect themselves from financial devastation. Owing to the bad experiences they had or witnessed related to the consequences of taking credits from banks, or using their credit cards, many people are cautious about their use. However, a majority of the participants also state that they have even more than one credit cards with high limits (in some cases, 3 times their monthly income). Most of the participants are indebted because of either credit card usage or taking mortgage credits from banks to own a house. Yet, these financial tools have destructive effects on low income people such as the debt spiral. One of the participants described credit cards as being both a medicine and a snake in one's pocket, explaining further the contemporary relief they feel through using them and reaching the desired, and the negative consequences they face after using it. Even though a majority of the participants state that they are aware of the risks of using these tools, they still use them as these are the only way for them to reach the desired commodities.

One may claim that consumers can decide whether to use these tools or not and they are not forced to engage in these kinds of transactions with financial institutions, therefore they are responsible for the consequences of their acts. However, considering the case of low income consumers, it may not be possible to control their desires towards commodities even though they lack the resources, as we know that the consumer society and the culture of consumption that surrounds us direct us to consume for identity creation and for conformity. Thinking about the

current market system, we may claim that human desires are directed towards commodities to ensure the survival of the system through the cycles of consumption and production. On the one hand, it may not be possible for any of us to escape from the marketing messages surrounding us and calling us to consume more to reach "satisfaction". On the other hand, because of the uncontrollable nature of desire, it is not possible for many people to stop themselves from attempting to reach the desired. At this point, another important institution of the contemporary society, namely the financial institutions, comes on the scene, delivering the hope for attaining the desired even if you do not have the resources to attain it. In the case of low income consumers, taking credits from banks or other financial institutions may have severe effects. However, we cannot assume that everybody has the knowledge about the possible negative consequences of using credits especially if we are talking about people of lower education levels. On the other hand, as stated in many participant discourses, these financial institutions give credit cards with high limits very easily, not taking into consideration the applicant's level of income and disregarding whether these people are capable of paying these credits back. In some cases, they state that banks send credit cards to their houses without any application with the aim of increasing the possibility of acceptance. Moreover, some banks send messages explaining their credit options and encouraging them to take credits even though a great majority of these people do not have the ability to pay them back. In this case, we may claim that these institutions are acting inconsiderately, without taking into consideration the well-being of their clients, and the society at the macro level. Using these tools without the ability of making the required payments, many people face severe economic problems and even confiscation which result in not only

a financial downfall but also devastation of families and lives. In addition, macro level consequences of these policies of the financial institutions are needed to be discussed as well, considering that an important reason of the 2008 financial crises and credit crush is the inability of debtors to pay back the credits they took. In view of the importance and severity of the issue and the fact that many participants are struggling with the debt spiral, it is possible to state that there should be strict policies applied by the government to make sure that financial institutions act more considerately in terms of the long term benefits of the people and, in general, the society. First of all, financial institutions should be obliged to make investigations on debtor's ability to pay the debt in the long run before giving the credit, especially in the case of vulnerable consumers. In addition, the limits of the credit cards should be adjusted according to the monthly income of the client to avoid the consequences of using credit cards with high limits exceeding many times their monthly incomes. To prevent the negative outcomes of the unpaid debts and the debt spiral on people, on society, and in the long run, on the financial system, banks and financial institutions should act responsibly, considering the long-term benefits of all stakeholders. It may be too optimistic to think that these institutions can change their focus barely from making profits to long-term interests of the society, and government intervention in regulating their policies can be very limited and insufficient, considering that the financial system itself is also a tool for governance. Therefore, I believe that the most viable solution to prevent the problems faced by low income people can be providing them with "financial literacy", contributing to their current knowledge on the possible outcomes of taking credits, using credit cards and other interactions with

financial institutions (Braunstein and Welch 2002, Brown and Gartner 2007, Lusardi 2008).

6.1.2. Effects of Institutions on Directing the Desire

i. Mass Media

According to participant discourses, one of the major institutions which shape and direct the desire onto certain objects or commodities is mass media. Even though a majority of the participants are not aware of or do not have knowledge regarding the possible effects of media on their perceptions, lives and desires, some of the participants who have higher education levels criticize the media harshly for triggering their desires and creating emulation for "the other life".

According to the findings, a majority of the participants are watching TV (especially soap operas) addictively. The reasons for this addiction can be stated as TV's being the cheapest alternative for entertainment, their need for a connection to the outside world as some of them are living inside the neighborhood, and its being considered as a cure for loneliness especially for women whose lives are limited to their houses. In addition to the addictive TV watching habits, a minority of the participants are listening to radio, connecting to Internet and reading newspapers. Therefore, we can state that the major medium for exposure is TV and its addictive consumption affects their objectifications of desire deeply.

Among the TV programs they watch, soap operas are the most popular ones as they provide them with the enthusiasm and joy of experiencing (even vicariously) "the other life". In many cases, the participants' discourses about their favorite soap operas and their statements about "what they lack" in their lives are matching. Consequently, men are interested in soap operas with themes of power relations, mafia and patriotism, which may be a representation of their desires for being more powerful. On the other hand, a majority of the female participants are stating that they desire to have love relationships and wealthy lives as portrayed in their favorite soap operas. Being a way for them to experience what they lack in their lives, soap operas, in a sense, provide them with a taste of "the other life." In addition, they may be presenting them an opportunity for catharsis, as well as an escape from the problems of the real life. However, in many cases, their effects extend beyond the soap operas, shaping their objectifications of desire. Being exposed to the lives of the wealthy media figures, celebrities, soap opera characters and brands affect the way they objectify their desires deeply. In many cases, participants do not have any knowledge of the product placements in these soap operas representing affluent lives, which may cause them to get affected more by what they see without having the knowledge that this is a marketing strategy. Furthermore, they are exposed to paparazzi shows which are frequently watched and liked especially by female participants. In this case, the audience knows that these are reality shows which are the representations of real life rather than being fictional as soap operas. Having known that people are really experiencing those affluent, "glamorous" and "smooth" lives, their desires towards these lives and commodities are triggered even further.

In a majority of the discourses, participants criticize the media, especially paparazzi shows, soap operas and advertisements, for triggering the desires for commodities which may lead to negative consequences for people living in poverty such as consumer misbehavior or debt, and to negative feelings such as disappointment or anger.

As stated previously in the literature review section, usually the mass media shows representations of the rich minority and their desirable lives which leads to underrepresenting the poor who constitute the majority of the world's population (Lichter et al. 1994, O'Guinn and Shrum 1997). Being exposed to the affluent lives which are overrepresented in TV, they may perceive that these lives are the dominant way of living among the other members of the society which may cause them to "normalize" the consumption patterns they see on TV. However, the income gap between the two classes openly reveals that it can almost never be possible for a low income consumer to engage in such consumption behaviors. Therefore the contradiction between their own lives and the affluent lives represented on TV may cause them feel alienated from the mainstream society, thinking that they cannot become a part of it. Furthermore, a majority of the female participants reveal that they are affected negatively by the representations of "ideal beauty" which is very frequently depicted in almost every TV show, as they lack the resources to get dressed, groomed and consequently look alike those ideal women. In addition, children are affected by these desire-inducing representations of life in a deeper sense, even more intensely compared to adults who are aware of the impossibility of reaching those objects. Therefore, some participants state that they try to make their

children become aware of their own situation, understand their limits and try to control their desires accordingly.

As revealed clearly, mass media (especially TV), marketers, advertisers and other parties involved in the constitution and sustainability of the market system has a huge effect and responsibility on directing the desire onto certain lifestyles and commodities. In most cases, it is not possible for the low income consumers to reach these commodified representations of the desire triggered by exposure to mass media. Consequently this contributes to their vulnerability further. Therefore, mass media and all other parties which take part in the formation of its content should act more considerately to protect the vulnerable: the low income people and especially, their children. Equal representation of the underrepresented, informing society more on vulnerable people and their lives, advertisement content which is more respectful about the sensitivities of the vulnerable and placing information about the programs to warn the audience regarding the content of the program could be alternatives for alleviating the negative effects of mass media on low income people. However, as discussed previously, I believe that expectations about media and marketers to become more considerate about the vulnerable in the expense of losing profits may not be very realistic. Even though the government can also help in protecting the vulnerable through certain rules or legislations on the content of the media, it is more important to empower the individuals against its negative effects. Therefore, just in the case of financial institutions, literacy comes on the scene as an important strategy for the well-being of the vulnerable, and in general, the society. Media literacy may help people to use the media more intelligently, to analyze and criticize the media content and to think about the possible effects of media messages. Acquiring

knowledge about mass media's structure, and its aim of being a moneymaking enterprise rather than being a medium of entertainment is important in interpreting these messages (Thoman and Jolls 2004). Therefore, citizens should be equipped with the ability to understand the commercial or ideological spins behind media messages which may contribute to their more effective interpretation, and consequently may help in protecting the vulnerable.

ii. The Consumer Society

In many of the participants' discourses, desire for conformity and social likability stand out as the main factors behind their consumption behavior. A majority of the participants state that wearing nice clothes and looking good is directly related to the respect paid to you in society, criticizing other people for paying too much attention to appearance, objects and commodities which are thought to reflect a person's identity. On the one hand, low income consumers are claiming that they are against these prejudices "the other people" have, yet, on the other hand, they also reveal in their discourses that they want to become a part of the consumer society, reflecting their needs for conformity.

In addition to the need for conformity, emulation can be considered as an important dynamic which directs their desires to consuming the popular, fashionable, and specifically, branded products which are used by "everyone else." According to the findings, friends and peers have prominent effects on branded product consumption. Social interactions with different people who have different lifestyles and being exposed to more marketing messages and word-of-mouth communication

lead to an inclination for using branded products. In addition, the findings reveal that younger participants can be considered as more open to the effects of peers and friends in terms of consumption practices, and especially branded product consumption. We may argue that youth is more prone to consuming branded products as they require these commodities for self-verification and for conformity. In the case of low income consumers who cannot afford most of the branded products, new alternatives are developed to cope with the need for conformity, such as using fake products which look more or less the same as the original ones. To protect their children from the negative feelings created due to humiliation, families are trying to attain the branded products which puts an additional burden on them.

Importance attached to commodities and objects are not limited to everyday consumption practices but extends its domain to traditions and rituals as well. As a very prominent example, the findings revealed that the wedding rituals have become a theater of conspicuous consumption. Social comparison, the desire for social conformity, respect and likability, sometimes goes so far that some of the low income families spend all their investments on weddings and wedding rituals to be able to say "I can do it."

As stated above, a majority of the low income participants criticize the society for evaluating and classifying people according to their possessions, being materialists, spending carelessly, engaging in conspicuous consumption and being ignorant towards poverty and poor people's lives. Even though they describe the consumer society's negative traits through their criticisms, their discourses also reveal that they also want and try to become a part of this society through adopting

similar consumption practices such as engaging in conspicuous consumption or using branded products even at the expense of economic problems they face.

In this section, I revealed my comments on the consumer society, discussing it as one of the institutions that shape and direct our desires. The reason for me to take the consumer society as an institution is mainly because of its being shaped by the major institutions of the contemporary society, such as the institutions of marketing, finance, education, and media. The consumer society is an outcome of the acts of the institutions of the capitalist market system, directing all of its members to consume more in order to ensure the sustainability of its creator. Therefore, I consider the consumer society as a very important institution itself as it is one of the main elements of the market system, continuously reproducing it through turning each member of the society into consumers by directing their desires onto objects and commodities.

6.1.3. The Consequences and Coping Strategies

Even though the institutions of the contemporary society directs the desires of all members of the society onto objects and commodities, in a majority of the cases, low income consumers are not able to reach these objectified forms of desire which may create severe consequences both on the individual and social level. In most of the cases, the participants reveal that the unattained objectifications of desire leads to learned helplessness, pessimism about their future, hopelessness, feelings of incapability, powerlessness and anger which can be directed towards themselves, their families, or even, the society and the system. Furthermore, these negative

feelings may lead to feelings of humiliation and incapability on the family and communal level. Anger may be reflected to the family members as violence, or it may lead to different forms of escape such as alcoholism or physically escaping from their environment, even leaving their house. Consequently, family relationships may get damaged which may affect children deeply. In some cases, participants state that the unrest at home results in misbehavior of children such as escaping from school, consumer misbehavior or even the use of addictive substances which threatens their future deeply and may entrap them to persistent poverty.

Interestingly, the consequences of not attaining the desired leads low income people to very different interpretations of their situation. Most of the participants revealed that even though they do not reflect on it most of the time, they have a feeling of anger inside them because of not being able to reach what they desired. However, how this anger is directed changes extensively from person to person. According to the findings of the study, these different interpretations and ideas about "who to blame" for their situation can be related to education level, literacy and religious beliefs. In some cases, participants blame themselves for not being able to reach what they desire and for not being capable of having an affluent life. They blame themselves for their poverty as they believe that they haven't struggled enough to change their lives. On the other hand, some participants declare that their problems are mainly stemming from the disfunctioning of the market economy, and criticize the inequality in income distribution, the institutions of marketing and media, and the consumer culture for triggering their desires, yet, at the same time, sentencing them to poverty. Some of these participants criticized the government for allowing the exploitation of labor by private companies and foreign investors. In

addition, they criticize the media for creating emulation and underrepresenting the poor who are indeed the majority of the world population, and consequently creating a false representation of reality. Furthermore, some of the participants, most of whom have strong religious beliefs, claimed that they do not blame anyone for their vulnerability as they believe that one's life is preordained and being poor is all related to what is written in their fate. Therefore personal effort or hard work will not result in any improvement in their life unless God desires so. Consequently, they are not blaming themselves or others, or the inequalities in the system for their situation. They accept their life as given as they believe that they need to show *tevekkül* (resigning oneself to one's fate) to attain God's blessing.

As well as explaining their points of view towards and interpretations of poverty, these statements also gives us clues about how they cope with the negative feelings emerging due to unattained objectifications of desire. Although these coping strategies have been a topic of interest in previous studies, we can state that these strategies may vary extensively according to the research context. We may argue that these coping strategies are developed to diminish the negative effects of the feelings of incapability, and consequently, of powerlessness. Yet, as the conceptualization of power may vary from culture to culture and person to person, it cannot be possible to extend the findings of a particular study to other domains. Within the context of this research, I aimed to investigate how the participants of the study manage their feelings of powerlessness emerging due to the unattained objectifications or commodities.

While investigating the coping strategies, I came across two different streams of thoughts one of which is about preserving the hope to reach a powerful state during their lives. Sustainability of hopes and dreaming may provide the individual with a sense of powerfulness. Accordingly, some participants believe that they will reach a powerful state which will provide them with the ability to reach the objectifications of desire. On the other hand, participants' discourses also reveal that some of their hedonic consumption behavior can be related to the urge to say "I can do it". Contemporary escapes from their daily lives, and having a taste of the other life may provide them with a sense of relief and powerfulness as, in this way, they prove to themselves and to others that they have the ability to at least experience the affluent lives for a while.

Furthermore, another important strategy for restoring the feeling of powerfulness may be the act of avoidance (avoiding the exposure to prevent the desires from being triggered by the consumer culture agents). In participants' discourses, I came across two different modes of avoidance. One of these modes is "planned alienation" which describes low income consumers' efforts to stay away from the media of exposure to consumer culture, and specifically the places where they are exposed to commodities, such as shopping malls. Therefore, limiting their own life spheres to their neighborhoods and work places, they may become alienated from the mainstream society; however, this is a planned alienation in order to protect themselves from the feelings of incapability and powerlessness. On the other hand, another important form of escape which is frequently mentioned by the participants is their desires for going back to their hometown. A majority of the participants (who are mostly older than 30) state that they want to go back to their hometown to

establish a new, self-sufficient life for themselves and their families in which they will not be dependent on any institution or person to make their living. Contrary to the idea that they may desire to be a part of the modern and Westernized world (Belk et al. 2003), some of the participants revealed their desires for escaping from that world which requires them to have material prosperity to be a part of it. This may also protect them from the feelings of powerlessness they face in the city, and consequently, be considered as a strategy to restore the feelings of powerfulness.

In addition to all these strategies for coping with the feelings of incapability and powerlessness, some participants state that because of the learned helplessness, they are not dreaming of the desired anymore and they minimized their expectations and try to be satisfied with what they have. However, in most of the cases, participants' such discourses are followed by their statements about their intense desires for objects and commodities, disproving their previous statements. This fact, which is backed by the previous research on desire as well, leads to the idea that it cannot be possible for any individual to control or mute their desires even in the case of a permanent failure in attaining them (Lacan 1977, Bouchet 2011). In that case, we may claim that people are not able to control the desire in any way, but it may be possible to redirect the desires onto new representations which are not necessarily commodities or objects.

6.1.4. Redirecting the Desire: The Institution of Religion as an Extension of the Market

i. Religion as a Coping Strategy – Postponing the Desire?

As discussed in the previous chapters, religion has an important effect on our understanding and interpretations of desire. Desire was mentioned in all religions to be an expression of evil and a diversion from God, and it was considered to be related with sin and uncontrollable instincts which may pose a threat to the order of the society. Therefore, in most of the religious discourses on desire, it was suggested to be rationalized and controlled through the *reconstruction of the expressions of it*. In Islam, all material desires are considered to be a part of the *nefs*, which directs people to earthly pleasures and to misbehavior for achieving the materialist desires. Islam bans obeying nefs (desires) and consequently, it suggests that people should stay away from the pleasures of this world. However, as discussed before, it is not possible for the human beings to supress or control their desires. Consequently, Islam suggests reconstructing or redirecting the desire towards different non-material assets such as the love of God, worship and prayer, but the most prominent example of this redirection is the other world and heaven where they will be rewarded with whatever they lack in this world. Considering the definitions of heaven, we may see a clear contradiction between the two discourses as the things promised to be reached in heaven are actually the material things which are banned to be desired in this life. On the one hand, religion suggests that people should control their desires, and

especially the desires towards objects and commodities. On the other hand, the reward for this control is said to be these material things.

Thinking about the case of low income consumers, we may state that the hope for attaining the materialist desires (the desire for commodities) is already constrained by the market system as they lack the resources to reach the desired objects. On the other hand, religious discourse also suggests that they should turn away from these material desires as they are earthly pleasures, which should be avoided. This can be interpreted as a justification for the unattained desires as they may think that this is also what God wants them to do. Therefore, rather than making them feel as incapable or powerless, it may provide them with a sense of powerfulness or resistance as they may feel that they are withdrawn from the market system by their own will in order to obey the religious rules and attain God's blessing.

However, as discussed above, religion cannot be considered as an alternative for the market system which redirects the desire from materialist things to non-materialist assets, as religion itself promises reaching the materialist desires not on this earth but in heaven. Therefore, the religious discourse, in a sense, suggests people to postpone their materialist desires in this world as they will be rewarded with what they sacrificed in the other world.

ii. Religion and Rebellion

In addition to postponing the desire rather than redirecting it onto non-materialist assets, religion also erodes the possibility of rebellion which is another reason for it to be considered as an extension of the market. First of all, being promised to reach whatever they lack here in the other world may diminish the possibility of resistance or rebellion against their situation as they believe that they are just postponing the desires and will reach whatever they want in heaven. In addition, most of the participants believe that the life conditions they have in this world is a test for them to prove that they are good people, and God is trying to understand whether they will rebel against him or not when they face difficulties. As they believe that rebelling against one's fate is sinful and they have to show tevekkül (resigning oneself to one's fate), they may prefer to accept their situation and thank God for what they have. This is the only way they can get God's blessing, and consequently, reach heaven where they will be provided with whatever they desire. This may also provide them with a sense of relief, reducing the felt-deprivation caused by the feelings of incapability and powerlessness. Consequently, the discourses glorifying one's resigning to her/his fate may lead to low income people's acceptance of their situation rather than thinking or asking questions about their poverty, the system, unequal income distribution, and so on, diminishing the possibility of the poor to rebel against or to resist the system.

iii. Religious Commercialism

Another reason for considering religion as an extension of the market rather than being an alternative for it is that religion itself has become a domain for consumption. Desires may be redirected to non-materialist assets; however, the contemporary market system re-redirects these desires back onto commodities and re-objectifies them through religious commercialism. The desires for consuming luxury religious fashion brands' products for getting dressed properly, religious practice of Hajj turning into a million dollar event in the tourism industry, even charity becoming a medium for competition as donating the highest amount of money means -for some- that you are a better Muslim may lead to the idea that even though religious beliefs cannot be commodified, religious practices have turned into domains of the market. Therefore, even though the low income consumer tries to find relief in religion through its discourses against materialism, religious commercialism appear on the stage as a counterforce, turning the redirected desire back onto commodities. This indicates that religion may be considered as an institution of the market system, contributing to its sustainability rather than being an alternative for it.

These complex relationships between desire, religion and other institutions of the capitalist market system which are discussed in this study can be seen in *Figure 5*.
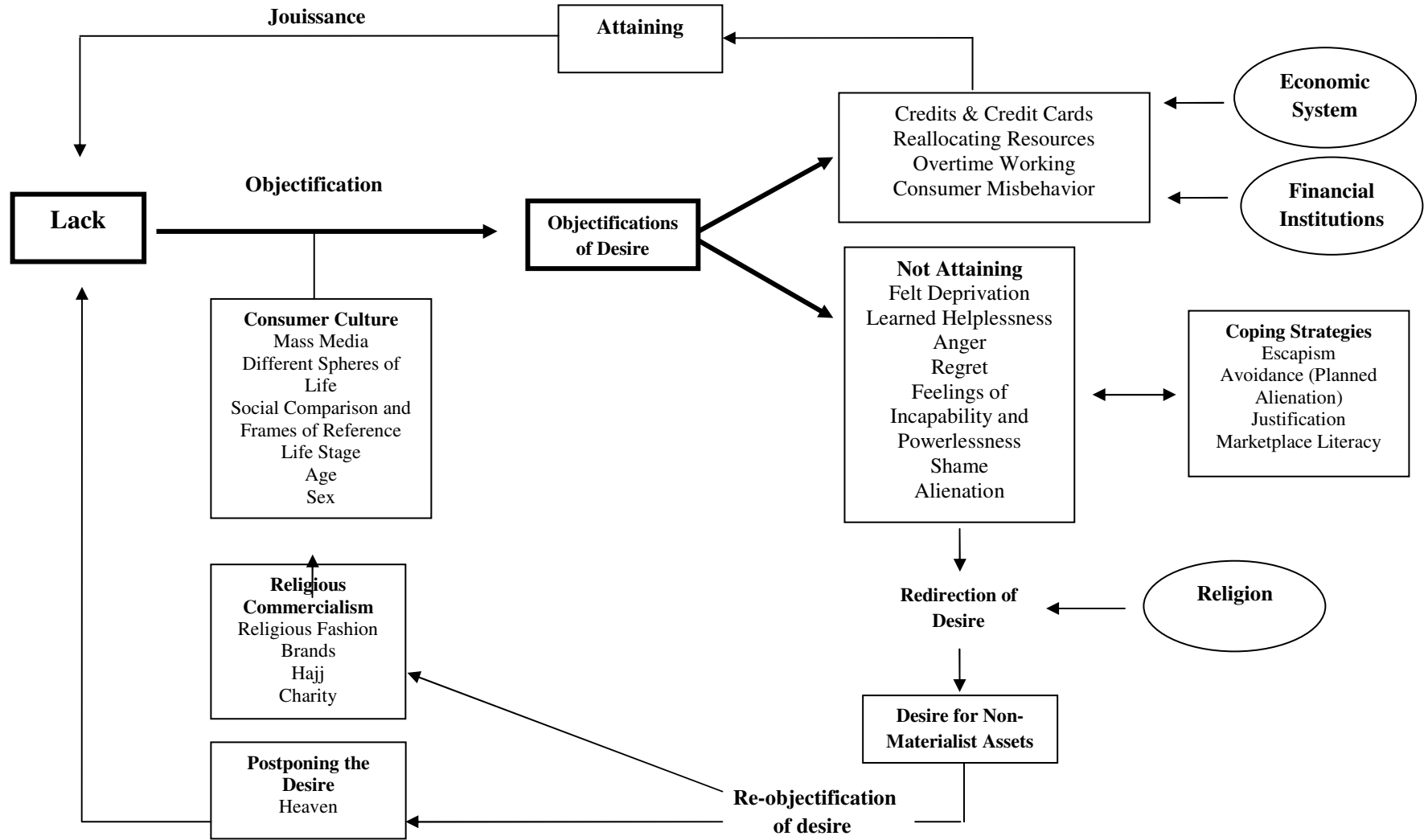
Figure 5. *Objectification and redirection of desire: exposure to consumer culture*

6.1.5. The Capitalist Market System and Religion

Considering the discussions on religion being an extension of the market system, contributing to its sustainability, I believe that further discussions on the relationship between religion, governance, power and control will be beneficial to have an understanding of the broader effects of religion on low income people, and in general, on society. Can religion be considered as a way to control or govern society, and especially the proletariat and the poor? If so, what is the relationship between power, control, religion and the capitalist market system? Is it possible to argue that Marx's most frequently cited comment, religion being "*the opium of people*", is still valid in contemporary society, and specifically in the research context of Muslim low income people? Even though the limited content of this dissertation may not be enough to delve into deeper discussions on the possible answers of these questions, I want to discuss the role and possible effects of religion on low income people's lives.

Marx explains that the reason for people to turn to religion is their alienation. In "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (Marx 1844), Marx states that in capitalist societies the workers, their labor and the products they produce are treated as commodities or objects. The proletariat does not have the means for production, and they cannot govern their own products which is one of the reasons of the feelings of alienation. On the other hand, they are expected to work as if their bodies are a part of a big machine of production, which means that their bodies are also seen as commodities which may intensify the feelings of alienation even further. Consequently, individuals have problems in having an understanding of their

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circumstances in this world and may feel like losing their identities. In Das Capital (1990 [1867]) Marx states that the reason for the primitive man to turn to religion was his helplessness in view of the natural forces, while the reason for the proletariat is this alienation which creates a similar feeling of helplessness.

Furthermore, Marx and Engels (1975) also argue that religion can be considered as an ideology. According to this theory, in class societies, the ruling ideas of the time are the ideas of the ruling class which legitimate their interests and are used to manipulate the subordinate classes such as the proletariat. Furthermore, having its antecedents in Feuerbach (who declares that to enrich God, man must become poor), Marx argues in Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right [1975 (1844)] that religion is created by man to provide a false picture of reality.

> *"Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again….This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion (p.244)."*

Struggling against this false representation is, in a sense, a struggle against the world that creates it. On the one hand, religion becomes a tool of the ruling classes who perpetrate injustice in this world. On the other hand, religion is also a protest against this injustice as the people who are aware of and disturbed by this

injustice turn to religion as a way to reject the world that creates it. Therefore, it can be considered as a search for an alternative life which also means that people are not happy with what they face here (injustice, oppression etc.). Religion is a form of false consciousness, as it serves to provide compensation, a relief in this heartless world of corruption and suffering. Consequently, it is not the religion but this world itself that should be eliminated. As long as the unjust, heartless world sustains, the ideological bases of the religion will also be sustained.

> *"Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. [Marx, 1975 (1844), p. 41]''*

The phrase "opium of the people" has been discussed, criticized or supported in numerous studies in previous literature; however, only in some of these studies it has been discussed comprehensively, helping to understand what Marx really meant through this metaphor. For example, McKinnon (2005) argues that to be able to reach a better understanding on this metaphor, one first needs to reach an understanding on the meaning and connotations of opium in Europe in the middle of the 19th century. McKinnon (2005) argues that opium was the most important and valuable medicine used at the beginning of the 19th century and kept its importance as the only medicine for pain relief during the whole century. Small doses of opium were medically useful and it has been regarded as a medicine rather than a pleasure inducing substance especially at the beginning of the century. Considering its effects on pain relief, it can be argued that religion also provides people with a relief from the pain caused by the heartless world, as it is the *"the sigh of the oppressed*

creature." Consequently, it can be argued that religion may be considered as a coping strategy. It helps the oppressed in diminishing the level of pain they face because of injustice, inequality, being alienated and so on. Therefore, it may provide the individual with a feeling of temporary relief, a feeling of happiness, a haven to be protected from the cruelty of the world. These explanations are very much in line with the research findings, as in the case of low income, religion can be considered as a way to cope with the inequalities they face and the pain that emerges due to the feelings of incapability and powerlessness which are the outcomes of the unattained desires.

However, Marx argues that religion will provide people only with an illusory happiness. Therefore, they need to give up this illusion through the criticism of religion even in the expense of their happiness, and search for the real happiness through *"plucking the imaginary flowers from the chains"* so that the chain will no more provide them a comfort. Therefore, they will *"throw away the chains to pluck living flowers." (Marx, 1977)*

As these chains with flowers provide the members of the subordinate classes with a sense of relief, it may diminish the possibility of criticizing their situation, and they may not resist or rebel against their chains. Therefore, as discussed previously, religion can be argued to contribute to the sustainability of the capitalist market system. On the other hand, we should not undermine the importance of the psychological relief they feel through religion, which may be considered as a positive effect considering their vulnerability and severe life conditions.

Another important and interesting interpretation of the metaphor of opium is on its economic value during the 19th century. Opium was a very important commodity and a source of great profits, generating an important amount of the total revenue of the British government (McKinnon 2005). Furthermore, Marx and Engels also argued that opium is a prominent example of economic imperialism. Just like its metaphor, Marx also criticized religion's commodification, its becoming a commodity sold in the market through various forms. McKinnon (2005) further argues that as the religion itself becomes a commodity, it may not be considered as a superstructure, but as a part of the economic production. This statement is in line with the findings on religious commercialism and its becoming an extension of the market system. As discussed previously, the unattained desire towards commodities can be redirected to non-materialist assets through religion. However, the findings also reveal that the desire can be directed back to commodities by religious commercialism, which means that religion becomes a part, or an extension of the market. Consequently, the market system can be considered as the superstructure and religion becomes an institution of it, contributing to its sustainability in different ways.

In addition to the previous discussions, in late 19th century opium was started to be used not only as a medicine but also for the purpose of inducing pleasures by creating illusory and utopian visions (McKinnon 2005). Similar to these utopian visions which leads to temporary pleasures and happiness, religion also supplies people with a utopia, which is heaven. As discussed above, the definitions of heaven in holy books reveals that religion promises people reaching whatever they desire in the other world. Considering the pain felt by low income people due to unattained

objectifications of desire in this world, dreams about heaven where they will be rewarded with whatever they lack here can provide them an illusory happiness. People who are able to control their desires in this world will deserve the heaven and they will reach all unattained objectifications there. This attractive utopian vision may lead to a state of comfort and happiness which, as discussed above, is a desirable state for the sustainability of the system as these feelings will diminish the possibilities of the subordinate classes to question their situation, and consequently prevent resistance and rebellion. In addition, according to the religious discourse, people should not rebel against their situation in this world and resign in their fate in order to be blessed, which is another desirable outcome considering the interests of the system.

These different meanings of opium help to understand the metaphorical explanation of religion provided by Marx in a much clearer way. Furthermore, it also leads to discussions about religion being a very important tool for power, governance and control. As stated by Foucault (1978), today, it may not be possible to control or govern people by using power in the form of an oppressive force but through the strategies of modern governance by investing subjects with desires. As also discussed by Belk et al. (2003), low income people may engage in activities of resistance in case they face an oppressive force in addition to their felt deprivation. Therefore, more subtle forms of power are needed for governing people in addition to providing them with different forms of desires which may create an illusion of free will and power. This form of governance provides the individuals with a feeling of agency and control while governing them through showing "the right things" to direct their desires onto. Whether these "right things" to desire are commodities or

the utopian vision of heaven depends on the ability of the individual to reach these desires. The market system directs the desires onto commodities through the institutions of media and other consumer culture agents in order to ensure its sustainability through constructing a consumer society, which becomes an institution itself. On the other hand, if the objectified forms of desire are not attainable, people should be invested with new forms of desire through different institutions such as religion. Through the religious discourse which declares the sinfulness of materialist desires, low income consumers who do not have the resources to attain the commodified forms of desire develop a sense of powerfulness as they believe that they willfully withdraw themselves from the consuming society to attain God's blessing. In this case, the desires are redirected to the utopian vision of heaven. This powerful and comfortable state which is enriched by different forms of desire abolishes questioning, criticism and most importantly, resistance to their current situation.

As the discussions in this thesis clearly state, the capitalist market system and its institutions contribute to the vulnerability of the low income people in different ways, and rather than curing the problem, they may intensify it further in some cases. Considering that these problems are faced by a great majority of humanity, urgent attention is needed from all parties involved in the creation and persistency of poverty. For the long term benefits of the vulnerable, and in general, the whole society, different institutions of the market system such as the institutions of finance, education, media, marketing and the government should take responsibility in improving low income people's lives. On the other hand, one may consider that these institutions may continue with their profit-oriented mindset at least in the short run,

and consequently keep serving for the short-term benefits of themselves and the market system rather than considering the long term benefits of the majority. In this case, I believe that the academia should take more responsibility, do extensive research on this highly important topic in order to shed light on the reasons and severe consequences of poverty, and develop strategies for breaking this vicious cycle. In addition to these, I argue that one of the most important ways to alleviate poverty, prevent its persistency and diminish the vulnerability of the poor is to empower them with the knowledge and understanding on the possible reasons and solutions of their poverty. Critical interpretations of the roles of different institutions in the market system may help them regulate their relationships with these institutions, and they may be able to protect themselves from the negative consequences of these interactions. Furthermore, it may be possible to trigger questioning, criticism and most importantly, resistance to their current situation, which I believe, is the most important way to the emancipation of the poor, and in general, of all.

CHAPTER 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Considering that desire in the low income context is a relatively understudied topic in the literature, I tried to adopt a very broad perspective to discuss the issue comprehensively which leads to some limitations and several future research directions. First of all, I would like to discuss the methodological issues and make suggestions for future studies. The data used in this study was collected mainly through 60 in-depth interviews conducted in 6 different settings in addition to the observations and field notes (both written and visual) taken during the 10 months data collection process. I believe that I achieved triangulation of resources through collecting data in different settings and through interviewing participants from different age groups, occupations, education levels, backgrounds and so on. Even though I achieved a certain degree of triangulation of methods through using more than one data collection method, it may be possible to include different techniques such as reflective methods and focus groups in the future research to contribute to the richness of the data.

Furthermore, within this research, my position as a researcher can be described as non-participant observer. Even though I researched in each setting for around one and a half month and tried to make observations through spending a lot of time in these neighborhoods, it was not possible for me to live and immerse in the

setting and become a member of the group. Therefore, researchers may prefer to adopt a full-participant role in future studies which will help in reaching a deeper understanding of the phenomena at hand. Participant observation research may generate core insights into low income consumers' culture and may help in exploring different dynamics inherent in their consumption practices. Consequently, an ethnographic study conducted in the low income setting can be beneficial, considering that a deeper understanding on the lives and cultures of the low income people may contribute extensively to the interpretations of the data.

On the other hand, the sample of this study consists of Muslim consumers only, as a great majority of the Turkish population is Muslim (86 %). Considering that discourses on desire and its redirection may vary extensively in different religions, people with different religious beliefs should also be included in the sample in the future studies to ensure a broader understanding on the relationship between desire and religion, and to reach the opportunity for making comparisons. In addition, future studies may also include different minority groups such as Romans or immigrants in their samples to collect richer data.

Although I did not adopt a grounded theory approach fully, I tried to avoid having a pre-constructed model in my head regarding the relationships between the focal constructs prior to data collection, which resulted in the emergence of different constructs such as religion even though the first interview protocol did not include any questions about it. Taking into consideration the participant discourses on religion, I included some questions to the semi-structured protocol to cover the topic in a very broad sense. As redirection of desire through religion is an understudied

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topic especially in the low income context, future studies may focus specifically on these constructs, with detailed questions and investigations on the issue which may lead to a much deeper understanding.

Furthermore, as suggested by Blocker et al. (2012), the effects of power in the low income context can be a topic of interest for future studies. Considering the issue through a transformative consumer research perspective, different forms of power exercised by the poor in order to manage their felt deprivation can be an interesting topic for further investigation which may lead to a better interpretation of the relationships between power, control and governance.

Another point which needs further attention is the development of suggestions for poverty alleviation and the protection of the vulnerable. I strongly believe that effective strategies on poverty alleviation and protection of the vulnerable can be developed only through the vulnerable's eyes which means that we need bottom-up solutions. As a topic of ongoing interest, further research needs to be conducted for mapping the problem of poverty and discovering possible strategies that may solve it. In consideration of the complexity of the phenomenon at hand and the difficulty of discovering the effects of different dynamics inherent in the cultural and social context as an outsider, participatory action research approach should be adopted to develop effective, long-term strategies. As suggested by Viswanathan et al. (2012), the complex nature of the phenomenon at hand requires civic empowerment and innovative bottom-up solutions. Participatory action research methods are based on reaching the experiential knowledge of participants, with the idea that transformation can be accomplished through bottom-up solutions from

people who are already experiencing the problem, and who will be the ones to be directly affected by the solution (Lewis 2001, Ozanne and Saatçioğlu 2008). It has the goal of creating awareness in people that they have the potential to play an active role in the change that aimed to be realized. Consequently, this perspective might contribute in reaching a better definition of the problem, exploring its dimensions clearly, and developing strategies for alleviating it through the experiential knowledge of the participants.

In addition, to make sure that these research have real-life implications, potential strategies and solutions can be presented to relevant parties such as different government institutions, municipalities, NGO's or angel investors who might help in putting these strategies into practice. Future studies should focus on stimulating participatory action through the support of people who are directly affected by the problem and to empower them to alleviate the severe consequences of poverty.

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