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Consumption, Waste and the Middle-Class Mindset: A Qualitative Exploration of Gendered Attitudes and Beliefs in South African Suburbs

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Abstract for the dissertation titled: *Consumption, Waste and the Middle-Class Mindset: A Qualitative Exploration of Gendered Attitudes and Beliefs in South African Suburbs*

This dissertation explores the complicated relationship between South Africa's growing middle class, and their patterns around consumption and waste. Crucially, it identifies who the middle class hold responsible for consumerism and waste management. It also looks at these ideas through the lens of gender to uncover variations in the way different genders perceive and approach consumption and waste.

A qualitative approach was used (using interviews, waste diaries, and a survey). Preliminary findings indicate that middle-class white South African women tend to engage in conspicuous consumption, impacting their waste generation. However, women's family-oriented consumption also influences their purchasing and waste habits. Surprisingly, participants viewed women favourably in terms of consumption and waste, despite waste-diary evidence to the contrary.

This research contributes valuable insight into consumption and waste as social, cultural, racial, and gendered matters – instead of purely environmental ones. Ultimately, it shows that gender, race and socio-economic class play a role in how much an individual consumes and wastes, and highlights the need for increased education around these topics in South Africa.