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GOING GREEN: REDUCING CONSUMPTION IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Going Green: Reducing Consumption in Contemporary America

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My dissertation looks at the conditions under which people voluntarily reduce their consumption of goods, energy, and water. My research draws on 45 in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation with three groups who restrict their consumption in various ways: (1) *voluntary simplifiers*, members of a loosely organized social movement centered on addressing environmental harms by buying less and reducing waste; (2) *religious environmentalists*, individuals embedded in religious communities who consider environmental concerns a religious calling; and (3) *green home owners*, individuals who remodel or build their homes in such a way as to use resources efficiently, and reduce unfavorable impacts to the environment. I employ a comparative approach in order to describe the diverse experiences of reducing consumption and to generate new theory by analyzing the similarities and differences between groups. My work explains the gradual process of transitioning to a green lifestyle, the way green technology is integrated into everyday life, the strategy and

tactics employed by informants to recruit people to change their lifestyles, the relationship between lifestyle change and other forms of political participation, and the way social connections and gift giving make reducing consumption more difficult. I adopt a pragmatist perspective to understand lifestyle change as a deliberate process undertaken in response to a problem left under-addressed by current policies and practices. Green practices are not isolated decisions or actions, but components in an ongoing project. As a result, green lifestyles are often experienced as both a work-in-progress and a provisionally coherent life narrative. I also use a mutual shaping (of technology and society) perspective to go beyond a focus on production and design, and highlight instead the importance of technology use and the way social practices enable the green-ing of technology. I find that contrary to theoretical claims about the individualization of responsibility, lifestyle change is a companion strategy that does not create a tradeoff with other forms of collective action or support for government regulation. Instead, green lifestyles address climate change both directly through household changes (to a small degree) and indirectly by supporting environmental activism.

DEDICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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I attended a dinner recently at the Easterns where someone asked me “why is Paul McLean your adviser – doesn’t he study Renaissance Florence?” Good question. I replied by explaining that we both study economics, politics, framing and strategic action – but I was thinking, I couldn’t imagine it any other way. Paul and I began working together in my second year of graduate school when I was thinking through ideas about consumer lifestyles – a topic he took quite seriously despite my half-formed ideas and the lack of consumer research in sociology. It was Paul who suggested that I add a final question to my interview schedule for the dissertation – one that would get at the idea of lifestyles (an idea I had given up on). It resulted in the first published article from my dissertation research (“Going Green: The Process of Lifestyle Change”), also chapter 3 here. Having an adviser that believes in your ideas more than you do is a rare gift. I would also like to thank Paul for sharing his unique brand of enthusiasm (cynical enthusiasm, enthusiastic cynicism?) and beautiful writing style with me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Working for Change

Can changing a light bulb save the planet? Of course not, but similar sentiments about simple and easy changes in everyday life have fueled the popularity of green lifestyles, while enflaming the controversy over addressing climate change through individual actions. Due to enduring debates in the U.S. over government intervention and regulation, the responsibility for addressing climate change and other environmental problems has fallen disproportionately on individuals, households, and “choices” made in the marketplace. From changing light bulbs to changing lifestyles, many individuals have taken it upon themselves to “do their part.” This involves individuals consuming less, consuming energy and water more efficiently through better technology, and consuming differently (green or ethical consumption) at the household level. But how does someone go about rejecting the dominant consumer culture and voluntarily reduce their consumption of goods, energy, and water?

To address this question, I draw on a set of forty-five in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation of three groups in the United States who limit their consumption in a range of ways: (1) *voluntary simplifiers*, members of a loosely organized social movement centered on addressing environmental harms by buying less and reducing waste; (2) *religious environmentalists*, individuals embedded in religious communities who consider environmental concerns a religious calling; and (3) *green*

home owners, individuals who remodel or build their homes in such a way as to use resources efficiently, and reduce unfavorable impacts to the environment. I employ a comparative approach in order to describe the diverse experiences of resisting consumption and to generate new theory by analyzing the similarities and differences between groups. By examining actors' accounts of how processes of change are perceived and managed, my work explains the gradual process of transitioning to a green lifestyle (chapter 3) and the strategies employed by actors to spread those changes through their social networks (chapter 5). My work also investigates the incorporation of green and smart technology into everyday life (chapter 4), the trajectories of involvement that bridge lifestyle change and more traditional forms of environmental movement participation (chapter 6), and the way social connections (i.e., gift giving) can both enable and constrain reducing consumption (chapter 7).

Within sociology, social transformation has returned to the forefront of scholarly attention in recent years, from "Real Utopias," the 2012 American Sociological Association meeting theme, to "Sustainable Communities/Sustainable Lives" – the 2013 Eastern Sociological Society's meeting theme. With it has come a renewed focus on understanding how social change happens (or the social mechanisms and processes which underlie causal pathways in macro-level change) and how culture influences action. Does culture, in the sense of motivations and values, cause action or simply explain action after it has occurred? I push beyond this dichotomy and focus on process over causality by examining what leads individuals to explain their actions in particular ways (relating to the environment) and how those explanations over time transform

into motivations and foster green practices. My work also examines changing habits, strategic action, avoiding politics, and efficacy in the face of uncertainty. These broader themes move beyond the study of environmental sociology, the sociology of consumers and consumption, science and technology, or social movements and into the sociology of culture, micro sociology and symbolic interaction, economic sociology, political culture, and behavior change. I consider this part of a larger research goal to examine processes of personal and social change as they are embedded within social contexts and unfold over time. My approach provides an empirically grounded political and processual perspective on green lifestyle formation and transformation.

Theoretically, I draw on ideas from Giddens (1991) and Bourdieu (1984) in order to discuss habitual action (i.e., everyday action is primarily habitual with only rare moments of deliberation). In order to complement work on habitual action, I draw on Dewey's (1922) understanding of how habits change (i.e., deliberation occurs in response to a problem situation which current habits fail to solve). Dewey's work on changing habits (part of pragmatist action theory) shares the understanding that social action is primarily habitual, but then goes on to discuss in detail how habits change.

For Dewey (1922:15) habits are socially "acquired dispositions" or externalized "arts" that exist in the world and not just the individual. They are a co-production of both actors and environments. Habits bring together the "skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials" (Dewey 1922:15). Habits can be changed by disrupting their paths and setting new ones. I extend Dewey's theory by defining disruptions in the life course as "problem situations" which prompt

deliberation. Several empirical studies have touched upon problem situations (power outages, for example) or life course transitions (having children is a common one) as a reason for going green without connecting them to a common theoretical framework (i.e., that both disrupt habitual action). Thus I coordinate the questions: (1) how do people go green and (2) how is habitual action disrupted making change possible?

The seriousness of climate change, according to my informants, calls for a comprehensive approach – from more aggressive government regulation down to small household conservation efforts. Thus lifestyle change is not a strategy which stands alone, but rather a “companion strategy” (Jasper 1999), which neither replaces other forms of collective action nor detracts from support for government policies. For example, Tess a Catholic environmentalist, explains that changes in lifestyle, like composting food waste in your own backyard, can offer “a way into the whole picture” of global food shortages, the over-industrialization of the food system, and how corporate food producers contribute to climate change. Insisting that individual actions matter is part of the “mobilizing force of imagined futures” (Mische 2009:695). When people believe that they can make a difference in addressing climate change (i.e., efficacy) they are more likely to change their consumption patterns (Goldblatt 2005). Changing lifestyles and demanding that corporations take responsibility for environmental harms are not mutually exclusive; according to Tess one supports the other.

Among my informants are environmental group members or founders, leaders at places of worship, green business owners, and teachers with a green curriculum. They

lobby to change local building codes, protect green spaces, organize to support local and national political candidates, attempt to change school policies, and are raising their children to be green. The people I interviewed wanted to feel more involved in the environmental movement, they were not willing to wait for institutional change, or they were skeptical that institutional change would occur even with their help. Personal change at the level of a lifestyle can happen rapidly in comparison to institutional change. It can make one feel more involved than a weekly meeting and offers concrete evidence of change at the micro level. Ultimately, lifestyle change, like conscientious consumption, is part of “a larger repertoire of strategies and actions oriented toward social change” in which individuals explicitly link their everyday actions with larger political movements (Willis and Schor 2012:161).¹

Social theorists in a myriad of disciplines have responded to the scope and immediacy of environmental problems by focusing greater attention on the resistance to consumption – often called anti-consumption² or green consumption.³ A sociological approach focuses on how individuals or groups construct their lives through restricted consumption practices (Spaargaren 2003, Nye and Hargreaves 2010); sustainable or

¹ For a multidisciplinary review of the literature on lifestyle change, see Jackson 2005. See Southerton, McMeekin and Evans 2011 for a review of (mostly European) behavior change initiatives.

² For example, boycotting (Glickman 2009), culture jamming (Rumbo 2002), voluntary simplicity (Grigsby 2004), downshifting (Schor 1998), and product sharing or cooperative consumption (DeMaio 2009, Schor 2010). See also Iyer and Muncy 2009 for a taxonomy of anti-consumption.

³ Green, ethical, conscientious, or sustainable consumption works with the market to make consumer goods less resource intensive and less toxic, while improving labor conditions and profit distribution (Brown 2013, Clarke et al. 2007, Jones 2002, Shaw 2007). For critiques of green consumption, see Connolly and Prothero 2008, Goodman 2004, Littler 2009, Szasz 2007.

green lifestyles (Cherrier 2009, Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000); and intentional communities.⁴ My dissertation continues this investigation and explores the question: why do individuals, under some conditions, reject the dominant consumer culture, and voluntarily reduce their consumption? And how do they manage that task?

The individuals in my study do not advocate the standard aggregation hypothesis. The aggregation hypothesis is the idea that individual actions alone (“if everyone does a little” rhetoric) can add up to significant change. In the case of climate change, the aggregation hypothesis implies that voluntary, market-based actions by individuals (i.e., recycling, carpooling, or buying green products) are sufficient for addressing climate change and thus government regulation is unnecessary. Yet, for my informants, lifestyle change is only one strategy among many which they advocate. Considering that my informants advocate change on all levels, it would be more accurate to say their motto is: “even individuals have a part to play.”

To put this into context, environmental scholars estimate that changing household practices and technologies can reduce overall U.S. carbon emissions by about 7.4% over the next ten years (Dietz et al. 2009, Vandenberg, Barkenbus and Gilligan 2008) and reduce U.S. energy use by 20% (Gardner and Stern 2008). While these numbers may seem small, scholars are quick to point out that this is more than half of President Obama’s current (2014) emissions reduction goal and a good example of “low hanging fruit” when compared to the government regulation of industry during a time

⁴ Examples here would include ecovillages (Chitewere 2008, Georg 1999, Kasper 2008), cohousing (Meltzer 2005), and transition towns (Haxeltine and Seyfang 2009).

of congressional gridlock (Dietz et al. 2009, Vandenberg, Barkenbus, and Gilligan 2008).

Dietz and his colleagues (2009) argue that household and transportation changes can act as a “behavioral wedge” and fill the void until more controversial, large-scale legislation is passed. The behavioral wedge argument echoes the sentiments communicated in my study – many of my informants would prefer large-scale government action on climate change, but while they work toward achieving that they are also changing their lifestyles and trying to convince other people to do the same.

Environmental issues have become highly politicized in the United States among both political elites and the public (Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins 2012, McCright and Dunlap 2011). Thus, comprehensive climate change legislation is unlikely in the near future. My dissertation tells the story of average people confronted by the gridlock in Washington who are seeking out practical ways to address climate change and other environmental harms. They have narrowed their efforts in order to accomplish social change. They focus on lifestyle change, as well as regional watersheds, local food production, township building codes, and state initiatives for alternative energy. In this case, practical changes like household energy efficiency are politically motivated. They also recruit others to change their lifestyles by avoiding political talk and instead, for example, encouraging people to save money. The results matter more than the mechanism or strategy. Informants are not necessarily disillusioned with politics, but they are aware of the challenges to addressing climate change and innovate within those constraints.

DEFINING TERMS

I embrace the term “going green” throughout my work for two reasons. First, the word “going” implies an on-going process. In my research I find that transitioning to a green lifestyle is a never-ending process – one can always be greener or live a simpler life. Second, the people I interviewed used the term “green” far more often than comparable terms like “sustainable” or “less-resource-intensive.” While I am aware of the problems inherent in referring to practices, technologies, or lifestyles as green (by what criteria?), I do so for the sake of simplicity and also to convey a particular, subjective understanding of a certain way of life. In addition, I use the term “green lifestyles” because it was also used by informants – interpreted as a continuum from light green to dark green or as different types: “hippy green” (voluntary simplifiers) or “commercial green” (green home owners) according to Kim a green home owner. Whereas the term “sustainable lifestyles” was not used by informants, perhaps because interviewees viewed sustainability as a dichotomy (lifestyles were sustainable, or not, based on some external criteria). Several informants were skeptical that American green lifestyles were sustainable. In my discussions of the literature, however, I use the terms green and sustainable lifestyles interchangeably which is a convention of the literature. And in my exploration of “green technology” in chapter four, I spend a good deal of time working with, critiquing, and revising the concept. If the reader is so inclined, feel free to imagine “green” and “sustainable” in quotes throughout the text.

Reducing consumption

Reducing consumption⁵ includes three areas of practice. First, individuals or households decrease material consumption as a whole (fewer purchases, not necessarily less expensive purchases). Second, individuals or households direct consumption in some way using environmental, ethical, or political standards (i.e., green consumption, ethical consumption, political consumption, conscientious consumption). Third, actors conserve resources by reducing both direct energy use (i.e., oil, natural gas, electricity) and embedded energy use (i.e., the energy used to extract raw materials, manufacture and distribute goods). These three areas of reducing consumption are treated as analytically different in the consumption literature – although in my own research I find that those transitioning to a green lifestyle participate in all three practices, but to different degrees. Studies often focus on only one area of reducing consumption, for example, ethical consumers and alternative consumption (Connolly and Prothero 2008, Newholm and Shaw 2007, Raynolds 2002), household energy saving practices (Anue 2007, Gram-Hanssen 2010, 2011), or voluntary simplifiers and reduced consumption (Craig-Lees and Hill 2002, Elgin 1981, Grigsby 2004, Huneke 2005, Maniates 2002a, McDonald et al. 2006, Schor 1998, Smith 2003, Zavestoski 2002).

⁵ Scholars discuss reducing, restricting, and resisting consumption. These terms are used interchangeably, however the term “resisting” assumes that the consumer economy has a certain pull or coercive force that urges people to consume and must be resisted by individuals who go against the mainstream. The term resisting consumption is primarily used in cultural studies and the humanities. The term anti-consumption is also used to describe people with a political or ethical stance against consumption due to environmental harms or labor laws. Anti-consumption also indicates an interest in reducing overall consumption, instead of just greening consumption. The term anti-consumption was originally an umbrella term from the business literature used to describe anything from boycotts to personal dislikes (Iyer and Muncy 2009). In the interest of simplicity I primarily use the term “reducing consumption.”

Previous studies also tend to focus on one product (e.g., coffee, milk), one type of product certification (e.g., organic, fair trade, forest certified, anti-sweatshop), or one category of alternative consumption (e.g., green consumption, ethical consumption) (Connolly and Prothero 2008, Newholm and Shaw 2007, Raynolds 2002). These case studies are excellent resources; however they make no attempt to account for reducing consumption more generally. Studies that do attempt to address reducing consumption typically limit their studies to only one group of people, namely voluntary simplifiers (McDonald et al. 2006, Huneke 2005, Grigsby 2004, Maniates 2002a, Smith 2003, Zavestoski 2002, Elgin 1981). For comparisons, more committed voluntary simplifiers are compared to less committed voluntary simplifiers (McDonald et al. 2006, Huneke 2005, Schor 1998).

Sustainable consumption

In 1986 the Brundtland Commission, part of the United Nations (U.N.), defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UNBC 1986).

This now-famous definition is also used to define sustainable consumption. The

Brundtland Report goes on to state:

Living standards that go beyond the basic minimum are sustainable only if consumption standards everywhere have regard for long-term sustainability. Yet many of us live beyond the world's ecological means, for instance in our patterns of energy use. Perceived needs are socially and culturally determined, and sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire (UNBC 1986, chapter 2).

More specifically, the U.N. defined “sustainable consumption⁶ and production” in 1992 at a conference in Rio de Janeiro where developing countries called on industrialized nations to recognize their consumption as an environmental problem and take steps to address it. Sustainable consumption is defined as the “use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or products so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations” (sic) (UNEP 2010:12). The ‘life cycle’⁷ of products includes the embedded energy used to make the product and transport the product, as well as the potentially toxic consequences of disposing of the product. The difficulty of defining the life cycle cost of a product, as well as “basic needs,” “quality of life” or “the needs of future generations” has made this a controversial definition (Goldblatt 2005, Dolan 2002), although it continues to be cited as the standard definition. The controversy over the definition of sustainable consumption and production echoes a similar problem with defining the term sustainability alone (Farley and Smith 2012, Gould and Lewis 2009).

Consumption patterns, especially within the U.S. and other industrialized countries, are now defined as unsustainable leaving many asking how to modify

⁶ I do not use the term “sustainable consumption” due to the difficulty of defining the concept and the unresolved critiques of the original definition offered by the U.N. (that consumerism is sustainable if it does not jeopardize future generations) (Goldblatt 2005, Dolan 2002). In addition, the people I interviewed were more likely to use the term green than sustainable.

⁷ This is similar to Braungart and McDonough’s (2002) “cradle to cradle” concept which calls for less resource-intensive product design that would reduce the conflict between the building industry and the environment.

lifestyles developed over decades of historically and geographically specific social, cultural, political, and economic development (Dolan 2002). In 2011, the U.N. began the creation of sustainable consumption goals for developed countries that echo sustainable development goals for developing countries. This marked a serious departure from the neo-Malthusian discourse linking climate change, deforestation, and desertification to over-population in developing countries (Adger et al. 2001). Although the battle to define climate change as a problem continues (i.e., is it a problem of population versus consumption or a problem of current consumption in developed nations versus future consumption in developing nations?) and reflects the on-going struggle to locate responsibility for action on climate change. Ideally the worst polluters, namely developed nations, would be responsible for the most drastic action on climate change. However, that seems highly unlikely. This research project is about what average Americans are doing when caught up in this debate and their attempts to “do everything they can reasonably do” even in the absence of institutional support.

In the following sections I discuss my research design and describe the three groups that I chose to study: voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and green home owners. I end this chapter with an outline of the rest of the dissertation in the form of chapter summaries.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this dissertation project I draw on a set of forty-five interviews and participant observation with members of three strategically chosen groups who reduce their consumption in different ways: voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and

green home owns. Members of these groups have unique life patterns and experiences restricting their consumption. Rather than using a sampling logic with the goal of representation, I use “case study logic” to sample for range. Case study logic involves identifying subcategories (like voluntary simplifiers) within the broader category of environmentalists and conducting interviews within those subcategories until saturation is reached, where answers are repetitive (Small 2009). In this case the aim is saturation rather than representation.

Many different groups could be considered, and would consider themselves, to be committed to reducing their consumption. Four main dimensions of difference guided my choice of groups: religious versus secular orientations, communal versus individual responses to the problem of over-consumption, high-tech versus low-tech strategies, and differences in commitment levels (see Table 1). First, I compare religious versus secular rationales for reducing consumption. Previous research finds both a greening of religion (Wilkinson 2010) and a secularization of simplicity and environmentalism (Zavestoski 2002). Second, I am interested in communal versus individual responses to perceived harms caused by the consumer driven economy. Grassroots activist groups who live communally have been the most successful (in Europe) at restricting their consumption (Georg 1999), suggesting that communal support is a key component of commitment to restricted consumption practices. Third, I investigate different levels of participation in status accruing consumption, both in terms of traditional positional goods and alternative consumption. Those most concerned with social status would be expected to restrict their overall consumption the

least. However, I also study the paradox that rejecting social status contingent upon the ownership of consumer goods might also be a way of building status, referred to as “conspicuous nonconsumption” (Barringer 2008) or “conspicuous simplicity” (Bekin, Carrigan and Szmigin 2005). Fourth, previous research on voluntary simplifiers shows an avoidance of technology (Maniates 2002a), while green home owners are known for their intensive use of innovative technology (Fischer 2010). Little was known about the relationship between technology and religious environmentalists – a group included in the larger project because of their value-oriented, communal perspective on going green. Fifth, I consider the level of commitment made to reducing consumption. Voluntary simplifiers are known for high levels of commitment, whereas green home owners often purchase innovative technology today, increasing their consumption, in order to conserve water and electricity tomorrow. Also, previous studies suggest that commitments to reducing consumption are disrupted by commitments to children or spouses (Grigsby 2004). The original intent of this study was to include three groups that would allow for a comparison between religious, secular, and status-driven motivations for reducing consumption, as well as an analysis of communal versus individual responses, technologically-driven vs. anti-technology strategies, and high versus low levels of commitment to restricted consumption. Although differences motivated my choice of groups, in some chapters I tease out the similarities between groups, for example in how green lifestyles emerge and progress.

Table 1. Group Characteristics based on a Literature Review

| | Religious Narrative | Communal Response | Status Concerns | Employ Technology | Reduce Overall Consumption |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Voluntary Simplifiers | Low | Medium | Medium | Low | High |
| Religious Environmentalists | High | High | N.A. | Medium | Medium |
| Green Home Owners | N.A. | Low | High | High | Low |

Indicates low, medium, or high significance to the group. N.A.=not applicable

Other groups considered for this study include: “locavores” or individuals in the local food or slow food movements, conservative and/or evangelical eco-Christians, kibbutz visitors, Pennsylvania Dutch Amish, downshifters (white collar workers who have reduced their consumption in order to take their time back from paid labor, also called less committed voluntary simplifiers), home power advocates (with homes off the power grid), and individuals who have signed up to buy nothing new for a year (1800 people on *The Compact* Yahoo! Group), popularized by Judith Levine (2006) in “Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping.” I also considered the study of local currency like the “Ithaca Hours.” These topics were excluded because they were subsumed in other groups that I have decided to study, would be difficult to reach, or have less explanatory value. For example, voluntary simplifiers are often interested in organic locally grown food, may try to buy nothing new, and are sometimes characterized as downshifters. Home power advocates would be difficult to reach and are to some extent included in the topic of green homes. Kibbutz values have loosened over time and no longer include a hard line against consumption and evangelical environmentalists are also

referred to as more “market friendly” than other religious environmentalists. Overall, I excluded the study of food specifically because of the popularity of organic food (supported by Oprah) that would make meaningful lifestyle distinctions difficult. Also, food consumption may not necessarily be related to reducing consumption or other changes in lifestyles.

Interviewees are from the Northeastern United States and were recommended for inclusion in this study by the founder of a voluntary simplicity community group, the Executive Director of a non-denominational green religion non-profit, and the Senior Technical Consultant for residential building at a green building business. In each case respondents were either group members, their place of worship held membership, or they were customers (owner/builders using LEED consultant services). I chose these groups based on their size, longevity, organized structure, and the ties they afforded to potential research subjects. I also pursued recommendations for other possible interviewees directly from respondents in a snowball sample and recruited informants by attending events open to the public (e.g., green religion conference, green home tour).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2010 and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Many interviewees, especially green home owners, also gave me a tour of their home which made total visits as long as three hours. Most interviews were conducted at homes, with a few exceptions of interviews conducted at a café (2), library (1), or office (1). Interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service and uploaded into *Atlas.ti*, qualitative data analysis software. The

interviews were performed simultaneously rather than one group at a time. Field notes were entered into a laptop computer. Pseudonyms are used in data analysis, writing, and publication.

I scheduled interviews with voluntary simplifiers through the Garden State Earth Institute, a non-profit organization located in Morristown, NJ. Voluntary simplifiers, in the first few interviews I conducted, had all participated in a 4-week summer course on voluntary simplicity offered by the Garden State Earth Institute. I snowballed out from there. In order to contact religious environmentalists I was given contact information for three individuals through GreenFaith, a non-denominational environmental organization. I gathered further interviewees through their recommendations and the conference I attended on green religion which GreenFaith sponsored. GreenFaith focuses on conservation and efficiency at places of worship. Their stewardship program includes: energy and water conservation, alternative energy, pesticides and toxics, waste reduction and recycling, and food and faith. Interviews of religious environmentalists included people who identified as: Episcopalian, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, and United Church of Christ. A Senior Technical Consultant for a residential building company emailed several green homeowners (called "owner/builders") on my behalf allowing them to contact me if they were interested in participating in an interview. The residential building company was one of the twelve builders selected for the "LEED for Homes" pilot program by the U.S. Green Building Council. Some of the green homes I visited were in the process of being LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. In each case I

made a concerted effort to diversify my sample as much as possible by income, education, sex, race/ethnicity, and religious affiliation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Sample Characteristics based on Demographics Questionnaire

| | Voluntary Simplifiers | Religious Environmentalists | Green Home Owners |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| # of Informants | 16* | 15 | 20* |
| Age Range | 28-81 | 43-80 | 25-68 |
| Typical Education (Range) | Masters (HS – PhD) | Masters (BA/S – PhD) | BA/S (Some college – MA) |
| Median Household Income (Range) | \$80,000-\$99,999 (\$20,000 - \$100,000+) | \$80,000-\$99,999 (<\$19,000 - \$100,000+) | \$100,000+ (\$60,000 - \$100,000+) |
| Sex | 14 women, 2 men | 9 women, 6 men | 8 women, 12 men |
| Race/ethnicity | 1 Asian, 15 white | 1 Indian, 1 Jewish, 13 white | 20 white |

*Some informants insisted upon being interviewed as a married couple. I counted an interview with a couple as one interview. There were 15 interviews with each group.

Interviews focused on the history and lived experience of going green – a kind of green biography. I collected data on what or who had influenced informants to go green and how they influenced others. I also asked about household changes and social movement participation defined broadly from membership in groups to guest lectures. Barriers to change came up, including the demands of work, family, health problems, and the cost of innovative technology. Several interviewees mentioned problems with

innovative technology installation and local building codes. For those who could not afford to adopt innovative technology it was often aspirational. Interviews also covered problems with defining the terms green and sustainable. Interviewees explored their acceptance of labels like environmentalist and any future plans to live more sustainably.

In addition, we discussed the supportiveness (or lack of support) of friends, family, and coworkers, and others known through relationships with community groups and religious organizations. The nature of these data led me to focus on what people talk about when trying to convince others to change their lifestyles. These data rely on informant testimony about personal events and unplanned encounters. This self-reported talk offers us a window into the conscious effort informants put into communicating in certain ways to support action on climate change. For the most part formal presentations relied on big, social ideas (e.g., stewardship) and informal talk used small, personal ideas (e.g., saving money). Prominent in-group discourses like those related to antimaterialism (voluntary simplifiers), interconnectedness (religious environmentalists), and conservation (green home owners) were rarely used in informal talk.

More specifically, the interview guide was based on a review of the literature and focused on how someone first learned about voluntary simplicity (or brought together religion and environmentalism, or heard about green building), how they became involved with it, as well as average buying habits, conservation of energy and water (technology adoption and use), values/ethics, pride/status, social connections and disruptions (family, friends, and community groups), barriers and solutions, and

longevity (where do you see yourself in 5 years). In addition, the interview schedule included three questions on sustainable or green lifestyles: Does simple living (religious environmentalism, green living) influence every aspect of how you live? Can you identify a time when you became more environmentally aware (tipping point)? Do you do things that help you remember to be more environmentally responsible? These questions elicited a strong response and became the basis of chapter three and informed my decision to use pragmatism as a theoretical frame. I had a previous interest in lifestyles; however, I was not convinced that they existed beyond marketing segmentations and was curious about the extent to which people felt they actually lived a lifestyle. If the topic of lifestyles did not come up spontaneously I brought it up toward the end of the interview. Questions that elicited little response beyond yes/no answers in early interviews were dropped (Has reducing consumption improved your quality of life? Yes.) See the attached interview guide which includes (1) core interview questions that every group was asked to answer thus ensuring comparability (described above), (2) interview questions for each group that were specific to their situations, (3) a short open ended demographic questionnaire.

The primary interview data were supplemented with participant observation which took place in classes, lectures, film discussions, professional tours of green homes, weekend retreats, and a conference on green religion. This ensures the direct observation of social interaction, with-in group rhetoric, and how group goals are presented to the public. More specifically, the participant observation portion of the study included tours of green homes--both professional tours of green homes in New

Jersey and tours done by the interviewees of their own homes. It also included GreenFaith events like an environmental justice bus tour of Newark and a conference on green religion. I also attended events at Genesis Farm, a learning center for earth studies on a 226-acre farm sponsored by the Sisters of St. Dominic. In previous years the Garden State Earth Institute held classes on voluntary simplicity and choices for sustainable living. Unfortunately, those classes were discontinued because the teacher was dealing with a significant health crisis. However, I did obtain the syllabi for the classes. I also attended several meetings and classes offered by the U.S. Green Building Council. In addition, I attended local and regional environmental events like a solar forum (offering information to homeowners who want to invest in solar panels) and a film/discussion series. In chapter four I discuss the solar forum in greater detail. However, the main return on this work lies in observing the difference between in-group (chapter three) and out-group (chapter five) discourses; and highlights the extent to which informants were participants in other environmental groups and activities (chapter six).

I used *Atlas.ti* and the grounded theory approach to systematically explore codes and larger categories within the data in order to identify social patterns of restricting consumption. Codes were determined first by theoretical expectations about values, knowledge, status, and technology use. Second, emergent themes generated by the interview and observational data were organized by grouping common topics and creating taxonomies (Corbin and Strauss 1990). The major categories of emergent themes began with (1) causal conditions, or factors which caused respondents to

consider restricting their consumption, (2) strategies, or actions taken by the respondent to restrict their consumption or the consumption of others, (3) intervening conditions, situational factors that influence strategies positively or negatively (Corbin and Strauss 1990).

My goal is to build upon the descriptions of informants' experiences, using the grounded theory approach, in order to construct a theory to explain the practice of restricting consumption and to make a framework for further study (Creswell 2006, Strauss and Corbin 1998). I am also analytically attentive to processes, rather than causes, as well as conditions that may inform differences (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Inductive research is called for in this matter because theoretical commitments, like the expected consistency between values and action, have colored much of the previous research. My goal is to describe how people manage reducing their consumption and what life circumstances assist or hinder that project. I also build theory around the "habitualisation of environmental activities" or how consumers transition to lower levels of consumption (Georg 1999, Zavestoski 2002). The nature of these data led me to focus on the different ways individuals bring together lifestyle change, technology use, recruitment, and more traditional forms of political participation.

DATA: GROUP DESCRIPTIONS

Voluntary Simplifiers

From the literature we know that voluntary simplifiers (aka simplifiers, simple livers, living a simple life) are individuals who are part of a loosely affiliated movement

determined to limit their consumption to an extreme degree (Cherrier and Murray 2002, Craig-Lees and Hill 2002, Etzioni 1998, Sandlin and Walther 2009). Simple living often begins with an intense period of de-cluttering (Ballantine and Creery 2009). In some cases individuals attempt to buy nothing new with the exception of food, medicine, and some items of children's clothing (Huneke 2005, McDonald et al. 2006, Walther and Sandlin 2013). By reducing the clutter in their lives they believe that they can return to a time with stronger family and communal bonds, cultivate a greater appreciation of nature, become more independent, and experience meaningful personal growth which has all been eroded by consumerism (Grigsby 2004, Elgin 1981, Johnston and Burton 2003, Zavestoski 2002). This philosophy often leads to a low-tech, nostalgic 19th century approach to addressing environmental problems.

Johnston and Burton (2003) studied multiple definitions of voluntary simplicity and concluded that five main ethical frames can be identified—these frames have endured from the beginning of the movement in the 1970s (Elgin and Mitchell 1977, Johnson 2004). Those five key interdependent values include: material simplicity, human scale, self-determination, ecological awareness, and personal growth. *Material simplicity* involves a commitment to reducing consumption (buying fewer products but not necessarily less expensive products). The driving interest here is utility, durability, using fewer resources in production, and avoiding mass produced goods—local products, hand-made products, green products, free trade, certified renewable, etc. *Human scale* “denotes a commitment to working and living in environments that are smaller, decentralized, and less complex” (McDonald et al. 2006): adhering to the

principles of the “Not so Big House” (Susanka 1998), self-built homes, and carefully designing spaces for maximum utility. *Self-determination* as a value means less reliance on the government (incentives, regulations), big business, or other institutions; for example, choosing gardening or the farmers market over large scale grocery or box stores or learning to repair goods instead of throwing them away. A couple of studies refer to this as regaining a feeling of “control.” *Ecological awareness* includes conservation, recycling, reducing waste and pollution. In some cases this branches out into issues of equality, diversity, and social justice like fighting environmental racism (when pollution and waste is concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods). This includes a component of community awareness and community action. The final value is *personal growth*, which in the literature is often described using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and his notion of self-actualization (Etzioni 1998, Huneke 2005, Zavestoski 2002). McDonald et al. (2006:516) observe that the beginning of the voluntary simplicity movement was more closely related to religious and spiritual motivations and today voluntary simplifiers are more likely to promote the development of “practical, creative, or intellectual abilities.”

While the sentiments of voluntary simplifiers are often traced back to Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden Pond*, the first article on the value and practice of simplicity was written by Richard Gregg (1936). Gregg “traced the lineage of simple living to Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tse, Moses, Mohammed, and to more recent saints and leaders such as Francis of Assisi, Hindu rishis, Hebrew prophets, Moslem Sufis, and even Lenin and Gandhi” (sic) (Zavestoski 2002:150). Gregg (1936) argues that the realm of production is

beyond our power (Marxist alienation) so the only area we have control over is consumption. Studies show that voluntary simplifiers are communal or heavily networked, have serious environmental concerns, consider themselves secular, and some communicate anti-capitalist/Marxist ideas (Zavestoski 2002). This group is also considered extreme reducers when it comes to consumption, some living on as little as \$6000-10,000/year.

Several studies of voluntary simplicity find that the number of practitioners has remained steady over the last thirty years, while theoretical arguments often claim that numbers are rising. There are no representative surveys of actors who simplify their consumption, and estimates range from thousands to millions. Schor (1998) estimates that 20 percent of Americans (50 million) have downshifted or simplified their work life and lifestyle. And one study from 2000 predicted that by 2005 15% of the population in developed countries will practice voluntary simplicity in some form (Talvi 2000:11). Different estimates probably stem from different definitions of simplicity. Smith (2003) argues that it is the definition of voluntary simplicity that has changed since the 1970s and not the number of people practicing it. A more recent multi-national online survey (n=2268) finds that approximately 20% of people in the developed world are downshifting or about 1 billion people (Alexander and Ussher 2012). Over 80% of those surveyed said that environmental concern was one of their motivations, and in the aggregate environmental concern is the primary motivation reported for living a simple life (see Figure 1 below from Alexander and Ussher 2012).

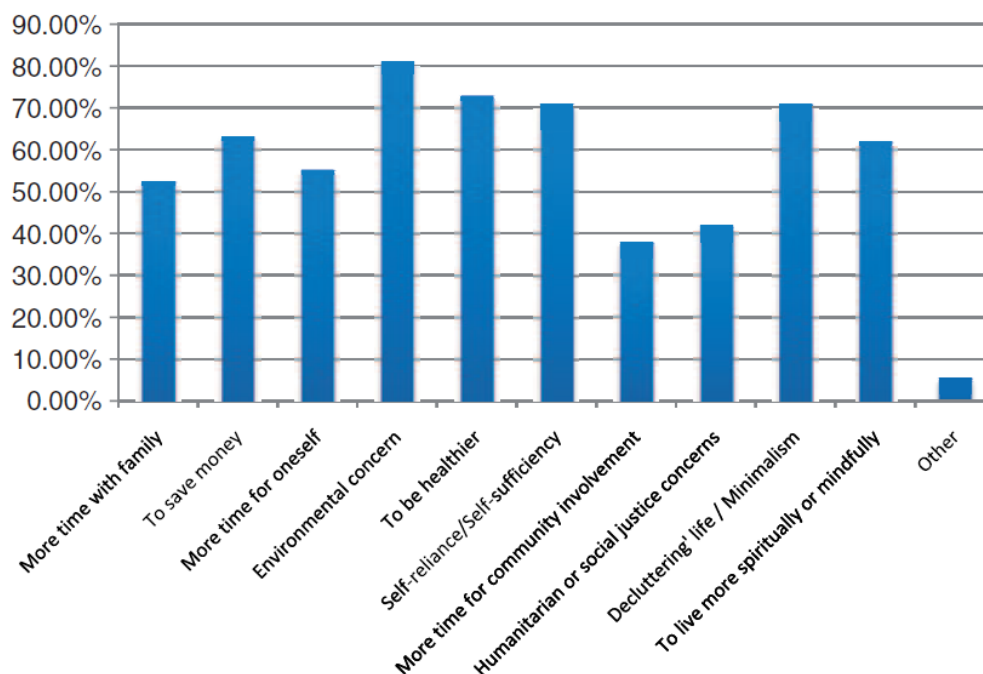


Figure 1. Percentage of participants listing specific motivations for living simply.

Other studies of voluntary simplifiers show both positive reasons (“increase life satisfaction”) and negative reasons (“being tired of the pressure to consume, environmental concerns”) for restricting consumption (McDonald et al 2006: 520, Zavestoski 2002). The “stress of consumer society” also figures prominently in social psychology explanations of voluntarily restricting consumption.

In my research I focus on voluntary simplifiers who reduce their consumption specifically to address environmental harms (climate change and rising sea water, pollution, growing landfills), as opposed to others who are attempting to spend less so they can work less and take back their time from paid labor (Schor 1998). Some voluntary simplifiers that I interviewed were long-time activists (anti-nuclear, pro-peace) with ties to local school programs, local political committees, or community groups;

whereas others gave money to regional and national environmental groups but focused primarily on changing their own household. Most live below their means and have little debt. Their lifestyle commonly causes small conflicts with family members, coworkers, or neighbors especially surrounding gift-giving – as simplifiers would rather not give or receive gifts.

Voluntary simplifiers that I spoke with argued that we should separate needs from wants to reduce consumption but not deprive ourselves. Needs are contextual, thus we are allowed to define a cell phone (to keep in touch with our family or for emergencies) or laptop (for work) as a need. Angela, a voluntary simplifier, explains “love, food, education, medical care, decent housing, clothing, you know, is essential. So I would say, try to think about what you really need in your life, and see what consumer items really are necessary and what are not.” Voluntary simplifiers argue that quality of life increases with restricted consumption, and claim that material objects literally get in the way of personal fulfillment and social relationships that can be restored when material barriers are cleared away.

Catherine explains that being a voluntary simplifier primarily means doing without, using less, and reducing waste. She explains that reducing consumption includes the use of energy and water.

[Voluntary simplicity is] trying to live lightly on the earth, not consume too many resources, reuse, recycle, you know, do without, reduce - definitely reduce energy consumption. In terms of heat and - heat in the winter, you know, we wear sweaters in this house, wool sweaters [laughter] instead of turning the heat up very high. And not consuming too much water. I always, you know --- doing things like loading the dishwasher 'til it's full before running it, doing, running full loads in the washing machine, so conserving water, thinking about water and gas and other forms of energy.

Other simplifiers also mention an “awareness” of energy and water that is out of the ordinary. Voluntary simplifiers focus on reducing overall consumption, use alternative consumption sparingly, and practice mundane energy saving like turning off lights or turning down hot water heaters. Voluntary simplifiers are interested in buying less as their main practice and are less likely to invest in innovative technology. For example, they would rather use water and vinegar as a cleaning product, ride their bike, or use public transportation than buy green cleaning products and a Prius hybrid.

However, simplicity within a consumer economy is not simple – it is complex and time-consuming (Librova 2008). Simplicity is a bit of a misnomer implying a calm and austere life when the reality is much more challenging, hectic, and cluttered. Lane explains:

There is sort of, I think, a way of looking at voluntary simplicity and thinking: Oh, everything - you know, there's like, no stuff around and everything's sort of calm, and you know, and there's not clutter and that kind of stuff. And I think none of that's true. I think probably, we are trying to live in a more simple way, but it's a very hard and complex, crazy society when you're an activist.

And Cynthia, whose garage is filled with things to reuse or recycle, explains “it's more the saving and the resourceful things that are not simple. But as far as just collecting, recycling and putting it outside, and energy efficiency things, are just part of your routine.” Another voluntary simplifier likened herself to a pack rat, repairing and keeping things that may be useful in the future.

Voluntary simplifiers are occasionally critiqued as apolitical isolationists (Maniates 2002a). However, my informants are involved in community groups and local initiatives. In a recent survey 67% of simplifiers reported that they are also involved in a

community organization (Alexander and Ussher 2012). For example, Tracy, a voluntary simplifier and nurse, went to Tennessee to train with Al Gore to give the *Inconvenient Truth* slide show. She offers a good description of what it means to support change “on all levels.” Tracy talks about the personal, town, state, national, and global levels where change is possible:

Individual versus [collective]? It has to be both. It has to be at every level. And whenever I do a presentation [the *Inconvenient Truth* slide show], you give people alternatives for individual, personal behavior, and you get tell them how they can get involved in their town. Because at the town level, you can make a difference. You can. You have more of an impact. Definitely at the state level, supporting off-shore wind turbines... And then, at the national level, definitely, electing people who understand the urgency of the situation. And then it's obviously a global situation. So, for every issue that does reach global proportion[s], such as climate change or unsustainable lifestyles, I think it has to be a combination of everything.

At the end of the slide show, Tracy urges others to take multiple actions and influence every level. She finds that people are more willing to change their lifestyles than get involved with politics, so in her talk she tries to encourage them to go beyond lifestyle change. Tracy talked about the way political participation is getting easier today with internet petitions and software to log calls to elected representatives. Contrary to critiques of simple living, Tracy, and others like her, discussed their political involvement as higher than most people they knew. Tracy continues “I think you have to do everything. But I tend to do more than, you know, in a political sense, I tend to do more than the average person.”

Voluntary simplicity is the least costly way to adopt a green lifestyle. Several informants are single or divorced women relying on their own incomes to care for

themselves and, for some, their children. I also encountered women who were retired and on a fixed income. Catherine, a special-needs teacher is divorced with two children. She owns her own home and a fuel-efficient compact car (not a hybrid). She is waiting for her children to leave home before selling the house and moving into a cohousing community. Studies find that single/divorced women without children, or married women with no children living at home, are the most likely to participate in voluntary simplicity (Grigsby 2004, Huneke 2005).

Religious Environmentalists

Religious environmentalists come from diverse religious backgrounds and believe that caring for the environment is part of their religious responsibility (Kearns 1996, 2004, Smith and Pulver 2009, Taylor 2007). They are often members of organized mainstream denominations with weekly services (Taylor 2006). Green religion is diverse because environmental ideas have penetrated every world religion and many smaller religious movements in a kind of ecological zeitgeist (Gardner 2006, Taylor 2001a, 2001b, Walsh 2008). Religious environmentalists have an approach which brings together progressive interpretations of religious texts, practices that reduce consumption, and technological solutions to environmental harms including clean energy.

Religion, previously blamed for supporting environmental degradation through worshipping the sacred and neglecting or denigrating the natural world, is now viewed as part of the solution (Haluza-Delay 2014). According to some studies religious rationales for supporting environmentalism and limiting consumption have been on the

rise since the early 1990s beginning with mainstream Protestants (Walsh 2008). Even earlier (1982) calls for voluntary simplicity were explicitly made to Christians on the basis of religious doctrine (Zavestoski 2002). And Christians and progressive activists were the first groups connected to fair trade product purchases and distribution (Zick Varul 2008). Green religion refers to “religious sensibilities that consider environmental concern a religious duty, regardless of whether nature itself evokes reverence or is considered sacred” (Taylor 2006:590). Green religions include “environmentally concerned world religions...nature-as-sacred religions...[and] post-supernaturalistic ‘spiritualities of connection’ to nature” (Taylor 2004). Referred to as green religion, faith-based environmentalism, nature religion, *tikkun olam* (the healing of the world), or care for creation the sentiments are wide ranging in their appeal. The National Religious Partnership for the Environment, an organization founded in 1992, now includes the National Council of Churches, the U.S. Catholic Conference, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (Walsh 2008). Also, movements which find nature deeply meaningful or transcendent, like deep ecology, Earth First!, Bioregionalism, Scientific Paganism, and the New Age are occasionally included in the definition of green religion although they may not embrace the label of religion themselves (Taylor 2001a, Taylor 2001b).

There is a growing literature on the “theological, pastoral, or normative” prescriptions supported by particular religious traditions (Haluza-Delay 2014, L. Lorenzen 2007), yet little research has been published about the ways actual “religious institutions, groups and individuals are responding to the problem of climate change”

(Veldman, Szasz and Haluza-DeLay 2014:3). There is also a preoccupation with the study of Christianity, to the exclusion of other religions, and conservative Evangelical Christians in particular (Kearns 1996, McCammack 2007, Walsh 2008, Wardekker, Peterson and van der Sluijs 2009, Wilkinson 2010, 2012). Although survey data show that, on the topic of climate change, the U.S. is more polarized by political affiliation than religiosity (measured by attendance at a place of worship) (McCright and Dunlap 2011).

In contrast, religious environmentalists interviewed for this study include people who identified as: Episcopalian, Jewish, Muslim, Quaker, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, and United Church of Christ (UCC). Informants included religious leaders (clergy, teachers at a religious school, fellowship or outreach committee members), some of whom were long-time environmentalists. Others were congregation members and long-time environmentalists specifically recruited by their place of worship to assist in greening buildings and practices.

Their in-group discourse focuses on interconnectedness and environmental stewardship. Stewardship, in this context, is not understood as a top-down experience like a “gardener/caretaker” (Kearns 1996), but rather as playing one, co-equal part in a larger system. One study of Christian-Jewish environmental discourses called this “conservational stewardship” which uses an ethic of solidarity and caring (Wardekker, Peterson and van der Sluijs 2009:515). Natalie, a member of a United Church of Christ congregation, explains that from a religious perspective everything is interconnected – whether you call it ecology, creation (her term), or human rights. Natalie explains:

I think for me, a lot of it is about the effect it's having on people. So my values of feeling that - that we need to - that we're responsible, that we're responsible for

each other, and that when people's livelihoods or people's health and wellbeing are endangered by practices, by our practices, that's what really gets to me, that we need to care for the earth, but we need to care for all of God's creation. But we need to care when we're affecting other people and their livelihood and their ability to have a decent life.

Therefore, addressing environmental harms – especially the pollution of land, air, and water – is part of a stewardship project which includes a myriad of other concerns like poverty, health, and affordable housing.

Louis, a rabbi, explains that when he gives his “basic talks” on Jewish environmentalism in adult forums (meetings before religious services), he defines stewardship as taking responsibility, thinking long-term, and “realizing the interconnectedness” of creation. His commitment to environmentalism is influenced not only by his religion but also by a recent health crisis which pushed him to think about the legacy he wanted to leave behind when he dies. Louis explains:

Consumerism is a very short-term mentality. Stewardship, which comes naturally to religious communities, is about long-term perspectives. In fact, that's how I define environmentalism. Being an environmentalist is - environmentalism is based on science, the idea of interconnectedness, which is an actual scientific fact, as well as an existential idea, and long-term thinking. All of those things are perfectly compatible with a religious perspective. And I often begin my basic talks with that, to show people what it means to be an environmentalist, and therefore a religious environmentalist.

At the end of his talks Louis stresses the importance of taking “personal action, local actions, state action, and national action.” Louis believes that religion is an important tool for social change, however his discussions of climate change quickly run up against major theological debates – like is god all loving or all powerful? Louis explains that some of the Jews he encounters find the idea of an all powerful god “existentially

comforting.” And if god is all powerful then how can people have the freewill to destroy the planet and the responsibility to repair it? In order to motivate people to take action they need to believe that people have enough free will to do both. This echoes findings from a case study by Kari Norgaard (2011) which finds that climate change denial can support ontological security.

There has been some disagreement over whether green theology unites (Haluza-Delay 2014) or divides religions (Taylor 2004); the informants I studied fell into two main categories which were not necessarily defined by their religious affiliation (for example, Roman Catholics were in both categories) and who worked well together despite their differences. I refer to these two groups as liberals and radicals (non-supernaturalists). Both groups focus on interconnectedness and stewardship but have slightly different perspectives supporting those ideas. The liberals relied more on progressive interpretations of theology and religious texts. In the liberal case, god is all loving and not all powerful – this means that god is not responsible for evil in the world and thus people have a duty to address it. In terms of religious texts, an Episcopalian pastor that I interviewed had a green bible in which all the passages related to the environment were printed in green ink. Bible stories are re-interpreted as prescriptions to care for the environment (do not sow salt into your enemies’ fields for it is a sin against nature). Furthermore, the sacred-ness of the environment (as god’s creation) is emphasized. In their public presentations, and in interviews, liberals imply that god would be disturbed by the pollution of the planet and ask implicitly “what would god want you to do?” The liberals have a kind of double consciousness about their own theology. On one hand

they are sincere in their beliefs, but on the other hand they carefully craft messages to reach more conservative religious audiences.

The radicals, whom I also call non-supernaturalists, are Christians only in so far as they are part of a larger Christian community. They include mostly Unitarians and Roman Catholics, particularly nuns or “green sisters” (Taylor 2007). They do not believe in anything supernatural. In their theology, called creation spirituality, there is no god in any traditional sense and Jesus is not divine. Instead God is a “sense of the divine mystery” of creation and the universe (Swimme and Berry 1992). The goal of creation spirituality is to offer a new creation story rooted in contemporary physics and quantum physics – called the Universe Story (Swimme 1984, Swimme and Berry 1992). By focusing on an explicitly non-religious physics of creation and biological evolution, the architects of the movement (Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry) are constructing a framework that may be used in concert with any world religion (or any world religion that is not anti-science). Swimme and Barry (1992) argue that science has the facts right about the creation of the universe, but scientists are not very good storytellers. Therefore, they are in the process of developing a new language for integrating those ideas into our everyday lives.

Marjorie, a Roman Catholic nun and teacher, spoke to me at length about this perspective. She met Thomas Berry in the 1970s while attending conferences at the U.N. on population, poverty, and the environment. She jokingly calls what follows her “30 second elevator talk” on cosmology and the universe story. First she describes the problem and why religion has been blamed for environmental harms.

Well, it gives us a different origin story, how everything has come to be...The cosmology that is foundational to the west has some basic assumptions. One is that the human is separate from everything else, and the human is the only one that has psyche, soul, spirit, consciousness, and everything else doesn't even matter. And while humans also have matter, we have a transcendent spirit, and this does not emerge out of the universe, but is a direct intervention by the creator into the human spirit, the human being. And that kind of sets up a lot of perceptions and assumptions about the way things are. And so, it has led to the industrial way of life that we've created through technology and chemistry and all the rest of it, which of course, is what is so totally damaging to the planet, to the natural life systems.

In western culture nature was defined as an object for exploitation (man shall have dominion over the earth) and something wild to be tamed and conquered (manifest destiny). Instead of simply fighting against this perspective she hopes to replace it, although this may be difficult to do in our science-challenged culture. She argues that sacred texts do not "have enough there to make us green," that instead we need a paradigm change because we have learned a great deal about the world since biblical stories were written.

Marjorie goes on to describe the new cosmology, which she also calls: the "origin of the universe" or the "emergence of the universe," the "universe process," or the "evolution of the universe."

The new cosmology, which ironically, comes out of the west as well, is scientifically based... [it] suggests that the universe is the context that has brought everything forth, including the humans. So, the human exists and can think and feel and is spiritual, and those capacities had to be there from the very beginning. And so it's one seamless developmental process, and that's a powerful vision, hopefully with enough capacity to change us from the way we are living now to what's really being asked of us if we are going to survive - I mean the whole planet. ...We have to change this fundamental understanding that we are earth in the form of a human, not humans living on an earth

In other words, people have a responsibility for creation because people are part of the on-going process of creation and everything began from the same creation event (what you or I might call the big bang). Marjorie argues that “we have this rare, little, gorgeous planet” and “one single community of life” where everything is “one unbroken sequence of changes...the same energy...the universe is one with itself.” Swimme and Barry (1992:264) explain that “the universe we might consider as a single, multiform, sequential, celebratory event...expressing delight in existence.” This notion of interconnectedness is more literal (we are all made of stars) than the liberal understanding of interconnection as interdependency – although in practice they fit well together.

Surprisingly, religious environmentalists did not talk about their values or ethics to me any more or less than the other two groups. And in one-on-one conversations (like the ones I discuss in chapter five), religious and ethical appeals are largely absent. Similarly, Lichterman (2005, 2009) finds that religious groups, organized around addressing state welfare reform, do little “God talk” and (whether conservative or progressive) define themselves against stereotypical evangelizing Christians (bible-thumping fire and brimstone preachers/televangelists). Religious talk is governed more by personal identity and group style than by religious membership (Lichterman 2005, 2009).

Green religion proponents like Oelschlaeger (1994:7) argue that in the face of government failure religion can act as a catalyst for action and “move us democratically toward sustainability.” And a recent study of GSS data finds that “among Christians

more religious individuals do report engaging in more private environmental behaviors than do less religious ones” (Clements, McCright and Xiao 2013). Both the liberals and the radicals that I spoke with hope to use religion as a lever for change. However Greenfaith, a non-denomination organization which supports green religion and my original contact for these interviews, almost exclusively uses the liberal theology as part of their strategy for change. When I spoke to the founder of Greenfaith he explained that he had very clear political goals for the group and a broad audience in mind. Sam, a retired Episcopalian pastor and the founder of Greenfaith, explains that the group was part neighborhood consciousness-raising and part state lobbyists:

I can remember being at a state meeting, and I said something - this was after [the environmental conference in] Rio [in 1992] - saying something about sustainability, and somebody got up and said, “Don't use that word. That's a [bad word]” [laughter] I forgot what their problem was. That there was still - it still had not surfaced to consciousness. So, I do think that indirectly, what became GreenFaith had an impact on the state. But it was a conscious decision to commit locally and to also try very hard to have an impact at the state level, with the politicians.

Greenfaith has several audiences: clergy and congregation leaders, members at places of worship, and state policy-makers. In order to be inclusive Greenfaith uses the rhetoric of responsibility and stewardship, rather than attempting to convey a revised creation story.

Greenfaith works at multiple levels by greening schools and church/temple buildings; as a result of GreenFaith's energy initiative several religious congregations in the state now have solar panels on their rooftops. GreenFaith also supports off-shore wind energy and has a home energy audit that one may download from their website.

Another main concern for GreenFaith is health and avoiding the use of toxic chemicals in the cleaning of religious buildings. At the state level they helped stop an incinerator expansion and at the congregation/household level they review and recommend products on their website that are non-toxic. I talk more about the relationship between the state and religious environmentalists in chapter four, and more about non-religious persuasive rhetoric in chapter five.

Green Home Owners

Green home owners build or remodel homes in such a way as to use resources more efficiently, and to decrease unfavorable impacts to human health and the environment. Green building typically focuses on the efficiency of energy, water, building materials (for example, cement counter tops, bamboo flooring, and non-toxic paint), and indoor air quality (Fischer 2010, Lipke 2001); although there is no consensus on the definition of green building (Kibert 2004). Some homes in this study are in the process of being Energy Star, EPA (Environmental Protection Association), or LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. LEED is a third party certification process supported by the U.S. Green Building Council, a non-profit organization attempting to change building standards throughout the U.S. (Abair 2008, Groom 2008, Kibert 2004, Kibert and Grosskopf 2007). Green home owners have an intense relationship to technology (discussed in chapter four). More efficient technologies and the use of renewable and recycled resources are viewed by green home owners as the main solution to climate change.

Many of the green home owners, with whom I spoke, work in the building industry. They were architects, teachers of green design, owners of small green building companies or heating and air-conditioning companies. Others worked in industries related to technology from IT (information technology) to auto mechanics, and one couple designed theater sets and did event planning. But all green home owners were somehow connected to design, building, or technological problem-solving. In most cases informants were planning to build or renovate a home before they became seriously involved with green building. The sentiment “we’re building/renovating this anyway so we might as well make it green” was often shared. Those involved in green building were influenced by, among other things, Frank Lloyd Wright, the book “A Pattern Language” by Alexander, Ishikawa, and Silverstein (1977),⁸ and the sustainability goals laid out by the U.S. Green Building Council and their LEED for Homes certification program. Those outside the green building business were more influenced by the back to the land movement or were do-it-yourself environmentalists and were less likely to use cutting edge green building products. Also those who were financially constrained, both inside and outside of the green building business, were less likely to use new green building products.

A kind of ecological balance or sustainability was sought by green home owners. Anthony is a retired Dean of a private university; he is currently acting as his own architect and general contractor and building a platinum LEED certified home (also EPA

⁸ The book *A Pattern Language* was organized to tackle design problems at any scale: doorknobs, rooms, gardens, homes, neighborhoods, or geographical regions. While the book was designed to include a non-expert audience it was most influential to those who specialized in design.

certified for air quality and handicapped accessible). He is conscious of his status as an early adopter and wants to serve as a role model for how to build a sustainable “100 year home.” He uses extremely high levels of insulation (R-value 40 in the walls) to create a “tight envelope” and has designed a whole-house fan to increase ventilation and replace air conditioning. He also uses geothermal heating which he argues will last longer than a solar panel system. Anthony is essentially an expert on sustainability and green home building, which was typical for green home owners. He explains why he became involved in green building.

Is it right to recycle? Of course it is, because if you don't, you're utilizing resources that you could basically regenerate through the recycling process. So why tax future generations and burden future generations by having less available resources than we're capable of leaving them. ...It's the right thing to do because our generation doesn't have the right to utilize any more resources than it absolutely needs...resources need to be shepherded, hoarded, you know, carefully dealt with.

Anthony focuses on the finite supply of resources, the fairness of their distribution (present use vs. future use), and considers the connection between future generations and remaining resources. He believes that green home building is the responsible thing to do and wants to be part of the diffusion of green building ideas and practices.

Green home owners work with businesses, rather than against them, and they support market mechanisms for change as one part of a larger political project. They also get pulled into local politics for their expertise on city planning. And behind the scenes they support government regulation, especially of the building industry. Martin, a green home owner, explains that change requires more than voluntary action. Martin says, “I think a very good argument could be made that the government needs to step

up and do more and force people to change more quickly than they would on their own.” Most green home owners involved with the “LEED for Homes” program want to make LEED the national building standard. This is already happening in the case of some government buildings and cities. The ultimate goal is to create a new norm in residential areas that sets a contemporary standard for energy efficiency.

Green homes are a relatively new phenomenon and literature on green homes tends to focus on the material technicalities of energy conservation and sustainable design (i.e., or what builders and policy makers call post-occupancy evaluations). Green homes may include the use of non-toxic and recycled building materials, Energy Star appliances and lighting, double or triple glazed windows, extra insulation, and context appropriate architecture to reduce heating and cooling costs (like homes that face south in cold climates). Building smaller, and in a way that is appropriate for the climate, is also a concern for sustainability. The green home building trend began in Austin, Texas in 1991 and an “estimated 50,000 eco-friendly homes have been constructed in the U.S. over the past decade” (Lipke 2001); 3,000 of those built between 1998 and 2007 were LEED certified (Kibert and Grosskopf 2007). Green home building rose 30 percent between 2005 and 2006 and by 2013 could account for up to 5 percent of the U.S. housing market (Schmidt 2008a). Regardless of the size of this trend proponents argue that they are making a significant impact by establishing a new trend for residential areas (Schmidt 2008a). According to Jennifer Senick, founder and executive director of the Rutgers Center for Green Building, green homes are the only area of the housing market that has continued to grow despite the foreclosure crisis. Addressing the built

environment as a source of resource use and pollution is important because Americans purchase about 2 million new homes in the U.S. a year (Brown and Vergragt 2008). And the average new home in 2007 has grown to 2,459 square feet compared to 1,500 square feet in 1973 (Schmidt 2008a).

Studies of green home owners themselves are rare (Lipke 2001, Martin, Swett and Wein 2007). Also, little work has been done on energy consumption and resource consumption more generally, from the perspective of consumers in the U.S. with a few critical exceptions (Bin and Dowlatabadi 2005, Emery and Kippenhan 2006, Erickson 1997, Leonard-Barton 1981, Lutzenhiser 1992, 1993). Most demographics of green home owners and buyers are generated by marketing companies and thus not available to the public. However, one online report summarized the findings of three green home buyer studies by the Natural Marketing Institute, American LIVES, and Roper's ASW (Martin, Swett, and Wein 2007). Patterns in green home buyer attitudinal and behavioral characteristics include:

...higher levels of education, greater overall awareness of environmental issues such as global warming, and concern over the health and performance attributes of a home... Common behaviors and characteristics of green homebuyers: seek out healthy food options, purchase green products, participate actively in environmental and cultural organizations, desire holistic experiences and authenticity, look for multiple and extensive sources of information, pursue higher education (Martin, Swett, and Wein 2007:11).

This suggests that owning a green home is part of a larger lifestyle pattern that includes green consumption as well as environmental movement participation.

Reducing the expense and extending the access to green homes is a major topic of consideration (Schmidt 2008a). Government and private incentives range from tax

credits, utility rebates, and expedited permitting, to coupons for green products (Schmidt 2008b). A study by McGraw-Hill Construction shows that nearly two thirds of green home buyers earn more than \$50,000 a year (Schmidt 2008a). In my own research I find that green home owners tend to be upper-middle class with two-income households and college degrees. They typically had more economic capital than cultural capital.

The LEED program was officially launched in November of 2007 after a couple of pilot programs. Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council the LEED program rates buildings on a scale of 0-69: 0-25 not certified, 26-32 LEED certified, 33-38 LEED silver certification, 39-51 LEED gold certification, 52-69 LEED platinum certification. Areas investigated include: site sustainability, water conservation, energy efficiency and atmosphere protection, materials and resource conservation, indoor environmental quality, and innovation and integrated design (Yudelson and Fedrizzi 2007:17). In the first six months of 2008, 10,250 new home projects applied for LEED certification compared with 3,100 in 2006—the first year of the home rating system previously only available to businesses (Barringer 2008). Most LEED buildings are commercial or institutional but as of June 2008, 684 homes in the U.S. were LEED certified, 48 with a platinum rating (Barringer 2008). LEED has also trained 23,000 industry professionals in green building and sustainability (Kibert and Grosskopf 2007).

However, LEED certification is not without its critics. Some contractors argue that the LEED certification is too narrow, that the bar is too high. Also that there are items measured that do not directly relate to the environmental impact of a building.

Other certification programs within the U.S. include the Energy Star home certification program, Green Globes web based self-assessment offered by the Green Building Initiative, and regional or industry specific certification programs for green homes (Yudelsohn and Fedrizzi 2007).

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

Chapter 2 – Why do People Go Green?: 4 Perspectives

I begin by describing the literature on why people go green and reduce their consumption, highlighting theories on available information, commitment to values, access to systems of provision, and lifestyles. I label these four perspectives: (1) *homo economicus* (the rational choice perspective on the informed consumer), (2) the predictably irrational consumer (for example, the environmental psychology perspective on the values-oriented consumer), (3) the locked-in consumer (systems perspective), and (4) the socially organized consumer (a practice theory perspective which includes attention to lifestyles). I deal with the first two categories briefly (summary and critique), and then go on to describe the alternative perspectives (the latter two categories) coming out of sociology today. I end by placing the literature in the context of the “Shove-Whitmarsh debate” which highlights the differences between the “systems and practices model” on the one hand, and the “ABC model” of Attitudes, Behaviors, and Choices (values and information perspective) on the other.

Chapter 3 – Going Green: The Process of Lifestyle Change

This chapter identifies common patterns in the emergence of green lifestyles across all groups. Green practices are not isolated decisions or actions, but components

in an ongoing project. As a result green lifestyles are often experienced as both a work-in-progress and a provisionally coherent life narrative. Furthermore, I explore bricolage, the cobbling together of resources at hand by non-experts, as a mechanism for lifestyle change and expand the concept to include environmental practices and themes. I adopt a pragmatist perspective to understand lifestyle change as a deliberate process undertaken in response to a problem left under-addressed by current policies and practices. Ultimately, going green is a dynamic process that happens over time and not a simple recipe or blueprint. This chapter also weighs in on the debate in the sociology of culture over how culture influences action.

Chapter 4 – Green and Smart: The Co-construction of Users and Technology

This chapter explores the adoption and use of technology as part of an effort toward greener living. I highlight divergent adoption practices, of innovative and ordinary technologies, within these three relevant social groups. Although differing in their approach (constitutive, strategic, and practical) all three groups construct or augment the green-ness and smart-ness of technology through their practices. I find that an intensive use of innovative technology, rather than avoiding a change in practices, cultivates equally intensive practices to support it. Thus green-ness is jointly produced by aspects inherent to technology design, as well as the ways users adopt technology through domestication practices in the interest of social change. This chapter also shows how domestication theory, the co-construction of users and technology, and an expanded definition of green technology may contribute to a re-shaping of policy objectives and approaches.

Chapter 5 – Convincing people to go green: managing strategic action by minimizing political talk

I investigate the strategy and tactics used by environmentally conscious actors to convince people to change their lifestyles and become more environmentally responsible. Aware of the public's aversion to discussing volatile issues like climate change, informants distance themselves from their in-group discourses and instead focus on changing practices while downplaying political ideas and engagements. This is part of a pragmatic lifestyle change strategy which unites several persuasive techniques including: tailoring appeals to particular audiences, making "I feel" statements, being role models, highlighting financial rewards like the "win-win" proposition, and the rare direct environmental appeal. I discuss how informants manipulate the lack of public political talk to their advantage in order to reach a wider audience. In this case, avoiding politics is not only active, but strategic.

Chapter 6 – Green Lifestyles and Environmental Activism: How Lifestyle Change Supports Collective Action

Environmentally sustainable lifestyles have been characterized as part of "prefigurative communities" (aligning interests with social movements) or, in contrast, "inverted quarantines" (when environmental protection is satisfied by consumer goods at the expense of political action). I dispute the assertion that green lifestyles are apolitical or create a tradeoff with political participation or support for system-level change. Transitioning to a sustainable lifestyle is often one part of a multi-faceted approach to addressing climate change. First, my research confirms that people who are

in the process of cultivating a sustainable lifestyle are often pulled or pushed into collective action through social networks. Second, activists also use lifestyle change to shore up long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. And third, I find that those who wish to avoid formal, contentious politics are drawn to sustainable lifestyles – a case of selection effects rather than causality. Contrary to the inverted quarantine thesis, transitioning to a more sustainable lifestyle does not cause people to avoid politics. Lifestyles do not necessarily support the individualization of responsibility so much as they are a consequence of it. The result is an expansion of the tactics used to address climate change, rather than the replacement of public strategies with personal ones.

Chapter 7 – Reducing Consumption: Social Connections and the Problem of Gift Giving

The main research question in the study of consumers and consumption is why do people buy more than they need? The body of literature which attempts to answer that question is characterized by theories of differentiation, indulgence, identity, and social connections. Environmental scholars have capitalized on these insights and assert that the first three of these theories (differentiation, indulgence, and identity) represent barriers to reducing consumption. In contrast to environmental scholars my interviewees are relatively successful in creating green social status comparison groups, ignoring marketing and the new “must have” product, and defining their identities based on what they do not buy. Instead, I find that disrupting social connections creates the most interpersonal conflict in everyday life and represents an unrecognized challenge to reducing consumption. For example, conflict over gift giving (i.e., one way

consumerism supports social connections) was pervasive. Attempting to withdraw from the gift economy strained social ties and was rarely successful. Instead most interviewees compromised by using green/ethical gift giving as a tactic for recruiting others to live a green lifestyle. In the discussion I consider how the social connections perspective may be furthered using social network theory.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion: The Role of Lifestyles in Social Change

I end by returning to the big picture of how personal and social change happens. I map out the lived experience of lifestyle change, in context, as one tactic among many that is used to address environmental problems and climate change. To do this I summarize my empirical and theoretical contributions in terms of explaining what a green lifestyle is, how people transition to a green lifestyle, how people convince others to go green, and the relationship between lifestyle change and more traditional forms of political participation. I also discuss the value of green lifestyles as an approach for addressing climate change and other environmental harms. I find that green lifestyles contribute both directly and indirectly to addressing climate change. First, in the sense of the aggregation hypothesis, individual actions directly contribute to small reductions in emissions. Green lifestyles also contribute to addressing climate change indirectly by shoring up environmental activism and drawing people into environmental activism. Regulatory measures are time consuming and difficult to achieve, whereas, household interventions can be achieved more rapidly although they reach fewer people. Using both of these strategies makes sense given that they are cooperative rather than competitive at the level of everyday life.

In the next chapter I lay out the four different perspectives that orient work on reducing consumption: *homo economicus*, the predictably irrational consumer, the locked-in consumer, and the socially organized consumer. They represent an on-going debate between highly agentic micro perspectives that favor voluntary, market-friendly, individual change and macro perspectives that favor top-down, government-driven, systems-level change. While I hold more sympathy for the macro perspective, my goal is to conduct inductive research that avoids the assumptions made on either side of this debate.

Chapter 2

Why do People Go Green?: Four Perspectives

The literature that attempts to explain why consumers reduce their consumption, or why consumers are unable to reduce their consumption, is primarily organized around theories of information, values, system lock-in, or habits (Kennedy and Krogman 2008). I refer to these four perspectives as: (1) *homo economicus* (the rational choice perspective on the informed consumer), (2) the predictably irrational consumer (for example, the environmental psychology perspective on the values-oriented consumer), (3) the locked-in consumer (systems perspective), and (4) the socially organized consumer (practice theory perspective) (Shwom and Lorenzen 2012). The environmental psychology and rational choice perspectives focus primarily on the micro level of individual action and decision-making, the locked-in perspective is structural and concentrates on the macro level of systems and institutions, and the socially organized perspective studies the meso level of social practices and routines. For a summary of these perspectives see Table 3 on the next page, from Shwom and Lorenzen 2012.

TABLE 1 | A Summary of the Four Social Science Perspectives on Consumption

| Consumer Typology | Model of Consumption | Unit of Analysis | GHG-Intensive Consumption Studied | Implied Policy Solutions |
|------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| <i>Homo economicus</i> | Consumers rationally reflect on narrowly defined self-interests and consume accordingly to maximize satisfaction | The individual | Direct home energy use, food consumption choices | Information about carbon impacts (i.e., carbon labeling) or pricing and consumption levels (i.e., energy metering) Changes in prices of GHG-intensive goods and services via taxes, rebates, subsidies, etc. |
| Predictably irrational | Consumers are influenced by cognitive, social, and emotional factors that shape how consumers defines and maximize utility | The individual | Direct home energy use, consumption of status goods | Social marketing that uses salient messages and messengers, public commitments, and feedback to change social norms Changing preset product default settings (i.e., energy saver) |
| Locked-in | Focuses on circumstances that constrain consumption, such as the work-spend cycle and corporate and government decisions on technological infrastructure and investment | Interconnected social, economic, and technological systems | Home location and size, infrastructure (especially related to urban sprawl), personal transportation | Change technological investment patterns, shift work-spend patterns, urban planning and denser living |
| Socially organized | Emphasizes how social institutions and social meanings organize consumption and lifestyle patterns | The social practice | Technological practices, alternative housing arrangements, car sharing and collaborative consumption | Creating alternative forms of social organization, new patterns of green living with low consumption lifestyles |

(Table 3, Shwom and Lorenzen 2012)

In the sections below I briefly touch on the two most popular perspectives (i.e., *homo economicus* and the predictably irrational consumer) for explaining why people go green and then I go on to discuss more thoroughly the competing perspectives coming out of sociology today (i.e., the locked-in consumer and the socially organized consumer). Popular explanations of why individuals restrict their consumption argue that certain people are more receptive to environmental messages due to their knowledge and education, values and ideals, or their personal connection to nature. In contrast, the systems perspective (i.e., consumer lock-in) attempts to explain why consumer habits have changed little in the face of rising concerns over climate change and other environmental harms. The most important line of inquiry for my work is the socially organized consumer which uses a practice theory perspective to account for both social context and constraints, as well as how consumers establish new patterns and lifestyles.

THE PREDICTABLY IRRATIONAL CONSUMER

The most popular explanations for why people reduce their consumption or consume differently (buying green or fair trade products) come from environmental psychology and behavioral economics. Scholars study a broad range of influences including cognitive factors (framing, heuristics, and biases), social factors (keeping up with the Joneses), emotional factors (emotions at the point of purchase and the meaning associated with consumer goods), as well as values and ethics (altruism or postmaterialist values) (for reviews of this literature see Gifford 2014; Dietz, Fitzgerald, and Shwom 2005; Shwom and Lorenzen 2012).

Research on voluntary simplicity focuses on values and asserts that a commitment to certain values accounts for a reduction in consumption. For example, those who value nature, community, personal growth, living small, self-determination, or authenticity are more likely to restrict their consumption (Johnston and Burton 2003, Wells and Lekies 2006, Zavestoski 2002). Work from inside the voluntary simplicity movement echoes this sentiment. Elgin's 1977 magazine survey finds a long list of reasons behind voluntary simplicity, the primary one being to create a balance between one's inner ethical convictions and the external routines of work, consumption, family, and community (Elgin 1981).

Here values and attitudes are treated as causal pre-action motivations. Yet, Olli, Grendstad, and Wollebaek (2001:182) argue that research since the late 1970s shows that "the environmental attitude-behavior correspondence (ABC) is tenuous" at best (see also Laidley 2013). Similarly, Howell (2013:282) argues that "holding certain values does not lead to environmentally responsible behavior" or low-carbon lifestyles. In a review of the values literature, Dietz et al. (2005:335) find that "little can be said about the causes of value change and of the overall effects of value change on changes in behavior." Even if co-variation between pro-environmental values/attitudes and behaviors existed the issue of causality remains, along with alternative explanations like cultural scripts. But even assuming causality between values and behavior, research has not established how values change or how changes in values affect behavior.

Zavestoski (2002) argues that restricting consumption is the result of an existential crisis in which the needs of the self are unfilled by material goods, thus

pushing individuals to find practices that are more authentic. In other words, a reexamination of values leads to a change in those values, which causes a transformation in actions. Much of the literature relies on self-reflection as a mechanism for change, although with no clear cause, beyond a lack of fulfillment and authenticity, as to how routines are disrupted and reflection is triggered. The marketing and business literature adopts this assumption that values determine behavior, “whatever the reason for its growing strength, this trend [decreasing consumption] must be taken seriously by marketers because it may signal a real shift in consumer values and thus consumer behavior” (Stark 1997:20).

Current explanations of voluntary simplicity both popular and academic stress a crisis of conscience or an existential crisis that leads to a break in routine and reflexive thinking. For example, compiling consumer goods is not personally fulfilling and consumer goods get in the way of sustaining real relationships to people. In the rare case, this may include a death in the family or a personal illness (Pierce 2000), but for the most part these are not necessarily “unsettled lives” (Swidler 2001). These “awakening” moments (pre-action motivation) induce reflexivity and reorder individual values, causing a change in behavior (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). From this perspective values influence behavior both directly (similar to the cognitive perspective) and indirectly by fostering dissatisfaction and reflection. However, awakening moments could just as easily be interpreted as post-hoc justifications for action (DeGloma 2010). Work in the last decade has focused on describing and classifying consumers in terms of their purchase of alternative products and commitment to alternative lifestyles (Iyer and

Muncy 2009). For example, much of the literature on voluntary simplifiers presents three-part taxonomies on the embeddedness of actors in the values and behaviors of simplicity (for a taxonomy of the taxonomies see McDonald 2006:523, Table 1; for a critique see Ballentine and Creery 2009). These studies demonstrate that voluntary simplicity is a plastic concept involving different levels of restricted consumption. First, studies (via snowball sampling) identify those who do not participate in simplicity as a pseudo-control group (aka non-simplifiers, non-voluntary simplifiers, not to be confused with forced simplifiers who have lost a job). This group is described as “indifferent, unaware, or opposed” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977). Second, an intermediate category describes “less committed simplifiers” (Huneke 2005), “partial simplifiers” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977), “downshifTERS” (Schor 1998), or “beginner voluntary simplifiers” (McDonald et al. 2006). Third, voluntary simplifiers who are the most committed to the values and behaviors of simplicity are labeled as “full voluntary simplifiers” (Elgin and Mitchell 1977), “holistic simplifiers” (Etzioni 1998), or simply “voluntary simplifiers” (Zavestoski 2002). These individuals are the most consistent in terms of their values and restricted consumption behaviors. The expectation of consistency between values and behaviors, and the preoccupation with reporting the level of consistency, has been a theoretical stumbling block; articles often conclude by defining ideal types and the characteristics within them and move no further. The assumption that purchasing patterns fit into demographic segmentations or some slightly altered form of cultural logic makes consistency the null hypothesis in many studies. McDonald et al. (2006) point out that consistency for voluntary simplifiers is often a matter of time, rather than

commitment, as those who had been simplifying their lives for longer periods of time had adopted more green practices.

While the parallel between environmental values and ethical behavior is a neat package to present, it doesn't attempt to account for *how* values affect action (both directly and indirectly?), the support of particular value systems within social networks, or the external barriers to realizing intentions—in other words the mechanisms and context by which values are activated to affect behavior. While sociology has largely left behind Parsons and the study of values/action, Vaisey (2009) argues that we should reexamine values as a part of cognition and motivation. I agree with Vaisey's (2009:1976) project to “coherently combine the appealing possibility that culture matters both as a social and psychological justification *and* as a motivation for action” (emphasis in original quote). I further this project by offering an empirically informed pragmatist perspective which explains how values arise in concert with changing practices. Values do not have to pre-exist action to be an important part of the process of change. Although lifestyles are often thought of in terms of status groups (Weber 1978), or in terms of competition between social classes (Bourdieu 1984), lifestyles may also create alternatives to the mainstream by rejecting traditional values (for example, consumer culture) and establishing new ones (Hebdige 1979, Zablocki and Kanter 1976).

HOMO ECONOMICUS

Consumers are defined as rational actors attempting to maximize their utility in many studies in economics. Weighing alternatives, in light of preferences, may lead to reducing consumption especially if there is some benefit to the actor. This assumes that

actors are informed and engaging in some form of cost/benefit analysis (Jaeger 2001). It follows that correcting the information deficit results in more knowledgeable consumers who make better decisions, like in the case of carbon labeling (Vandenbergh, Dietz and Stern 2011). Or for example, information about the exploitive labor practices and environmental harms caused by large-scale coffee plantations make consumers more likely to purchase, and more willing to pay more for, fair trade organic coffee (Raynolds 2002). The causality between information (i.e., on products, labor practices, and environmental impacts) and purchases is not explicitly established but rather inferred because consumers are assumed to be rational choosers. However, it is possible that consumers learn more about their purchases after they make them. In addition, as an alternative explanation, social networks might influence purchases (the first importers of fair trade coffee were places of worship) and knowledge could be used to rationalize one's agreement with the group. In a recent international study, only 11% of respondents indicated that "insufficient product information" was a barrier to reducing consumption and living a simpler life (Alexander and Ussher 2012).

Problems with causality aside, there is no such thing as the perfectly informed consumer (Connolly and Prothero 2008). And even consumers well informed about environmental harms do not necessarily change their consumption patterns (Connolly and Prothero 2008, Goldblatt 2005:40). In fact, consumers do not necessarily behave in ways that reflect either their values or knowledge (Kilbourne and Carlson 2008). Rationales for behavior (cognitive dissonance) are only brought up when this kind of inconsistency arises (as a coping mechanism). However, a simple-living informant

explained to me that she has the same frugal practices as her conservative parents but rationalizes her behavior from a progressive perspective. Her politics/values changed over time but her behavior has not. Thus even those with inconsistent values and behaviors can rationalize their choices (Swidler 2001). In fact, consistency may be a consequence of rationalization. Also a change in behavior can precede a change in values (Goldblatt 2005:41), and rationalization can serve to bring values in line with behavior. Regardless of these critiques, values and information eclipse all other explanations for reducing consumption and are often taken as fact by policy makers.

CONSUMER LOCK-IN

Alternatively, work in environmental studies and ecological economics on sustainable consumption depicts lifestyles as a result of institutions and structures that individual consumers have little control over. Studies debate the extent to which consumers are “locked-in” to consumption patterns (Briceno and Stagl 2006, Jackson and Papathanasopoulou 2008, Mont 2004, Ropke 1999, Sanne 2002, Unruh 2002). By “locked in,” I mean consumers have limited opportunities to influence their own consumption patterns considering the “provision systems” (Briceno and Stagl 2006:1550), “institutional arrangements (regulatory and normative)” (Mont 2004:135), “structural forces” (Sanne, 2002:276), or “the frame for consumption choices” (Halme, Jasch and Scharp 2004:125) in the consumer economy.

The locked-in consumer emphasizes how social and technological systems interact with and shape people’s options or paths for consumption. Under this model, consumption patterns emerge as a result of institutions and structures that individual

consumers have little control over. Studies, like those cited above, call into question the extent to which consumers have active choices that can change their consumption patterns. Within this literature there are different ideas about how consumers become locked-in to consumption patterns. Some of the literature focuses on how the economic system encourages people to become locked in to consumption in general. This literature identifies issues like the rise of shopping as a leisure activity and the work-spend cycle, where extensive working hours and diminishing leisure time lead to increased expenditures such as the purchase of prepared foods and investment in personal transportation (Schor 1993).

Others emphasize the infrastructural or technological aspects of lock-in. The literature on carbon lock-in focuses on how technological systems interact with social systems to create an environment which blocks the widespread use of alternatives (Unruh 2002). Not only are high levels of investments made in technologies, but a whole system of knowledge and social practice grows up around technologies making them deeply entrenched and difficult to replace. This perspective is a particularly relevant one when we think about how people might move away from a fossil fuel system that is embedded in our transportation and electrical systems. More generally, the idea of a locked-in consumer recognizes that structural formations and institutionalized ideas present in socio-technical systems constrain consumers by guiding them down certain paths.

The recognition of geographically and historically specific socio-technical systems which limit consumer action leads to research on policy-driven structural changes that

would guide consumption down a different path. Single-owner automobile transportation is often cited as a primary example of the over-determined consumption “choice.” Decisions made at multiple levels of government may lead to the presence of highways instead of affordable and timely public transportation options (Spangenberg 2002). There are a few degrees of freedom in this scenario--individuals may move closer to their jobs, carpool, or park n’ ride--but there are market constraints and real cost implications (Wilson and Dowlatabadi 2007). Similarly, one can think of green and efficient housing decisions: few consumers have the time and financial resources to build a home to energy efficient specifications and are instead subject to the market and what has already been built by real estate developers. A systems perspective would recommend mixed-use redevelopment to support dense urban living and walkable cities. Although these studies of consumer lock-in incorporate structural constraints, at the micro level consumer behavior is often explained by importing the conclusions from social psychology about consumer values and knowledge. This dichotomous focus on values at the micro level and barriers at the macro level has meant that social processes at the meso level are largely disregarded (Briceno and Stagl 2006).

The locked-in perspective is a cornerstone of the sustainable consumption literature which also includes practice theory and sustainable lifestyles – part of the socially organized perspective described below. Scholars that employ a systems perspective may also advocate a social practices approach (Shove 2010) or consider new routines in social practices as one way to address unsustainable consumption (Schor

2010). The locked-in perspective and the socially organized perspective share a concern with emergent structural conditions and taken for granted routines.

THE SOCIALLY ORGANIZED CONSUMER

While the previous perspectives focus on how people make decisions or how they do not have any decisions to make, the study of meso-level attempts to find some middle ground by looking at shared practices and patterns that emerge from different ways of life. Work in this area is united, in part, by a split from rational choice theory (revealed preferences) and behavioral drive theory (attitudes and values cause behavior). Scholars question the idea that preferences, values, and beliefs are pre-fixed and predict action. Practice theory has various iterations. Here I focus on work from Giddens (1991) and Bourdieu (1984), as well as the constellation of theoretical commitments generally shared by practice theorists. Practice theory defines action as (1) primarily habitual with brief moments of deliberation and change, which means that (2) the vast majority of social practices are tacit routines that are at a level of social performance that is taken for granted (Reckwitz 2002, Spaargaren 2011, Warde 2005). Practices include materials and resources, skills (rules for performance and norms for appropriate context), and shared social meanings. By falling into routines (for efficiency or comfort) individuals can reproduce social context while repeating practices. If there are breaks in a routine (power outage, moving to a new city) individuals may briefly consider reordering practices to solve problems and establish new habits. This stands in contrast to the assumption that choice is commonplace and undetermined, or that cognitive changes (reconsidering values) precede and thus cause behavioral changes.

The socially organized consumer exercises limited influence while embedded in durable social structures that support certain ways of life. Studies try to account for the social context of consumption as it emerges from social interaction with others, combined with the structural conditions under which people act (emphasized in parts of the locked-in consumer perspective). From this process, social practices (shared ways of doing things) emerge as a form of collective action. Two important research emphases emerge that share this social practices framework: sustainable lifestyles and ecological habitus.

In trying to understand how social context and social structure interact to influence consumption, research emerging from the socially organized model of the consumer has focused on sustainable or green lifestyles. This work views the consumption of resources as an outcome of the lifestyles which organize people's everyday lives. From a social psychology perspective a lifestyle is simply the pattern created by people's pre-set attitudes, values, and their resulting behaviors. The study of sustainable or green lifestyles from a sociological perspective focuses on particular categories of social practices (i.e. work, home, leisure), lifestyles as social performances (symbolic interactionism), and as part of social spaces, social networks, and social movements (Barr and Gilg 2006, Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000). Several studies borrow Giddens' (1991) definition of a lifestyle as routinized practices or a "more or less integrated set of practices which an individual embraces, not only because such practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material

form to a particular narrative of self-identity” (81). A lifestyle is both a pattern of practices and the story people tell about them.

Because lifestyles are situated in real-world contexts they are constrained by access to resources or conflicts with other lifestyle priorities like health concerns or childcare. Horton (2005) defines green lifestyles as “embodying a culturally produced awareness of environmental risks, rights, and responsibilities” (127). Practically, lifestyles organize and unite daily practices into a somewhat coherent whole. Evans and Abrahamse (2009), and Spaargaren and van Vliet (2000), find that sustainable lifestyles are daily routines of social practices that change over time in an on-going process.

In order to better understand structural constraints, some researchers situate lifestyles within an ecological habitus. Ecological habitus has been defined in two main ways: first, as an environmentally friendly orientation which is similar to the definition of sustainable or green lifestyles (Kasper 2008, 2009), and second, as a category that includes both environmentally friendly and environmentally damaging orientations on a continuum (Kasper 2009). In other words, everyone has an ecological habitus but some are more damaging than others. The term habitus comes from Bourdieu (1984) and places lifestyles within social classes or categories formed by unequal cultural, social, and economic structures. Habitus is used by Bourdieu (1984) to argue against economic determinism and explain why tastes and practices are not direct “functions of income but of inherited life-style” (68-69). Kasper (2009) uses both the concepts of lifestyle and ecological habitus, arguing that lifestyles are the products, practice, or in Bourdieu’s words the “practical metaphor,” of the habitus (317). Evans and Abrahamse (2009) also

use both concepts, habitus and lifestyle, in their analysis in order to include those who inadvertently (habitus), as well as intentionally (lifestyle), live green lifestyles. Research on socially organized consumers, primarily by sociologists and anthropologists, emphasizes the importance of collective efforts to create alternative low-impact green lifestyles such as intentional communities (ecovillages and Transition Towns) and coordinated systems of product sharing, as well as team, neighborhood, and social network effects on reducing consumption.

These perspectives (the social psychology perspective on the value-oriented consumer, the rational choice perspective on the informed consumer, the systems perspective on the locked-in consumer, and the practice theory perspective on the socially organized consumer) represent the landscape of research with which I was confronted as I began my work. They also represent diverse and competing theoretical understandings of social action, the relationship between the individual and society, and how social change happens. Overwhelmingly, the psychological (values) and economic (information) perspectives dominate academia and policy-making.

A recent debate, dubbed the “Shove-Whitmarsh debate,” highlights the differences between the “systems and practices model” (locked-in and socially organized perspectives) vs. the “ABC model” of Attitudes, Behaviors, and Choices (values and information perspective) (Shove 2010, Whitmarsh et al. 2011, Shove 2011, Wilson and Chatterton 2011). The subject of the debate: Is significant social change more likely to happen through reforming social institutions and socio-technical systems, or by guiding individuals to change their habits and make better choices in the

marketplace? Shove (2010) argues in favor of systemic change in terms of building public transportation and renewable energy infrastructure. In response scholars that favor the ABC model argue that policy makers should simply use both individual- and systems-level approaches to address consumption at different scales (Whitmarsh et al. 2011, Wilson and Chatterton 2011). Shove (2011) reiterates that the two approaches (ABC and systems) have competing understandings of social action (i.e., agency, context, etc.) and how social change happens. She calls for a more direct confrontation between the two perspectives. For example, the systems approach views the consumer as locked-in to consumption habits due to the socio-technical context of their lives – from this perspective an information campaign to change individual habits would fail.

This debate has important implications for the definition of unsustainable consumption and its solutions (see table 3, Shwom and Lorenzen 2012). It has also pushed scholars to take sides and either support micro or macro perspectives, leaving little room to study the meso level of shared practices and collective action or connections between the micro and the macro (with a few exceptions; see Heberlein 2012, Rudel 2013). I agree with much of what Shove says; large-scale change would be ideal. However, the political and financial feasibility of systemic change is rarely under consideration. In contrast, my research studies average people attempting to address climate change and other environmental harms. My informants would also agree with Shove and believe that strong government leadership and top-down change would be ideal. However, in confronting congressional gridlock and public skepticism on climate

change they are left, instead, with the politics of the possible. And while their consumption is influenced by their social context, it is not determined by it.

In the following chapter I explain how my research and theoretical perspective (pragmatist action theory) furthers work on sustainable lifestyles and the practice theory perspective. Pragmatist action theory helps explain how habits change while also recognizing, like Bourdieu, that habits change “indirectly” by modifying conditions (Dewey 1922:20). This meso-level understanding bridges the micro-macro debate by showing how individual and systemic changes are interrelated and interdependent. In addition, I make note of instances when my research contradicts the values or information perspectives. Throughout my dissertation I attempt to account for practical, strategic action as it is oriented by and toward social interaction, social networks, and social context (from the cost of efficient technology to the strained political climate in the U.S.). This work is based on a robust understanding of social action as shared practices, a form of collective action, rather than individual choices. My approach provides an empirically grounded perspective on green lifestyle formation and transformation, adding much needed complexity to extant understandings of actors as maximizing their utility, following norms, or fulfilling demographically determined dispositions.

CHAPTER 3

Going Green: The Process of Lifestyle Change

But the real problem – the real energy consumption is in our lifestyle. You know, do we like to travel? How many times do we use airplanes to travel each year? What's our lifestyle in terms of the clothing we wear? Recognizing that we literally can't touch anything in this daily life without it having a relationship to consumption – consuming materials that require a lot of energy to produce, down to the acrylic fiber in our socks.

- Bruce, an Episcopal environmentalist

Green lifestyles include sets of practices by which people today try to address an interrelated set of environmental problems: climate change and rising sea levels, air and water pollution, peak oil, and the increasing size of landfills, among others. The typical American lifestyle is implicated in the worsening of these environmental problems. Bruce, quoted above, experiences environmental problems on multiple levels – there are problems in the world and at the level of personal lifestyles. Contrary to Beck's (1992) notion of the individualization of responsibility, the people I spoke with support change on all levels – changes of lifestyle, changes in schools and institutions, changes in business behavior, and action at the local and national government levels. However, an awareness of the durability of institutions led the people I interviewed to change their lifestyles because they wanted to feel more involved in the environmental movement, they were not willing to wait for institutional change, or they were skeptical that institutional change would occur, even with their help.

The term lifestyle was taken for granted as the way to talk about how people live and organize their priorities, integrating both big ideas and small practices. My informants noted that they have unique worldviews, mindsets, “think differently” or “marched to a different drummer” than others, but the term used with the most frequency was lifestyle. Informants spontaneously discussed that their “lifestyle” was “conservation oriented,” that they had struggles within their “lifestyle” over what was sustainable, that they had adopted a “green lifestyle” before it was popular to do so, or that their everyday actions involved “little things, you know, lifestyle things” like taking shorter showers to conserve water.

To change a lifestyle, people not only have to change their practices, but also the story they tell about their practices, or their “narrative of self-identity” (Giddens 1991:81). Thus, a *green lifestyle* is a pattern of living that involves deliberation over the uncertain environmental impacts of everyday practices and a guiding narrative that makes that process personally meaningful. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the process of green lifestyle adoption in more detail by focusing on the commonalities among groups: the resources used to build a green lifestyle, how that lifestyle is established, and how it is subjectively understood. Although voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and green home owners differ in certain respects, there are similarities in how their green lifestyles emerge and progress.

Deliberation is one commonality among these groups. Deliberation (or what Dewey calls intelligence) happens in response to a problem that current habits fail to solve (Dewey 1922), or when there are alternatives to consider and individuals make a

slow and explicit choice with an intent that can be verbalized. This is particularly true when one makes the harder choice among alternatives (Danna-Lynch 2010). My informants report oscillating between deliberation and habit; they deliberate over how to make changes and then new practices, performed consistently, recede into habitual action. Through this process, individuals can create new habits or “habit sets”—“repertoires for thinking and acting vis-à-vis a set of problems” (Gross 2009:371). However, the overall process of lifestyle change remains far from simple.

In the case of environmental issues individuals confront a problem, the solution to which is inherently complex and uncertain. Individuals respond, in part, by changing their lifestyles – drawing on old goods and practices, deliberating over new goods and practices, and bringing them together with overarching narratives based on environmental themes. This is not the same as replacing an old habit with a new habit; rather resources are drawn from many different areas and cobbled together through *bricolage* to serve a new purpose. Here the emphasis is not on consumer practices or environmental discourses per se, but how people draw on them pragmatically to construct and account for green lifestyles.

Ordinary material goods and everyday practices are not necessarily rich in meaning, nor are they clear and consistent in their significance, but within the paradox and ambivalence of the commonplace, individuals do their own phenomenological work to pull together disparate goods and practices into a consistent whole. It is this background of meaning, built in a bricolage style, which accounts for the difference between someone changing light bulbs or changing lifestyles. My informants view green

practices not as isolated decisions or actions, but as components in an ongoing coherent project. But how is lifestyle coherence supported during a period of intentional change and does the notion of a lifestyle aid or hinder the process of changing practices? I propose the concept of *provisional coherence* to explain the simultaneous existence of an overarching lifestyle narrative which prevails in the face of deliberation, uncertainty, and anxiety over changing practices. Ultimately, green lifestyles are a “coordinating hypothesis” for action (Whitford 2002), experienced as a path that supports future action as well as explaining past action.

LIFESTYLES: IDENTITY, GROUP MEMBERSHIP, AND RISK AVERSION

Social theorists in multiple disciplines have responded to the scope and immediacy of environmental problems by focusing greater attention on resistance to consumption. A sociological approach frequently focuses on how individuals or groups construct their lives through restricted consumption practices (Kennedy 2011, Shove and Warde 2002, Spaargaren 2003), sustainable and green lifestyles, ecological habitus, and resistant identities (Barr and Gilg 2006, Brown 2013, Cherrier 2009, Chitewere 2008, Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Horton 2006, Howell 2013, Kasper 2009, Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000).

Lifestyles assist in organizing self-identity and self-expression.⁹ They are routines that include the presentation of self, consumption, interaction, and setting (Giddens

⁹ This perspective was made popular during the postmodern turn, and characterized by hyper-agentic consumers that use brands creatively through bricolage (i.e. defined at the time as hyper-stylization, customizing, or appropriation of consumer goods) (Slater 1997). For example, Hebdige (1988) studied young men who wore grey suits and skinny black ties; juxtaposed with their scooters this look went from corporate to mod. My use

1991). Consumer goods and practices are part of an imperfect system of shared meaning (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979], Sahlins, 1978) that has nonetheless become integrated into our identity projects (Holstein and Gubrium 2000, Callero 2003). We believe consumer goods, practices, and patterns signal to others who we are, intentionally or unintentionally, or who we would like to be (Bourdieu 1984, Veblen 1998 [1899], Zukin 2004). Lifestyles do not arise in a vacuum but exist in concert, bringing together multiple and sometimes conflicting priorities like work and family.

Lifestyles also include our standpoint or social position in relation to other groups: our identity-in-context. This involves the social class we belong to and our socialization into groups and institutions, which affect our aspirations and the resources we may call on to fulfill those aspirations (Bourdieu 1984). Lifestyles are relational by definition and can only be meaningfully understood in context (Harvey and Lorenzen 2006, Holt 1997). I use the term lifestyle instead of habitus (Bourdieu 1984) because the explanatory strength of habitus lies in the social reproduction of everyday practices, as opposed to confronting problems and finding innovative strategies to address them. Also, individuals in the same social class, with similar levels of economic capital, may have different and competing lifestyles. Habitus reminds us of the structural contingencies in which lifestyles exist; lifestyles are constrained by context – most often financial limitations, health, and family commitments (Veal 1993) – but not determined

of bricolage returns to the more standard Levi-Straussian definition of piecing together available resources (beyond consumer brands and styles) to serve needs. For more on the structure/agency debate in the sociology of consumption see Schor 2007.

by it. Aspiration (what we want) should not be entirely collapsed into expectation (what we are capable of doing).

Lifestyles also address practical and existential concerns over predictability and ontological security. Beck (1992) argues that in a risk society everyday life is increasingly reflexive. Lifestyles create habits and narrow choices (Schwartz 2004), thereby offering a kind of practical utility and reducing the noise of the environment. Although these are habits, they remain open to periodic reflexive thought and thus change (Giddens 1991). Here Giddens echoes pragmatist theory, where action is thought to be primarily based on habit with moments of deliberation and change. Giddens (1991) also offers a middle ground between a focus on agency (in the case of self-identity) and structure (in the case of group membership or social class). While persuasive, Giddens over-emphasizes the coherence of lifestyles (Chaney 1996).

Evans and Abrahamse (2009:491), using a perspective made popular by Giddens, argue that “lifestyles are made up of relatively consistent and coherent bundles of social practices.” In confronting “tensions and inconsistencies” within lifestyle change they argue that individuals have multiple lifestyles and switch between different bundles of coherent practices (Evans and Abrahamse 2009:500). I offer a simpler solution and question the coherence of lifestyles, making inconsistencies typical rather than problematic. The actual coherence of lifestyles – in terms of discourses, objects, and practices – is an ongoing, dynamic, and piecemeal process. Lifestyles change gradually and with some continuity by drawing on old goods and practices that are given new

context and meaning (Schor 2010), with the ongoing goal of creating and maintaining coherence and spurring the adoption of further compatible practices.

The search for coherence has been viewed as a mechanism for change previously in scholarly attention to the so-called Diderot Effect (McCracken 1988). McCracken (1988) uses the example of a fine gift that disturbs a consumption pattern, such that the recipient then begins to buy other fine things to match. Established consumption patterns, undisturbed, exert a kind of inertia that resists any major change. Once interrupted, the unity of consumption patterns becomes a mechanism that seeks to rebalance itself (Lorenzen 2007). This attempt to regain coherence results in expansive consumer spending and continual trading up. Evans and Abrahamse (2009:491) imply a similar kind of coherence mechanism in their work on sustainable lifestyles and argue that “changes in one social practice lead to changes in other domains.” This is not simply about coherence, it is about problem solving and addressing environmental harms, consistency is not an end in itself. Also, this is a reasonable consistency that people are trying to achieve, a kind of “doing what you can” and not an unachievable ideal. To complicate the situation there is always more information coming out, and new alternative practices coming to light through social networks, which means a continuation of the deliberation process.

Studies often focus on a single pro-environmental behavior instead of sets of practices and routines, and how they are interrelated (Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Spaargaren 2003). In lifestyles people attempt to connect an array of social practices into a reasonably coherent whole (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000). Change hinges on

the extent to which practices coalesce into the “embodied logic” of everyday life (Kasper 2009:319). This “holistic view of one's personal life” contributes to sustained participation in green social movements (Passy and Giugni 2000:117). But what accounts for this integration and holistic perspective?

Many scholars agree that sustainable or green lifestyle adoption is processual (Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Nye and Hargreaves 2010, Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000). Deliberation over practices and discussion of local knowledge, or how to go green given the constraints in your area, are important parts of that process (Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Kennedy 2011, Nye and Hargreaves 2010).¹⁰ I contextualize this work by explaining how practices unite, through bricolage, and become integrated into a holistic lifestyle narrative. I also expand on the role of deliberation. Uniting practices is not a simple process of deciding which practice is greener, frequently the answer is unclear. Informants do thoughtful work to redefine old practices as related to the environment and recombine them with newly adopted materials, practices, and environmental discourses to form a new pattern.

Current studies lean toward symbolic interaction as a theoretical frame and explain sustainable or green lifestyles or ethical identities as a performance constrained or enabled by particular systems of provision, green infrastructure, social context, or social boundaries (Brown 2009, 2013, Evans and Abrahamse 2009, Horton 2006, Nye and Hargreaves 2010). This is a productive area of inquiry and overlaps with pragmatist

¹⁰ Similarly, processing information about how individuals may address environmental harms (Hobson 2002) and constructing a consumer-resistant identity (Cherrier 2009) involve reflection and debate.

theory in the belief that knowledge and innovative solutions emerge from deliberation and discussion. For example, Horton (2006:127) defines green lifestyles as a performance of “embodying a culturally produced awareness of environmental risks, rights, and responsibilities.” He stresses socialization into green cultural codes as a mechanism for change through shared practices, networks, spaces, and times. To expand on this theoretical foundation, I draw on pragmatist theory to stress the problem-solving orientation of informants and how they use their lifestyle to address environmental problems.

Substantively, I explain how those whom I interviewed understood their lifestyles as holistic, involving high levels of deliberation while also in a process of guided gradual change. Furthermore, I explore bricolage as a mechanism for lifestyle change and expand the concept to include disparate resources like material goods, practices, family stories, and environmental themes such as antimaterialism, environmental protection, and interconnectedness. I also show how environmental themes are often integrated into preexisting storylines. The discussion includes an explanation of how these ideas fit into pragmatist action theory and presents implications for theorizing culture in action. I focus on how individuals explain their actions as environmental, and how those explanations over time transform into motivations and foster green practices.

LIFESTYLE CHANGE: COHERENCE, DELIBERATION, AND GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION

Green lifestyle change is a gradual, deliberate process that is a response to environmental harms. Thinking of going green as adopting a lifestyle creates a relatively

coherent story and collective vision of the future; it bridges discourses (e.g. Islam and ecological interconnectedness) and encourages changes in everyday practices so individuals may live out the environmental themes they use to make sense of their actions. People define lifestyles as both holistic and in never-ending change. Overarching ideas are holistic, but changing practices is a gradual, deliberate, and infinite process (one can always be “more green” or live a simpler life).

It is evident from my interviews that many practices are shared by those trying to live more sustainably. People report buying less and try to extend the life of what they have. Individuals recycle (cans, plastic, glass, newspaper, junk mail), they use cloth bags, compact florescent (CFL) or light-emitting diode (LED) light bulbs, and they avoid kitchen paper products. They keep their programmable thermostats low (60-65 degrees in winter), they have weatherized their homes, they take short showers and run their hot water heaters on low or have tankless hot water heaters, they use baking soda instead of commercial green cleaning products, rarely if ever use air-conditioning, and they do only large loads in the dishwasher (if they have one) or washing machine and use clothes lines or drying racks. They grow their own food, cook from scratch, buy local, buy organic or raise organic fruits and vegetables to sell, avoid red meat, or are vegetarians/vegans, buy recycled toilet paper and tissues, use restrictors on water faucets, have rain barrels or rain gardens, reuse grey water, ride their bicycles to work, or carpool or avoid idling their cars, shop at and donate to thrift stores or consignment shops or pick things up off the curb. Several of those with whom I spoke pay a premium for renewable energy through their local energy provider, buy carbon offset credits,

have solar panels on their roofs, use geothermal power to heat and cool their homes, or own a hybrid vehicle. What unites and supports these practices?

Coherence

Lifestyles incorporate materials, practices, and themes connected by a life narrative that pulls these together with a coherent result. Roni, a religious environmentalist and a Muslim, has made environmentally friendly changes in every area of her life and pushes her family and co-workers to do the same. She explains:

So, I believe that it's [religious environmentalism] a whole worldview. Everything you look at has to fit in. If it doesn't fit in, it doesn't make sense... So when they talk about the environment, it is very Islamic. It's with that understanding that it's part of our world, and it's just the one lifestyle.

The coherence between environmentalism, Islam, and her practices at home, work, and in worship are imposed by her understanding of a single lifestyle. Other Muslims, like her husband, do not necessarily agree. She is currently attempting to eat organic and Halal, although there is only one butcher in town that satisfies both requirements. This is a good example of lifestyle as bricolage: the green lifestyle does not arise in a vacuum but is integrated with preexisting priorities. Roni goes on to explain that there are many “different paths” or “roads” that lead to living a more sustainable life, you just have to decide on the path to take – she indicates that the decision lies more in the means one uses than the goal itself.

Green practices are more likely to multiply if the individual defines those practices as meaningfully part of a larger project or lifestyle. Natalie, a UCC environmentalist, describes how lifestyles crystallize out of smaller choices.

I think you start out by making choices, one – individual choices. But then I think it becomes, has to become, a lifestyle, that it's kind of – that it's there. It's there in your mind all the time. 'Am I making a good choice doing this?' or 'How could I do this better?'

She describes a process that in the initial stages is highly deliberative, but actions develop into automatic responses. During interviews, practices subject to deliberation at the time came readily to mind, whereas more routine practices that had been in place longer were more difficult for people to remember, which sometimes prompted a follow up email.

Deliberation

My data show that much of the process of greening a lifestyle is deliberative in nature because it is a difficult path with a high level of uncertainty. Deliberative actions are slower, controlled, serial, effortful, rule-governed, consciously motivated, flexible, and tend to disrupt each other (Kahneman 2003). Many interviewees explained that being green is hard work, from growing your own food to changing township ordinances to include green technology. Ava, a voluntary simplifier, explains that deliberation and uncertainty “slow me down in making decisions, but in a good way.” She defines an environmentalist as “anyone who makes *conscious* decisions” about their impact on the environment, although she notes no one is perfect. This struggle, which some might consider draining or time consuming, makes her feel “intensely alive.”

Given the status quo bias (the tendency to go along with the status quo) and loss aversion (a loss is argued to have a greater impact than an equivalent gain; (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), it may be difficult to reduce consumption without some deliberation. To clarify, a dual cognition approach (automatic and deliberate) does not mean that

automatic and deliberative actions are mutually exclusive. Overlap and interaction is possible between the two systems. For example, the automatic system can be retrained with planned repetition (Thaler and Sunstein 2008), like bringing cloth bags to the grocery store. Done once a week it can recede into the automatic system. Pragmatist theory agrees that individuals alternate between habit and creativity when problem-solving, and that innovations can regress into stock habits (Gross 2009). This involves different degrees of deliberation; consumer deliberation should not be considered simply present or absent (Johnston and Szabo 2011).

Carol, a voluntary simplifier, hangs a cloth bag on her front door knob so she'll remember it on her way out. Carol referred to this as one of her "little tricks" to adopt a new routine. Natalie, UCC, also uses this convenience strategy. Her washing machine and dryer sit just inside the kitchen door. Natalie explains, "I have them [cloth bags] on the washer, where I – And so they're accessible when I'm going to the store." Seeing the cloth bags as she leaves her house reminds her to take them along allowing her to change her routine with minimal effort and make self-monitoring less demanding. She only needs to remember to put them back in place when she gets home from the store.

The main barrier to going green is uncertainty (Connolly and Prothero 2008). Thus, an attempt to match practices with a green lifestyle results in deliberative action and interaction. Several interviewees recounted times when they had asked themselves, "Am I making a good choice doing this?" or "How could I do this better?" Lindsey, a voluntary simplifier, describes her day-to-day thinking when she goes to buy something:

And sometimes, I go and I look, and I'm ready to pick it off the shelf and I say: Wait a minute. Where am I going to put this in my house? Do I really need this?

Is it going to serve a purpose? Or am I just going to give it away to somebody in a few months when I realize it was nice when it was new, but I don't care for it anymore? So I try to prevent myself from just blindly buying things just because I was raised in a feel-good culture where buying things makes you feel good. ...And so when I feel a need to buy, I try to assess: Why do I need to buy this thing? Why do I need [x]? Maybe I need to go for a walk instead. Maybe I need to do something for myself, but not in a way that furthers that consumerism drive within me. ... So I think: Is it something that I need? Let's say food. And if it's food, am I going to buy the box of highly-processed food, or am I going to buy the fresh food, even if it's not, say, organic? ... Or if I need to buy something, can I buy something that is organic and/or fair trade? Like if I want to buy coffee, is it fair trade? Is it shade grown?

She uses a kind of decision making tree when considering her purchases (A or B? If A, then C or D?). She acts as her own intervention, saying “wait a minute” – this is micro-level, incremental change. Through reflection about how to be green, Lindsey is really asking herself what practices or purchases fit her future lifestyle? She explains why she has to ask herself so many questions:

Well, unfortunately, it always seems like a struggle. It's that, if you want to make choices, you've got to think about it. You can't just automatically go and buy the nearest thing on the shelf, or even the cheapest thing, or even the most expensive thing.

Her reflection during shopping is an attempt to distance herself from an old imagined lifestyle (consumer-oriented) and move toward a new lifestyle (simplicity). She uses the critique of consumerism as disease to support this change.

Similarly, Beth a green home owner and residential green building business owner (with her husband) explains, “we [my husband and I] think about this stuff a lot, and we try to do whatever we can reasonably do.” When I asked her when she started to consider environmentally friendly options for her home and business, she identified the dinner table as the place the process started. Beth explains that knowledge

production around green building and LEED certification is accelerating and it's hard to keep up with.

Since January 20th of this year [2009], [laughter] things have moved very much faster, I think. ...[For example] Oh, I think it's LEED, ...if they follow them [the LEED guidelines], they're [the buildings are] turning out not to operate efficiently. So, I think there's a lot going on. ...Because people ask us all the time in our business about what a lot of this means. ...There aren't clear definitions of a lot of things. So what I say is that –We've made a decision for it at this point in time. But I'm not sure whether it's better for me to buy a stick of wood from a sustainable forest in Oregon and have it brought here, or cut down the tree in my backyard and not replant it. Do you know what I'm saying? And I'm not – I'm neither knowledgeable enough nor have the ability – for every stick of anything – [to] figure out which is better. So we've made our own decisions for now, and it's possible that next year, I'll find out that was wrong, and we'll change it.

She uses her own home as a testing ground for many innovations, like geothermal heating and cooling, and then introduces them to her clients. This trial-and-error process at home reduces some of the uncertainty in her business and although she anticipates course corrections in the future she still approaches these decisions as a kind of moral dilemma.

My interviewees foresee refinements in their green practices as they learn more, but it doesn't paralyze their action in the present. Ava, a voluntary simplifier, explains that "in ten years knowledge will change" so we have to continue to be "open to changing practices, when we learn practices are wrong." Informants do the best they can with what they know now. In this case knowledge does not necessarily precede action, especially as knowledge is expected to evolve and expand. Darren, an architect and green home owner, explains that trying to be environmentally friendly is a "moving

target”¹¹ which leads to a few mistakes and many conversations with his wife and two kids at the dinner table.

In sum, my informants oscillate between deliberate and automatic cognition when building a green lifestyle. There is a great deal of deliberation over what is more sustainable. When new practices are adopted they are incorporated into routines (automatic cognition) until or unless called into question by new knowledge, leading to further deliberation and revision. This means that the resources used to assemble a lifestyle are constantly changing.

Gradual Transformation

Green lifestyles are also characterized as a process of gradual change over time, to such an extent that a tipping point is difficult to identify. Carol, a voluntary simplifier, explains “I’ve taken a little path,” which sounds like a typical conversion experience (DeGloma 2010), but her description has a much longer time horizon. She states:

I think that voluntary simplicity is, you know, broader, and it involves more of a total lifestyle change...Uh, it's been a progression...I came back from [a retreat], I decided that was what I was going to pursue. But you know – but it's certainly – You know, I certainly wasn't one way one day and another way another day...You know, even decluttering – you could do that all the time. You know, you keep going. There are still things here [at home] that I, you know, know that I don't need and could get rid of, and so, it's a process. And so, I haven't – You know, I was convinced after the [retreat] that, that was simple.

The decision to make a change may happen at a specific time, like during a retreat (although this was rarely identified in the interviews), but the change in practices and shedding material goods is a long, slow process.

¹¹ Greenwashing was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews but was alluded to, and involves exaggerations in corporate public relations campaigns and/or deceptive product claims (Muldoon 2006).

Tess, a progressive Catholic environmentalist, describes a project of understanding and synthesizing knowledge. This is not simply the accumulation of facts, but rather coordinating how those facts fit together and their political implications.

So, how do people start? They start someplace. And wherever they start, they can move onto something else. And as you learn more and more and more, you have more hooks inside you to absorb. ...[W]hen somebody tells you something, like the IAASTD report [2008 International Agricultural Assessment of Knowledge, Science and Technology Development]...you could hook it someplace. You have someplace to put it. Now, if you've never heard of genetic engineering, if you've never heard of, thought much about, monocultures, then you might not appreciate what diversified farming [is] – and [the importance of] having all the stakeholders instead of just the leaders of countries and well-to-do corporations made decisions – to have that unusual grouping of people that made that report. You have the hooks now. You can absorb what you're learning from people.

Tess also envisions learning that connects macro food politics to everyday life. Lindsey, a voluntary simplifier, focuses more on the dynamic process of changing practices.

And sometimes, I do make progress [buying healthy food, fair trade, and avoiding sweatshop products], and then sometimes, I feel like I slip back. So for me, it's not a constant forward movement. It's kind of a moving ahead and a slipping back, and a moving ahead, kind of an ebb and flow.

Lindsey used to rent a house and then moved back to an apartment for financial reasons. She mentioned several practices that she felt she had to give up due to apartment living, like composting.

Part of what accounts for this slow process of change, aside from deliberation over what is green or sustainable, is the reality of multiple and possibly divided priorities — for example, family commitments, health concerns, and/or a lack of financial resources. Lifestyles emerge out of preexisting conditions and may conflict, as for example when “caring consumption” gets in the way of simplifying or reducing

consumption because cultural ideas about being a good mother are closely related to provisioning (Thompson 1996). Bricolage assists in the adoption of a greener lifestyle, drawing innovatively on bits and pieces of practice and value orientations at different times as constraints change.

BRICOLAGE: A LIFESTYLE MECHANISM

Bricolage is a make-shift, do-it-yourself mechanism used to build, change, or repair something—in the present case, a lifestyle. It involves the cobbling together of resources at hand by non-experts who figure things out as they go. *Bricoleur* was originally used by Levi-Strauss (1966) to describe someone who recycles old materials to make do with whatever is at hand. I return to this definition, as opposed to bricolage as appropriation, to explain how green lifestyles are adopted.

Bricolage includes materials and practices from old lifestyles viewed in a new light and recombines them with newly adopted materials, practices, and environmental discourses to form a new pattern. Part of bricolage is what you have already built in your life. For example, commonsense practices surrounding the careful use of well water becomes water conservation, not eating meat for health reasons shifts in focus to avoiding resource-intensive factory farming, and a collection of Depression-era glass gravitates toward emphasizing ‘The Depression’ and de-emphasizing ‘collection.’ As Angela, a voluntary simplifier, explains:

But I really believe in using something until it's unusable. And one of my fetishes is buying Depression glass because it's collectible. But it's old. It was made in the 30's. It's lasted this long, and I just feel that that's a badge of honor. It's also sort of pretty.

She's a little embarrassed that a simplifier would have a collection of anything, but integrates it into her lifestyle by pointing out its longevity and symbolism.

Bricolage is continually pulled together in a patchwork composition that imposes provisional coherence on this dynamic process. Cynthia, a voluntary simplifier, mentioned that simple living is a matter of perspective and simple living practices are associated with multiple and even contradictory lifestyles. The practices themselves have no objective or inevitable coherence. Instead coherence is crafted by imposing the idea of a lifestyle onto disparate materials, practices, and discourses. When the term lifestyle is invoked in interviews it is in itself a discourse for asserting cultural coherence.

Interviewees who grew up with frugal practices often returned to them when faced with the problem of environmental harms (see also Howell 2013). For example, Cynthia, a voluntary simplifier, explained to me that she has similar practices as her politically conservative parents but justifies her behavior from a progressive perspective. Cynthia's old family practices included do-it-yourself home renovation and car repair, going to garage sales and the dump to find goods to reuse, composting, and picking up litter. Cynthia continues those practices minus the trips to the dump; instead she uses Freecycle and Craigslist and drives around nearby neighborhoods on garbage day to pick up small pieces of furniture or building materials. In college she adopted a new environmental perspective that revived old practices concentrated around self-reliance and reducing waste, and that motivated new practices. Thus far I have given examples focused primarily on practices and material goods; however bricolage also

incorporates environmental stock themes which are key components of provisional coherence.

Environmental Themes

Environmental themes are “available culture” (Swidler 2001) and when integrated into a lifestyle act as guiding principles that lend it coherence. The three main environmental themes¹² that I found integrated with life narratives include: (1) antimaterialism, (2) environmental protection, and (3) interconnectedness. These three primary environmental themes, along with secondary themes, are combined in diverse ways to support lifestyle change.

Antimaterialism was used most distinctively by voluntary simplifiers to critique consumer culture. Green home owners primarily relied on a critique of the overuse of finite resources and called for their protection (a theme present in other groups, but used differently – in combination with other themes). Religious environmentalists supported the idea of interconnection through their view of creation as sacred, making stewardship of the earth a religious calling (this was also used by other groups but in terms of secular ecology). So while I single out the three primary themes for analytic purposes, they were used in combination with other supporting themes like health concerns.

Many interviewees, especially voluntary simplifiers, reduced their consumption for both personal and environmental reasons. They argued that reducing consumption

¹² For example, Brulle (2000:273) identifies several discursive frames adopted by the U.S. environmental movement: manifest destiny, wildlife management, preservation, reform environmentalism, deep ecology, environmental justice, ecofeminism, ecotheology.

can be spiritually fulfilling and personally satisfying, as well as reducing reliance on nonrenewable resources. Voluntary simplifiers used the theme of antimaterialism to help them reach this goal. Voluntary simplifiers that I spoke with argued that we should separate needs from wants to reduce consumption but not deprive ourselves. Needs are contextual; thus we are allowed to define a cell phone (to keep in touch with our family or for emergencies) or laptop (for work) as a need. Angela, a voluntary simplifier, explains “love, food, education, medical care, decent housing, clothing, you know, is essential. So I would say, try to think about what you really need in your life, and see what consumer items really are necessary and what are not.” Voluntary simplifiers argue that quality of life increases with restricted consumption, and claim that material objects literally get in the way of personal fulfillment and social relationships that can be restored when material barriers are cleared away.

Angela describes her approach to antimaterialism:

...simple living means just being more what people are meant to be. And as I said, stuff is – it should not be ruling us; consumerism shouldn’t be ruling us. You know, *people-ism* should rule us, and so, a sort of side effect would be, you know, to help the environment as well. But it’s also – it’s really bad for us to be so thing oriented, and to be so wasteful.

Angela also incorporates a kind of non-deist spirituality and views the world as an interconnected ecosystem. She explains, “I think of the whole world as one organism, sort of Gaia-ish, you might say, and then, I think humans are a part of it; they're not apart from it.”

She also brings together secondary themes in her justification for lifestyle change – the economic downturn, environmental justice, and economic inequality. In

addition to drawing on these themes to explain her actions she also lives below her means and considers food quality and the distance it has traveled, doesn't eat red meat, has recently had a home energy audit and is planning small renovations (attic insulation and replacing windows), and owns a Prius hybrid, to name a few. This "toolkit" (Swidler 2001) of practices and discourses does not simply follow action as an explanation, but is inextricably connected with action as it unfolds over time and motivates future action.

Environmental protection includes the conservation of natural resources and landscapes. All three groups used the theme of environmental protection predicated on the critique of finite resources. However, it was the primary theme used by green home owners whereas other groups used it as more of a supporting theme and in combination with other themes. Groups acknowledged the environmental damage that had already occurred and their desire to take responsibility for it. This was often assisted by both a sense of urgency (time is running out) and an open view of the future (beyond a single lifetime). Interviewees asked, "what are we leaving behind for our children and grandchildren?" A kind of ecological balance or sustainability was sought by green home owners. There was also awareness that intensive use of resources in the U.S. means a lack of necessary resources in other regions, truly a zero sum game. Anthony, a green home owner and builder, in the process of LEED certification and EPA certification for air quality (Environmental Protection Agency), explains what he means by green building being the right thing to do.

Is it right to recycle? Of course it is, because if you don't, you're utilizing resources that you could basically regenerate through the recycling process. So why tax future generations and burden future generations by having less available resources than we're capable of leaving them. ...It's the right thing to

do because our generation doesn't have the right to utilize any more resources than it absolutely needs...resources need to be shepherded, hoarded, you know, carefully dealt with.

Anthony focuses on the finite supply of resources, the fairness of their distribution (present use vs. future use), and considers the connection between future generations and remaining resources. Notice this is a kind of interconnection, but not the secular ecology ("Gaia-ish") understanding that many voluntary simplifiers share, nor the sacred understanding the religious environmentalists share.

Religious environmentalists explained that everything is connected because it was part of a single process of creation. People rely on this "web of life" for their survival. Secondary themes called on to support this idea included: social and environmental justice, labor exploitation and economic inequality, super storms and sea water rising killing and displacing people, and people hurt in the name of progress and industrialization.

Bruce, an Episcopal environmentalist, argues that "we are required by God to be good stewards of creation." He believes that faith can make people more motivated to change their lifestyles.

Well, we're really trying to look at ecology from a faith perspective look. It's – In the past, we [Church Ecology Committee] looked at it as the right thing to do, and taking a biblical perspective puts a totally different spin on things. And I think we have not been as – What it does is that it gets you to – I mean, if people were to recognize it from a biblical perspective, that we are to be stewards of all of creation, we would take this idea of saving energy and saving – you know, recycling bottles and paper, and take it to a whole new perspective [level]. We would begin to ask ourselves. We would get into the question, you know: What is our carbon footprint? ...But trying to be mindful of our lifestyle and how we influence our – the production of CO₂ is something that we – it takes this to a far more significant depth.

Using a religious lens for his critique results in a deeper understanding of the problem and possible solutions, and makes the process more meaningful to him. Bruce is a retired chemical engineer and does not require a religious perspective to be an environmentalist. As an engineer he was concerned about air and water pollution and disposal of hazardous waste, but now he has expanded that to include America's carbon footprint and the fairness of resource distribution. He has alternative narratives available to him, but he chooses a biblical perspective as more personally meaningful and flexible enough to bring together many concerns.

Bruce organizes interconnectedness around global inequality. He understands that resources used in the developed world come at the expense of the developing world. Bruce points out that the church has moved from a focus on personal piety to saving all of creation – both people and the environment. He also mentions secondary themes of environmental protection and resource efficiency (saving money heating church buildings), resource distribution (concern for developing countries and the poor), and energy independence (for national security reasons, in the news at the time of interview). These themes are not in themselves cohesive, yet the narrative of a green lifestyle and interconnectedness brings them together under a single umbrella of provisional coherence, even though they are formed over time in a piecemeal fashion.

Environmentalism was often incorporated through progressive politics, akin to what Snow et al. (1986) describe when they use the term frame bridge. A frame bridge is a link between ideologically compatible frames used to address a particular problem. For example, Natalie, UCC, has been involved with gun control and supporting women in

politics which are brought together with environmentalism through a Catholic human rights background and a focus on social justice. This is similar to findings by Howell (2013) who shows a connection between feminism, environmentalism, and transitioning to a low-carbon lifestyle.

Interviewees defined environmental harms as problems to be addressed at all levels, including individual lifestyles. Informants brought together different resources for this cause, redefining old goods and practices, recombining them with new consumer goods and practices, and supporting these with environmental discourses, often in dialogue with other progressive political issues.

A PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVE ON LIFESTYLE CHANGE

According to the pragmatist theory of action, beliefs, values, and desires do not preexist and motivate action. Instead, pragmatists argue that routines and conventions are followed until a problem situation is encountered. Dewey (1922) gives the example of a traveler confidently following a path, until she meets an obstacle. The traveler stops, studies the situation, considers past experiences, including the experiences of others, and imagines future alternatives for action to plan her “anticipatory project” (Dewey 1922:182). Pragmatist theory rejects the idea of final ends and the dualism between ends and means. In its place, the traveler poses an “end-in-view” or a subjective and flexible goal which can be amended with deliberation (Whitford 2002). Here action is continuous and not segmented into means/ends. Actors do not choose ends but rather choose a means of dealing with a problem.

Hobson (2002:110) finds little evidence for a pre-existing “environmental preference or the awakening of a latent sense of environmental concern” as expected by prevailing studies of changing behavior.¹³ Instead people were “made to think,” when confronted with literature about the environment – made to think about trust, authority, interests, responsibility, access, right and wrong, distribution, and fairness (Hobson 2002). As Nye and Hargreaves (2010) note, many studies tend to define context as preexisting and neglect the emergent factors in deliberation and interaction. Moreover, Cherrier (2009:189) argues that for some consumer-resistant identities “resistance does not emerge from promoting an objective truth on environmental degradation or social inequalities but from promoting discursive fields in everyday life as a source for self-reflection.”

Drawing on pragmatist action theory, Herrigel (2010:20) argues that goals “emerge out of action as a socially interactive, reflective, creative, and experimental process that both discovers and generates possibilities for further action.” This in-between state of deliberation is where ideas break through at the edges of thinking. Actors choose processes which bring certain goals into sight. The process of going green addresses a problem situation and during that process values and desires are co-constituted with that project. A change in behavior can precede a change in values

¹³ Other work assumes a return on moral utility from going green. For example, Mazar and Zhong (2010) have stirred up a debate over moral licensing rebound effects – arguing that increased morality in one area (green consumption) reduces morality in other areas. For those with a more holistic perspective on sustainability this does not seem to be the case.

(Goldblatt 2005). And knowledge is built up over time after practices have started to change and is used as a rationale for past and future changes.

A green lifestyle emerges out of this process. This is an agentic project because the “processes of reconstruction and creative reflection make it possible for actors to move beyond existing constraints” (Herrigel 2010:20). Individuals use bricolage to build a critique of the problem and pull together old and new sustainable practices. Green lifestyles create provisional coherence which organizes and synchronizes action. Green lifestyles are typically experienced as a path, not a tipping point. A very small minority of informants can identify when they entered the path post-hoc. A much more common perspective was the realization of being on a new path but unable to identify a tipping point or starting point. A period of deliberation or information gathering did not precede action, but rather was closely linked with action unfolding over time. People wrestle with problems and recombine routines with practices they grew up with or incorporate environmental themes that critique the problem of climate change and rationalize present action. These environmental themes support cohesive action even as they are themselves evolving and provisional, subject to new knowledge.

Changes in life also afford opportunities to re-think problems, choose between the means to address them, and set new paths. The interviewees in my sample linked changes to having children, having children leave home and go to college, having grandchildren, surviving breast cancer, retirement, divorce, moving to a new place, or building a new home. When something intrudes on our routines like an “interruption of the guaranteed supply of water or energy...or [a] home-improvement project,”

individuals become “(temporarily) alert” and consider alternatives in “periods of de- and re-routinisation” (Spaargaren and Van Vliet 2000:64-5). Swidler (2001:93, 99-100) has noted that “culture thus has greater, or at least more obvious, influence over action” when people have unsettled lives, when they are “reorganizing their strategies of action or developing new ones.” These transitions, and problems related to them, require more than habitual action in response.

The dichotomy between motivations (values, cognition, heuristics) and rationales (justifications, cultural repertoires, toolkit)¹⁴ rests on the view of periodic action and linear time. Yet if we consider “culture in action” to be continuous, then process is prioritized rather than causality. Using a process perspective opens up a different relationship between motivation and rationale. Nothing stops a motivation from becoming a rationale or vice versa. Dewey (1922) argues that the difference between means and ends is the time at which they are considered. Similarly, Whitford (2002:337) argues “an end, or effect, soon becomes a means, or cause, for what follows.” Looking at interconnected actions over time turns motivation/rationale into a reciprocal phenomenon. The people I spoke with about environmental concerns and the decisions they made to work on developing environmentally sensitive lifestyles provide ample evidence of this pragmatic approach.

CONCLUSION

¹⁴ This is discussed by Vaisey (2009:1676), whose project is to “coherently combine the appealing possibility that culture matters both as a social and psychological justification *and* as a motivation for action.”

The people I interviewed brought together old and new consumer goods, old and new practices, and environmental discourses to form a more sustainable lifestyle. Despite this creative use of resources – subject to uncertainty, deliberation, and incremental change – an experience of provisional cohesion was cultivated. The gelling together of these resources to confront environmental harms is what accounts for a green lifestyle, which functions as a compass to guide everyday deliberations.

A green lifestyle reaches into everyday lives including transportation, grocery shopping, or using cloth diapers. Lifestyles emerge from deliberation over environmental harms and choosing between the means of living more sustainably. My informants go green gradually because they believe their actions matter. Green practices snowball to build a more coherent lifestyle or ebb and flow according to life circumstances. Environmental themes are used as a justification for action that becomes, in turn, a motivation for future action to build a more sustainable lifestyle and new practices resolve into habits.

Coherence is cultivated over time through life narratives. Lifestyles remain fraught with contradictions, tentative solutions, and dinner table discussions. My findings suggest that “doing the right thing” is a process of awareness, critique of the problem, and deliberation over the right course of action. This is a gradual change over time which allows us to witness the process of going green. It also tells us something about how people relate to their culture in a meaningful, reflexive, and self-disciplining way. Policy makers and advocates should consider fostering reflection and dialogue, instead of organizing environmental information in to-do lists.

The treatment of environmentalists as exceptional (holding higher values, greater levels of knowledge, or inspiration) lifts individuals out of their social processes, fostering a one-dimensional understanding of action and a narrow avenue for the transmission of sustainable practices. Lifestyle change is not a recipe or blueprint, but an ongoing process that co-constitutes values, knowledge, and hope for the future. A pragmatist perspective offers fresh insight into explaining how green lifestyles emerge and how the understanding of a problem can be invested with prescriptive, and not just descriptive, powers.

In the next chapter I explore the incorporation of green technology into everyday life and how voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and green home owners differ in their approach to reducing consumption. A green lifestyle is an umbrella category that includes groups that attempt to reduce overall consumption (i.e., voluntary simplifiers), attempt to make consumption more efficient through the use of technology (i.e., green home owners), and groups that pursue both tactics (i.e., religious environmentalists).

Chapter 4

Green and Smart: The Co-construction of Users and Technology

Part of modern consumerism is a preoccupation with products that are new, improved, innovative, and state of the art (Campbell 1992). A common perspective on sustainability is that the more we improve technology, the less we need to change how people live (van Vliet, Chappells and Shove 2005). In a 2006 Pew research poll 23% of Americans agreed that “technology can solve the problem of global warming without major sacrifices.” In addition, people who believe that technology will address environmental problems tend to use resources in a more careless manner (Patchen 2010). The use of so-called green technology is usually framed as part of ecological modernization, a philosophy which leaves the basic principles of the market economy intact and advocates the design of more efficient technology, the strategic pricing of non-renewable resources, and carbon trading between firms (Schor 2010). Essentially it advocates the “consumption of commodities that are familiar, only greener” (Chitewere 2008:101). Chitewere (2008) argues that this focus on green technology may overshadow opportunities to change practices and reduce overall consumption.

One way to reconcile this tension between green technology and changing practices is to integrate users fully into the definition of what makes technology green. Green technology reduces or replaces the consumption of energy (decarbonization), raw materials (dematerialization), and/or toxic chemicals. Research that addresses

environmental problems often focuses on these technological developments (Mol and Spaargaren 2005). However, I argue that green technology is, in part, defined by the practices that integrate it into everyday life, i.e., its domestication. For example, user behavior plays a significant role in the success of sustainable buildings (Wener and Carmalt 2006). Greenness is thus jointly produced by things inherent in the technology, and the ways users adopt the technology through practices. Practices may also green ordinary technologies or monitor them in a way that replicates smart technology (a system of observation and feedback that supports lower resource consumption). Thus the green-ness of technologies and the green-ness of users are mutually shaped, co-produced, and co-dependent.

I employ domestication theory (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992), which focuses on how technology is adopted, displayed, and integrated into everyday lives. I conceive of domestication as a form of social change – that is, as an ongoing process of integrating technology into ethically charged lifestyle projects. I begin by bringing together literature related to green lifestyles, domestication, interpretive flexibility, and the co-construction of technology and groups. I show the different ways that people from my target groups combine practices and technology and how “green” is negotiated. This includes practices that co-create “green” and “smart” technology as efficient in use and not just design, and practices that transform ordinary technology into something green or smart. I also find that an intensive use of innovative technology, rather than avoiding a change in practices, cultivates equally intensive practices to support it.

GREEN LIFESTYLES AND THE DOMESTICATION OF TECHNOLOGY

In her study of an ecovillage in Ithaca, New York, Chitewere (2008) finds that hybrid vehicles and solar panels are iconic symbols of green living, but refraining from the use of innovative technology also distinguished residents as living a green lifestyle. For example, some residents relied on passive solar heating for their homes instead of solar panels and informal car-sharing instead of purchasing a hybrid vehicle. Similarly, Horton (2006) observes that while computers facilitate a green lifestyle in the UK, symbolically the absence of technology is of primary significance. He argues that “life without a car or a television (and especially both)...signals good, green living” (Horton 2006:139). This understanding of technology (iconic presence or noted absence) as a symbol of lifestyle membership or distinction helps explain what objects mean to users and their social groups. One goal of this chapter is to move beyond observations of the presence/absence of technology and study not only what technology *means* but how it is *used*. This agenda fits with the growing interest in studying *how* people consume, rather than simply *what* they consume (Gram-Hanssen 2010, 2011, Harvey and Lorenzen 2006, Holt 1997, Warde 2005).

Domestication theory explains how technology is absorbed into the structures, habits, and patterns of users and daily life. Domestication involves the way technology is adopted (“appropriation”), displayed in the home (“objectification”), and integrated into everyday lives (“incorporation”), as well as how it is used to express lifestyle commitment (“conversion”) (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). Highly successful technologies owe their success to the fact that they are flexible enough to conform to

different lifestyles or “narrative[s] of self-identity” (Giddens 1991:81). For example, Tatum (2000:15) finds that for the Home Power Movement in the U.S. the “interest has not been in technology per se but in living differently, with technology gaining attention only as a partial instrument” to fulfill that project. This capacity of technologies to conform to different lifestyles or social, cultural, political, and economic contexts is called “interpretive flexibility” (Bijker 1997). Because it is socially determined, interpretive flexibility is also processual, unfolding over time. Domestication moves beyond how designers imagine ideal users will behave to the real-world actions of users.

I argue that domestication, in the interest of social change, is not only about making the unfamiliar familiar or taming the wild, but also about integrating technology into conscious lifestyle choices – or the way everyday practices are used as a “companion strategy” to address climate change in addition to other forms of collective action (Jasper 1999). Technology amplifies our resource use and can lock people out of technological systems (a lack of public transportation), but it can also promote environmentally responsible practices. This is an exercise in the study of the “user-consumer” (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003), where “consumer goods [act] as active constitutive elements” in everyday life and the project of social change (Watson 2008). Consumers, when they live as enthusiastic members of voluntary communities, use technology in innovative ways (Franke and Shah 2003). As discussed in the last chapter, green lifestyle may be employed to respond to environmental problems by recombining the use of objects and practices to form a new life narrative. This chapter contributes to our understanding of the different ways that technology use is mobilized in the interest

of identity formation, or as one scholar puts it, “how meaning is formed through action” (Håpnes 1996:128).

While domestication studies have ventured far outside the home (Silverstone 2006), the home remains an important hub of activity for those working to change their lifestyle. The home is not a private sphere, separate from markets – nor is it simply a micro-economy of its own (Zelizer 2005a). The home is, rather, a “point of intersection for the complex negotiation of [the] personal interactions and institutional demands” of “materials, markets, moralities, and meanings” (Allon 2011:205). In the home, technology is integrated into everyday life in a dynamic and improvisational manner and is ultimately re-scripted through deliberation and interaction (Sørensen 2006).

Users, made up of complex and fragmented groups, retain some degree of autonomy and creativity in terms of the meaning, function, and process of appropriation of technology (Mackay et al. 2000). Meaning is never in the technology itself; rather, material objects (technologies) and social groups construct each other. Without reflexivity, domestication is simply a way of avoiding change and maintaining routines despite the entrance of new technologies (Silverstone 2006). In the interest of conservation, technology becomes familiar but not taken for granted. Even stable technologies, those which have achieved so-called sociotechnical closure, can be reinterpreted by social groups who improvise in unpredictable ways (Hand and Shove 2007, Kline and Pinch 1996). Domestication theory thus combats technological determinism and goes beyond linear, decontextualized theories of diffusion that rely on a theoretical commitment to rational actors and a singular notion of causality (Berker et

al. 2005). I conceive of domestication as an ongoing process of problem-solving in the interest of greener living, which involves integrating innovative technology into everyday life and “greening” ordinary technology.

GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND GREENING TECHNOLOGY

Green technology, also known as environmental technology or clean technology, is typically defined in relation to how it is designed and produced rather than how it is used. Green technology is developed with a consideration for environmental impacts over the lifecycle of a product. It may be used to conserve natural resources or rehabilitate habitat. For example, wind turbines, hybrid or electric vehicles, and organic fertilizer are defined as green technologies, whereas coal, vehicles with low gas mileage, and chemical-intensive fertilizers that pollute ground water are not. Smart technology is one way to approach efficiency and to assist individuals in monitoring their resource use. For example appliances may have product-integrated feedback to display how much water or energy is used.

I argue in favor of an expanded definition of green technology which includes (1) technology that is *intentionally designed* and (2) technology that is *intentionally used* in a way that reduces or replaces the consumption of energy and fossil fuels, water and raw materials, and toxic chemicals. To illustrate this distinction, consider the following vignette from a solar forum I attended that included speakers from the state, local utility provider, nearby university and businesses. A business speaker (whose company supports solar, wind, and hydro-electric power) recommended that before anyone installs solar panels on their home they should first weatherize their home, consider

purchasing energy efficient appliances, and change out old light bulbs. He argued, that “solar waste is still waste” and home owners should “conserve as much as they can.”

Once home energy use is curbed then a smaller solar system can be installed. He warned against companies that do not concern themselves with efficiency before installing solar systems. Installing solar panels without weatherizing a home would fit under the first definition of green technology but not the second. Car-sharing, as discussed by Chitewere (2008), would fit under the second definition but not necessarily the first. Ideally, green technology should fit both of these definitions. The rest of this chapter explores how diverse users contribute to making technologies green through their use of *innovative technologies* (technology designed to be green/smart) and *ordinary technologies* (technology not necessarily designed to be green/smart).

INNOVATIVE AND ORDINARY TECHNOLOGIES IN USE:

CONSTITUTIVE, STRATEGIC, AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Households account for 40% of U.S. energy use. Changing household practices and increasing technological efficiency has the potential to cut that in half (Gardner & Stern, 2008). Members of all three groups recognize the problem of climate change and other environmental harms and are attempting to modify their household use of resources as a response. State and national incentives include tax credits and rebates for weatherizing homes, purchasing hybrid vehicles, and investing in renewable energy sources like solar and geothermal. In recent years states have paid as much as 70% of

the cost of a solar installation.¹⁵ These programs are a major way by which innovative technology has been made accessible to average consumers. The majority of people I spoke with had looked into the possibility of solar for their home, although green home owners were twice as likely as the other groups to actually have a roof or larger ground installation.

Green home owners have a *constitutive* approach to technology use in that their primary solution is enacted through innovative technology. Religious environmentalists have a *strategic* approach to technology use. Innovative technology enables a connection with the state and is one tool among many that households rely on. Voluntary simplifiers have a *practical* approach, mainly consisting of practices, greening ordinary technology, and investing in innovative technology when necessary. In the following sections I offer illustrative highlights of how each group uses innovative and ordinary technologies.

Green Home Owners: A Constitutive Approach to Technology Use

Green home owners viewed innovative technology as essential to conserving resources and addressing climate change. Theirs is an aggressive use of technology that epitomizes a kind of smart living which is systematic and scientific, where the ideas of green living and using innovative technology are closely coupled together (i.e. constitutive). I find that this intensive use of innovative technology is enabled by equally intensive practices (deliberation, knowledge gathering, and monitoring). Green home

¹⁵ Renewable energy consumption makes up 7% of all U.S. energy consumption. Of that 7%, only 1% comes from solar. For details see http://www.eia.gov/cneaf/solar.renewables/page/trends/rentrends.html#_consumption

owners embrace innovative technology and deliberate over design features and the circumstances of production – extending the adoption phase of domestication. Their practices are also focused on using technology in the smartest way possible through monitoring resource throughput to achieve an ideal union of technology that is intentionally designed, and used, efficiently.

Buying things that “are familiar, only greener” is not a simple prescription. Primarily relying on innovative technology involves a great deal of uncertainty and deliberation that contributes to lengthy adoption periods. Geoff, an architect who builds LEED buildings, explains that he gets bad information from marketers (i.e., greenwashing), and often contractors do not know if a product has recycled content. He says “I think that’s the toughest thing for me with green – is you almost develop a mental breakdown just by trying to figure out: Is it good? Is it not good? Is it green? Is it the right green [to earn LEED points]?” Similarly, Darren, an architect who designed and built his own home, explains that trying to be environmentally friendly is a “moving target” which leads to a few mistakes, for example, the cork flooring he installed throughout his home contains formaldehyde although he was told that it did not.

Knowledge gathering, despite occasional misinformation, is a significant part of the deliberation process. The solar forum I attended, as part of the participant observation for this study, included a business speaker who exhorted audience members to “do your homework” about home solar installations. He explained, “you can’t just say I want a blue one [solar panel], I want it square and 12 inches by 12.” Jacob, a green home owner in the process of LEED certification, did his homework by

reading magazines, books, websites, attending trade shows (green expo, lighting expo), and traveling out of state to take a weekend course on green home design. Jacob, who works as part of the administration at a private school, also thinks green is a “moving target.” Here he describes his home renovation:

The [kitchen and bathroom] counters are ice stone, which is recycled glass and cement and made in a daylight factory in Brooklyn. So it’s also, you know, within a 500-mile radius. We tried to source most of the materials within 500 miles and [use] FSC [Forest Stewardship Council] certified [wood] where we could or recycled materials where we could. The siding on the house is that kind of fiber cement siding, which lasts forever and doesn’t need to be painted as much. There are a couple of different brands. We chose the brand that has recycled fly ash in it, which is a coal-plant byproduct. ...So you know, every step along the way, you know we were checking on things and working with the people.

Jacob, like other green home owners, had an extensive amount of knowledge about where products were made, the conditions under which products were made, and if they were certified or had recycled content. Green home owners, if not already, often felt that they had to become experts themselves on green building in order to make decisions about product adoption.

Despite high levels of uncertainty, green home owners often identified product design as the key to innovation, rather than how a product is used. Geoff recently purchased his first home with his wife Kim. Both are architects and LEED APs (Accredited Professionals). Geoff (the one almost developing a mental breakdown deciding what is greener) describes technology designed to be green as “inherently good” and gives the example of low-VOC paint. Kim adds that living is consuming, therefore we should try to make products “in the most efficient way possible,” and make “the greenest thing” possible, with a “very blatant” use of technology. Kim, while currently priced out of the

market on many innovative technologies, including the Prius hybrid, still advocates putting a great deal of thought and energy into greener production. This clear allegiance to innovative technology as a primary solution, even when uncertain or unaffordable, distinguishes green home owners from other groups.

Still, changing practices and innovative technology use are deeply intertwined. Practices like deliberation and knowledge gathering enable innovative technology adoption. Green home owners also cultivate practices that use innovative technologies in the smartest way possible. The largest variation in the display of innovative technology, part of the domestication process, came from solar monitoring systems. Green home owners were more likely to have a dedicated monitor (a little black box with a readout of solar panel efficiency) versus using a website or computer program. This allows for constant attention to the system. Andrew, an architect and self-described “solar fanatic” describes himself as “future thinking” and prefers building materials that take into account everything “we know now” and all technologies available to us. He has a dedicated monitor for his solar panels on the end of his kitchen counter. Andrew is an intensive user of this feedback system (“you just press a button day or night” – he currently works from home), but laments that the countertop display is not as detailed as he would like.

Thus, green home owners approached solar panels as a smart technology and not simply an innovative technology. Andrew monitored solar input and usage to the extent that dips in input caused investigation into afternoon shadows, and spikes in

energy usage were traced to their source like the refrigerator turning on. Andrew explains:

So, getting the information, I think it's very helpful to be able to see instantly what you're producing, where the problems are. As a matter of fact, I realized a problem not too long ago, that energy was falling off – the solar production was falling off earlier in the afternoon than I planned. And I went up on the roof, and sure enough, there was a shadow. The sun was so far back to the west, because it was close to June 21st; so the sun is the highest in the sky and has the widest arc. So, when the sun is at smaller aperture, it's not quite as high in the sky. – the panels were – to face this way, but the sun was tracking back here. [laughter]...Nothing I can do right now. [laughter] But I was aware of it. I knew why.

The way green home owners spoke about their solar panels and other aspects of their home was technical and exacting. Andrew has calculated his house's carbon footprint at 6.2 tons of carbon dioxide a year; he buys carbon offset credits to bring his footprint down to zero. This kind of devotion also indicates a passion for the science of sustainability and gadgetry. For other green home owners this love of gadgetry spilled over into consumer electronics more generally, somewhat compromising energy efficiency, and was predictably gendered.

In some cases uncertainty calcified into different schools of thought. There was a sustained debate over which innovative technologies to use to fulfill overall home energy needs (solar vs. geothermal). The majority of green home owners had solar panel installations. However, geothermal was used by a minority of green home owners, who explained that it was a better choice than solar in the Northeastern United States – it would last longer (in the interest of building a “100 year house”), needed less maintenance, and was less visible (thus more aesthetically pleasing). Others saw geothermal installation (especially drilling 1-3 bore holes) as prohibitively expensive

(about \$10,000 per hole) for a single-family home. Another green home owner and architect, Adriana, suggests that it would make more sense to power an entire neighborhood with geothermal because it would produce more energy than a single home could use (unless it was a very large house).

This touches on a problem with innovative technology, namely, the inefficient use of innovative technology. Depending on the size of the house, a solar roof installation was often not sufficient for all home energy needs. Jacob points out that there are people with “very big houses who, you know, try to call them ‘green’,” which he sees as problematic. Anthony, a retired college Dean who is working as his own general contractor, points out that the “green” in green building should include both the construction and operation of a building. But interviewees in the business of home-building brought up the fact that people do not seem to want small green homes, so they compromise by building big green homes (which sell for over a million dollars). This is certainly not an ideal use of innovative technology and it also results in pricing most people out of the market.

Green home owners primarily concerned themselves with acquiring the best designed innovative technology. But even products designed to be green called for a great deal of deliberation over green claims. Once adopted, green home owners sought to use innovative technology in an efficient manner, taking advantage of reporting technology to an extreme degree, augmenting the smart-ness of the technology with their practices. The drawback with this constitutive orientation is the tendency toward

building single-family, relatively big green homes – or what amounts to adding innovative technology to a business-as-usual framework.

Religious Environmentalists: A Strategic Approach to Technology Use

Innovative technology was used strategically by religious environmentalists at places of worship to address environmental problems while reducing operating costs, recruiting new members, and creating common ground with the state on clean energy. Individuals used innovative technology selectively as part of their toolkit to reduce their use of resources, although they did not prioritize innovative technology over other strategies.

Religious environmentalists believe that caring for the environment is part of their religious responsibility (Gardner 2006, Taylor 2009). Addressing environmental harms – especially the pollution of land, air, and water – is part of a larger project of stewardship which includes a myriad of other concerns like poverty and health, human rights, affordable housing, and land conservation to name a few. Sam, a retired Episcopal Priest and founder of an interdenominational green religious group, invited a renewable energy provider into the state. He explains:

With the deregulation of the electrical industry in the state, we were able to convince Green Valley Energy [a distributor of renewable energy] to come in and to begin offering energy as an alternative to Eastern Gas & Electric [the dominant utility company]. And as a matter of fact, [my place of worship] was the first small business to sign onto this.

Sam was also a member of a state commission on the environment for four years. He believes that his group had an impact on, or at least planted the “seeds” for, the state support of renewable energy. But he also notes that the green religious group has to

start over with each new administration and environmentalism has become a partisan issue garnering more support from Democrats than Republicans.

By focusing on clean energy, similar to President Obama's strategy, religious environmentalists are able to work with conservative pro-business politicians in office and state agencies. The question answered by clean energy is not simply how to make places of worship more efficient and cost effective, but also how to work with the state. Lydia, a Quaker and former Evangelical Christian, explains that solar energy has strategic value because it is not a "political position." In other areas, like social justice, religious environmentalists are overtly political, for example, challenging commercial trucking routes that contribute to air pollution and rising asthma rates in poor areas.

Giner and Tabara (1999) argue that ecoreligions legitimate themselves through scientific discourse and the incorporation of technological solutions. Religious environmentalists use innovative technology to position themselves within a contentious field that includes both secular environmentalists and conservative Evangelical fundamentalists who challenge the notion of anthropomorphic climate change. Thus, not only is technology constituted through its adoption by social groups but it is part of the negotiation of boundaries between groups and contributes to the constitution of the group.

Religious environmentalists integrate innovative technology into notions of stewardship of the earth as they use it to define themselves and build coalitions. Renewable energy and increased efficiency reduces pollution – a major social justice issue – as well as reducing the operation costs at places of worship. Solar panels also

serve as a visual symbol of environmental awareness. Upon completion of one church project a banner was raised that read “This congregation generates solar power.

Interested?” This assumes that solar is publicly symbolic and has the potential to recruit new members.

In one Episcopal congregation the need to replace old furnaces began the process of going green. The only furnaces available for purchase were Energy Star – an energy efficiency certification program created in 1992 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. This began a discussion at the administrative level of how else to use resources more efficiently. For example, the church has gone paperless (no bulletins or disposable cups). They are now considering a larger environmental project, like the installation of solar panels, for its 50th anniversary celebration. Daniel, an Episcopal Priest and leader of the congregation, explains:

So, in our 50th year celebration, we might do something as radical as put solar panels in, and we're looking into that. We're looking into any possible way - to conserve....And just keep at it, just keep at it. ...And how can we make this building more green, be better stewards? Solar --- solar heat.

Here, solar is considered a “radical” possibility mainly due to its expense, but it would essentially serve as part of a larger incremental project (“just keep at it”).

For religious environmentalists innovative technology did not hold a privileged position, but was considered on par with other practices that reduce consumption. Sam, a retired Episcopal Priest, sees renewable energy as part of his whole perspective on stewardship.

But you know, as I say, when we [my wife and I] made the commitment to green energy [through a renewable energy distributor], we understood it was going to cost more, and we just decided that this is part of our commitment to

stewardship. So, we went for the green energy. A lot of little things, you know, like being aware to take a shorter shower. [laughter] Buying [at the] farmer's market, that sort of thing, sort of came along with it. I have a sense that we've always felt that it was important to walk gently on the earth. It's been a part of our faith.

Sam describes himself as “downwardly mobile” as he just moved into a smaller house and plans to continue to downsize. It is clear that he views energy efficiency as part of a larger ethical system and interconnected with other lifestyle practices. This is an entirely different way of domesticating innovative technology. In this case, technology is serving the purpose of the group, rather than defining the purpose of the group like in the case of green home owners.

Religious environmentalists used innovative technology strategically to build relationships with new members and the state. Innovative technology, as a symbol, did not simply indicate group membership but recruited new members; it did not make distinctions but generated solidarity between different political groups. As individuals, religious environmentalists also integrated innovative technology into larger stewardship goals without prioritizing innovative technology over ordinary technology.

Voluntary Simplifiers: A Practical Approach to Technology Use

Voluntary simplifiers, with their commitment to reducing all forms of consumption, rarely purchased innovative technology, invoking a kind of practical minimalism. They only turn to innovative technology when it addresses a problem which is difficult to address with practices alone (renewable energy) and when it fits their larger goal of reducing consumption. However, simplifiers embrace the use and repurposing of ordinary technology to conserve water and energy. This does not mean

that they are averse to technology, as their reputation indicates, but rather that they have different ideas about the endurance and longevity of technology.

The literature on voluntary simplicity explains that by reducing the clutter in their lives people hope to strengthen family and communal bonds, cultivate a greater appreciation of nature, become more independent and experience meaningful personal growth (Elgin 1981, Johnston and Burton 2003, McDonald et al. 2006, Zavestoski 2002). However, simplicity is a bit of a misnomer implying a calm and austere life when the reality is much more challenging, hectic, and cluttered. Lane explains:

There is sort of, I think, a way of looking at voluntary simplicity and thinking: Oh, everything --- you know, there's like, no stuff around and everything's sort of calm, and you know, and there's not clutter and that kind of stuff. And I think none of that's true. I think probably, we are trying to live in a more simple way, but it's a very hard and complex, crazy society when you're an activist.

Simplicity within a consumer economy is not simple – it is complex and time-consuming (Librova 2008). Catherine explains that being a voluntary simplifier primarily means doing without, using less, and reducing waste – this includes the use of energy and water.

Several simplifiers are adopting renewable energy through an energy provider, as opposed to personally owned solar panels. Here, Ava weighs different renewable energy providers in order to decide which is the most green. She does not accept business claims about the use of renewable energy, but tries to collect information about the details on her own.

While it'd be great if the Eastern Gas & Electric program was more effective, it's not. And in fact, I was thinking of opting out because they're not giving us information about where the money's really going to. I've been trying to [get more information]. I opted for True Earth. They're not 100% green. I just found

that out. So, [a local non-profit is] actually thinking of doing this project with Verdant Energy, which I think has a greener portfolio. They're going to look into that. So they're looking for greener energy [community] groups to come in and then help people buy cooperatively into those.

Tracy also mentions the new Verdant Energy program. The community group she's a member of gets a "kickback" when they sign people up for the program. She explains:

Verdant has now entered the market, and it's really doing a big marketing campaign by approaching organizations that can fundraise for themselves by promoting green energy. And we think it's – We've checked it out. We think it's consistent with our mission to green the energy utilities, and so, we're okay with that.

While using an energy provider has no up-front costs, unlike most household solar installations, it is difficult to get information about the percentage of renewable energy used (renewable programs are often not 100% renewable energy), the type of renewable energy offered (% wind vs. % solar, etc.), or the exact reason for the price premium if there is one and where that money goes. While complicated, this choice eliminates the adoption cost of solar panels or geothermal and is thus a choice Ava and Tracy feel comfortable recommending to others in their community. Notice that Tracy deems it "consistent with our mission" as a community group – the mission being of primary concern, not the use of innovative technology.

Voluntary simplifiers typically focus on restraint as opposed to technological efficiency. In line with this philosophy, voluntary simplifiers were more likely to ask: Is innovative technology necessary? And what are the tradeoffs? For example, shade trees or solar panels? Informants didn't find this a good tradeoff and often kept the trees

after considering the installation of solar panels. Thus the adoption period of domestication turns into a non-adoption period. Mike explains:

We looked into solar, eventually. It took a long time to get to it...and I've been looking forward to it for many, many years since we have, I thought, a really, *really* nice, southern exposure here. But then it turns out, the company that I called came, and they did a quick audit, and they said we've got two monster trees on both neighbor's front yards. So they wouldn't even put it in because I wouldn't qualify for the prime, the minimal rebate – unless I can get my neighbors to chop down half their trees, and I couldn't ask my neighbors to do that. So, no solar.

A few voluntary simplifiers had this experience of long aspiration and non-adoption.

They tended to live in older middle-class neighborhoods with mature trees where houses sit closer together. No one decided to cut down their trees or ask their neighbors to do so. In some cases trees had been planted to shade the house in order to keep it cooler in the summer.

Voluntary simplifiers are reluctant users of new, innovative technology. For example, old cars or kitchen appliances must be unfixable and unusable before they are replaced. This is a narrow interpretation of the “principle of replacement consumption” or a “reduced readiness to define a product as in need of replacement” (Campbell 1992: 57). Librova (2008:1118) refers to this ethos as a “faithfulness to things and an inability to get rid of them.” Angela, explains that she has kitchen appliances over ten years old that are still running and she wouldn't “throw out a fairly-working appliance” in order to buy something more efficient. And Carol argues that simplifiers cannot simply withdraw from the market altogether so when something is defined as a need after careful consideration, then it's best to purchase something efficient, “with the Energy Star logo.” Several simplifiers were waiting for an appliance or car “to die” before replacing

it. Iris clarifies that there is a real “struggle” between buying new Energy Star appliances and keeping old appliances out of landfills.

Voluntary simplifiers should not be characterized as anti-technology or avoiding technology. Instead, I argue that simplifiers are efficient and creative users of ordinary technology. For example, Cynthia has an ordinary (high-efficiency gas) hot water heater but she uses a five-gallon bucket to capture water while her shower is heating up in order to reuse the water later. Here Cynthia explains how she also tries to use her space heater in an efficient way.

Oh, I have a little space heater that, when I’m at home during the day, if I don’t come [to school], and it’s just me, it seems silly to be heating the whole house. So I’ll just have one room that I do my work in, and I have a little space heater. I can shut the door and I can bring the dog in with me, and then we just heat the room and not worry about heating the whole house until my husband gets home and we’re going to be doing things in other rooms of the house.

Space heaters are notorious for being inefficiently used. They may be used in addition to heating a home or office, or used in offices when the air conditioning is turned up too high. But here Cynthia maximizes the efficiency of the space heater by heating one room and leaves the rest of her house at about 50 degrees.

Catherine also uses ordinary technology in a smart way. She is part of a small group that is monitoring their energy (gas and electric) consumption, turning a monthly energy bill into a kind of smart reporting system. The group creates a baseline measure with data from the last year (2009) and then work to reduce their use of resources in the present year (2010). Catherine explains:

Um, we are kind of actually doing, um, trying to record by gas and electric consumption; we're doing it as a group. We have this Energy Champions

program that we started at the Fellowship. And we're recording last year's energy consumption and this years, and we're trying to reduce consumption. We have this book, *Low Carbon Diet* [by David Gershon], which we're working with to try to find ways to reduce energy consumption.

Catherine has a high-efficiency gas furnace and is essentially creating smart technology by taking advantage of a common reporting system that many people ignore. However, this is a somewhat inexperienced use of technology compared to the green home owners.

Catherine is working in a group with a book for guidance – she is not doing her homework and becoming an expert herself.

Voluntary simplifiers are not avoiding technology but they are more involved with changing lifestyle practices than adopting innovative technology. They treat ordinary technology as potentially green depending on use and adopt innovative technology when necessary. Innovative technology, for simplifiers, is compatible with reducing overall consumption when used judiciously with deliberation (a careful consideration of wants versus needs) and a narrow definition of the principle of replacement. Overall, simplifiers rely more on practices than technology design in how they achieve efficiency and reduce their consumption.

Groups not only shape technology through its use, but are also shaped by it. The use of innovative technology by green home owners is somewhat over-determined by their association with the building industry as architects or heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) specialists. Their professions associate innovation with design. Religious environmentalists champion renewable energy in order to build a stronger relationship with the state; however the project of supporting renewable energy spills over into many areas of their work as a more general strategy for change. Voluntary

simplifiers often could not afford innovative technologies like solar panels or hybrid vehicles regardless of financial incentives. This spare use of innovative technology, due in part to limited access, was part of what shaped their interest in ordinary technology in addition to the ethic of simplification.

RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Energy efficiency is “at the heart of international efforts to reduce carbon emissions and slow global environmental change” (Biggart and Lutzenhiser 2007:1072). The U.S. is no exception. Energy policy in the last few years¹⁶ has focused on clean energy projects and energy efficiency initiatives; including research and development in renewable energy and biofuel, smart grid technology, energy efficiency in public buildings and industry, new regulations for federal buildings and building codes, tax incentives for industry and consumers, and automobile fuel economy. The U.S. still has a long way to go in terms of supporting energy efficiency and following the example set by key states like California (Chang, Rosenfeld and McAuliffe 2010). I argue that studying the domestication practices of technology can offer a way into a more comprehensive energy policy, one that incorporates both innovative and ordinary technology, and the use of technology as well as its design and production.

Academics from Lutzenhiser (1992, 1993) to Anue (2007) have called for a richer cultural understanding of energy use. For example, Anue (2007) finds that energy use in

¹⁶ For a summary of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 see http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/RL34294_20071221.pdf

For a summary of green projects, a little more than 7% of the total budget, in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 see <http://www.treehugger.com/corporate-responsibility/guide-to-the-green-projects-in-obamas-economic-stimulus-bill.html>

Norway is related to how people define home – as a haven, a project, or simply an arena for activities and working together. The haven, associated with comfort, is the most energy intensive, whereas the home as an arena or stage has the most modest energy use. Those who think of the home as an on-going renovation project adopt the newest innovative technologies for efficiency, and while they are not the most efficient energy users the changes they make offer possibilities for intervention. Anue (2007) argues that policy interventions should be tailored to these ideas of home. A well insulated home, for example, could be framed as cozy rather than more efficient, aiding interpretive flexibility. But there is another lesson here. Those who are the most intensive users of efficient technology are not necessarily using the least amount of energy.

Policy is split between efforts to change individual behavior, particularly product labeling like Energy Star and consumer education, and more systemic responses in the form of technology (efficient technology and energy supply) and resource management (Shove 2010). Shove and Walker (2007:768) observe that in spite of discussions about “sociotechnical coevolution” in the transition management literature, “there is almost no reference to the ways of living or to the patterns of demand implied in what remain largely technological templates for the future.” Even working within the technological template there are a few obvious problems uncovered by the research presented here: some solar companies have little regard for home efficiency, green home builders compromise by building big single-family green homes, renewable energy programs do not necessarily offer 100% renewable energy, and gadgets like cell phones or consumer

electronics are not produced to be efficient. There is also a regulation lag in building codes at the local level.

Hafkamp (2006:381) argues that “policy should not accept the dichotomy of technology and behavior” – a focus on technology tends toward unintended consequences and rebound effects, while a focus exclusively on behavior is inclined to moralize and alienate. Even a “two-track approach,” argues Verbeek and Slob (2006:394), which focuses on both technology and behavior, although separately, is too limited. They recommend instead policy focused on the interactions between technology and behavior, how they influence each other in a socio-technical context. This means technology/practices must be studied in the unpredictable everyday life-worlds of diverse users, with short-term feedback loops for policy makers to learn and adjust – in this case policy would be more “goal seeking” than goal defining (Verbeek and Slob 2006:396).

The groups I studied are involved with creative and sometimes subversive uses of both innovative and ordinary technologies. U.S. Energy Policy should expand to support the intentional *use* of technology in a way that conserves resources. Addressing environmental harms is not only about designing and producing more innovative technology, but also about how technology is domesticated into everyday life. Not surprisingly, the most comprehensive behavior change policies are the most successful and include, for example, education, financial incentives, and social outreach (Dietz et al. 2009, Nye and Hargreaves 2010). However, policies usually focus on innovative technology adoption which is only the first step in domestication. The community

outreach component could be expanded to involve more of the domestication process. Greater consideration for the co-construction of technologies and users makes it clear that technology does not take the place of changing practices. Rather, practices are relied on to domesticate innovative and ordinary technologies in a way that maximizes efficiency and complements greener living.

CONCLUSION

This chapter describes how technology domestication practices contribute to greener living. The three groups I studied differ in their domestication of technology, but each displays an uncommon consideration for reducing the consumption of hidden resources like energy or water. Green home owners rely heavily on the adoption of innovative technology to reduce their use of resources – a constitutive approach. However, innovative technology (designed to be green) was never taken for granted, but rather researched and scrutinized before adoption. Once innovative technologies were adopted they were pushed to fulfill their potential, like the rigorous use of monitoring equipment which made the most out of solar panel installations. This fulfills both the letter and the spirit of green technology which should include (1) technology that is *intentionally designed* and (2) technology that is *intentionally used* in a way that reduces or replaces the consumption of energy and fossil fuels, water and raw materials, and toxic chemicals.

For religious environmentalists innovative technology was a strategic means of addressing a larger project of stewardship. Religious environmentalists use innovative technology mainly at places of worship to reduce pollution, use resources more

efficiently, and decrease the cost of building maintenance; but they also use it to recruit new members and connect with the state through the less-partisan discourse of clean energy. Thus, the symbolism of innovative technology is recognized and put to work to accomplish the goals of the group. In their own lives, religious environmentalists may use innovative technology selectively as a partial solution, but it was not privileged over the use of ordinary technology.

Voluntary simplifiers use innovative technology sparingly in order to fit their frugal lifestyles – a practical approach. Using resources more efficiently, when they had to be used at all, was a strategy compatible with their goal to live lightly on the earth. They were also often priced out of the market on more substantial innovative technologies like solar panels or hybrid vehicles. Most simplifiers concentrate on changing practices and using ordinary technology (space heater, gas furnace) efficiently instead of adopting innovative technology.

Although differing in their approach to innovative and ordinary technologies, all three groups construct or augment the green-ness and smart-ness of technology through their domestication practices. Monitoring solar panels makes the best use of technology that is designed to be green and smart. Detailing a spreadsheet of monthly utility bills also creates green and smart technology out of ordinary technology. Voluntary simplifiers, especially, show us that there is no point at which technology, no matter how ordinary, is beyond the improvisation of social groups attempting to address new problems. Thus domestication is ongoing and conforms to the larger goal of lifestyle change and resource conservation.

In these cases, users matter not only to the successful diffusion of innovative technology, but also to the effectiveness of the technology in addressing environmental harms. Louis, a Jewish environmentalist, calls this a “grass-tops movement” because it works from both the top-down and the bottom-up – producers and users come together to green technology in order to address environmental harms. Ideally a more inclusive energy policy would take into account both innovative and ordinary technologies, and the use of technology as well as its design and production. Essentially, there is no such thing as “green technology;” greenness emerges in the linkage between people and things.

The next chapter returns to the similarities between groups but continues my interest in strategic action. It examines how my informants attempt to recruit other people to go green and change their lifestyles. Efficient technology plays a small role in these rhetorical techniques, primarily as a way to save people money. Recommendations about saving money are popular because they sidestep more political (climate change) or controversial (reducing overall consumption) topics.

Chapter 5

Convincing People to Go Green: Managing Strategic Action by Minimizing Political Talk

With some people, you might just need to say, 'This'll save you money.' With other people, you can say, 'This is saving the planet,' or 'This is helping people to live better lives.' So, I think it's important, that they understand that different things will – different arguments will work with different people. –Natalie, Religious Environmentalist, United Church of Christ

Natalie, the Chair of the Environmental Committee at her place of worship, does not consider herself an activist but uses her social networks to advocate living a more environmentally responsible lifestyle. In the introductory quote she describes strategically using a financial appeal, an environmental appeal, or a human rights appeal which she switches between depending upon her audience. The strategy of action shared by Natalie and people like her is the focus of this chapter. Specifically, this chapter details the tactics used to persuade other people to change their lifestyles in an effort to address climate change and environmental harms. My work highlights, not the establishment of mutual agreement over an issue like climate change (communicative action), but rather, the ways in which people manage the task of getting others to do what they want (strategic action) (Jasper 2006). In previous chapters, I have focused on the *intrapersonal* experience of adopting a green lifestyle. In contrast, this chapter explores what happens *interpersonally* when informants attempt to spread lifestyle changes throughout their social networks.

The seriousness of climate change, according to informants, calls for a comprehensive approach. As part of this approach, informants target people within their social networks for the express purpose of advocating change. Friends, family members, romantic partners, co-workers, religious congregation members, neighbors, and strangers are approached strategically using a set of persuasive techniques. These techniques tailor appeals to particular audiences or make use of “I” statements – that is, informants avoid accusatory statements towards others while also communicating how much acting green feels to them like an authentic, passionate, and inevitable choice. I also find informants claiming to act like role models and creating teachable moments, as well as highlighting financial rewards like appeals that combine multiple positive consequences together (as in the use of “win-win” imagery), as well as the rare appeal for the environment and future generations.

My informants argue, and suggest with their tactics, that small, private lifestyle changes are easier for people to enact than public, possibly contentious political action. This makes lifestyle change a valuable starting point for recruitment with little risk of conflict and low entry costs. The *lifestyle change strategy* uses flexible tactics that mask political action in order to advocate the adoption of more environmentally responsible practices. The underlying assumption is that small lifestyle changes will snowball into more significant lifestyle changes (from changing light bulbs to installing solar panels) and, potentially, collective action. For informants, transitioning to a green lifestyle made them feel more involved in environmentalism and shored up long-term, sometimes discouraging, action in social movements with short-term household accomplishments.

Even those informants who attempted to focus on household changes alone were ultimately drawn into other forms of action through speaking engagements or nominations to local government commissions.

I define the term strategy as employing the means to address or solve a problem(s) against possible resistance from others. I define strategy in terms of problems, rather than goals, because as I have noted earlier, I employ a pragmatist theory of action rather than a rational choice framework. Thus strategic action is not calculating, *per se*, but rather purposive, improvisational, and opportunistic. Informants show a practical focus on problem-solving through the flexibility of their tactics and the way they prioritize changing practices rather than ideology.

I find that political talk, which strategically minimizes political content while upholding a political agenda, takes advantage of the public's tendency to 'avoid politics' (Eliasoph 1998) in order to address a polarizing issue (e.g., climate change). My informants are aware that targeted appeals to big issues, like the environment, make people uncomfortable. Political talk is threatening – not only is it potentially confrontational but it may also bring to light insecurities over knowledge limitations and conflicts over who has the authority to speak to an issue (Eliasoph 1998). Because the public is deeply divided about climate change (Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins 2012), informants selectively draw on persuasive techniques in informal talk that downplay their political ideas and engagements. Due to the inhospitable political context, educating outsiders with less radical appeals is viewed as a necessity rather than a dilemma. In order to sidestep climate change skepticism, my informants often resort to

modeling practices rather than proselytizing ideas. Their strategy compels us to study the active management of informal persuasive talk in the service of environmental politics.

In what follows I explore in detail the relational strategy and tactics used by voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and green home owners to convince others to change lifestyles. I begin by briefly discussing the literature on the politics of private action and political talk. I then examine the strategy of advocating lifestyle change through informal talk in social networks. Substantively, I document and organize the discussion around several persuasive techniques: audience assessment; making “I feel” statements; being role models; highlighting financial rewards; and the rare environmental appeal. I analyze how talk is managed, the content of talk, and the context of talk. This is primarily a story about avoiding environmental appeals in order to save the environment, or more generally the political avoidance of politics.

PRIVATE ACTION AND POLITICAL TALK

There is an on-going debate over the politics of private action. Individual actions are characterized either as *leading to* more significant lifestyle change and collective action (positive spillover effects) or as *preventing* further lifestyle change, collective action, and macro-level policy interventions (negative spillover effects or tradeoff). Within this “individual/collective debate,” individual-level, market-based actions (i.e., changing a light bulb) are often defined as distinct from collective, traditional movement politics (i.e., attending a rally) (Stern et al. 1999).

There are different ways of understanding a *positive* link between private action and public activism. First, scholars dispute the basic assumption that private actions are apolitical and redefine individual actions, in the service of social change, as inherently political (i.e., conscientious boycotts or buycotts of ethical and green goods) (Clarke et al. 2007, Jones 2002, Shaw 2007). Second, scholars also focus on the correlation between individual and collective action. For example, conscientious consumers are just as, if not more, involved with political and social movement action than regular consumers (Stolle, Hooghe and Michelette 2005). Third, some scholars support an escalation thesis (or catalyst argument) in which changing practices may establish new habits (e.g., carpooling), snowball into more significant lifestyle changes (e.g., no longer owning a car), and escalate into political participation (Thøgersen and Crompton 2009) and the support of broader environmental policies (Scerri and Magee 2012, Thøgersen and Noblet 2012). Thus ethical or green consumption, alongside attempts to reduce overall consumption, are pathways into political participation and collective action (Barnett et al. 2005, Nelson, Rademacher and Paek 2007, Schoolman 2012, Seyfang 2006, Willis and Schor 2012). Yet, do conscientious consumers become more involved in politics or do activists become involved with conscientious consumption? I find that causality goes both ways.

On the other hand, the tradeoff argument asserts that conscientious consumption and lifestyle change frame the solution to climate change as individual-centric and market-based, thus reducing political participation and the potential for macro-level approaches (Maniates 2002b, Webb 2012). In this scenario political

participation is primarily limited by resource and time constraints. Szasz (2007) argues that becoming involved with commercial solutions and lifestyle change satisfies immediate environmental concerns and causes people to neglect broader political action resulting in an “inverted quarantine.” For example, installing a water filtration system in one’s home may reduce one’s concern about the municipal water supply. Similarly, lifestyle change is defined as arduous, time consuming, and distracting; which leaves little room for political commitments (Carrier 2008). Webb (2012:109) makes a broader argument, asserting that the focus on individual behavior and incentives to change it “obscures alternative understandings of society as a collective accomplishment.” There is also a small amount of laboratory data on negative spillover effects, or the idea that making one habit greener will rationalize that other habits may be less green (moral licensing rebound effects). For example, Mazar and Zhong (2010) found that college students who increased morality in one area (e.g., green consumption), reduced morality in another area (e.g., cheating in a game).

While these arguments are rhetorically compelling, they rely on minimal empirical evidence and are contradicted by both qualitative and quantitative empirical studies of conscientious consumption and lifestyle change. In addition, the social movements literature, which is rarely brought into this debate, finds that lifestyle practices are a valued site of environmental movement participation (Pichardo Almanzar, Sullivan-Catlin and Deane 1998). They are integrated into a holistic understanding of environmental movement commitments (Lichterhan 1996), and contribute to sustained participation in environmental movements (Passy and Giugni

2000). In this chapter I explore the individual/collective action debate by exploring recruitment. In chapter six I return to this debate with an in-depth exploration of the trajectories of participation experienced by my informants (transitioning to a green lifestyle and then becoming more involved with traditional forms of political participation is one of those trajectories).

Ideally, recruitment to environmental movements would involve communicative action (finding common ground on knowledge and science) and politicizing everyday life (connecting consumer goods to sweatshop labor practices), all in the interest of social justice and structural transformation (Luque 2005). However, the content and style of informal talk in politically laden situations, as studied by political sociologists and political scientists, is far from ideal. From them we know that people filter political talk through their own identities (framing issues in “us vs. them” language), which is informed by where people place themselves in relation to other people (Walsh 2004). People talk about politics in situations they deem appropriate (Eliasoph 1998) and with people they think will respond in a friendly manner (MacKuen 1990). People also have very few conversational partners when it comes to political talk (Huckfeldt, Johnson and Sprague 2002). Conspicuous conflict in political talk is rare and when people do disagree they tend to talk past each other, rather than acknowledging that differing opinions directly conflict or follow political cleavages (Duchesne and Haegel 2006).

Most well known on this topic is Eliasoph’s study of avoiding politics which finds that activists speak eloquently about politics and the big picture in private, but simplify and focus on self-interest in public discourse. These ideas are helpful for understanding

environmentalists' talk. As I will show, in informal persuasive talk, politics is avoided.

However, avoiding politics, in this case, is not a symptom of apathy, dissatisfaction with political institutions, or mere politeness. Rather it is part of a deeply pragmatic strategy to reach a wider audience and create social and environmental change. Thus, avoiding politics is not only active (Eliasoph 1998, Norgaard 2011) but strategic.

LIFESTYLE CHANGE STRATEGY

The persuasive tactics, detailed in the next section, share the strategy of advocating lifestyle change through informal interaction. Here, I describe this strategy and then in later sections detail the tactics that further it. Informants in my sample spoke explicitly about exploiting their networks to effect change. Jane, a simplifier, believes in a “multi-prong[ed] approach” to creating change but emphasizes the way people are connected:

You have to try to change habits. You could do it financially. You could do it with laws. Yes. But I don't think that's the whole answer. ...We can't use a rational way, it seems, to change your habits, because the evidence is there. Yet, that rational argument doesn't seem to be working. So, somehow, I think we have to use our connectedness to do it.

Jane is “amazed at how much evidence [about climate change] has been squarely in front of people's eyes” without resulting in action. She explains that if information via the mass media fails to persuade people to change their lifestyles and reduce their consumption, then activists should persuade people face-to-face through their social networks, “since we are so interconnected.” Jane continues, “I think the only way to really do it is to do it on a small scale and let that grow, just like a little puddle grows when the rain is starting and it just gets bigger and bigger.”

Catherine, a simplifier and special needs teacher, often makes suggestions to friends, family, and co-workers about what they can do to be greener. She thinks that “as an environmentalist, it's important to, you know, share my beliefs with other people as much as possible.” She recently started an environmental group at her school (pre-K to grade 5).

I started a green committee at work, at school, and the kids are doing great with recycling and all that. But my co-workers laugh at me, you know, when I recycle, when I take things out of the garbage and wash them up, and put them in recycling. [laughter] So, I mean, it's good-humored, but people have been influenced, people at work – I have influenced quite a lot of people at work, the people I work closely with.

Catherine views her contribution in terms of her social networks and face-to-face interaction. She contributes to local and national environmental groups financially but does not consider herself actively involved with them. Catherine notes that making “suggestions” is not “telling people what to do.” Several informants used distinctions like this to avoid the taboo against strategic action and manipulating people (Jasper 2006). Yet, this is not a seamless process and there is some tension in her role which is expressed through jokes made by her co-workers.

When I asked Iris, a voluntary simplifier, what she focuses on – getting people to join her community group, getting people involved with local politics, or asking them to write their congressperson. She replies that her goal is “mainly to change their lifestyles.”

That's what I do. I talk to people, and I think that's something that personally, that's something that I feel comfortable doing, that I can, you know get the message across to a lot of people that way.

Q. So do you think people are more willing to change their lifestyle than write their congressperson?

A. I'm not sure, but I think, for me, it would be – I would change my lifestyle, just to do certain things that – like, bring reusable bags to the store. So it's really not that big of a thing. ...So I think people – I think it's easier for people to change their lifestyles a little bit.

Iris assumes that lifestyle change is easier for people than political action; she uses her own feelings on the topic as evidence. In Tracy's opinion, another simplifier, lifestyle change is "less confrontational. It's like, there's no disagreement. Nobody's going to criticize them."

Part of the logic behind advocating the lifestyle change strategy is to catalyze a larger process of change, and possibly, political involvement. Martha, a simplifier, argues that "you have to start small" and agrees that "if people just do one thing at a time [they won't be overwhelmed] – they find out they don't have to eat meat every night or they can lower their thermostat a degree or two. Or maybe they could combine trips or carpool." Informants want changes to be easy for people at the beginning (low entry costs), but they also expect a certain follow-through that moves beyond simple and easy. They avoid political action as a starting point because they believe it is harder to persuade people to act politically. The underlying assumption is that changing small practices is a gateway into making more significant lifestyle changes and participating in other forms of collective action. They assume lifestyle practices will snowball into an on-going, never-ending process because that is how they have experienced the process of lifestyle change for themselves. Starting small also minimizes conflict, as do several of the interaction tactics used by informants.

TACTICS OF INFLUENCE

The environment has become a polarizing topic in the last ten years (McCright and Dunlap 2011). Message tailoring by environmental groups, in response to different political and cultural contexts, is not uncommon (Merry 2012). Many informants spoke about negative responses to their lifestyles, being called “granola head” or “tree hugger.” Anthony, a green home owner and leader of a community organization for Democrats, explains “We look at them [conservative republicans] as being Neanderthals. They probably look at us as being pinko liberal communists.” Angela once tried to explain voluntary simplicity to an acquaintance and the person replied, “Well, do you mean we should go back and live in caves?” Similarly, Jane, also a simplifier, explains “They think you're a freak. They think you're a jerk. They think you're stupid. They think you're some, you know, some la-la peacenik. ...Some of them feel very threatened, that you're trying to take away their toy car, or all their comforts, which we're not doing.” Most informants determine the boundaries of politeness in political talk by overstepping them. As a result of encounters like these, that spur defensiveness and retrenchment, informants avoid controversial (reducing consumption) or explicitly political (environmental regulation) topics when trying to get others to live a more environmentally responsible lifestyle.

This practical concern for politeness meant a great deal of effort went into negotiating the etiquette of persuasion. Informants employed a kind of “strategic fitting” and careful use of motivational frames in order to minimize political talk (Benford and Snow 2000). Thus, the strategy is experiential, interactive, and responsive to political context, as are the tactics used to carry it out (McLean 1998, 2007).

Persuasive techniques included: audience assessment, making “I” statements, being role models, highlighting financial rewards like the ‘win-win’ proposition, and the rare environmental appeal. In the following subsections I offer illustrative examples of each of these approaches.

Audience Assessment

Informants attempt to get a feel for their audience before bringing up issues related to environmentalism. Audience assessment involves sorting people into two groups: those who may be sympathetic vs. those likely to be unsympathetic toward environmentalism. Important proxy measures for assessing an audience’s receptivity include supporting animal rights, certain eating habits (visiting a farmer’s market, eating organic, vegetarianism), closeness to nature (hiking, biking, gardening), and whether or not someone voted for or supports President Obama.

Mike, a simplifier and consultant for greening businesses, sizes up his audience and waits for an opening to discuss simple living. When he gets a cue that someone is a sympathetic audience, then he offers advice. Mike explains:

You know, simple living is not something I bring up that much in many, many of my travels for a couple of reasons. I'm not totally comfortable with communicating it, because I'm afraid I will sound patronizing and like: Who am I to tell people, you know, that there's a better lifestyle out there, if they give up, or they look for some happiness other ways? It puts me in a position I don't want to be in; I'm not comfortable with it. But at the same time, I'm noticing that it's becoming – it's coming out voluntarily at more and more functions that I go to, including with businesses. So, it's very, very nice to see. And certainly, when it comes out from someone, I'll jump on it and use it as an opportunity.

Mike mentions that he and his wife, while opportunistic, “don't typically proselytize,” but “maybe just some softer education we do with the right people at the right time and

place.” He says that he is “constantly playing with when and where to do it” – there are not any hard and fast rules. Mike also tries to “be careful” and not sound “pompous and presumptuous” or too “weird” because he thinks the credibility of the source influences the credibility of the message especially when it comes to polarizing topics like environmentalism.

Lindsey, a simplifier, has two main frames that she chooses between depending on her audience. She refers to these as thinking and feeling. Lindsey works for the Department of Environmental Protection and is also Wiccan (modern pagan).

So for me, it's both. It's both a thinking and a feeling. And if I'm trying to get a message across to somebody, I try to feel out which way they prefer and then try to make sure that I can give someone facts if they're scientifically oriented, and give them a logical discussion. And with somebody that's more touchy-feely, then I go more for the warm, fuzzy and the love and the nurturing and the nature kind of thing.

Lindsey tries to “open their eyes” and “introduce the other side to them in such a way that it's non-threatening,” but not (to paraphrase) ram it down their throat. She talks about sustainability and finite resources with some people, and at other times, makes an appeal for mother earth.

Middlemiss (2011) finds that people previously interested in sustainability, when they became involved in an environmental group focused on changing lifestyle practices, were more likely to actually change their lifestyle practices. Therefore, targeting a sympathetic audience not only avoids climate change skeptics and minimizes conflict but may also be more likely to succeed in creating actual changes. This suggests that informants are not just conflict averse, but have an intuitive sense that their pragmatic strategy is more effective.

“I Feel” Statements

The self-help model of expressing feelings (“I feel” statements) is typically used to avoid accusations and acknowledge that feelings are subjective. Informants talk about environmental harms and changes in practices in this way. Jane, the voluntary simplifier who wanted to use her “connectedness” to influence people explains her first person strategy:

Well, I'm not trying to *change* their habits overtly, but I try to – I try to speak more to *what I like* to do and why I do it. ...So, I think it's better to just keep it in the first person, that, I have this car because I save 500 gallons of gas a year, or whatever. I save money. I feel more comfortable about putting less carbon dioxide into the air. And I'm concerned about that, because I'm concerned about people drowning. I'm concerned about the asthma rate going up amongst children. I'm really concerned about that. And you don't have to mention them [the audience] at all. You can just tell them what *you're* concerned about. And if they hear it, you know, and if they're listening, they may pick up something from that.

When speaking in the first person Jane alludes to sea water rising and super storms due to climate change and air pollution (i.e., people drowning and asthma rates). She feels comfortable mentioning environmental harms in terms of human consequences (see also Howell 2013). Jane avoids telling people what they are doing wrong or what they could do better, rather she shares her own concerns and problems as she defines them, and what she is doing to address them.

Iris, another simplifier, who is well known in her small community, answers questions on green living, tries to nudge people in the right direction, and talks about changes that she has made in her own life. She is preoccupied with the etiquette of interaction and finds that it is hard to help people make changes without making them feel bad about their habits. Iris explains:

So, it just – it is – you know, you just have to approach people properly. I mean, normally, people will come and ask me questions and stuff. So, I'll try to help them, answer any questions or concerns that they have. But for the most part, you just let them know what they can do, like, just lead them to do it. In time, they may do one thing at a time – you know, like bring [cloth] bags, and then change the light bulbs. But I don't expect them to have worm [compost] bins, you know, in every home and have a rain barrel and stuff. But I can just tell them what I do, and then they can decide if that's something that they want to do.

She also recommends: do not “preach” or tell them what not to do, instead “I'll try to make things easy for people. ‘Oh, you need a [cloth] shopping bag? I'll give you one.’”

Similarly, Cynthia, a simplifier, tries to talk about problems she's encountered and how she has solved them.

I try to convert them by talking about why I do something and why it's been a good solution for me or easy for me, and then see where they might go with it. But I don't ever like to tell people, “You should compost.”

Speaking to others in terms of personal benefits was also captured by Howell's (2013) study in which a Carbon Conversation Group¹⁷ facilitator explained that he avoids talking about climate change or consumerism, and instead conveys a positive message about the benefits he's experienced due to a low-carbon lifestyle. These descriptive statements avoid telling people how to live, but allow an instructive glimpse into environmental concerns and best practices. The “I” statement as a strategy attempts to minimize conflict and blame; however, it is also an identity commitment and an implicit invitation to do like I do.

Role Models and Reputation

¹⁷ Carbon Conversations Groups are based in the UK, run by volunteers, and include 6 meetings at homes, offices, etc. with 6-8 people who are looking to reduce their carbon footprint. <http://www.carbonconversations.org/>

The role model mode of influencing lifestyles is even more subtle – people do not necessarily narrate what they are doing and why, they just do it, and hope their example will have viral effects. Informants spoke about being a ‘guinea pig’ or ‘poster child’ to show people how to go green. This strategy focuses primarily on the credibility of the source or walking the walk. It involves showing people how to be environmentalists instead of telling them what to do. Jones (2002) argues that individual actions affect others because people witness or hear about them; for example, when people see someone biking to work or are told about someone’s decision to bike to work, this may cause someone to consider biking to work themselves. Ultimately, my informants aspire to be ‘templates’ for the future action of others; helping others clarify their possible and alternative futures (Mische 2009).

Roni, a Muslim environmentalist and elementary school science teacher, makes an association between being a role model and helping people understand alternative ways of living. By living a lifestyle that is not wasteful she hopes to show people “what *is* wasteful” because “people don't see themselves as wasteful” and it would be impolite to point it out. Roni is trying to make certain kinds of cultural practices available to a wider audience. She explains “usually when people see something new...they start to talk about it.” Role models make repertoires of action more available to us and may influence the definition of the “right way to live.”

Highly symbolic products that employ green technology, like solar panels or hybrid vehicles, often create teachable moments. Carol, a retired homemaker, activist, and voluntary simplifier, was an early adopter of the Prius hybrid, in part, because she

wanted to show her commitment to a green lifestyle. She was often approached in grocery store parking lots by strangers asking her about it. She describes:

When we decided to buy the car [Prius]. [laughter] ...It was interesting. It was one of the first ones – You know, I think it was the first year or two that they were selling them here in the States. ...But buying it then, and it being so different, it was a learning experience, not for me, but for other people. Every place I parked, people would come over and say, 'Hmm, is that the electric car?' or, 'What is that car?' You know, 'Is that one of those new things?' There was a tremendous amount of curiosity about it.

Carol capitalized on curiosity about the Prius, using it as an opportunity to not only explain how it worked, but also to explain the need to curb carbon dioxide emissions more generally.

Leading by example was the most prevalent tactic used by all groups; the importance of it was often stressed in interviews. Role models can make people aware of alternative practices and show them that experiments in green living are achievable. Role models also tend to have information about best practices after experiencing trial and error for themselves. This is about modeling problem-solving in action.

Financial Appeal

Informants may personally express an interest in antimaterialism or conservation, but their informal persuasive talk often has more to do with saving money – a theme they expect to be persuasive in a weak economy. Economic considerations are an important motivator for environmental practices (Pichardo Almanzar, Sullivan-Catlin and Deane 1998). The financial appeal is used most often to recruit strangers.

Iris is a simplifier and member of the Green Town project. They have a different campaign each year that challenges people to change their lifestyles. It started with small things and every year they add more recommendations. Iris explains:

So, then every year, we step up the challenges for people to do. So, we've done the shopping bags and the light bulbs, and now, you know, we're asking people to do bigger things, like retire – if they have a second refrigerator, to retire that, because that takes a lot of energy. Their next vehicle – can they get the hybrid? Oh, then to get home energy audits as well. So, we will provide resources for people, and if there are rebates and credits and things like that, we want to make it easy for the homeowner, and apartment dweller, to go green by doing these certain things, which will ultimately help them save money and help the environment as well. ...I would say half [of people are motivated by saving money]. The other half – the people genuinely do want to do something to help the environment.

Each year the group has a meeting about what would be feasible for people to do. They focus on changes that could save people money which they can promote to a wide audience. Typically, the wider the frame the more successful it is. For example, framing recycling in terms of 'good business sense' is one of the few frames with bipartisan appeal (Lybecker, McBeth and Kusko 2013:328).

The 'win-win' proposition, a type of financial appeal, describes the way financial investments or efficient technology can benefit both the economy and the environment. Discussing advantages in terms of their multiple benefits somewhat sidesteps the necessity for audience assessment or message tailoring (Johnston and Baumann 2010). For example, green home owners emphasize the benefits of green building beyond addressing environmental harms. For Dylan green building is a "triple threat" including energy efficiency, saving the environment, and healthier living. Andrew, another green home owner, described solar energy as a "win, win, win situation" because it makes

sense financially for the household, it reduces dependence on foreign oil, and it reduces pollution. This is similar to the “three legged stool” image invoked in more formal presentations, i.e. the way green building can benefit the economy, the environment, and support social justice.

Appeal to the Environment

Informants assume that most people will not respond to environmental concerns, therefore outright appeals to saving the environment are rare. Environmental appeals use facts about pollution and the environment, support efficient technology, or are couched in concern for future generations. When informants resort to discourse about the environment many attempt to use facts about environmental harms which have mixed results. Jessica, a green home owner, explains that her parents, who are conservative Republicans, respond to facts about the environment like the number of plastic water bottles that make their way into landfills every day (notice she does not invoke climate change science). However, research shows that “factual information is usually not sufficient to motivate behavior” change (Chess and Johnson 2007:228).

Cameron, an architect currently renovating his home to make it more energy efficient, has less success:

It’s also hard to explain it [green building] to people who also don’t believe in global warming. That our consumption actually has an effect on the environment. Which, I don’t understand how they can deny the plastic island in the ocean, or the icecaps melting or landfills filling up.

Cameron finds that environmental science and facts on environmental harms are a discredited discourse. Facts may bounce off a strong frame like “global warming is a hoax” or “the warming cycle is natural and not caused by human actions” – two popular

anti-climate change frames. Informants feel compelled to speak up when someone asserts that climate change is a “myth,” but they often respond with facts that, studies show, have little impact.

Environmental appeals also focus on the least political environmental discourses like market-friendly technological solutions or concern for children. Natalie, a religious environmentalist with the United Church of Christ, quoted in the introduction, explains:

I talk to people. It's interesting. At church, during coffee hour, there are some people, businessmen, one who's in a mining corporation and other people who, at first, didn't think there was global warming or climate change, then – now have come to the point where, 'Yes, it's probably happening, but it's not man's problem; it's nature and, you know, we've gone through the ice age before. We've gone through this thing.' And I guess I do try to talk to them and I try to say, 'But if there *are* more efficient ways of doing things, and there *is* technology that can make clean coal or whatever, why wouldn't you want it? Whether this is a real thing, or how desperate it's going to get or whatever, why wouldn't you want it anyway? Why wouldn't you want it for the earth?' And that's kind of been my argument with them, and you know, they listen.

Natalie couches her environmental appeal in the form of energy efficiency and technology innovation. Notice that she does not directly challenge the climate-change-is-natural frame. Tactics used by informants try to avoid provoking strong reactions.

Of the rare environmental appeals, a call to consider what the environment will be like for one's children and grandchildren was the most common. Martha, a retired simplifier, describes her typical speech about the environment:

I try to be perfect [in my own lifestyle] – but it's very, very hard – because I am so concerned about my grandchildren, what they're going to have. What's going to be left for them? Polluted water, polluted air. And that's what I keep saying. I had a wonderful life, but I want something left for my grandchildren. And that's usually my spiel to everybody. I say, 'Don't you have grandchildren? Don't you really care?' And they do, but they don't, in a way. It's hard to make changes.

Concern over healthy living conditions for children and grandchildren was a theme that cropped up in all three groups. It was not only used by informants as a way to influence others but also, in a few cases, as a reason for changing their own lifestyles. Implicit in this strategy is the assumption that appeals to protect children are powerful and universal. Despite these examples, a direct environmental appeal in face-to-face conversation was rare. Even in more private settings discussions about environmental politics seem to wane – informants often explain that family and friends “know how I feel” and that it would not be polite to keep returning to the subject. Thus political talk is not just private but relatively well confined to designated areas like environmental community groups.

MANAGING STRATEGIC ACTION AND AVOIDING POLITICAL TALK

My research confirms findings about the dearth of big ideas in public political talk in the US, but explains the phenomenon, in this case, as part of strategic action. In other words, environmentalists are aware that they are catering to different audiences and altering their discourse in order to appeal to a wider audience. Therefore, the ‘Janus Dilemma’ of strategic action – where insiders prefer a more radical understanding of themselves and their goals and yet educate outsiders with less radical rhetoric (Jasper 2006:125) – was not viewed as a dilemma, but a practical and necessary strategy. Informants were willing to deviate from their own in-group discourses and use any argument they thought would create even the smallest change. Rather than mourning the loss of political talk, this deeply pragmatic view made avoiding politics and focusing on practices seem like an important tool for social change.

For this discussion I will concentrate on three main interrelated themes: how persuasive talk is managed, the content of talk, and the politically divided context of talk. Managing talk involves the suppression of controversial identities, group connections, and the uncertainty experienced when adopting a green lifestyle. A “‘style’ of political communication” involves how actors move between communicative and strategic action, and how actors negotiate the “expression or suppression of other aspects of their identities” (Mische 2008:203). Similarly, McLean (1998) observes that the strategic process of framing may involve foregrounding or backgrounding particular social relations. In most of their attempts at informal persuasion, my informants do not speak as environmentalists, simplifiers, congregational or environmental group members, but as individuals. As a result of avoiding group associations in informal persuasive talk, they silence larger projects that they are involved with, like working to change US building codes or fighting the expansion of a local incinerator. In addition, they rarely invoke their science- or education-related careers or credentials. They present their expertise as lived experience rather than formal knowledge. In general, my informants attempt to control their presentation of self so as not to seem too far from the mainstream, because advice from the fringe is easily ignored. With the segmenting of identity and network affiliation, informants can speak as neighbors or parents/grandparents – average people with no clear political agenda.

Part of the lifestyle change strategy also involves suppressing the uncertainty of green lifestyles. Recall Geoff, a green home owner, who joked that you “almost develop a mental breakdown just trying to figure out [what’s greener].” The uncertainty and

deliberation that goes into adopting a green lifestyle was concealed by talk that made it sound simple and easy. My informants also downplay the conflicting priorities and identities they juggle; and the doubts some of them had about whether or not individual actions matter, whether American green lifestyles are sustainable, and if we might be too late to prevent serious climate change. Dynamic, internally complex categories like “green” are simplified or bracketed off in order to focus on recruitment.

The content of talk is also carefully controlled in order to appeal to a large number of people. Informants firmly believe that the ethical and environmental arguments they find convincing will not be convincing to others and thus they must resort to wider appeals. This recalls Brown’s (2009) study where fair trade coffee is described as tasting good by respondents, rather than being part of a more ethical system of profit distribution and land use. This avoids drawing strong moral boundaries; also, taste may seem like a broader and more persuasive argument. According to Johnston and Baumann (2010:206) taste remains the “ultimate valuation” for food even in the area of ethical consumption. In order to cast a wide net, discourses must have broad appeal, which means that references to the environment are selective and topics related to politics tend to drop out of the conversation all together.

In addition, my informants focus on changing practices rather than winning hearts and minds. Focusing on lifestyle practices is part of a pragmatist model of change which introduces small problems and new habits to solve them. This strategy has the potential to result in immediate action and circumvent the attitude-behavior gap (where actors have pro-environmental attitudes but do not act on them). By focusing on

practices my informants are attempting to bypass political allegiances. They are essentially introducing the building blocks for a green lifestyle without imposing an overall definition of the problem of climate change onto the situation.

The context of talk involves a public that is deeply divided on climate change, primarily due to the clash between political elites in the US (Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins 2012). Rumpala (2011:669) argues that by privileging “free” markets we end up with a “constrained space of possibilities” for addressing climate change and other environmental harms. The extreme polarization of elites, policymakers, and the public over climate change make it unlikely that any compromise will be reached (McCrigh and Dunlap 2011). This strained state of political opportunity structures lends credibility to incremental and unconventional strategies (Rootes 2011). Haenfler, Johnson, and Jones (2012) suggest that lifestyle change flourishes when political action is blocked by an unfavorable political climate. Enabled by the divided context, the Janus dilemma of strategic action is transformed into an opportunity to speak to both sides of the culture war.

Political talk is not simply about identifying topics worthy of public debate, but also about negotiating, through interaction, “ways of engaging” and the “etiquette for political participation” (Eliasoph 1998:18). When serious talk about the environment is defined as both impolite and counterproductive, there is little leeway for carving out the parameters for debate. Those most interested in action to address climate change feel the least able to speak their minds – as any talk about the environment is labeled political and thus suspect. This is, however, not the same kind of public silence

encountered by Norgaard (2011:44), who finds that climate change is framed as a national and international issue but “not a local one” – justifying a lack of public engagement at the local level. Rather, the tactics I describe are chosen because they mask political action at the local level. This strategy does an end-run around the well-funded misinformation campaigns skeptical of climate change (Oreskes and Conway 2010) which make conditions inhospitable for communicative action. Bringing together informal interaction and lifestyle change broadens the toolkit of actions environmentalists may draw on and helps them feel as though they are working for change at every level.

CONCLUSION

My research shows that individuals transitioning to a green lifestyle are not retreating into their own private life-worlds, but rather are using lifestyle change as a point of departure to support a broader, multi-level political project. Many of my informants have experienced the escalation thesis for themselves (participation in environmental change begins with small household changes, expands into more significant lifestyle change, and then collective action) and are now consciously attempting to fulfill the escalation thesis in others. Advocating lifestyle change is, according to my informants, less controversial than recruiting members for an environmental community group.

My informants are savvy users of environmental discourses and attempt to employ them in an exploratory and tactful way. Encountering resistance in informal talk has led them to adapt their cumulative strategy. Persuasive techniques include:

audience assessment; making “I feel” statements; being role models; highlighting financial rewards; and the rare environmental appeal. Informants selectively draw on environmental themes only after they have determined that their audience is sympathetic and receptive, in the form of an “I feel” statement, or in combination with a financial appeal, as in “win-win.” Being a good role model was the most common tactic used among all three groups to convince others to change their lifestyles. Informants hope to communicate their concerns about the environment by demonstrating a different way of life that is both fulfilling and less resource intensive.

The etiquette and content of talk is carefully managed in response to the partisan political context. This means suppressing controversial identities, group connections, and the uncertainty of transitioning to a green lifestyle. Rather than talk about ethics or the environment, my informants use broadly inclusive rhetoric and focus on changing practices rather than beliefs. The strained political context translates into more flexibility for movement tactics and the avoidance of strategic action dilemmas.

The extreme discursive flexibility used to manage strategic action, and the awareness of that flexibility shown by informants, means that scholars need to continue to think through the notion of avoiding politics. There is a significant difference between political apathy on the one hand, and downplaying the significance of politics in order to negotiate the contested issue of climate change on the other. Eliasoph (1998:7) observes that public speech is “less generously open-minded” than private speech. Rather than fighting this trend, informants manipulate informal interactions and

transform the avoidance of politics into a pragmatic strategy for social and environmental change.

In the next chapter I continue my exploration of the escalation thesis and the individual/collective debate but from a slightly different perspective. Previously I explored the politics of private action in the form of micro interactions with political implications. Now I will concern myself with the relationship between lifestyle change and traditionally defined formal politics (i.e., participation in government commissions, social movement groups, attending political rallies, etc.). I find that the tradeoff argument, that green consumption is replacing green politics, hides a much more varied and complex picture of political involvement. Trajectories of involvement show that green lifestyles are deeply intertwined with formal political action.

Ch. 6

Green Lifestyles and Environmental Activism: How Lifestyle Change Supports Collective Action

Green lifestyles include practices by which people today try to address an interrelated set of environmental problems, including climate change. “No Impact Man,” whose real name is Colin Beavan, is probably the most famous example of lifestyle change today. Beavan, a writer living in Manhattan, attempted to radically reduce his carbon footprint. His book (2009) explains that he, along with his wife and daughter, “swore off plastic and toxins, turned off his electricity, went organic and local, and became a bicycle nut.” In addition to a book he also has a blog (<http://noimpactman.typepad.com/>) and a documentary film (also titled *No Impact Man*, 2009) about his life.

People often ask Colin Beavan “what is the one, most important, thing I can do to help the environment?” First, he gets a little upset that people only want to do *one* thing, but then he tells them “join an environmental group.” He told this anecdote at the Consumer Studies Research Network conference I attended in Boston in 2008. I thought this was an interesting answer considering that he’s known for radical lifestyle change, rather than connections with the environmental movement. He has subsequently become involved with an organization called 350.org (350 parts per million CO₂ in the atmosphere is the safe limit), founded by Bill McKibben, and he is now running for congress as part of New York’s 8th district. This trajectory goes against some

of the critiques of lifestyle change, namely that people focused on their lifestyles are akin to apolitical isolationists (Maniates 2002b, Szasz 2007). Which leads me to the question I want to explore in this chapter: what is the relationship between transitioning to a greener lifestyle and political engagement? In this chapter I move beyond the debate over whether or not reducing consumption, or green consumption, is in itself political (Jones 2002) and, instead, investigate different trajectories of environmental activism that involve some combination of both lifestyle change and collective action.

Environmentally sustainable or green lifestyles have been characterized most prominently as part of “inverted quarantines” (which draw people away from environmental movements and traditional forms of activism) or, in contrast, as “prefigurative communities” (which draw people into environmental movements and traditional forms of activism). Inverted quarantines, mentioned in the last chapter, occur when personal environmental protection is satisfied by consumer goods as opposed to political action (Szasz 2007). Prefigurative communities are “collectivities fashioning their lives according to oppositional norms” (Cooper 2001:139). They attempt to generate new and immediate paths of action, rather than imagining future utopias or campaigning for structural change. In terms of recruitment, prefigurative communities assist in aligning individual interests with social movements (Passy and Giugni 2000, Pichardo Almanzar, Sullivan-Catlin and Deane 1998). Individuals participating in prefigurative communities (i.e., green lifestyles, eco-village resident, vegan) are targeted for recruitment to more formal environmental movement groups. Thus, prefigurative

communities are viewed, from a social movements perspective, as feeding into traditional forms of activism.

First, my research confirms that people who are in the process of cultivating a sustainable lifestyle are often pulled or pushed into collective action through social networks and a reputation for being “the green one.” This process, however, involves more tension, uncertainty, and reluctance than the prefigurative community thesis would suggest. Not only are environmentalists recruiting those with a green lifestyle (what I call the pull mechanism), but non-environmentalists are seeking out experts that can explain sustainability to communities, businesses, and students (the push mechanism). Even those of my informants who attempted to focus exclusively on lifestyle and household changes were drawn into collective action through these mechanisms.

Second, I find that activists use lifestyle change to shore up long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. In this case lifestyle change follows intensive participation with social movements, rather than preceding it as in the prefigurative community thesis. And third, those who wish to avoid formal, contentious politics are also drawn to green lifestyles and community action. It is important to note that those who are “avoiding [formal] politics” are still involved with community groups and environmental programs in local schools. Contrary to the inverted quarantine thesis, transitioning to a more sustainable lifestyle does not cause people to avoid politics, or engender a feeling of safety to such an extent as to make political action unnecessary. Instead, those who wish to limit confrontation or

who are disillusioned with government action and market mechanisms focus instead on their local regions, communities, and households. It would be better to describe this as a kind of regrouping of environmental efforts that focus on the local, rather than the polemical and exaggerated notion of “avoiding politics.” Changing lifestyles is not a greedy tactic; instead it is often combined with other tactics that involve collective action and social movement participation.

LIFESTYLES AND POLITICAL ACTION

Movements that focus on or include changing lifestyles, identities, or ethics are nothing new (Calhoun 1993).¹⁸ Supporting a particular lifestyle has become a form of political mobilization that advocates either the legitimacy of new cultural forms or defends traditional ones (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Within prefigurative communities green lifestyles are part of a learning process that aligns interests with a social movement. This is especially fruitful for those on the cusp of participating in social movement actions, and is considered an early stage in social movement recruitment. Pichardo Almanzar et al. (1998) find that for those in the environmental movement, day-to-day lifestyle practices are a particularly important site of participation. Similarly, Lichterman (1996:164-5) finds a unified “culture of commitment” among some environmentalists in which “egalitarian organizations, personalized effort, ‘socially

¹⁸ In Jasper’s (1999) definition of post-citizenship movements (aka New Social Movements) he includes poor relief, anti-vice crusades (temperance, anti-pornography), peace and disarmament, alternative health, animal rights, spirituality (New Age), and protection of the environment. There are no clear boundaries between political, economic, and cultural agendas within social movements; thus there is some disagreement over the usefulness of separating lifestyle issues from other social movement strategies, as well as disagreement over which movements should be described as primarily cultural.

responsible' work, and unconventional private lives all cohered as a meaningful whole."

In Alexander and Ussher's recent (2012) international study, 68% of voluntary simplifiers said they felt they were part of a simple living moment and 67% reported that they participated in a community organization in addition to making household changes. Passy and Giugni (2000:117) go one step further and argue that a "holistic view of one's personal life" actually contributes to sustained participation in environmental movements. In addition to the commitment to a particular identity, network ties to other participants are a key component in predicting activism (McAdam and Paulsen 1993).

In contrast, the most popular argument from environmental sociology characterizes lifestyle change as a potential inverted quarantine, or a kind of gated community. An inverted quarantine happens when personal environmental protection is satisfied by consumer goods while neglecting political action that would address environmental problems for a larger population (Szasz 2007). For example, installing a water filtration system in one's home may reduce one's concern about the municipal water supply. Szasz (2007) argues that we used to protect the environment and now we protect ourselves. In other words, getting involved with lifestyle change satisfies immediate environmental concerns and thus causes people to neglect broader political action. In my research on green lifestyles I found no evidence that people were satisfied with household changes or were withdrawing from political participation as a result of lifestyle change. Green lifestyles were considered to be personally necessary or

inevitable (i.e., “the right thing to do”) (see Howell 2013), but not sufficient for addressing critical environmental problems.

Some scholars warn that a focus on household practices will promote the idea that individuals are now responsible for social and environmental problems that were previously in the realm of governmental oversight – resulting in an “individualization of responsibility” (Beck 1992). However, I find that green lifestyles do not necessarily cause the individualization of responsibility so much as they are a consequence of it. The people I spoke with advocate change on all levels – changes in lifestyles, schools and institutions, businesses, and government regulation. The result is an expansion in the tactics used to address climate change, rather than the replacement of public strategies with personal ones.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN GREEN LIFESTYLES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

In the analysis of my data I find three qualitatively different relationships between lifestyles and collective action. First, my research confirms that lifestyle change pulls and pushes people into collective action through social network contacts. Here I offer a slight twist on the prefigurative community thesis and find that the demand for expert knowledge on sustainability is a significant factor in pushing people toward collective action. Second, I find that activists use lifestyle change to support long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. And third, I find that those who wish to avoid formal, contentious politics are drawn to lifestyle change as a tactic which may make it seem as though green lifestyle participation is

causing political withdrawal. I consider these patterns to be part of a larger continuum of political involvement, but in the following section I briefly explore each one in turn.

From Lifestyle Change to Collective Action

My research confirms that people who are in the process of cultivating a sustainable lifestyle are often drawn into collective action through social networks and a reputation for being “the green one.” Face-to-face social networks contribute social support and help generate ideas for what actions can most effectively protect the environment (Horton 2006, Kennedy 2011). Network connections also offer people procedural and practical information about how to reduce consumption in their particular town (Nye and Hargreaves 2010). However, the process of recruitment from lifestyle change into collective action involves more tension, uncertainty, and reluctance than the prefigurative community thesis would suggest. This is not simply a story about environmentalists recruiting people with a green lifestyle into community groups. Rather, it is also driven by non-environmentalists seeking information about sustainability and pushing experts into the spot light.

There are two mechanisms at work that pull and push people into collective action. First, and supported by social movements research, environmentalists *pull* like-minded people into lifestyle change and environmental movements (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). When doing their own recruiting my informants sought out people who supported animal rights, had certain eating habits (visiting a farmer’s market, eating organic, vegetarianism), felt close to nature (hiking, biking, gardening), and voted for President Obama. For example, Tess, a Catholic environmentalist, explains that changes

in lifestyle, like composting food waste in your own backyard, can offer “a way into the whole picture” of global food shortages, the over-industrialization of the food system, and how corporate food producers contribute to climate change. Ideally this understanding would lead to greater participation in food politics.

Second, my research reveals that non-experts like community members and government officials also *push* people into an expert role in order to learn more about sustainability. For example, a teacher may want a guest lecturer or a mayor may seek to appoint someone to an environmental commission. Adrianna, an architect in the process of building her own LEED certified green home and mother of three, explains that teachers started to notice the no-waste lunches that her kids were eating at school (part of her lifestyle change) and was consequently recruited to talk to students about sustainability and help empower them to lower their own carbon footprint. Adrianna talks about her involvement:

I got involved in the green team of our school and helped put that together. And we brought education to our kids. We have a grade school my kids go to. There's over 600 children. We got them started on a litter-less lunch program, helping them understand how much garbage they create with their little lunches.

Although Adrianna was reluctant at first to become involved, her level of knowledge on sustainability was sought after by her daughter's science teacher and she is now a key member of the school's green team.

An unintended consequence of having green home owners promote the LEED for Homes program was to establish reputations that resulted in participants being pushed into different kinds of collective action. Jacob is a green home owner whose home is in the process of being Platinum LEED certified. The LEED program recommends contact

with the community through blogging and home tours. Jacob began with a focus on renovating his home but now has associations with the local government (as part of the city planning commission), the local high school, and college. Although he did not intend to become involved with greening the city as a whole, when he was recruited by the mayor, he embraced his role as change-agent. Jacob explains:

You know, every time I would go over to the town council meetings, I made a point of wearing green, and you know, that's one of those subtle, little things. But it's a reminder, you know, oh, the green guy's back. ...You know, I would walk down the hall, and the police chief would walk by and said, 'Oh yeah. I haven't ordered those hybrid vehicles yet,' or 'I've ordered them, but they're not here yet.' You know, I wouldn't even have to ask him. You know, just by seeing me, he would know that it would be good for him to mention something about what they're doing green.

Jacob's reputation for being green made him a target for recruitment by local government officials. Now he consciously works to cultivate his reputation. This was not a meeting-of-the-minds as one might expect from a prefigurative community, so much as filling a void in expert knowledge. The majority of informants, even those who attempted to focus exclusively on changing their lifestyles and homes, were eventually pulled or pushed into collective action. This finding directly contradicts the notion that lifestyle change supports a kind of social and political isolation.

Activism Supported by Lifestyle Change

I also find that activists use lifestyle change to shore up long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. In this case lifestyle change follows intensive participation with social movements, rather than preceding it (Passy and Giugni 2000). This is an inversion of the prefigurative community thesis showing that collective action and political involvement can precede household

changes. For example, Carol, a long-time peace activist was recruited into an environmental group by her neighbor. Carol's recruitment follows the expected route of an environmentalist pulling like-minded people into environmental movements. Carol explains:

You know, it was in the 80's, and all that was just happening. So, it was --- It was --- I think it was a personal person talking to me, you know, like a one on one, or three on two or whatever. Yeah, that. And it was in my neighborhood, and they were starting up a little group, and it just, you know, sounded like, yeah. I mean, there were terrible scares, you know, around that time, in the 80's. There still are. And as I said, my kids were little, and I wanted them to grow up, and now, I want my grandchildren to grow up too, in a decent world.

Later Carol began to change her lifestyle and became a voluntary simplifier as a way to "feel more involved" in environmentalism, rather than only attending a meeting once a week. Similarly, Howell (2013) finds that "routes to engagement" with "low-carbon lifestyles" began with participation in Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth, or local community politics. Some informants were discouraged by gridlock in Washington or drawn-out lawsuits over protecting green spaces. Making concrete changes in everyday life, and encouraging others to do so as well, offers them visible evidence that change is occurring. None of the informants that I spoke with had given up on collective action or government regulation in favor of lifestyle change.

Avoiding Politics?

Finally, from anarchists to soccer moms, people interested in avoiding formal, contentious politics are drawn to lifestyle change as a tactic for addressing climate change. In part this is a case of selection effects. Lifestyle change does not *cause* people to be critical of political solutions, but it does attract people who already are. However,

informants who professed to “avoid politics” were often involved with environmental community groups, environmental programs in local schools, and (unofficially) local government environmental commissions.

For example, Iris, a voluntary simplifier, participated in a week of workshops on social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability offered by a local non-profit and was certified as a sustainability educator. She talks to neighbors and community groups, teachers and students. She focuses on changing her own lifestyle and recommending lifestyle changes to others. This summer she organized a day-camp for kids on the topic of sustainability. She avoids politics for two reasons. First, she is not comfortable with contentious politics or confrontation. And second, she avoids politics strategically because she wants to stay a neutral party that can appeal across political boundaries. She was trained as a scientist and likes to keep the focus on the science of sustainability rather than be distracted by the politics of it.

Aware of the public’s aversion to discussing volatile issues like climate change, informants distance themselves from their in-group discourses (like antimaterialism or conservation) and instead focus on changing practices while downplaying political ideas and engagements. They use several persuasive techniques that avoid a direct discussion of the environment. Informants strategically manipulate the lack of public political talk to their advantage. In this case, Informants have explicitly political goals and hope to recruit people by engaging them in seemingly apolitical lifestyle change and, eventually, collective action.

In contrast, Lane, a voluntary simplifier and self-identified anarchist, advocates community-driven, grass-roots change rather than working within formal politics or through market mechanisms (so-called “voting with your dollars”). She explains:

I have [worked with the Environmental Commission]. I’ve actually done a rain barrel training at the Environmental Center. Some of the Environmental Commission people, I believe, are on the Sustainable Township Committee. I’m actually not a member of Sustainable Township. I’m always a non-member of things. The only thing I’m really a member of is my own group, which is [the] Edible Gardens Project, which is completely separate and grass roots and not really connected to anything, although we were real involved in the high school – in the school garden project. ...So, my approach is to assume that, you know, we’re kind of going to hell in a hand basket, and the best thing that I can do is to just build the society that I want inside this stinking, rotting corpse [laughter] of the one that’s going to go away because it can’t sustain itself. ...So, it’s not the individuals; it’s grass-roots efforts, it’s working together to create something. Screw the corporations. ... we’ve got to get a clue and really do whatever we can for our little land base and for each other.

Lane volunteers with people who are officially on the local government’s Environmental Commission, or are recognized members of the Sustainable Township group/committee (a community group that also consults with the local government). However, she does not view herself as a member of these organizations. Instead she directs her energies into non-governmental community groups like her Edible Gardens Project. She defines grass-roots as outside government involvement, although in practice these groups overlap in membership and, at times, work together.

On a larger scale, national government policies to address climate change, even those advocated by the Democrats, have been relatively conservative considering the scale and immediacy of the problem. Disillusionment with a lack of climate change legislation, enforcement failures, and the weakness of market mechanisms makes individuals scale back to a local level where they may actually be able to see change

happening. Those involved with lifestyle change are sometimes characterized as disillusioned with national politics (Maniates 2002b); however my research shows that this does not seem to prevent work at the regional or community levels.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Community groups and households are responding to climate change with multiple strategies and tactics for change. In this chapter I explore how green lifestyles come together with collective action in community groups, local government commissions, and schools. Transitioning to a more sustainable lifestyle is part of a multi-pronged approach to addressing climate change and functions as a companion tactic that works well in collaboration with a broad range of approaches. Lifestyle change is often viewed as one component in a strategy that encompasses both micro- and macro-level change. The result is an expansion of tactics used to address climate change, which does not create a tradeoff with other forms of collective action or support for government regulation. In fact, my work offers evidence that green lifestyles, while insufficient in themselves, are more likely to feed meso-level participation in collective action and support for macro-level policies than create a tradeoff that reduces political participation.

Informants believe that “even individuals have a part to play,” rather than the typical aggregation hypothesis – that individual actions alone can solve the problem. My informants were enthusiastic about lifestyle change while still remaining practical and pragmatic about the necessity of change on a broader scale. Green lifestyles do not hinder other forms of political action and they may act as a gateway to support

collective action and more formal political involvement. Thus, I argue that the addition of lifestyle change to other tactics of change is a consequence of the individualization of responsibility, rather than a cause of it.

From chapter three, we know that a green lifestyle is a subjective pattern of living that involves deliberation over the uncertain environmental impacts of everyday goods and practices, and an emergent guiding life narrative that makes that process personally meaningful. And the lifestyle change strategy, defined in chapter five, uses flexible tactics that mask political action in order to advocate the adoption of more environmentally responsible practices with an expectation that, for some, those practices will snowball into green lifestyles and more traditional forms of political involvement. Lifestyles as a strategy for change, while not new, have seemingly become more popular in the current period of anti-regulation and congressional gridlock. The popularity of lifestyle change can be accounted for, in part, due to attempts to push responsibility down-stream by policy makers and businesses. Yet, even those in my study who tried to focus exclusively on their households were quickly pushed or pulled into more collective action. In other words, the individualization of responsibility for climate change, in practice, is not particularly successful at the level of everyday life.

However, the everyday experience of green lifestyles, as compatible with multiple other strategies for change, may play out differently in a policy arena. The real danger is when policy-makers single out household changes as the primary way to address climate change. Policies that support lifestyle change, like those popular in Europe, may create a tradeoff by eclipsing more expensive and unpopular policies that

would do more to regulate businesses or support system-level changes. Does chipping away at the edges of a problem, through lifestyle change, create momentum to address that problem on a larger scale or does it distract from more effective solutions?

In the case of reducing consumption, there are two main competing discourses that frame the problem and the solution. On one hand, there is *homo economicus* (the rational choice perspective on the informed consumer) and the predictably irrational consumer (the environmental psychology perspective on the values-oriented consumer). On the other hand, there is the locked-in consumer (systems perspective) and the socially organized consumer (practice theory perspective). These perspectives are discussed at length in chapter two. To sum up, the environmental psychology and rational choice perspectives focus primarily on the micro level of individual action and decision-making. The locked-in perspective is structural and concentrates on the macro level of systems and institutions, and the socially organized perspective studies the meso level of social practices and routines.

Homo economicus and the predictably irrational consumer perspectives guide research toward micro-level problems/solutions like uncovering levers to increase participation in efficiency programs or reducing the attitude-behavior gap (where actors have pro-environmental attitudes but do not act on them). Webb (2012) argues that these perspectives are ultimately counter-productive because a focus on the individual eclipses an understanding of shared social context and the influence of context on actions – framing the problem this way, “as one of behavioural adjustments to individual self-interest obscures alternative understandings of society as a collective

accomplishment” (sic) (109). As an alternative, both the locked-in and socially organized perspectives highlight the circumstances in which people live from the life course to public infrastructure and socio-technical systems of provision. It is these perspectives that allow for a more complex understanding of life circumstances and lifestyle practices as a form of collective action that is embedded in a larger political project. Greater community and political involvement may be the most important contribution of green lifestyles.

In the analysis of my data I find three qualitatively different relationships between lifestyles and collective action. First, my research confirms that lifestyle change pulls and pushes people into collective action through social network contacts. Here I offer a slight twist on the prefigurative community thesis and find that the demand for expert knowledge on sustainability is a significant factor in pushing people toward collective action. Second, I find that activists use lifestyle change to support long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. And third, I find that those who wish to avoid formal, contentious politics are drawn to lifestyle change as a tactic. This is a kind of regrouping of environmental efforts that focus on the local, rather than the polemic and exaggerated notion of “avoiding politics.” Contrary to the inverted quarantine thesis, transitioning to a more sustainable lifestyle does not cause people to avoid politics. Lifestyles do not necessarily support the individualization of responsibility so much as they are a consequence of it. The result is an expansion of the tactics used to address climate change, rather than the replacement of public strategies with personal ones.

This research has implications for reassessing the scope of political action and the collaboration between lifestyle change like anti-consumption, and other social movement tactics. The trajectory followed by “No Impact Man,” Colin Beavan, may not be so surprising after all. Beavan changed his lifestyle radically, beyond most of the participants in my study, but his eventual collaboration with environmental groups and participation in formal politics is not an unusual trajectory of political involvement.

This chapter describes in detail the interconnection between lifestyle change and other forms of political participation. The different trajectories explored here underscore green lifestyles as a companion strategy. Rather than tradeoff with other forms of political action, green lifestyles co-exist with and even support political participation. In terms of impact green lifestyles make direct (if small) contributions to reducing pollution (a la the aggregation hypothesis), but their real value may be indirect – in terms of their support for larger scale political projects and environmental activism.

In the next chapter I explore possible barriers to reducing consumption. Environmental scholars have extrapolated potential barriers to reducing consumption from their interpretation of consumer research. Consumer goods are used for status claims, personal indulgence, and identity maintenance. Does reducing consumption mean the opposite – withdrawing from status competitions, austerity, and self-denial? Not according to my research. I find evidence for green status competitions, a re-definition of indulgence, and green identity. In contrast, the main point of contention, for those who are reducing their consumption, is the disruption of social connections when attempting to avoid gift giving/receiving.

Chapter 7

Reducing Consumption: Social Connections and the Problem of Gift Giving

“Oh, if only I could stop with all these stupid presents!”
– Carol, Voluntary Simplifier

Carol, a long-time activist and voluntary simplifier, is known in her family as “the green one.” She has not completely stopped giving gifts – she recently gave her grandchildren a subscription to *National Geographic Kids* magazine – but she does actively discourage anyone from giving her gifts. Her husband shares her environmental concerns and she’s had some success in getting her granddaughter to reduce her consumption. But Carol has pretty much stopped trying to change her children (who dismiss her as “Oh, that’s just ma”). The negotiation of gift giving, for people like Carol who are trying to reduce their consumption, is the focus of this article.

Many scholars have observed that people purchase goods that they do not need for subsistence or traditional display (Cohen 2003, Corrigan 1997, Cross 2000, Schor 1998, Slater 1997, Zukin and Maguire 2004).¹⁹ Theories about differentiation/emulation, indulgence, identity/self-expression, and social connections help explain why people over-consume. Consumerism helps people stand out or fit in (i.e., differentiation/emulation). A shopping splurge rewards people or makes them feel

¹⁹ For this chapter I am going to set aside the debate over defining “needs vs. wants” (exactly how much consumption is too much?) in order to focus instead on theories that attempt to explain over-consumption.

better (i.e., indulgence). Consumer goods also serve the on-going project of self-definition (i.e., identity/self-expression) and the exchange of goods supports social relationships and emotional ties (i.e., social connections). The difficulty Carol has in withdrawing from the “gift economy” (Cheal 1988) is explained by the social connections theory of over-consumption. From a social connections perspective consumerism is not selfish, but rather it is made up of “meaningful practices” that connect people to family, friends, and other social groups (Zelizer 2005b). Changing these meaningful practices implies disrupting relationships. In this way I argue that the gift economy is much like the rest of the economy when it comes to consumer norms.

The organization of these consumer theory categories is partly based on work by Claude Fischer (2003) who noted in an ASA (American Sociological Association) conference paper that “emulation, indulgence, and self-expression” were the “key models” used to explain “over-buying” in America from a social psychology perspective (see also Fischer 2011). I use these categories as a starting point and then add the social connections perspective from the anthropology and sociology literatures. The social connections perspective, made popular by Anthropologist Daniel Miller (1987), is primarily associated with ordinary consumption and thus is typically overlooked by environmental scholars who tend to focus on highly visual luxury goods.

Environmental scholars work to uncover the barriers people may face when attempting to reduce their consumption. Within environmental sociology scholars have highlighted differentiation, indulgence, and identity as potential barriers to reducing consumption. Scholars are concerned with the connections between consumerism and

accruing social status, the pressure people feel from marketers and peers to trade up and buy the next new thing, and the way consumer goods help convey personal identity. The purpose of this article is to explore these concerns empirically. An important question that underlies these environmental concerns is: Do people reduce their consumption for the same reasons they over-consume (i.e., a conscious or non-conscious social status competition)? Or does reducing consumption represent the inverse of over-consumption (i.e., a withdrawal from competition over social status)?

I argue that social status, indulgence, and identity are not necessarily barriers to reducing consumption. My interviewees are relatively successful in creating green comparison groups (differentiation in context), ignoring marketing campaigns (anti-indulgence), and crafting life narratives based on what they did *not* buy (green identity). Instead, I find that (of these theories), disrupting social connections (by giving/receiving fewer gifts) creates the most interpersonal conflict in everyday life and represents an unrecognized challenge to reducing consumption. Attempting to withdraw from the gift economy strained social ties and was rarely successful. Instead most interviewees compromised by negotiating the exchange of fewer gifts and using green/ethical gift giving as a tactic for recruiting others to live a green lifestyle.

The organization of this chapter is somewhat unconventional and combines several literature reviews with data analysis in four sections: (1) social status, (2) indulgence, (3) identity, and (4) social connections and gift giving. I begin each section with a brief review of the literature including the extent to which each topic (i.e., social status) is viewed as a barrier to reducing consumption. Then I use my own data to weigh

in on the debate. In the balance of the chapter I explore in detail the struggle to uphold the spirit of reciprocity and care evident in gift giving, while simultaneously changing gift giving practices. I organize the rest of the chapter around several themes: reducing gift giving, greening gift giving, and using gift giving as a tactic to advocate lifestyle change. In the discussion I consider why the social connections perspective was overlooked by environmental scholars and how the perspective may be furthered by social network theory. This chapter reminds us of the way consumerism supports social relationships by highlighting the difficulty informants have separating social support from material goods.

SOCIAL STATUS: DIFFERENTIATION AND EMULATION

Veblen (1998 [1899]) theorizes that the “conspicuous consumption” of goods and the “conspicuous waste” of time are two fundamental aspects of social status competition. Veblen (1998 [1899]) defines “conspicuous consumption” as the “unproductive consumption of luxury goods, primarily as a mark of prowess and wealth.” Conspicuous consumption is highly visible and includes the presentation of self, as well as, for example, giving valuable presents or buying everyone a round of drinks. Veblen argues that while these activities are the most obvious among the wealthy, all social classes participate to some degree.

Bourdieu (1984) refines this approach, arguing that consumer goods, practices, and patterns signal to others, intentionally or unintentionally, who we are and what social groups we belong to (see also Zukin 2004). Individuals are divided according to their specialized cultural knowledge and education, their social connections, and the

respect and authority their social position determines. In this context people do not have to *consciously* participate in a status competition, they may simply think that they are acting naturally or doing the right thing. Social status is synonymous with goods that are expensive and exclusive – requiring specialized practices or knowledge to consume (i.e., modern art) (Holt 1997). Additionally, consumer goods that factor into status competitions, or “positional goods” (Hirsch 1976), are relative to the field of competition within which they exist. Therefore, there is no universal object that conveys social status.

Rebecca Elliott (2013) critiques environmental scholars for not appreciating the differences between Veblen and Bourdieu. She finds that most scholars preoccupied with status as a motivational factor for reducing consumption presume that individuals are making *active choices* to pursue status, coupled with the assumption that status symbols are relatively universal. In addition, although the media has enabled a broadening of comparison groups (Cerulo 1997, Schor 1998), the assertion by environmental scholars that environmentalists are competing with “the mainstream” seems too broad if we assume that competition happens within fields.

Simmel (1971 [1904]) argues that rejecting fashion is also a way to participate in social competition. Similarly, Brooks (1981) argues that “the most effective status seeking style is to make a mockery of status seeking.” Lea (1980) defines the “counter-Veblen” effect, whereby individuals avoid ostentation and buy less than they can afford. These statements are definitions of “conspicuous nonconsumption” or “inconspicuous consumption.” In this case, individuals build status intentionally through being “expert

simplifiers” (Grigsby 2004); discussing how little they buy, the bargains they made, handmade projects, items they have repaired, gardens or composting, the green products they use, bicycling, or the energy they save. This is a kind of “subcultural capital” where larger systems of exclusion and stratification are imported into the subcultural milieu (Thornton 1996). Some studies show that environmentalists establish an oppositional identity (Lamont 1992) wherein they look down on the mainstream “mindless” consumers who serve greedy corporate interests (Grigsby 2004).

In contrast, emulation involves using status goods to fit in, as in “Keeping up with the Joneses” (a phrase from 1900). McCracken (2005) describes the relationship between differentiation and emulation as “chase and flight” where the upper classes buy goods or go on vacations to stand out and then the middle class follows. The more people who share a trend, the less popular it becomes, until opinion leaders move onto something new.²⁰ For example, a study of neighborhood buying patterns shows that if your neighbor buys a new car it makes you twice as likely to go out and buy a new car for yourself (DiMaggio and Louch 1998). A newer take on emulation shows that people consume certain goods or media (radio, TV) in order to appear normal and participate in water-cooler conversations (Groncow and Warde 2001). Scholars are concerned that an increasing number of products are defined as necessary for average consumption (i.e., smart phones, laptops, etc.) (Bauman 2001, Cross 2000).

There is some evidence of social comparison and competition between people who are going green. For example, Kolbert (2008:71) studied a Danish island where

²⁰ McCracken’s argument assumes a trickle-down effect from the top-down. However, trends can also come from the bottom-up or from one field to another.

energy efficiency “became a kind of sport.” Residents heated their homes with renewable resources and owned shares in wind turbines that exported energy – trying to out-do their neighbors by being more energy efficient. Similarly, Horton (2006) and Kennedy (2011) find that environmentalists seek out each other not only for social support and information, but also to judge how green they are in comparison. Grigsby (2004) finds competition within voluntary simplicity circles over who is an expert simplifier and who can simplify the most. The dynamic that induces the free rider problem (waiting for your neighbor to act before you do) could be reversed and “keeping up with the Joneses” could become associated with who can live a greener lifestyle, as opposed to who can live the most lavish lifestyle (Elliot 2013, Shove and Warde 2002).

I find that reference or comparison groups are an important factor in status competitions. Environmentalists primarily compare themselves to other environmentalists. The so-called “mainstream” is a distant concern in terms of status comparisons. Jane, a voluntary simplifier, explains that it is not difficult to compete with the mainstream, because average people do so little for the environment.

When I compare myself to some of my favorite environmentalist friends, I feel I'm never doing enough. When I compare myself to the world at large, I'm a freak. I'm freakily different. So it just depends on who you compare it to. I flagellate myself all the time for not doing certain things, to go that next step and that next step. Because there's always more you can do.

My informants spoke thoughtfully about their possible comparison groups, but returned to close friends (other environmentalists) as their main comparison group. Natalie, a religious environmentalist with the United Church of Christ, explains her perspective:

He [Matthew Sleeth in the book *Serve God, Save the Planet*] said, 'If you're driving a fuel-efficient car, you should not be looking at people in SUVs and saying, "Oh, I'm better than they are." You should be looking at people with a bicycle and saying, "I'm not as good as they are."' And it's a real - it's a different mindset. So, you know, the person with the SUV might be thinking, 'Well, I don't have a Hummer,' but they should be thinking, 'I don't have a Prius.' You know?

These observations reinforce the way comparison groups are relative and context-driven. Within environmental circles there are debates about what is greener: high tech vs. low tech strategies, solar vs. geothermal technology, and the Prius vs. public transportation or biking. The Prius, rather than symbolizing one's "environmental bona fides" (Sexton and Sexton 2011), is a symbol of compromise for many environmentalists who lack access to public transportation and live too far away from work to bike. The Prius is viewed as "light green" whereas biking (especially long distances) to work is "dark green." These kinds of judgments are negotiating the boundaries of "green capital" (Walther and Sandlin 2013). Green categories also come into play. For example, voluntary simplifiers may call green home owners "commercial green" and question the need to invest money in cutting edge technology. By contrast, green home owners may call voluntary simplifiers "hippy green" and question why anyone would want to build straw-bale homes.

Therefore, status seems to manifest in several ways, primarily as an "I'm greener than you are" game between environmentalists or as a debate over how best to go green. There was also a benevolent attitude toward anyone attempting to be greener and in rare cases a negative attitude toward the mainstream (or "those people with SUVs and TVs in every room"). However, in general, my informants attempt to control

their presentation of self so as not to seem too far from the mainstream because advice from the fringe is easily ignored. For environmentalists who are trying to recruit – as I discussed in chapter five – differentiation is problematic. My informants are making a sincere and concerted effort to recruit others to go green (i.e., encouraging emulation) and this might create greater legitimacy (i.e., status) in the short term, once practices become non-exclusive returns on status would decline.

Overall, it would be useful, in the context of green consumption, to move beyond status as an individual competition and understand it more covertly in terms of class and power (Johnston and Baumann 2010). Sustainability is a political project because it supports certain paths of action over others all the while assuming that green is universally welcome. It is this macro politics of sustainability (i.e., sustainable for whom?) that needs to be addressed. But on the topic of individual action, status concerns were not a barrier for those attempting to reduce their consumption.

INDUGLENCE

The indulgence model assumes that over-buying results from an irresistible desire to possess goods; also that owning beautiful goods is fulfilling and contributes to defining one's quality of life (Bauman 2001, Campbell 1992, Schor 1998). It includes practices from impulse buying to compulsive buying. This explanation gives buying an addiction-like quality. Also by labeling compulsive buying as abnormal, something like a holiday shopping spree can be defined as normal (Hemler, forthcoming).

Consumption in general has been culturally defined as feminine and shopping as a trivial economic activity (Huyssen 1986). Historically it was assumed that people,

especially women, may be seduced by beautiful things and overwhelmed by lust and desire (Satterthwaite 2001). Around 1900 shoplifters (mostly women) who were caught often defended themselves by arguing that they were driven by manias and overwhelmed by temptation (Slater 1997). And while women are responsible for household provisioning and managing budgets, they are also defined as frivolous, emotional over-consumers (Kessler-Harris 1990, Zelizer 2005a). The poor and people of color are also defined historically by their inability to delay gratification or understand the difference between what they want and what they can afford (Chin 2001). Indulgence is also related to identity-building (Belk 2000) and emulation, as people splurge on fashionable “must haves” that are part of celebrity culture.

My informants are not seduced by consumer culture and do not indulge in the next new thing (with the exception of green home owners and efficient technology). Scholars worry that people are surrounded by the pressure to consume by peers and the media, and are essentially socialized into a high consumption lifestyle (Bauman 2001, Schor 1998, Zukin 2004, Zukin and Maguire 2004). However, in a recent study less than 15% of people globally identified “resisting consumer temptations” as a barrier to reducing consumption (Alexander and Ussher 2012). In contrast, one of the primary barriers to reducing consumption, uncovered by the study, was a lack of public transportation. For example, for those without access to adequate public transportation it is difficult to live without a car.

Huneke (2005) finds that the most important activity undertaken by the voluntary simplifiers she studied was to avoid impulse purchases. Overall, my

informants feel that they are so far outside the mainstream that they no longer experience the pressure to consume.

Lindsey, a voluntary simplifier explains that she often reflects on the difference between a want and a need. When shopping she stops and asks herself “where will this go in my home.” This kind of reflection gives her the autonomy to make decisions that she feels are less influenced by consumer culture. Lindsey explains:

How do you go against the flow, when the whole culture seems to be pushing you in a direction of, ‘Buy things and use things and throw them out just because we tell you to do so?’ So, the voluntary simplicity is, yes, you can actually make a decision. You don't have to go along with what the advertisers tell you. You don't have to go with peer pressure, and you can, from your own heart, decide what exactly is enough for yourself and not to overindulge when it's something that is wasteful.

Lindsey is expressing a kind of oppositional identity (Lamont 1992), but instead of using it to compete for status, she uses it to reject advertising and avoid indulgence.

My informants, like Lane, a voluntary simplifier, also talked about reducing overall consumption and not being drawn into too much green consumption. Lane explains:

Frankly, you know, I don't know if the individual can really make a difference in terms of businesses. I think sort of, small town, small businesses, have a place and can be a good thing. Although, I have to say, not all of them, I think, are necessary. And I know a lot of people, what they'll say is, ‘Well, you know, if you shop green,’ and you know, all that kind of stuff, ‘it's going to influence the corporations,’ and blah, blah, blah. I don't know that I think that that's true.

One of the main critiques of green consumption is that it defines the solution to over-consumption as more consumption, only greener (Littler 2009). In this quote Lane is skeptical that “voting with your dollars” makes any difference. Instead she argues in

favor of reducing overall consumption. Therefore, indulgence (even in green consumption) did not act as a significant barrier to reducing consumption.

IDENTITY

Consumer goods and practices are often defined as part of an imperfect system of shared meaning (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979], Sahlins 1978) that has become integrated into our identity projects (Belk 1988, Holstein and Gubrium 2000, Callero 2003, Zukin 2004). The purchase of consumer goods is a kind of self-labeling that tells people who you are, as well as an on-going identity project related to who you want to be (Slater 1997). Goods display style, personality, group membership, and assist in constructing a life-narrative. Baudrillard (1998) argues that consumption is a system of meaning, like a language. People do not simply want to be unique in order to accrue social status; people have a personal investment in their self-esteem and self-image. For example, Heffner et al. (2007) interviewed early adopters of the Prius and found that owning a hybrid contributed to narratives of the self. Similarly, Niinimäki (2010) argues that “eco fashion” is a form of identity construction. However, studies that attribute consumption to identity are sometimes critiqued by environmental scholars who interpret identity-building as status-building (Sexton and Sexton, 2011).

Cross (2000) argues that reducing consumption will be difficult because our identities are formed around consumer goods. At the same time, what we do *not* buy, or buy less of, can shape our identity as much as what we do buy, especially in the case of green lifestyles (Ballantine and Creery 2009, Chitewere 2008, Horton 2006). Nelson, Rademacher and Paek (2007), in their study of a *freecycle* community, find that identity

can be decoupled from goods. Alternatively, I find that practices, in addition to material goods, matter for establishing and maintaining identity. A green lifestyle, as discussed in chapter three, relies on meaningful practices that prioritize reducing the consumption of goods, energy, and water. This focus on practices is one way to rework lifestyles and distance them from the market. The theory that invisible goods, like energy, cannot serve identity projects (Shove and Warde 2002) does not take into account that these invisible goods are coupled with visible practices and are part of an ongoing dialogue about how to live more sustainably. I find that practices, as well as what people do not buy or do not own, can also say a lot about their identity (i.e., no TV, no car, no plastic) and help them build a cohesive lifestyle. In this case interaction and performance help build identity without the assistance of material objects, which means that identity does not necessarily represent a barrier to reducing consumption.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND GIFT GIVING

My work, in the context of theories of over-consumption, reveals the importance of the social connections perspective. For example, conflict over gift giving (i.e., one way consumerism supports social connections) was pervasive. Previous research ignores the social connections theory on consumption and tends to downplay interpersonal conflict (unless it is in the form of status competition). Yet I found that attempting to withdraw from the gift economy strained social ties and was rarely successful. Instead, most interviewees compromised by using green/ethical gift giving as a strategy for recruiting others to live a green lifestyle. In this section I will define the social connections perspective, explain the two main prescriptions for reducing consumption (becoming

less connected or more connected to consumer goods), and discuss the problem of gift giving.

From a social connections perspective, consumerism is a fundamental part of social relations and is made up of “meaningful practices” that connect people to family, friends, and other groups (Zelizer 2005b). Consumerism is not immoral, selfish, or hedonistic but rather supports social relationships and group solidarity. The social connections perspective is primarily concerned with ordinary consumerism. Daniel Miller (1987), in his unique study of everyday life, followed people while grocery shopping in the UK. He argues that even mundane shopping is an expression of love in families. Similarly, in her ethnography of ten-year-old poor and working class Black children, Elizabeth Chin (2001) finds that when children have money to spend (like the \$20 given to them as part of the study) they spend it on practical necessities (i.e., shoes) and buy gifts to shore up social relationships. Similarly, Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) interviewed people in the U.S. and Niger (Western Africa) and asked them what their favorite object was in their living room. Americans typically said it was a handmade gift or a photo album – gifts that represent and support social relationships. (In contrast, interviewees in Niger tended to choose the most expensive item in their living room.)

In line with the social connections perspective, Leonard-Barton (1981) finds that the most common activity shared by voluntary simplifiers is to make gifts for others rather than buy them. Also, for simplifiers, gifts were the most difficult material goods to dispose of when de-cluttering (Ballantine and Creery 2009). Studies of voluntary simplifiers also indicate that restricting consumption can be more difficult for individuals

with children and/or spouses. For example, Grigsby (2004) finds that emotional and moral obligations to children make it difficult to reduce consumption. Women hit a point where, for the good of their family, they felt they could not simplify beyond. This is not considered a barrier to getting the “mainstream” to reduce their consumption, but rather a problem for people who are attempting to reduce their consumption to an extreme degree.

There are two main prescriptions for reducing consumption. First, some scholars argue that people need to become less connected to consumer goods and more rational. And second, to reduce consumption people need to become more connected to consumer goods so as to keep them out of landfills. For example, Shove and Warde (2002) argue that consumer goods must become less symbolic of social membership or status so people buy less and replace goods less often. Ideally, if consumers become more rational they will care less about fashion-value and perceived obsolescence (Hobson 2002, Jackson 2005, Shove and Warde 2002).

On the other hand, Schor (2002) argues that we need to invest more meaning into consumer goods to slow down the “buy-use-discard cycle.” She argues that America is not actually a materialistic society because if consumer goods really meant something to us we would not be able to throw them away. A society that was materialistic would be more likely to appreciate the use-value of consumer goods, instead of simply their fashion-value. Schor (2002, 2010) advocates investing in materialism to the extent that when something is broken people learn how to fix it or find someone who can.

Ultimately, consumers would buy fewer things that are of higher quality, made with materials that will last.

In my own research, I find that a utilitarian view of objects makes their quality and longevity even more important; they are defined as needs, not wants – fostering, if anything, stronger connections to fewer material goods. Thus, Schor's (2002) prescription seems to make more sense: that we invest more meaning into material objects rather than less. The following section illustrates the way consumer goods are symbolic of social connections (not just social status) and the difficulty inherent in attempting to change those connections.

Attempting to change gift giving practices was an on-going effort for many of my interviewees. Many who wanted to end gift giving entirely compromised by reducing the amount of gift giving, greening gift giving, and using gift giving as a strategy to advocate lifestyle change. Carol, the voluntary simplifier quoted in the introduction, speaks for herself and other simplifiers she knows, when she explains:

Gift giving is another thing that's very, you know, *very* difficult. 'Oh, if only I could stop with all these stupid presents!' But everybody will, you know, they'll laugh at me. They don't want to do it. 'How can I go along?' So, that is even the step further. Not only do I change myself, but how do I live with people who are not like that? I don't have that problem. I don't have that problem because my husband is just where I am, even more so. Couldn't care less. And my family knows that I just, you know, I'm not a gift giver of, you know, going to the department store and getting the gift. So, that's not one of my personal problems, but I see it all around, you know, that it is so difficult.

Carol is greatly relieved that her husband shares her environmental concerns but she's had much less luck recruiting the rest of her family. Lindsey, another voluntary simplifier, has a slightly more nuanced view and sees gift giving as synonymous with

social support. Sometimes she goes along with consumer cultural rituals like a baby shower in order to show her support. Lindsey says:

But I don't really have like, a support network. It's not like my whole family's into it [simple living] and I feel comfortable. And sometimes I see - I mean, like, I'm going to a baby shower today, and so, I bought baby shower things. You know, and it's like, alright - You know, I'm buying presents for someone having a baby. Yeah. You know? But you have to support the people in your family, and that way, they do support me. But sometimes, I might question and say, 'Why do you need all this?' But I try not to like, hammer it into them.

Lindsey attempts to influence her family to live simpler lives, but she still participates in special occasions that call for a show of social support through the exchange of material goods. In terms of a baby shower, that is especially true, as cultural ideas about good parenting are linked to material provisioning and preparedness.

When families succeed in reducing gift giving it has to be a mutual agreement.

Catherine, a voluntary simplifier, discusses her situation:

My sisters-in-law and me, we exchange books that we've read; we pass on books to each other, my sister as well. In the family, we've really cut back a lot on gift giving. We really don't give much to each other. I mean, I remember, years ago, when I first came over here [moved to the U.S. from the U.K.], the family that I came into was going *crazy* with gift giving, and we've cut that way, way back. For my kids, I try to give them things that are useful, or money that they need, rather than things that they don't need.

Other families have succeeded in reducing gift giving although gifts for children remain important. Adriana, an architect and green home owner, is one of the few who successfully influenced her children to give and receive gifts that are less resource intensive. Adriana explains:

I mean, one of the things that we started last year with my children is, we started asking for donations for charitable organizations instead of birthday gifts. My middle daughter was the first to agree to it. And I forgot the name of the organization. I think it was like, One Project, or, I can't remember what it was.

But you know, you send e-vites. Right? That's like the newest way to invite people. It's kind of like that, and it says that the child picked a charitable organization. Please do not bring a gift. Click here to give a charitable donation in my daughter's name or whatever. I didn't realize, the organization then took a percentage of whatever people sent them and send her a check, so she could go buy her one, a gift. So, let's say they collected \$50 - she got a check for \$5 or something and she could buy something for herself, but then 90% of it went the organization. And it was nice. She picked one for children's hunger in other countries, which was nice. So, yeah. My kids - they're pretty good with all that.

Many informants give gifts that are less resource-intensive in the form of experiences or services, like horseback riding lessons or concert tickets. Ava, a voluntary simplifier explains that she re-gifts things that are given to her, gives gift certificates to restaurants, or a bottle of wine. Ava explains:

Q. I'm curious if this [voluntary simplicity] has changed the way you give gifts?

A. Oh, yeah. Regifting, absolutely. Yeah. Um-hmm. So, like, I'm more likely to buy fair trade, and I've told my family not to buy me anything made in China because of the labor practices - not because I'm pro-American *per se*, but labor practices. I accidentally sent my sister something made in China several years ago, and she doesn't let me forget it. But that's okay. I do the best I can. But yeah. Like, or shopping like, at *Ten Thousand Villages* [fair trade store] more than to shop at - Like, I refuse to shop at places like *The Gap* now, or any of those clothing stores. I'm just incensed that it's all made in China. I was reading about the American fair trade zones. So it's not just an issue of just environmental protection, but also - Because working in the environment got me in touch with environmental justice, which turned me on to the whole inequity. So a lot of things go into it. And if I can do something like - it could be a gift to a restaurant or a bottle of wine or something like that, even more cool.

Green gift giving still conforms to representations of social support and understandings of reciprocity. No one I interviewed had been successful in doing away with gift giving and receiving altogether. For example, Cynthia, a voluntary simplifier was given a stainless steel composting container by her parents. On the one hand this conforms to gift giving rules (for one's birthday and a gift nicer than anything you would buy yourself), but it also conforms to her green lifestyle. Not only are gifts given and

received greener than average, but gift giving has become integrated into the tactics for changing the practices of other people.

Gift Giving as a Strategy for Change

My informants use the “moral economy” of gift giving (Cheal 1988) and the assumption of reciprocity to get a small change in practices in return for a gift. For the most part these ties are not symmetrical; informants do not want gifts in return, but they do expect recipients to use the gifts they were given and consider other changes they could make. Several respondents gave energy efficient light bulbs, cloth bags, stainless steel water bottles, or fair trade items as gifts. Gift giving may seem like an odd strategy to use when advocating for lower consumption levels but informants were also trying to avoid the stressful social repercussions of not giving any gifts at all.

Gift giving is also an opportunity to try to influence strong ties. Jessica, an architect (LEED Accredited Professional) and green home owner, bought her family *SIGG* water bottles for Christmas.

They [my parents] don't understand fully what we're [my husband and I] doing and why we're doing it [green building] and why it's important. Because scolding doesn't really work, because then everybody gets defensive, and that's not the point; it's really more, you know, I think that our tactic of slowly like, 'Hey, here's a water bottle, and I got a reusable lunch bag for you.' You know, they've slowly actually started to use it, and it's becoming part of their day-to-day life, too.

Jessica explains that giving reusable products is helping to change habits. She finds that her little sister is more receptive to suggestions than her conservative Republican parents. Similarly, Natalie, with the United Church of Christ, gave her family colorful hand-painted cloth bags as Christmas presents. She says that her family “knows how she feels” about the environment but otherwise she is not too vocal about changing their

practices – private political talk can be just as difficult as public political talk. In families with conflict over going green, gifts were often used as an alternative to create change without verbal conflict.

Beth, a green home owner and builder, explains that she and her husband “lobby a lot” (her mother, her kids, her friends) and use gift giving as a strategy to get people to conserve energy. She says:

We [my husband and I], back six years ago, we bought 600 compact fluorescents and gave them out all over the place around here [our neighborhood]. So, is that being an activist? I don't know what that is. But we – You know, so we're trying to get people on board.

Instead of a bottle of wine, she would bring compact fluorescent light bulbs to a dinner party. The compact fluorescent light bulbs were not only a utilitarian gift but also a gentle suggestion to consider other forms of energy efficiency. Beth implies that the green goods are part of a larger project to get people “on board” and doing something about the environment. Cloth bags and light bulbs serve here as nudges or reminders to consider other changes and consumption patterns more generally. Social connections represent an unrecognized challenge to reducing consumption – from household provisioning to gift giving. However, even the frustration over gift giving was transformed into an opportunity for recruitment to greener lifestyles.

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND NETWORK THEORY

My research has two important findings that should be factored into the study of reducing consumption. First, scholars should reconsider the way consumerism supports social relationships, which is evident by the difficulty informants have in everyday life when changing consumption practices clash with expectations for social/material

support. Social connections are not a barrier to reducing consumption, but they are a hurdle that requires careful negotiation when reducing consumption. Second, differentiation, indulgence, and identity do not necessarily act as barriers to reducing consumption. The use of the term “barrier” is in itself problematic and fails to convey the complexity of action and possibilities for improvisation which social situations allow. My interviewees compare themselves to other environmentalists, ignore marketing, and build green identities. They also negotiate a reduction in gift giving, green gift giving, and turn a difficult situation into a tactic for influencing lifestyle change in others. Social connections, especially among family, are an area of contention in reducing consumption that requires additional attention, but also offers an opportunity for innovation.

Social networks are typically viewed as enabling change, not as an area of contention. Social networks are known for facilitating recruitment to social movements and thus social network contact has become somewhat synonymous with consensus or consensus building (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). This is the main reason environmental scholars have overlooked social connections as an area of contention. Researchers find that social networks help to facilitate green lifestyle projects and environmental movement participation by bringing together like-minded people, sharing locally specific information and best practices, and offering social support (Horton 2006, Kennedy 2011, Nye and Hargreaves 2010, Stoddart and Tindall 2010). For example, Kennedy (2011) finds that environmentally responsible actors share resources and social support within networks embedded in sympathetic neighborhoods. This is consistent with social

movement research which explains that networks of weak ties are best at facilitating low cost, less explicitly political actions, especially when movement goals are widely accepted in a given social context (Della Porta and Diani 2006, Diani and Lodi 1988).

Many social movement studies assume an underlying “cohesion framework” in which networks support solidarity (Mische 2003:260). The cohesion perspective highlights three network functions: the “socialization function” of networks that builds political identities and raises consciousness, “the structural-connection functions” of networks which offer actors opportunities for involvement in movement events, and the influence of networks on participation decisions (“decision-shaping function”) (Passy 2003:24-5). Thus, networks are depicted as a “production site” or “transmission belt” for the development of collective identity (Mische 2003:260-2). Studies in this vein emphasize actor’s embeddedness in networks which draw them into and support their social movement goals. The “cultural proximity” (ideological agreement and close social distance) between actors and their networks, and between different networks, is deemed important for collaborative action (Passy 2003:31). However, analytically it is in danger of conflating networks and culture, *contact influences but does not ensure consensus*. This emphasis on imitation and contagion can lead to a case of “action without actor[s]” (Melucci 1988:329). Concentrating on ties or networks with compatible goals eclipses the way actors manage (express or suppress) their goals in light of the multiple everyday networks in which they participate, assuming instead that identities are fixed and the commitment of networked actors to movement frames is constant.

Scholars have recently redefined the relationship between networks and culture in two ways (Mische 2011). First, researchers are studying the way culture influences networks and vice versa (Lizardo 2006, Pachucki and Breiger 2010). For example, studies of environmentalists by Horton (2006) and Kennedy (2011) echo the findings of Lizardo and Vaisey (2010) who argue that moral worldviews have a causal autonomy that give rise to network homophily (birds of a feather flock together). This offers another explanation for network cohesion beyond socialization or framing, namely selection effects (unfortunately you cannot choose your family). The primacy of the cohesion framework (contact assumes consensus) and the moral worldview perspective (consensus leads to contact) leaves little room to explore social connections as places of contention and negotiation.

The second way that the relationship between networks and culture is reconsidered is through the study of interaction within networks, and the way culture and networks are co-constituted (Mische 2011). From the co-construction perspective, networks do more than produce cohesion. Mische (2003) argues that networks are more than sites or conduits of culture; rather they are “*composed of* culturally constituted processes of communicative [or strategic] interaction” (258). This perspective is concerned with the potential for network conflict and strategic action – the goal of which is to navigate between overlapping networks (i.e., environmentalists and non-environmentalists) and to influence actors within and beyond existing networks. Furthering our understanding of social connections and consumption requires just this kind of expansion in thinking from cultural cohesion to areas of contention and

tactics of influence. Social networks can both enable and constrain actors attempting to reduce their consumption.

CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to calm concerns about differentiation, indulgence, and identity as barriers to reducing consumption. In theory these topics appear to be potential barriers to reducing consumption; however in practice they do not stop people from changing their consumption patterns. For those transitioning to a green lifestyle and reducing their consumption, differentiation, indulgence, and identity were not stumbling blocks. For the most part, informants defined themselves in comparison to other environmentalists rather than the mainstream, they tend to ignore advertising, and define their identity by their conservation practices, the green/ethical products they own, and what they do not own.

Instead, negotiating gift giving was an on-going stressor for many informants. Material expressions of social support and the expectation of reciprocity in gift giving are fundamental components of consumerism. Attempting to withdraw from the gift economy strained social ties and was rarely successful. Rationalizing consumption to make it less symbolic of social connections was not a realistic goal. Instead most interviewees compromised by negotiating the exchange of fewer gifts and using green/ethical gift giving as a strategy for recruiting others to live a green lifestyle. Social connections are not a barrier to reducing consumption. Rather social connections, especially among family, are a hurdle or heightened area of contention in reducing consumption that requires additional attention, but also offers an opportunity for

innovation. My informants innovated by using gift giving as an opportunity to recruit people to live a greener lifestyle.

Research on social networks as enabling or discouraging consumption should take into account the content of network ties as places of contention and negotiation, instead of simply relying on the cohesion framework (contact assumes consensus). Assuming viral effects, where the audience is a passive receptor and going green is equivalent to catching a cold, does little to capture the complexity of social action and possibilities for improvisation shown here. It also makes no distinction between weak ties (acquaintances) and strong ties (family). I contend that going green is more of an appropriation network where recruiters care about the receiver and the receiver is active and agentic. In future research more attention should be given to the empirical reality of reducing consumption and the myriad processes of persuasion, cajolery, and strategy that actors use to manage their networks and to transform others' practices.

Empirical research on green lifestyles little resembles the concerns and assertions put forth by environmental scholars. My work offers an empirically grounded understanding of the lived experiences of a green lifestyle and replaces some of the more outrageous concerns – that alternative consumerism takes the place of politics or that individuals must withdraw from status competitions in order to go green. In real life there is no clear split between consumerism and politics, between household changes and community involvement. And people rarely compete with the “mainstream.” These are analytical definitions and separations that exist because of the on-going debate between micro and macro perspectives on social and environmental change. In the final

chapter I review my empirical and theoretical contributions, and then delve into the policy debate over the question: should green lifestyles be part of the solution to climate change?

Chapter 8

Conclusion: The Role of Lifestyles in Social Change

The research question that I began with (i.e., how do people reduce their consumption of goods, energy, and water?) quickly led to several other questions – some coming from the literature and some coming from my own data. The questions fall broadly into two categories. First, there were questions about green lifestyles (e.g., What are they? How do they work?). Second, there were questions about the *value* of green lifestyles as an approach for addressing climate change and other environmental harms.

Questions about green lifestyles included, for example:

- What is a green lifestyle?
- What resources do people need/use to create a green lifestyle?
- Why do people view their green lifestyle as a cohesive project at the same time that they are uncertain about which materials/practices are greener?
- How can policy makers encourage people to adopt a greener lifestyle?
- Does status-seeking, personal indulgence, and identity-building create barriers to reducing consumption?

- Should scholars/policy makers encourage people to be more connected to goods or less connected to goods – in order to encourage reducing consumption?

By contrast, questions about the value of green lifestyles included the individual/collective debate over private political action and the technology/practices debate, for example:

- Is private action an effective tool for addressing climate change?
- What is the relationship between green lifestyles and more traditional forms of political action? Do green lifestyles cause people to withdraw from politics?
- If producers make technology more efficient, a project easier for policy makers to legislate, can we avoid changing people's practices (harder to legislate)?
- Ultimately, are green lifestyles part of the solution (to address climate change and other environmental problems) or part of the problem (individualizing responsibility for a problem so big that it requires state, national and international action)?

Overall, my research on green lifestyles is reassuring – my informants are not withdrawing from politics, nor do they trust consumerism to address their environmental concerns. Informants typically participated in green lifestyles as part of a larger political project or “multi-pronged approach” to addressing climate change and other environmental harms. Borrowing a term from James Jasper (1999), and the study

of social movements, I identified green lifestyles as a “companion strategy.” That is, green lifestyles were a flexible, non-competitive strategy for social change which worked well in concert with other strategies.

I found that in all groups individuals were avoiding political talk in order to seek out larger audiences for their appeals. They were not only changing their own lifestyles but endeavored to change those around them. Their strategy and tactics created shared trends in the data, although their audiences were somewhat different. All groups attempted to influence friends, family, co-workers, and audiences of convenience (i.e., neighbors). Voluntary simplifiers tended to focus on recruiting for lifestyle change through community networks including activist groups and local schools. Religious environmentalists engaged with congregation members and other religious community members (face-to-face and through newsletters), while green home owners typically directed their energy into convincing local homeowners to renovate.

Lifestyle change is a practical approach where people tried to “do everything they can feasibly do,” rather than an ideologically rigid perspective. Informants often said that living a green lifestyle was the “right thing” to do, but they did not necessarily view it as the best or only thing to do. Informants did not accept full responsibility for addressing climate change, instead they attempted to support change “on every level” – from micro-level household changes to macro-level public policy initiatives. For example, they were interested in increased government oversight and the regulation of big businesses. They supported market mechanisms like cap n’ trade (i.e., emissions

trading) only so long as it actually gets results. This is a much more optimistic story than previous concerns about people replacing public politics with private consumerism.

Beyond the lifestyle change strategy, groups worked toward other types of change related to local schools, communities, the state, and the market. More specifically, the voluntary simplifiers I spoke with established an edible garden at a local high school – students tend the garden during the school year and community volunteers take over in the summer. They also began a summer program for local kids that teaches sustainability through nature hikes and art projects (i.e. a tomato planter made from a plastic 2-liter bottle). In chapter four I also discussed their support for a regional alternative energy program. In addition, voluntary simplifiers were also connected with other social movement concerns like peace and anti-nuclear groups, food insecurity, protecting green spaces and the local watershed, and the freedom of information. Voluntary simplifiers were less interested in working with the government or big business (i.e., green consumption and market mechanisms) and more interested in grass-roots activism and reducing overall consumption.

Religious environmentalists in my study had more institutional support for their political involvement. For example, Greenfaith supports local and national political candidates (e.g., organized a debate between local political candidates). They fought the expansion of a local incinerator and won. In chapter four I discussed their support of state initiatives for alternative energy. They also have a program to green religious schools and their curriculum. As individuals they were interconnected with environmental groups focused on local, organic food production. The religious

environmentalists I spoke with connected sustainability to local and global social justice concerns like the over-industrialization of the food system, super storms, poverty, gun control, prisoner's rights, and women's participation in politics. Therefore they sought to address both environmental sustainability and social justice through a myriad of tactics – sometimes working with the state and sometimes against it.

Green home owners were more invested in supporting the adoption of efficient technology and greening businesses – from architecture and HVAC to diesel cars and organic farms. They coupled the success of sustainability with profitability. In other words, in order to convince businesses to be more environmentally responsible it must be profitable. One of the main goals of the U.S. Green Building Council (sponsor of LEED for Homes, etc.) was to convince the building industry that going green can increase profits. In chapter four I explored the reliance by green home owners on efficient technologies to curb consumption. The green home owners in my study also worked to change local and national building codes, pushed businesses and townships to use greener materials, and worked with schools to give talks on sustainability and tours of their homes. For the most part green home owners believed in the power of business. Unfortunately, this investment in a market mechanism favors green consumption over reducing overall consumption and leaves little room for social justice concerns.

All three groups were involved with green consumption to a greater or lesser degree. Ultimately, green consumption was hard to avoid. All three groups purchased organic food, fair trade coffee, green cleaning products, Energy Star appliances, and alternative energy (through a distributor or home solar/geothermal installation).

Interviewees in all three groups also grew their own food and voluntary simplifiers sometimes made their own cleaning products. But for many products (i.e., refrigerator) there is no home-made alternative, which keeps all groups involved, at least minimally, with market mechanisms and green consumption.

The following section summarizes my findings and theoretical perspective on green lifestyles. My research answers many questions about green lifestyles – what they are, how people transition to a green lifestyle, the resources used to build a green lifestyle, and how people can understand their lifestyles as a cohesive project. It also examines how people recruit others to green their lifestyles. In addition, I weigh in on the debates over individual vs. collective action and changing technology vs. social practices. Following the summary of substantive chapters I return to the question: Should scholars advocate green lifestyles as an approach for addressing climate change and other environmental problems?

UNDERSTANDING GREEN LIFESTYLES

In chapter three (“Going Green: The Process of Lifestyle Change”) I identified common patterns in the emergence of green lifestyles across all groups (see also Lorenzen 2012a). Although voluntary simplifiers, religious environmentalists, and green home owners were included in this study because of their differences, there turned out to be similarities in how their green lifestyles emerged and progressed. I examined the resources they used to build a green lifestyle, how that lifestyle was established, and how it was subjectively understood. I defined a green lifestyle as a pattern of living that involves deliberation over the uncertain environmental impacts of everyday practices

and a guiding narrative that makes that process personally meaningful. Green practices were not isolated decisions or actions, but components in an ongoing project. As a result green lifestyles were often experienced as both a work-in-progress and a provisionally coherent life narrative. Transitioning to a green lifestyle was an on-going process with no clear tipping point. Rather, interviewees felt that they had stumbled upon a new path or a road.

Green lifestyles had no clear recipe because the ingredients used to build a lifestyle are unique and constantly change. Informants drew on old and new materials, practices, family stories, and environmental themes such as antimaterialism, environmental protection, and interconnectedness. Through bricolage, the cobbling together of resources at hand by non-experts, informants united these resources into a holistic lifestyle narrative. This phenomenological work, that served to bring together disparate resources into a seemingly cohesive whole, was what accounted for a green lifestyle.

Uniting practices was not a simple process of deciding which practice was greener, as frequently the answer was unclear. In this case knowledge did not necessarily precede action, especially as knowledge was uncertain. This may seem like an information deficit (from a rational choice perspective), but even informants who were experts on green building or sustainability (i.e., expert green consumers) were no better off. The greater their knowledge, the more nuanced the answers they sought. Their familiarity with green building, for example, created greater uncertainty. In addition, in chapter three, I responded to the debate over motivations versus

vocabularies of motive (in the sociology of culture) by focusing on how individuals explain their actions as environmental, and how those explanations over time transformed into motivations and fostered green practices.

In chapter three I also expanded on the role of deliberation. After I conducted a couple of interviews in which informants explained that going green was simply the “right thing to do” I considered using Bourdieu and his idea of habitus as a theoretical frame. However, after several more interviews it became clear that deliberation was a consistent theme in the data and I was forced to reconsider. In fact, the process of changing habits that I documented reflected many of Dewey’s ideas on social action.

Dewey is considered by some to be a social psychologist; yet he argued that action is primarily habitual with only brief moments of deliberation. He also argued (like Pierce and other Pragmatists) that beliefs, values, and desires do not pre-exist and motivate action. Instead, pragmatists maintain that routines and conventions are followed until a problem situation is encountered. This was an intriguing alternative to the notion that values were pre-fixed and influenced behavior. Therefore, I adopted a pragmatist perspective to understand lifestyle change as a deliberate process undertaken in response to a problem left under-addressed by current policies and practices. I find that my informants oscillated between deliberate and automatic cognition when building a green lifestyle. When new practices were adopted they were incorporated into routines until or unless called into question by new knowledge, which led to further deliberation and revision.

I am going to take a moment here to summarize and clarify my arguments regarding pragmatist action theory and processes of change. Discussions about changing habits often use a teleological framework which assumes that habits are oriented toward goals and interests, or values and norms. Pragmatism offers an alternative non-teleological theory of social action (Schneiderhan 2011, Silver 2011, Whitford 2002) which can contribute to this debate and explain how changes in habits can be both comprehensive and enduring.

Through creative action new habits can be established, and in certain situations changes in habits may snowball and produce additional changes. I argue in favor of expanding the definition of a “problem situation” (Dewey 1922) so it accounts for both settled and unsettled lives (Swidler 2001) and the influence of the life course. Transitional moments tend to prompt a response beyond the fulfillment of social scripts, allow actors to consider interrelated problems, and are more likely to support on-going social action. In addition, I argue that values are produced by the snowballing process of social action. In this way values are co-created as part of the process of problem-solving rather than preceding it as a motivation. Pragmatism also serves to explain the values-action gap or why changing values does not necessarily result in action. Below I briefly examine three issues: how problem situations begin with unsettled lives, how changes snowball, and how serial action accounts for changing values.

Dewey argues that action is primarily based on habit with intermittent moments of deliberation and change. Actors do not adopt goals, but rather follow routines until a problem situation arises in which they must decide between the means to address it.

Dewey (1922) gives the example of a traveler confidently following a path, until she meets an obstacle. The traveler stops, studies the situation, considers past experiences, including the experiences of others, and imagines future alternatives for action to plan her “anticipatory project” (Dewey 1922:182). Problem situations are variously defined, sometimes narrowly as in Dewey’s example of the traveler, sometimes broadly, as in the case of Jane Addams (Schneiderhan 2011) and her experiences of disconnect between welfare services sponsored by the state and what the residents of Chicago’s slums actually needed. In both cases, doubt is experienced in the world and not only in our minds and emotions. Doubt and deliberation are part of the process of action rather than a pre-existing condition or motivation for action. The problem situations I encountered in my research were tied to concrete, transitional moments in the life course. I find that doubts in the world start out with unsettled lives. For example, interviewees in my case study linked greening their habits to having children, having children leave home and go to college, having grandchildren, surviving breast cancer, retirement, divorce, moving to a new place, or building a new home. Surprisingly, the problem situations are not necessarily related to the environment, but they open up the space people need to reconsider their way of life. I argue that these transitions demand a response beyond habitual action, allow informants to evaluate multiple problems both directly and indirectly related to the situation, and are therefore more likely to support ongoing action.

Pragmatist theory rejects the idea of final ends and the dualism between ends and means. In its place, the actor poses an “end-in-view” or a subjective and flexible

goal which can be amended through a process of deliberation/action. When action is successful in addressing problems, a path for future action opens up. Silver (2011) argues that successful action in response to a problem situation does not mean that ends or ideals are achieved, but that actors have a better understanding of the importance and definition of the situation. As a result actors are more likely to feel called upon to act and, thus, perform additional actions. Successful action both establishes new practices that recede into habitual action and contributes to a platform or scaffolding for future changes. For example, my informants note that changing their habits made them feel more engaged with environmentalism and gave them a sense of forward momentum (i.e., efficacy). Through this process, individuals can create new habits or “habit sets” – “repertoires for thinking and acting vis-à-vis a set of problems” (Gross 2009: 371). In attempting to address one problem, other problems become evident. In addition, solutions are uncertain and action must often be revised. Consequently, one change leads to another and actions snowball. Lifestyle change (i.e., changing habit sets and the stories we tell about them) is just this kind of piece-meal, serial problem-solving.

Finally, I argue that values, instead of existing *sui generis*, are a construction of the snowballing process of social action. Pragmatism rejects the idea that actors have pre-fixed values that motivate action (Whitford 2002). From a pragmatist perspective values are an invocation of the criteria that should be used to guide deliberations over a problem. However, this is not a solution to the problem of what people should actually do. Rather, acting in a way we think is environmentally responsible helps co-constitute

sustainability as a principle or standard by which future action is guided. Changing values occurs in concert with action and not as a prerequisite for action. Eventually acting green, when successful, feels like an authentic, passionate, and inevitable choice. Hence, the moral weight that some scholars deem necessary for consistent and lasting change can be accomplished without resorting to a structuralist understanding of values or a teleological framework.

In chapter four (“Green and Smart: The Co-construction of Users and Technology”) I highlighted the differences between groups and the various ways that they integrated green technology into their everyday lives (see also Lorenzen 2012b). Although differing in their approach to technology (constitutive, strategic, and practical) all three groups constructed or augmented the green-ness and smart-ness of technology through their practices. Green home owners had a *constitutive* approach to technology use in that their primary solution to climate change and other environmental harms was enacted through innovative technology. For them the ideas of green living and using innovative technology were closely coupled together. Religious environmentalists had a *strategic* approach to technology use. Innovative technology was used at places of worship to address environmental problems while reducing operating costs, recruiting new members, and creating common ground with the state on clean energy. Individuals also used innovative technology selectively as part of their toolkit to reduce their use of resources, although they did not prioritize innovative technology over other strategies. Voluntary simplifiers had a *practical* approach to technology, mainly consisting of conservation practices, greening ordinary technology, and investing in innovative

technology when necessary. Voluntary simplifiers, with their commitment to reducing all forms of consumption, rarely purchased innovative technology, invoking a kind of practical minimalism. They only turned to innovative technology when it addressed a problem which was difficult to address with practices alone (renewable energy) and when it fit their larger goal of reducing consumption.

Chapter four also weighed in on the debate between changing practices versus making technology more efficient. In other words, if we made technology more efficient could we avoid changing people's practices (which would be more difficult)? In my research I found that an intensive use of innovative technology, rather than avoiding a change in practices, cultivated equally intensive practices to support it. Practices were relied on to domesticate innovative and ordinary technologies in a way that maximized efficiency and complemented greener living. Thus green-ness was jointly produced by aspects inherent to technology design, as well as the ways users adopted technology through domestication practices in the interest of social change. I also redefined green technology as (1) technology that was *intentionally designed* and (2) technology that was *intentionally used* in a way that reduced or replaced the consumption of energy and fossil fuels, water and raw materials, and toxic chemicals. I argued that studying the domestication practices of technology offered a way into a more comprehensive energy policy, one that incorporated both innovative and ordinary technology, and the use of technology as well as its design and production. Greater consideration of the co-construction of technologies and users made it clear that technology does not take the place of changing practices.

In chapter five (“Convincing People to Go Green: Managing Strategic Action by Minimizing Political Talk”) I examined how my informants attempted to convince other people to change their lifestyles and become more environmentally responsible (see also Lorenzen 2014). Aware of the public’s aversion to discussing volatile issues like climate change, informants distanced themselves from their in-group discourses (i.e., antimatierialism, interconnection, or conservation) and instead focused on changing practices while downplaying their own political ideas and engagements. They employed several persuasive techniques including: tailoring appeals to particular audiences, making ‘I feel’ statements, being role models, highlighting financial rewards like the ‘win-win’ proposition, and the rare environmental appeal. These tactics avoided accusatory language (i.e., “I feel” instead of “you should”) and masked political action. This is part of what I call the lifestyle change strategy, where informants advocated the adoption of more environmentally responsible practices rather than furthering a particular political perspective or recruiting people to join an environmental movement group.

My informants claimed that small, private lifestyle changes are easier for people to enact than public, possibly contentious political action. This made lifestyle change a valuable starting point for recruitment with little risk of conflict and low entry costs. The underlying assumption was that small lifestyle changes will snowball into more significant lifestyle changes (from changing light bulbs to installing solar panels) and, potentially, collective action.

In chapter five I also addressed the topic of the management of strategic action in informal interaction. I extended my pragmatist perspective in this chapter by defining the term strategy as employing the means to address or solve a problem(s) against possible resistance from others. I defined strategy in terms of problems, rather than goals, in order to distance it from an association with rational choice models. Managing talk involved the suppression of controversial identities, group connections, and the uncertainty experienced when adopting a green lifestyle. As a result of avoiding group associations in informal persuasive talk, they silenced larger projects that they were involved with, like fighting the expansion of a local incinerator.

The lifestyle change tactics fits with the larger trend of avoiding politics, or the dearth of public political talk in American life. Unique to this case, though, my informants manipulate the lack of public political talk to their advantage in order to reach a wider audience. Therefore, avoiding politics was not only active, but strategic. In addition, informants reported that political talk (on the rare occasions it happens) was not just private, but relatively well confined to designated areas like environmental community groups rather than family dinners.

In this chapter I also discussed the politics of private action and the individual/collective debate, a debate in which individual actions were characterized either as leading to more significant lifestyle change and collective action or as preventing further lifestyle change, collective action, and macro-level policy interventions. I argued that lifestyle practices were only one part of a much larger political project. And bringing together informal interaction and lifestyle change

broadened the toolkit of actions environmentalists may draw on to fight climate change. I continued my engagement with this debate in the next chapter where I explored trajectories of involvement in both lifestyle change and collective action.

In chapter six (“Green Lifestyles and Environmental Activism: How Lifestyle Change Supports Collective Action”) I investigated two of the most popular arguments on either side of the individual/collective debate. On one hand, green lifestyles have been characterized as part of “prefigurative communities” (aligning individual interests with social movements). On the other hand, green lifestyles are associated with “inverted quarantines” (when environmental protection is satisfied by consumer goods at the expense of political action; Szasz 2007). I disputed the assertion that green lifestyles were apolitical or created a tradeoff with political participation or support for system-level change. Instead, I argued that lifestyle change represents an expansion of the tactics (toolkit) used to address climate change, rather than the replacement of public strategies with personal ones.

More specifically my research revealed three trajectories of participation in green lifestyles. First, my research confirmed that people who were in the process of cultivating a sustainable lifestyle were often pulled or pushed into collective action through social networks. Even those informants who attempted to focus on household changes alone were ultimately drawn into collective action through speaking engagements or nominations to local government commissions. Second, activists also used lifestyle change to shore up long-term, sometimes discouraging, environmental and social movement participation. In the current political climate, when

comprehensive climate change legislation has been taken off the table, green lifestyles help prevent activist burn out. A strategic retreat into the household, community, and regional level allowed activists to continue to work for change – which ideally may be scaled up in the long term. Contrary to the inverted quarantine thesis, transitioning to a more sustainable lifestyle did not cause people to avoid politics.

And third, I find that informants who wished to avoid formal, contentious politics were drawn to green lifestyles. In other words, people in my study who were skeptical of formal politics as a mechanism for change or those that wanted to avoid conflict related to activating political frames transitioned to a green lifestyle. This group of people may, to some extent, account for the anecdotal assertion that adopting a green lifestyle causes a retreat from politics because there is a correlation between lifestyle change and avoiding politics (narrowly defined). However, in this case, green lifestyles were a consequence of the desire to avoid politics, rather than the cause of informants avoiding politics, so the association between green lifestyles and avoiding politics was a case of selection effects rather than causality. Additionally, informants who avoided formal, contentious politics often remained involved in environmental community groups and school projects – or politics, broadly defined.

Scholars like Szasz (2007) and Maniates (2002b) argued that green lifestyles support the individualization of responsibility (Beck 1992) – or the notion that individuals are (or feel they are) responsible for dealing with social and environmental problems that used to be in the purview of the government. I found that lifestyle change, as a social movement strategy, was nothing new and I argued that the rise of

green lifestyles is more likely a consequence of the individualization of responsibility rather than a cause of it. In order to weather the anti-regulation fervor in Washington my informants were digging in at a more local level, but their aims for system-wide change remained. It would be more accurate to describe this as a strategic regrouping rather than avoiding politics or individualizing responsibility. In reality, green lifestyles do not hinder other forms of political action and they may act as a gateway to support collective action and more formal political involvement.

In chapter seven (“Reducing Consumption: Social Connections and the Problem of Gift Giving”) I took on another concern of environmental scholars: does status-seeking, personal indulgence, and identity-building create barriers to reducing consumption? This concern was primarily theoretical and extrapolates from research on the sociology of consumers and consumption. Scholars in consumer studies discuss four main reasons why people consume more than they need: differentiation/emulation, indulgence, identity/self-expression, and social connections. Environmental scholars have highlighted the first three, while ignoring social connections or the ability of consumer goods to support social relationships and express emotional commitments.

In contrast to the arguments offered by environmental scholars, my informants were relatively successful in creating green social status comparison groups, ignoring marketing and the new “must have” product, and defining their identities based on what they did *not* buy. Instead, I found that disrupting social connections created the most interpersonal conflict in everyday life and represented an unrecognized challenge to reducing consumption. For example, ambivalence, and even conflict, over gift giving

was pervasive. Attempting to withdraw from the gift economy strained social ties and was rarely successful. Most interviewees compromised by negotiating a reduction in gift-giving and by using green/ethical gift giving as a strategy for recruiting others to live a green lifestyle. Thus, green gift giving became another tactic in the lifestyle change strategy.

Social connections or networks are typically viewed as enabling change, not as an area of contention. Social networks facilitate recruitment to social movements and social network contact has become synonymous with consensus in environmental studies. This is the main reason scholars overlooked the social connections as a potential barrier to reducing consumption. The primacy of the cohesion framework (contact assumes consensus) and the moral worldview perspective (consensus leads to contact), eclipsed the way actors manage (express or suppress) their goals in light of the multiple everyday networks in which they participated (as seen here and in chapter four). To better understand strategic action (processes of persuasion or cajolery to transform others' practices) we need to better understand the way culture and networks are co-constituted by tactics of influence within areas of contention.

Overall, my work offers environmental sociology a different understanding of social action and social change. If social action is primarily habitual then there is no simple, mechanistic equation for pushing people to go green (if we do X people will do Y). Rather the question becomes, how are taken-for-granted habits disrupted? I found that life course transitions (i.e., having children, retirement) or changes in life circumstances (i.e., moving to a new place, divorce) disrupt habitual action and create

opportunities to re-think problems, deliberate over the right way to live, and set new paths of action. I also factor in the content of social networks, trajectories of participation, and the contentious political climate in order to help explain the ways in which political engagement is shaped. My work takes social context seriously – as a sociopolitical setting, as access to particular sociotechnical systems, and as the definition of the situation that emerges out of interaction. From this perspective the research question evolves further into, which settings favor the reproduction of more sustainable ways of life? For example, a change in sociotechnical systems like renewable energy or public transportation alters the conditions in which practices occur.

Before I address social change and the value of green lifestyles in more depth, let me discuss two possible critiques of green lifestyles, as well as the limitations of this research. First, the broad approach to climate change documented here (addressing climate change on every level) may be too broad. Some of my informants seemed to value household changes as much as larger policy initiatives – putting them on equal footing. Others clearly valued macro changes more than micro changes, and were less enthusiastic about making micro changes, though they still felt that it was the right thing to do. In future research I will follow up (more explicitly) on the way people assign value to different mechanisms for change. Second, my research revealed a clear split between green lifestyles that saved money (i.e., voluntary simplicity) and those that cost money (i.e., green home owners). The price of efficient technology (e.g., Prius, solar panels, etc.) was often prohibitive – making certain kinds of green lifestyles unaffordable for the majority of Americans. As a scholar concerned with economic inequality it is

problematic to advocate a way of life that so few people can actually achieve. In any event, studies show that making consumption more efficient is not adequate for sustainability; consumption as a whole must be reduced (Brannlund, Ghalwash and Nordstrom 2007, Dimitropoulos 2007, Greening, Greene and Difiglio 2000). Therefore, reducing overall consumption (a pursuit not necessarily constrained by social class), and advocating a greater connection to fewer material goods, remains a useful avenue for change.

This research on reducing consumption has three main limitations. First, in my analysis I focused on the importance of unsettled lives and transitional moments for lifestyle change, although it is possible that culture is simply more visible during unsettled periods (Swidler 2001) or that these moments were more easily recalled by informants. Second, my data come primarily from interviews and accounts of reducing consumption, rather than ethnographic observations of reducing consumption. I attempted to minimize this concern through supplementary participant observation, conducting in home interviews, and home tours to see how people actually lived. Third, I began by recruiting informants who had some institutional affiliation: people who took a class on voluntary simplicity, were members of a religious congregation involved with GreenFaith, or were known to MaGrann Associates (a “LEED for Homes” green building business). I also recruited through a green home tour, a green religion conference, and snowball sampling. It is possible that I over-sample people who are politically engaged and civic-minded; involved in environmental movement groups or non-profit organizations (i.e., LEED). Yet, survey data supports my findings in chapters 5 and 6

about the political involvement of individuals who are reducing and greening their consumption. I recommend further qualitative research in order to confirm and clarify the process of going green and changing habits; additionally, understanding environmental projects in context will further our understanding of the connections between social action and social change. I also recommend further quantitative research with representative samples in order to speak to issues of generalizability.

The primary goal of my dissertation was to understand how people reduce their consumption. This simple question led to the study of green lifestyles and their place in social and environmental change. In spite of the limitations mentioned above, inductive, qualitative research allowed unexpected themes (i.e., strategic action) to emerge from the data and offered a rich understanding of green lifestyles. Exploring green lifestyles holistically, as opposed to green consumerism specifically, also offered a more complete picture of how private, political action intersects with public, collective action. The question that I am left with is: Should scholars advocate green lifestyles as an approach for addressing climate change and other environmental problems?

ADVOCATING GREEN LIFESTYLES?

Despite the lure of the consumer economy there are select individuals and social groups able to forge new routines that reduce purchases and conserve energy. An individual “doing their part” and reducing their consumption is an admirable project and tends to include other forms of political participation. However, government policies which sidestep environmental regulation because it is unpopular and support behavior change policies instead, place a great deal of responsibility on individuals who – all

together – can make only a small impact on climate change (Hobson 2002, Rumpala 2011). Choosing between legislation that focuses on individual behavior change vs. systemic change is a false choice because only systemic change can make a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmental issues have become highly politicized in the United States (McCright and Dunlap 2011, Brulle, Carmichael and Jenkins 2012). The debate over climate change echoes two sides of a broader debate over how to address social and environmental problems: through government intervention (i.e. environmental regulation of business) or market-based approaches that focus on the voluntary efforts of consumers. Within this charged political context, individual behavior change is considered “low-hanging fruit” – or the easiest and least controversial approach (Vandenbergh, Barkenbus and Gilligan 2008). Ways to address climate change, and other environmental problems within developed nations, are increasingly framed in this “personal consumerist paradigm” (Chitewere and Taylor 2010:148) and behavior change at the micro-level is “fast becoming the ‘holy grail’ for...sustainable consumption policies” (Jackson 2005:105).

In the sense of the aggregation hypothesis (or low hanging fruit), individual actions directly contribute to small reductions in emissions. Research shows that household changes like adjusting thermostat settings, lowering water heater temperature, replacing light bulbs, automobile maintenance, and carpooling could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 7% (Vandenbergh, Barkenbus, and Gilligan 2008). Other projections are similar and show that changing household practices and

increasing efficiency can reduce overall U.S. carbon emissions by 7.4% over ten years (Dietz et al. 2009) and reduce U.S. energy use by 20% (Gardner and Stern 2008). Dietz et al. (2009:18453) point out that this is more than half of President Obama's current emissions reduction goal. To put behavior change into a broader perspective, a 7.4% reduction over ten years (Dietz et al. 2009) falls far short of the 80% greenhouse gas emissions reduction that is recommended for industrialized countries by 2050 (or about 2% a year) (Hassol 2011). In addition, individuals and municipalities use only 10% of the water, 25% of the energy, and create 3% of the waste in the U.S. (Jensen 2009), while industry and the military are the primary contributors to resource use and waste production.

The most popular policy interventions to come out of the behavior change perspective include information campaigns and policies that combine taxes on goods which release greenhouse gases with incentives to support energy efficiency (i.e. weatherizing homes) and the adoption of more efficient technologies (i.e. hybrid vehicles or solar panels) (Shwom and Lorenzen 2012). These policies center on improving access to alternative choices in the marketplace that are more environmentally responsible, yet these policies alone have had little success in changing behavior (Jackson 2005; Chess and Johnson 2007). More comprehensive behavior change policies which include social outreach, in addition to education and financial incentives, are the most successful (Dietz et al. 2009, Nye and Hargreaves 2010).

The "Shove-Whitmarsh debate" (discussed in chapter two) between the rational choice/drive theory perspective (which primarily advocates behavior change) and the

systems/practices perspective (which primarily advocates changing the circumstances in which people make decisions) has two key points of accord when it comes to supporting social change. First, both sides of the debate agree that governments and institutions need to take on more responsibility and play a larger role in addressing climate change and sustainability. Given the amount of water and energy used by big business, targeting them should be a priority, even if political opportunity structures make it difficult. Second, they also agree that individual behavior change policies have limitations, especially when choices are highly constrained (i.e., in the case of high economic inequality). Therefore, individual perspectives (from psychology and economics) should only be one small part of a larger policy toolkit to address consumption and climate change. I echo these arguments. The potential for government policies to effect change on a large scale, related to big business and military resource use, should not be circumscribed by the popularity of behavior change. Government policies which focus on changing household practices alone will fail to adequately address climate change; they will also concede a whole arena of policy options that go far beyond what individual agency can accomplish. Policymakers would do well to consider changing circumstances rather than attempting to change people.

If behavior change is inadequate for addressing climate change, then what role can green lifestyles play? Dietz and his colleagues (2009) argue that household and transportation changes can act as a “behavioral wedge” to fill the void until more controversial, large-scale legislation is passed. The behavioral wedge can help make up for the “time lag” of larger reduction policies. If, for example, the goal is to reduce

carbon emissions by 2% a year, then behavior change could contribute to that reduction for the first few years. Dietz, and his colleagues, do not see a tradeoff between micro and macro policies. Fast-paced, micro interventions with small impacts will fill the gap while large-scale, large-impact interventions (i.e., building the infrastructure for a high speed train or a smart grid) develop slowly amid politically controversy.

While conducting my research I noticed that the behavioral wedge argument resonates with the sentiments communicated in my study – many of my informants would prefer large-scale government action on climate change, but while they work toward achieving that they are also changing their lifestyles and trying to convince other people to do the same. Green lifestyles support behavior change because individuals tend to adopt multiple kinds of green practices. However, green lifestyles are not synonymous with behavior change. Those transitioning to green lifestyles are not only changing their household and transportation practices (i.e., behavior change) but they are also involved in different forms of environmental activism and view consumption as part of a larger political project. The people I spoke with advocate change on all levels – changes in lifestyles, schools and communities, businesses, and government regulation. I find that lifestyle change is a companion strategy that supports collective action and political involvement. Green lifestyles seem to draw people into, and keep them involved with, environmental activism. Informants believe that “even individuals have a part to play,” rather than the typical aggregation hypothesis – that individual actions alone can solve the problem. The unforeseen consequence of advocating so-called market friendly, behavior change policies may be to increase support for large scale

government regulation. The behavioral wedge, in light of my research on green lifestyles, has the potential to not just fill the void but to jump start carbon emissions reductions and support future social change.

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Demographics: Restricting Consumption

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Thank you for answering all the questions to the best of your ability.

1. Your birth date: ____/____/____

2. Your sex:

☐ Female

☐ Male

3. Which of the following best describes your race? (you may chose more than one)

☐ White

☐ Black or African-American

☐ Asian

☐ Latino/a

☐ Other

Please specify:

4. Do you identify with a particular religion or theology?

☐ Protestant (Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist)

☐ Catholic

☐ Jewish

☐ Buddhist

☐ Hindu

☐ Muslim

☐ Agnostic/Atheist

☐ No religious preference

☐ Other

Please specify:

5. Which of the following best describes your marital status?

☐ never been married

☐ civil union

☐ married

☐ Other

☐ divorced and single

Please specify:

☐ divorced and remarried

☐ widowed and single

☐ widowed and remarried

6. Do you have any children?

☐ No

☐ Yes → Please list their gender and age(s):

7. Which of the following best describes where you live?

☐ A house I own

☐ A house I rent

☐ A townhouse or condo I own

☐ A townhouse or condo I rent

☐ An apartment I rent

☐ Other

Please specify:

8. What is the highest educational level you have attained thus far?

☐ High school degree or G.E.D.

☐ Bachelors

☐ M.D.

☐ Associates degree or equivalent

☐ Masters

☐ None of these

☐ Some college, but no degree

☐ Ph. D.

☐

Other: _____

9. Describe your current employment situation.

☐ Currently employed 40 hours a week or more (full-time)

☐ Currently employed more than 8 hours, but less than 40 hours a week (part-time)

☐ Retired

☐ Other

Please specify:

10. What is your official job title? If retired, what was your last official job title?

11. Please describe in a sentence or two what you do. If retired, please describe the last job you held.

12. Could you estimate for me your household income last year (2008)?

☐ \$100,000+

☐ \$40,000-59,999

☐ \$80,000-99,999

☐ \$20,000-39,999

☐ \$60,000-79,999

☐ \$19,999 or less

RESTRICTING CONSUMPTION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

PART I: ALL GROUPS

1) How did you first learn about (religious environmentalism/simple living/green homes)?

A) How would you describe simple living to someone not familiar with it?

B) How would you describe the UCC perspective on environmentalism to someone not familiar with it?

2) Why did you get involved in environmental concerns/simple living/green building?

A) Do you think your decision was shaped by your values? (identify values)

B) Are you trying to save money?

C) Some people report getting involved for health reasons, how do you feel about that?

D) Do you think about your carbon footprint?

E) Social justice? Inequality, sweatshops?

F) Education, educational campaign?

G) Do you think of nature as sacred?

H) Were your friends involved in it?

I) IF respondent mentions environmentalism, THEN ask:

A) Would you define yourself as an environmentalist? What does that mean to you?

IF religion is a reason – How long have you been involved with your church?

A) How long have you been active in environmental issues in your church?

B) Does your religious experience inform your everyday choices about what to buy and what not to buy?

3) In an average week what kind of products do you buy?

A) Buy local? Organic? Green cleaning products? Recycled products? Free trade coffee? Use Free-cycle or Craig's list?

B) Gas for your car? Do you own an automobile? If so, what kind?

C) Do you eat meat as part of your diet? Do you eat out or buy prepared food?

D) Do you try to use energy more efficiently? (energy efficient light bulbs)

E) Do you try to conserve water? (no bottled water)

F) Do you own Energy Star appliances? If so, please list them here.

G) Is there anything that you are currently boycotting? (product or store)

H) How do or have children factor into your consumption choices (green products, organic, a car instead of a bike)?

4) How different do you think your consumption is from the average American consumer?

A) Can you give me an example? Do you drive, bike, or take the train?

- B) Are you thinking of friends and family, co-workers and acquaintances?
- 5) Do you try to conserve energy and water in your home? If yes, how?
 - A) How much energy do you save per year? Or do you expect to save? (Kilowatt hours)
 - B) Have you done an energy audit?

VALUES

- 6) If you see a disconnect between people's values and behavior how do you explain it to yourself? For example if someone says they are an environmentalist but own an SUV. (inconsistency)
- 7) Do you think people who behave differently, like conspicuous consumers (people who consume a lot, buy brand name goods), have different values than you?
- 8) Do you think we need to change American values if we want more people to reduce their consumption? Do we need to change values in order to break bad habits?
- 9) How much would you say your behavior is shaped by your values or ethics? (when shopping for instance?)
 - A) For example, simplicity/frugality, living small, ecological awareness, community, authenticity, personal growth, self-reliance (anti-big business), global equality
 - B) How do you establish new habits?

STATUS

- 10) Do you feel a sense of pride regarding your contributions to reducing consumption and helping the environment?
 - A) Do you think this brings people together or divides people?
 - B) Do you think this can sometimes be misunderstood?

LIFESTYLE

- 11) Does environmentalism/simple living/ownership of a green home-- influence every aspect of how you live?
 - A) Is it a unified lifestyle and worldview or isolated decisions?
 - B) Do you think about religious environmentalism/simple living/owning a green home when you go on vacation? Drive/bike/walking? Give gifts? Meet new people?
 - C) Do you think about simple living when you recycle, turn down the thermostat, take shorter showers, compost or throw away your trash?

D) Is simple living part of a green lifestyle or is it its own lifestyle? Do you consider yourself to have a green lifestyle? (where your group membership/home is part of a larger pattern?)

12) Can you identify a time when you adopted a more environmentally aware/simple lifestyle, a tipping point? Or were you raised to be concerned for the environment/into simple living? Has there been a slow progression (any signposts along the way)?

A) If you did experience a change, what was your life like before?

B) If you did experience a change or a return to how things used to be, what made you change your thinking and actions? Why go green/simplify?

C) If you were raised with environmentalism/simplicity can you identify a point in your life when you learned more about it? Embraced it as your lifestyle and not just your parent's lifestyle? Was there a learning curve?

D) Do you think gradual change is typical? (why the slow change, because of a lack of resources?)

13) Is your lifestyle challenging or difficult to sustain?

A) Do you find specific times or events difficult, like weddings, homeownership, attending college, having children?

B) Do you have little tricks that help you remember to be environmentally responsible? (hang cloth bag on front door knob)

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND DISRUPTIONS

14) About what percentage of your friends and family are also environmentalists/simple living/own green homes?

I'm assuming you know others who are religious environmentalists/simple living/own green homes?

15) How did others (friends/family/co-workers) respond to your decision/ growing commitment to environmentalism/simplicity?

A) If you were raised as an environmentalist/simplifier do you share the same practices and values as your family or have they diverged? (same practices, different values?)

16) Do you feel that you are part of a network that supports your ideals and way of life? (face-to-face or via the web?)

A) If yes, is that support important to you? Do you think you could maintain a simple life without a supportive environment?

B) If no, how do you maintain your lifestyle without a supportive environment?

17) Have you had any misunderstandings or arguments with your friends or family, because of simple living or environmentalism?

A) Have you had people disagree with you?

B) Problems with holidays or gift giving?

18) Do you try and convince others to go green/simplify?

A) In what ways? Are you especially careful or subtle?

B) Lead by example?

C) Can you imagine everyone going green/being a simple liver?

BARRIERS/SOLUTIONS

19) What barriers do you experience in your attempt to be more environmentally responsible/live simply?

A) Do you think there are barriers to reducing consumption (especially in the U.S.)?

B) Do you need to drive to work?

C) Do you think it's difficult to reduce your consumption because of your family responsibilities? (cannot compromise children's needs?)

D) Are there things that you would like to do that you haven't (yet)?

20) What have you suggested to others to help them change their habits?

21) Do you have any ideas for how to reduce consumption in the U.S. more generally?

1) Do you think an expanded luxury tax would decrease consumption?

2) Or tax breaks and other incentives would make green living more popular?

3) Should businesses charge for plastic bags like IKEA?

4) Carbon trading? (for businesses or individuals)

LONGEVITY

22) Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years in terms of environmentalism/simple living?

A) Do you think your commitment to environmentalism/ simple living will continue?

B) Do you have an plans for the next few years?

23) How would you describe your quality of life today?

A) Do you think your quality of life has changed over time?

B) Do you think your quality of life is better than the average American? What would you say the differences are?

C) Do you think material goods get in the way of a good life?

CHILDREN

24) Do you think (your) children are more influenced by consumer culture today, than you were as a child? How so?

- A) If you see that as a problem, how do you address it?
- B) Do you know how other parent's address it?
- C) Do you think a child's age and/or gender make a difference in terms of how influenced they are by consumer culture?

PART II: Religious environmentalists only

- 1a) When did your (or your church's) association with GreenFaith begin? What do you do in the group?
 - 2a) What issues that they address are especially important to you?
 - 3a) What do you do as a Green Team leader?
 - 4a) How do religion and environmentalism fit together for you?
 - A) Can you tell me more about the theology or scripture it is based on (biblical foundations)? Nature is sacred?
 - B) Do simplicity and frugality play a role?
 - 5a) Do you think religious environmentalism is its own movement? (loosely organized group?)
 - A) Is that the best way to describe it?
 - B) Part of the secular environmentalist movement?
 - C) Do you work together with secular environmentalists?
 - 6a) Do you think environmentalism is a way to bring religions together (or will different interpretations and theology keep religions apart)?
 - A) For example, what do you think about more traditional religious practitioners who are not environmentalists?
 - 7a) Many religions have official statements about environmental conservation and stewardship. (EcoAction and the UCC)
 - A) Do you think it's important to put out that kind of statement?
 - B) How does (or can) the church go from making a statement to changing everyday behavior?
 - 8a) Are you involved in any other environmental organizations or web communities (besides GreenFaith)? If not, why not?
- I'm interviewing 3 groups and I want to see if there are any connections between the groups:
- 9a) Have you heard of voluntary simplifiers or simple livers?
 - A) What do you think about voluntary simplicity?
 - B) Do you know anyone who practices simple living?
 - 10a) Have you heard of the Garden State Earth Institute (Morristown, NJ)? Have you been to any of their events? (one of the other groups I'm interviewing)
 - 11a) Do you know anyone who owns a green home?

12a) What do you think about green home building and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification?

13a) Have you considered having your home certified (Energy Star, LEED)?

WRAP UP

14a) How can we get more people to live lightly on the earth?

15a) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about religious environmentalism that I did not ask about?

PART III: Voluntary simplifiers only

1b) What is your relationship with the Garden State Earth Institute?

2b) Do you think voluntary simplicity is a movement? (loosely organized group?)

A) Is that the best way to describe it?

3b) Are you involved in any other simplicity organizations or web communities (besides the Garden State Earth Institute)? If not, why not?

RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM

4b) Does religion factor into simplicity for you? Can you explain how religion factors into simplicity for you?

5b) Are most of the simplifiers you know religious?

6b) Have you heard of religious environmentalism (nature is sacred)?

A) What do you think of it?

B) Do you think it influences people to reduce their consumption?

C) What do you think of religious environmentalists? (do they have a reputation—what kinds of projects do they work on?)

D) Have you heard of GreenFaith (New Brunswick, NJ)? Are you a member of the group or do you know members of the group?

LEED

7b) Do you know anyone who owns a green home—LEED certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) or Energy Star certified?

8b) What do you think about LEED certification? Have you considered having your home certified (Energy Star, LEED)?

WRAP UP

9b) How can we get more people to simplify?

9b) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about simple living that I did not ask about?

PART IV: Green home owners only

1c) Do you think of your home as a green home?

2c) What makes your home more energy efficient?

A) How much energy do you save per year? Or do you expect to save?

B) What is your source of information?

3c) How active were you in the process of purchasing a green home (or renovating)?

Can you describe the decision-making process?

4c) How long do you plan to live in this home? Did that influence your purchase/renovating of a green home?

5c) Discuss the LEED certification process. Was there a lengthy application? How long did the certification process take (are you still waiting)? How much did it cost?

6c) Why have your house certified? What do these certifications mean to you?

7c) When you talk to people about your home how much of the conversation is about green aspects of it? Do you feel like you entertain more in your home now?

8c) There was an article in the NYT that referred to LEED certified homes as the next "hot designer label." What do you think of that reputation?

9c) Would you buy a green home again? Can you imagine everyone in the U.S. owning a green home?

10c) Have you heard of voluntary simplifiers or simple livers? What do you think about voluntary simplifiers?

A) Have you heard of the Voluntary Simplicity Movement? Are you aware of the Garden State Earth Institute? Have you been to any of their events?

11c) What do you think about religious environmentalists? GreenFaith?

A) Have you heard of GreenFaith? Are you a member of the group or do you know members of the group?

12c) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about religious environmentalism that I did not ask about?

It's routine that I collect some demographic details,
all I have left is a short demographic survey.