How Personal is the Political? Understanding Socially Responsible Consumption

by

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DEDICATION

This is for Brigid

and also for Anne.

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There is a reason that acknowledgements come first: without the support and help of many people, I could never have written this—or any—dissertation.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Theorists and social scientists concerned about political apathy and disengagement have often portrayed consumer culture—systems of practice and thinking related to shopping and other consumption activities—as a threat to democratic society. Consumer culture, according to critics, focuses attention on the requirements of the self, as opposed to the concerns of the larger community (Arendt 1958; Barber 1984; Etzioni 1993; Ketcham 1987; Sandel 1996). Sophisticated marketing strategies inspire overwhelming, if transient, desires that can only be sated by a constant stream of new acquisitions (Baudrillard 2000; Bauman 2007; Galbraith 1976). The result is a society of distracted, materialistic consumers who cannot conceive of common interests, much less concerted political action (Baudrillard 1998; Horkheimer and Adorno 1994). Indeed, according to Cohen (2003), market segmentation practiced by postwar producers led directly to the "slice-and-dice" approach of modern political campaigns, where notions of a common good are discarded in favor of narrow appeals to discrete groups. Historically speaking, consumer culture—self-interested, trivial—has had few friends among those interested in the ability of people to govern themselves.

In recent years, however, researchers associated with schools of thought such as postmaterialism and ecological modernization have staked out an alternative vision: that the marketplace itself can be a key venue for political action, as people connect political and ethical

values to consumption and lifestyle choices (Clark, Hoffmann-Martinot, and Gromala 1998; Giddens 1991; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). According to this new perspective, the modern phenomenon of incorporating concerns about social and environmental problems into purchasing decisions—a practice that I term "socially responsible purchasing," but which has also been called "ethical" and "political" consumption—represents a clear and theoretically crucial contrast to the self-interested, strictly utilitarian nature of conventional purchasing practices. Where consumer culture has typically been seen as bereft of public purpose, socially responsible purchasing is portrayed as inherently concerned with impacts on the world beyond the immediate users of the products or services being bought.

Importantly, revisionists do not suggest that the use of purchasing power for political ends is a wholly new phenomenon. Social movements, from New Deal-era safe workplace campaigns to African-American struggles for civil rights, have long turned to the economic realm when formal political channels proved blocked or unresponsive (Goldberg 1999; Jacobs 2005). What is argued instead is that socially responsible purchasing is as much an everyday tool of *un*-organized individuals as a strategy of organized social movements (Beck 1992; Micheletti 2004). Indeed, many researchers believe that contemporary socially responsible purchasing, unhinged from the structures of conventional campaigns, represents a fundamental realignment of political power away from political parties, unions, and bureaucratic advocacy groups, and in favor of engaged, checkbook-wielding citizens acting on their own initiative (Micheletti 2003; Spaargaren 2000; Prasad et al. 2004). Less sanguine observers see little to cheer in the trend toward individual-level solutions to public problems, which Szasz (2009) compares to homeowners building bomb shelters to shield themselves from nuclear fallout. But the weight of recent research, whether encouraged or distressed by the rise of "life politics" (Giddens 1991),

suggests that consumer culture and consumption activities may not lead ineluctably away from civic concerns.

The past fifteen years have yielded important insights into who engages in socially responsible purchasing, and why. Among socioeconomic characteristics measured by most surveys, the education level of consumers has emerged as the single strongest predictor of buying products for ethical or political reasons (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Micheletti and Stolle 2005; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Graziano and Forno 2012; Shah et al. 2007; Starr 2009). People who buy "green" and Fair Trade products also tend, on average, to be politically active in conventional ways (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Willis and Schor 2012). Despite these findings, however, key questions about socially responsible purchasing remain. First, the reliance of most quantitative studies on publicly available, nationally-representative surveys has resulted in possible causal factors *other than standard demographic and socioeconomic characteristics* remaining outside the window of investigators. And yet existing survey-based studies explain a relatively small amount of overall variation in socially responsible purchasing—a fact which suggests that current theory about the sources of socially responsible purchasing may be, at the very least, incomplete.

Second, socially responsible purchasing aimed at locally-owned businesses and locally-produced products and food has received little attention from social scientists, despite the increasing visibility of "localism" and "locally-focused purchasing" in the world of social movements (De Young and Princen 2012; Hess 2009; Lacy 2000; Lyson 2004; Shuman 2012). Do people who "buy local" fit the profile of those who most frequently purchase products that are "green," Fair Trade, or sweat-free? Are locally-focused consumers also relatively well-educated and politically active? Or does locally-focused purchasing cross socioeconomic and

political lines in a way that other forms of socially responsible purchasing do not? No theory has been developed, and no empirical research has been conducted, in order to answer questions such as these.

In this dissertation, motivated by specific gaps in knowledge identified above, I present the results of research intended to advance understanding of how, why, and under what conditions people engage in socially responsible purchasing. In Chapter Two, I propose a new explanation for the gap between professed concern for social and environmental problems, and purchasing-based action to address these problems. While most studies have traced the "concern-action gap" (Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013) to differences in consumers' socioeconomic characteristics, I argue that the subjective experience of purchasing activities in general also shapes whether individuals make everyday shopping a political practice. In Chapter Three, I investigate the identities and motivations of people who are especially interested in using purchasing to support locally-owned businesses and locally-based producers. I argue that "locally-focused purchasing," compared to other forms of socially responsible purchasing, is practiced by people from a surprisingly wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds who may not be politically active in conventional ways. In Chapter Four, I use newly available survey data to systematically test hypotheses about the relationship of the subjective experience of purchasing activities to the consumption of various socially responsible food products. I find that the conclusions advanced in Chapter Two are largely supported. Finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss the implications of my dissertation for future research.

Socially responsible purchasing has been, and continues to be, a strategy for social change integral to many notable and influential social movements. Just as importantly, the very idea that consumer culture is not inherently antithetical to social responsibility represents a

potentially radical break with much of sociological theory on consumption and society. In this dissertation, I hope to shed new light on why people take political action in the marketplace, as well as in the voting booth and on the street.

Chapter Two

Be a Good Shopper, or Shop for Good?

Non-Monetary Costs of Socially Responsible Purchasing

1. Introduction: Meaning and Time in Being a Consumer

After the social upheaval of the 1960s, two sociologists set out to investigate whether objects in people's homes were associated with systems of meaning rooted in politics, religion, or ethnicity. What Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton learned disappointed them: few people appeared to think of everyday objects as having a relationship to ideas of right and wrong or the public good. They write: "none of the great spiritual and ideological systems … have left objective traces in the homes of these Americans, nor has a new configuration as yet taken their place" (1981:86).

The work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton anticipated a phenomenon that has received increasing attention in recent years: far fewer people incorporate concerns about social and environmental problems into purchasing decisions—a practice that I term "socially responsible purchasing"—than express an intention or desire to do so (Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt 2010; Flynn, Bellaby, and Ricci 2009; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Pietrykowski 2011; W. Young et al. 2010). Efforts to explain the "concern-action gap" (Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013), and thus to understand why everyday consumerism has arguably fallen short as an outlet for political convictions, have mainly examined the role of education and social

connections in facilitating awareness of relevant product claims, and of income in making it possible to afford products that make such claims. Empirical findings regarding the effects of income on socially responsible purchasing have been mixed, however, and most people—including those who are relatively well-educated and socially connected—put ethical concerns on par with price and convenience infrequently, if at all (Cowe and Williams 2000; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney 2010; Micheletti and Stolle 2005; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Shah et al. 2007; Starr 2009; Tallontire, Erdenechimeg, and Blowfield 2001). Why? Can the paucity of purchasing decisions motivated by concern for social or environmental problems be attributed solely to lack of capital, whether human, social, or financial? Is "moral failure" to blame, as has also been suggested? Or have other explanations not been sufficiently explored?

In this paper, I argue that explanations of the concern-action gap in socially responsible purchasing must embrace two core principles of sociological theories of economic and political action. First, practices associated with spending money are not neutral vehicles for pre-formed desires, but are themselves pregnant with meanings that shape how decisions are made (Abolafia 1996; Horowitz 1985; Smith 1989; Wherry 2008; Zelizer 1996, 2011). Second, organizations and individuals pursue strategies for social change not only because of their objective utility, but also because collective identities, historical memory, and powerful emotions suggest certain avenues for the expression of discontent over others (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Groves 2001; Hart 2001; Polletta 2002; Whittier 2001). Building on these ideas, I argue that what it *means* to be a consumer, and the emotions and experiences associated with purchasing activities, shape whether and how social and environmental concerns are incorporated into purchasing decisions. Specifically, I draw on in-depth interviews with a

wide range of individuals to show that shopping trips for household needs are often associated with crowded stores, impersonal interactions, and the everpresent possibility of being duped into overspending. The fact that everyday shopping is often experienced as unpleasant at best, and onerous or degrading at worst, presents significant impediments to reflection on ethical concerns and the emotional rewards of activism. Meanings and experiences associated with being a consumer thus make everyday shopping a frequently inhospitable environment for ethical or political action—but not because consumption is necessarily a "fun system" or a "swarmlike" activity (Baudrillard 1998; Bauman 2007). Rather, meanings and experiences matter precisely because they make so much shopping *not* fun, *not* engaging, and in doing so detract from the amount of time, energy, and trust that people are willing to put into an activity with otherwise significant potential to be a vehicle for social and environmental concerns.

2. Explaining Socially Responsible Purchasing

2.1. The Role of Socioeconomic Resources

Efforts to explain the "concern-action gap" have generally used survey data to examine how socioeconomic resources affect the means of consumers to learn about, trust in, and buy products that make claims about social or environmental impacts. The education level of individuals, in particular, has often been identified as associated with buying products for ethical, political, or environmental reasons (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Micheletti and Stolle 2005; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Shah et al. 2007; Starr 2009). Depending on the source of data, the effects of a variety of different measures of education level have been tested, including dummy variables for high school, college, and

graduate degrees, and continuous measures of years of education. The correlation between education level and socially responsible purchasing—a relationship that has consistently been found to be stronger than that between socially responsible purchasing and income, sex, or age (ibid.)—has been robust to such alternative measures of education. Income level, like education level, has often been theorized as likely to have a straightforward positive relationship to socially responsible purchasing, as products that make claims about social and environmental impacts tend to be both more expensive and less widely available than those that do not. Despite what is frequently presented as an intuitive relationship between income and socially responsible purchasing, however, results of models testing the effect of income have been more inconsistent than those testing the effect of education. Several studies have found that the effect of income disappears once education is controlled for (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Shah et al. 2007), while others have found that the standardized effect of income on socially responsible purchasing is smaller than that of education (Micheletti and Stolle 2005; Starr 2009). Measures of social capital and network position have generally not been included in models testing the relationship between individual-level socioeconomic resources and socially responsible purchasing. One recent study, however, did find membership in voluntary organizations to have an effect comparable to that of education—due in theory to increased social pressure and access to word-of-mouth information (Neilson and Paxton 2010). The preponderence of evidence so far collected thus suggests that the socioeconomic resources of individuals play an important role in shaping socially responsible purchasing practices, but that among the different kinds of resources examined, the impact of education level seems most strongly supported.

Three aspects of existing studies, however, suggest a more complex and even ambiguous relationship between individuals' socioeconomic resources and socially responsible purchasing.

First, although individuals with a college degree are the group most likely to make socially responsible purchases at least once or twice a year, many individuals without a college degree also satisfy these criteria, and many individuals with a college degree do not (Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Starr 2009). Second, there is substantial variation in the frequency with which consumers, both educated and not, practice socially responsible purchasing. Most major periodic surveys—such as the General Social Survey and Eurobarometer—do not inquire whether individuals buy products for ethical or political reasons more than once or twice a year. But studies have found that approximately ten to fifteen percent of all consumers regularly incorporate social or environmental concerns into purchasing decisions—a number that suggests that many people with a college degree are sporadic but not regular socially responsible consumers (Cowe and Williams 2000; Tallontire, Erdenechimeg, and Blowfield 2001).[1] Similarly, a study of students at elite universities in Canada and Europe found that while a majority had chosen products based on ethical considerations in the past year, only 17% took political or ethical reasons into account "nearly every time they go shopping" (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005). Results such as these—which mirror those for the effects of income and social capital (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Starr 2009; Neilson and Paxton 2010)—point to substantial variation in the frequency of socially responsible purchasing within the group most likely to be socially responsible consumers.

Finally, the absolute amount of variation in socially responsible purchasing explained by socioeconomic resources in existing models is small. In one study that used data from a survey specifically designed to examine determinants of socially responsible purchasing, socioeconomic variables explained less than ten percent of the variance in "political consumerism" (Shah et al.

[1] As of 2012, according to the U.S. Census, approximately 30 percent of all adults in the United States held at least a bachelor's degree.

2007). In another study, just six percent of the variance in “environmental purchasing” was explained by all factors included in the model (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003).[2] At this point, survey-based studies, with their focus on the socioeconomic resources of individual consumers, have arguably thus not fully accounted for variation in socially responsible purchasing.

A number of recent studies have also suggested that the concern-action gap can be traced in part not just to individual-level differences in socioeconomic resources, but also to an inadequate *supply* of affordable, high-quality socially responsible products[3] (Prasad et al. 2004; Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013). The inability or unwillingness of firms to “cultivate the market for ethical consumption” has been termed a “market failure” (Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013: 22). The roots of this market failure may lie in disbelief, on the part of producers, in the existence of untapped demand for socially responsible products, reluctance to change competitive strategy, or desire to maximize shareholder value through continued reliance on conventional production methods (ibid.). Certainly, if knowledge of untapped demand for socially responsible products were coupled with widespread, deliberate avoidance of production strategies that might meet this demand, then there would appear to be a significant role for purely “supply-side” factors in the concern-action gap.

But it is also worth noting that, if the first explanation offered by Robinson and his coauthors were to hold, then this might actually constitute *support* for the idea of a concern-action gap rooted in the demand-side characteristics of consumers. In other words: if large and

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[2] Many quantitative studies of socially responsible purchasing use logistic regression and report Pseudo-R-squared measures, which cannot be interpreted as a straightforward percentage of variance explained.

[3] “Socially responsible products” are, in this paper, distinguished from “conventional products” by the claims that they make regarding social or environmental benefits, and not—insofar as they could be determined—the veracity of these claims.

small producers, collectively dedicated to massive investments in market research and product development, have concluded that a concern-action gap exists because most people do not, in fact, have the financial courage of their convictions, then this conclusion arguably ought to be taken seriously. Put another way: if producers consistently have failed to meet some hypothesized demand, then it is at least *possible* that this demand, in the view of these producers, is more "myth" than reality—and that most people ultimately will not buy those socially responsible products which they say that they want. This potential disconnect between stated preferences and actual purchasing decisions is, of course, the essence of the concern-action gap that this paper seeks to help explain.

The final and perhaps most provocative explanation for the concern-action gap in socially responsible purchasing is the argument that most surveys are misleading, and that individuals' concerns for social and environmental problems—their *moral convictions*—are, in truth, relatively weak, compared to other priorities. Perhaps surprisingly, measures of moral conviction and political views are absent in many quantitative studies of socially responsible purchasing. When variables such as ideology (ranging from conservative to liberal) and level of environmental concern have been included in quantitative models of socially responsible purchasing, however, large amounts of variation in the dependent variable continue to remain unexplained (Shah et al. 2007, 200; Starr 2009). In the cross-sectional model of Shah and her coauthors, for instance, "environmental concern" has a positive and statistically significant effect on "political consumerism"; but just 13 percent of the overall variation in political consumerism is explained by the resulting model (2009).

Why should moral convictions not have a stronger effect on action? According to Devinney and colleagues, the apparent frailty of moral convictions indicates that the idea of the "ethical consumer" is a "myth" whose debunking cannot come soon enough. They write:

> Individuals' 'tastes' for social issues [i.e. their ethical and political views] are not very different from their 'tastes' for other aspects of their existence, even for the very mundane features of the products that they purchase … [In fact, social tastes] are more important only when individuals, comparing them to all the other things that have value to them, determine that they are more important (2010:171).

This observation, supported with evidence from controlled experiments, has the ring of truth as a description of human decision-making. People constantly weigh moral convictions against other considerations with respect to many kinds of life decisions, including purchasing.

But Devinney's conclusion is really just a beginning, in that it raises more questions than it answers. Moral convictions may be "more important only when individuals … determine that they are more important." But how are these determinations made? What are the conditions that shape how ethical views are weighed against other kinds of concerns? Might the material and emotional context for purchasing activities influence the ways in which ethical views are expressed through consumption? These questions have not been adequately addressed in existing research on socially responsible purchasing and ethical consumption (but see Johnston, Rodney, and Szabo 2012).

2.2. Bringing Meaning and Experience Back In

If explanations of the concern-action gap based on socioeconomic resources leave significant variation unexplained, and if ideas of "moral failure" raise as many questions as they answer,

then where should the study of determinants of—and impediments to—socially responsible purchasing go next? Fundamental insights from economic sociology and the "cultural turn" in social movements research offer possible directions. With respect to subjects as diverse as women's' "pin money," bidders at auction, Wall Street traders, and interpretations of prices, economic behaviors have been found to be shaped by rich contexts of meanings and experiences related both to money itself and to the social situations in which decisions about money are made (Abolafia 1996; Smith 1989; Wherry 2008; Zelizer 1994, 1996). Abolafia, for instance, shows that reputational networks and informally-enforced social norms between "market makers" restrain opportunism among individuals whose short-term interest is to make as much money as possible (1996). The workings of markets in stocks, bonds, and futures, and the decisions of people who work in these markets, thus cannot be understood without knowledge of what the day-to-day life of the trader is actually like. Similarly, participation in social movements, by both individuals and organizations, has been shown to depend not just on objectively available "political opportunities," but also on historical affinities with particular centers of authority, vocabularies of protest, and the emotional rewards of being an activist (Barker 2001; Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Morris 2004; Polletta 1999; Tétreault 1993). In an essay representative of many of the themes of the emerging "passionate politics" school of social movements, Barker (2001) writes that no understanding of the origins of Poland's Solidarity movement is complete without attention to the powerful emotions at work in the shipyards themselves, as organizers faced the daily challenge of keeping workers motivated, angry, and engaged.

The fundamental insight that unifies such studies is simply that cultural factors influence economic and political decision-making in myriad ways. This insight, with its emphasis on the need to incorporate the subjective experiences of individual agents into explanations of economic

and political phenomena, holds promise for unpacking the conditions under which people incorporate social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions. Indeed, recent research into the lived experience of purchasing activities, and the meanings associated with the social role of the consumer, offers a window onto ways of understanding the concern-action gap that has been underutilized by existing studies of socially responsible purchasing.

Social theorists have often portrayed the activities of consumers as vacuous, conformist and self-centered (Baudrillard 2000; Bauman 2007; Horkheimer and Adorno 1994; Veblen 2000). Recent decades, however, have seen a shift toward understanding consumption from the perspective of the individual, and not simply castigating consumer culture as antithetical to civil society (Miller 2003; Zukin and Maguire 2004). New scholarship can been seen as creating two broad categories for purchasing activities: shopping that is "intrinsically enjoyable" (or "shopping *around*") and shopping that is "instrumental" (or "shopping *for*") (Hewer and Campbell 1997; Prus and Dawson 1991). Intrinsically enjoyable shopping—often associated with luxury goods—is fulfilling as much for opportunities to socialize with friends and partake in peripheral activities as for what, if anything, is actually bought (Jansen-Verbeke 1987; Lehtonen and Mäenpää 1997; Prus 1993; Shaw 2010). Instrumental shopping, on the other hand, focuses on the outcome, and not the process, of purchasing: it is useful for what is bought, but not enjoyable in itself. Activities associated with instrumental shopping—goal-oriented trips for groceries, household goods, and even clothing—have been characterized as "laborious" and "a chore" due to stress-inducing features such as repetitiveness, crowded stores, unresponsive salespeople, and ambiguous choices between products (Hewer and Campbell 1997; Prus and Dawson 1991). Intrinsically enjoyable shopping has arguably received more attention from scholars. But much of the shopping that people do is primarily instrumental in nature (ibid.).

Thinking of socially responsible purchasing as, first and foremost, a purchasing activity, leads to the thesis of this paper: that *instrumental* meanings and experiences associated with shopping constitute an impediment to socially responsible purchasing that is, to some extent, independent of the effects of socioeconomic resources such as income and education level. Existing research suggests that socially responsible purchasing, in itself, imposes at least two kinds of non-monetary costs on consumers. First, finding stores that carry socially responsible products, and finding socially responsible products within stores, involves outlays of time and energy. Second, reflecting on the relative merits of different socially responsible products, the seriousness of the issues that they address, and the credibility of their claims, is itself time-consuming and stressful (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Horton 2003; Macnaghten 2003). Ideas of instrumental shopping, however, raise the possibility that the non-monetary costs of socially responsible purchasing are not necessarily constant, but may be modified by, among other things, how people experience shopping in general. Specifically, to the extent that a person experiences shopping as a tedious chore, that person may be less willing or able to pay the non-monetary costs—in time, energy, and emotional investment—associated with socially responsible purchasing. Indeed, a largely instrumental experience of shopping may actually *exacerbate* the non-monetary costs of socially responsible purchasing. The effect on socially responsible purchasing of an instrumental experience of shopping, in other words, may be multiplicative, and not additive.

Existing studies, both survey-based and qualitative, have not adequately investigated the relationship between meanings and experiences associated with purchasing activities in general and socially responsible purchasing. The former, as discussed above, have focused on the effects of socioeconomic resources and demographic characteristics. The latter, however, have largely

explored the beliefs and practices of people who are unusually committed to a lifestyle that includes buying products for ethical or political reasons (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Horton 2003; Lorenzen 2012; Shepherd 2002; Young et al. 2010; but see Brown 2009). In particular, qualitative studies have addressed how people construct ways of life that emphasize socially responsible consumption and manage challenges to these lifestyles. But while such questions are crucial, the presumption that knowledge, financial resources, and concern are *sufficient* as well as necessary factors for socially responsible purchasing may not be warranted. The lived experience of purchasing activities is also relevant to whether social and environmental concerns are expressed through these activities, and whether socioeconomic resources are accessed, when they are possessed.

3. Research Design

The thesis of this paper emerged from a larger project in which, motivated by the shortcomings—outlined above—of explanations focused on socioeconomic resources, I used in-depth interviews to investigate determinants of socially responsible consumption. In recruiting individuals for this project, my primary goal was to obtain a sample that would be diverse with respect to socially responsible consumption practices, including purchasing. One-third of participants were recruited from each of three counties in Michigan: affluent, conservative Jefferson County; affluent, liberal Adams County; and economically struggling, politically moderate Mercer County.[4] Further, two thirds of participants were recruited from a stratified—

[4] All names of places, people and organizations have been changed. I used 2010 average household income (U.S. Census 2010) and results from the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections to classify each county according to its economy and political ideology

by voting frequency—random sample of the population of registered voters in the above counties[5], while one third was recruited from community political groups in these counties. Among the 157 registered voters with working phone numbers who received a recruitment letter, 46 (29 percent) participated in the study. I also recruited 25 politically active individuals—called "activists"—by volunteering with one conservative political group in Madison County, one liberal group in Mercer County, and one conservative and one liberal group in Adams County, for 8 months beginning in August, 2010.

Prior to each interview I gathered data on the socioeconomic characteristics, civic participation, and purchasing practices of each participant through a 20-minute telephone survey. Individuals in the sample were relatively diverse with respect to income, sex, education, and political ideology (see Table 1). Importantly, 39 percent of individuals said that they had not bought a product for ethical or political reasons in the past 12 months, and an additional 23 percent had made a socially responsible purchase only once or twice during this time.[6] Thus, the sample group answered the main need of the study: it was markedly more diverse, with respect to socially responsible purchasing practices, than that used by most existing qualitative studies of socially responsible consumption.

[Table 2.1 about here]

Interviews took place in participants' homes (52 percent) or workplaces (13 percent), a local library (18 percent), or a café (17 percent); most interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. My goal was to obtain rich data on concrete, vividly-remembered experiences, and to

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[5] Due to motor voter laws and the 2008 national election, over 90 percent of all eligible voters in Michigan were in fact registered to vote when I selected my sample (Hakala 2008).

[6] The wording of the questions addressing socially responsible purchasing ("How often have you bought/boycotted a product for ethical or political reasons in the last 12 months?") was chosen to be nearly identical to that of survey questions used by earlier studies.

avoid, to the extent possible, statements of abstract opinion unconnected to specific behaviors (Weiss 1995). In a typical interview, the first 15-30 minutes were spent discussing experiences with political and civic activities in general. The rest of the interview focused on the possibility of addressing social and environmental problems through purchasing decisions or other kinds of consumption practices. I asked participants to "walk me through" typical shopping trips for groceries, household goods, and clothing, and to describe what they were feeling, thinking, and doing when they bought or were aware of the opportunity to buy products that made claims about social or environmental benefits. In addition to asking about purchasing related to issues in which participants had voiced specific interest, I probed for feelings and experiences specifically regarding environmentally-friendly, American-made, union-made, and locally-based products and businesses. I attempted to reduce the potential for social desirability bias by not specifically mentioning my interest in purchasing practices when talking about my project, by using communications prior to interviews to establish mutual trust with respondents, and by emphasizing specific events and associated emotions, rather than abstract opinions, during interviews (Weiss 1995). In all, I conducted 71 interviews, of which 70 were recorded. Transcripts were coded using HyperResearch.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. The Role of Orientation

In this section, I argue that an *instrumental* orientation towards shopping presents an impediment to socially responsible purchasing that is to some extent independent of socioeconomic resources and differential concern for social and environmental problems. Specifically, to the extent that

everyday purchasing activities are experienced as unpleasant and time-constrained, and carry negative connotations for other reasons, people will be less likely to devote to shopping the time and energy that socially responsible purchasing can require.

The majority of participants in my study, like those in studies that draw exclusively on survey data, expressed concern for social and environmental problems and willingness to buy products that would address these problems (see Table 2.2). During interviews, participants elaborated on these opinions and testified to the importance of people doing their part to support American and Michigan companies and to purchase food and other goods with minimal environmental impact.

[Table 2.2 about here]

The extent to which these concerns were manifest in purchasing decisions, however, was correlated with—and, I will argue, influenced by—how participants experienced shopping. In the course of discussing specific purchasing activities and decisions, stark differences emerged in how participants described meanings and experiences associated with shopping at two kinds of venues: large, non-independent stores—such as Target, Meijer, Home Depot, and grocery stores such as Kroger—and small, independent stores and markets. In this paper, I focus on purchasing decisions made in the former, where most participants did the majority of their shopping. I coded the orientation toward shopping of each participant as: 1) *negative* if shopping in such venues was explicitly described as burdensome or unenjoyable due to time constraints or other reasons; 2) *neutral* if participants did not reference time constraints or characterize shopping as unenjoyable for other reasons; 3) *bargain-centered* if great pleasure was taken in searching out

sales and bargains[7]; 4) *positive* if participants took pleasure in shopping for reasons other than bargain-hunting, such as reading labels, comparing ingredients, and interacting with salespeople. I also coded participants as making socially responsible purchasing decisions, while shopping in large, non-independent stores, either *never or rarely* (once or twice a year), *infrequently* (more than once or twice a year, but during less than half of all shopping trips), or *regularly* (during most shopping trips). As I am interested in participants' purchasing decisions, Table 2.3 (below) excludes individuals who indicated that they personally did little or none of the grocery shopping for the household, which I treated as a proxy for doing little of the everyday household shopping in general.

[Table 2.3 about here]

The correlation between socially responsible purchasing and how purchasing activities are experienced supports—or at least does not contradict—the thesis of this paper. No one with a negative orientation towards shopping, versus 19 percent those who were neutral towards shopping and 40 percent of those who enjoyed shopping for reasons other than bargain-hunting, regularly incorporated concerns for social and environmental problems into purchasing decisions.[8] By itself, however, this correlation cannot speak to the question of causality. It is

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[7] Unsurprisingly, nearly everyone in the study mentioned that they like to save money. But for a small minority of participants, the joy of searching out sales had turned shopping itself into a recreational activity.

[8] The 72% whom I coded as "never or rarely" practicing socially responsible purchasing is larger than the 62% who, according the pre-interview survey, "never" or "once or twice" bought products for ethical or political reasons during the past year. Two reasons explain this discrepancy. First, during interviews, it became clear that some respondents had overestimated—unintentionally or intentionally—the number of times they made socially responsible purchases, and my coding reflects this. Second, some of the people who gave, in the survey, a relatively high frequency of socially responsible purchasing, had in mind their efforts to patronize local businesses—a practice which is understudied in the literature on socially responsible purchasing. In this paper, however, I am primarily interested in factors affecting the buying of socially

possible that some people enjoy shopping more *because* they buy socially responsible products—for instance, because venues such as Whole Foods Market are relatively luxurious (Johnston and Szabo 2010)—as opposed to the other way around. In the rest of this section, I seek to show that people's orientations towards shopping *precede*, in many ways, their practices regarding socially responsible purchasing. I do this by first unpacking the mindsets and practices of seven cases from the group of participants who both expressed a negative orientation towards shopping and either never or rarely incorporated social or environmental concerns into purchasing decisions. Then, I do the same for two participants who both had a neutral or positive orientation to shopping and were committed socially responsible consumers.

4.2. Instrumental Shopping: "Hurry Up to Wait"

For many participants, the meanings and experiences associated with an instrumental orientation to purchasing activities contributed to an overall reluctance, resistance, and in some cases hostility to incorporating concerns about social and environmental problems into purchasing decisions. Beatrice, like many in the conservative activist community of West Plum in Jefferson County, is fiercely committed to the idea of supporting Michigan businesses and keeping American jobs from going overseas. Answering the pre-interview survey, Beatrice, a librarian married to a Chrysler engineer[9], could not contain her extemporaneous comments when the subject of buying American came up.

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responsible products during regular shopping trips to the large, non-independent stores where most people do the majority of their shopping.

[9] Participants are white unless otherwise noted; there were only five non-whites in the sample.

> Buying things made in America? Oh, that would be a 10 [out of 10]. Yep, yep, and it pisses me off that there's so many things that you can't find that are built in America anymore. You know, and now they're screwing farmers, and I don't know what's gonna happen. If you get rid of the farmers, you might as well say goodbye to the plains. Because there are investors from Japan, China, wherever, that are buying land out west. The problem is, they don't properly take care of it. And as a result, all of the topsoil is blowing away, and it's terrible for the land.

Beatrice's comments to me were echoed in emails that she sent out to friends, exhorting them to remember to buy American "in order to do my little part and try and save this country!" In practice, however, Beatrice's firm convictions and best intentions run up against a considerable roadblock: her equally deep-seated—if largely unspoken, and even unconscious—understanding of shopping, whether for food, clothing, or household goods, as a stressful waste of time. Like most study participants, Beatrice did not explicitly draw a direct line between her attitude towards shopping in general and her practice—or usual lack thereof—of socially responsible purchasing. But, as with many participants, her responses to questions about socially responsible purchasing led to unprompted ruminations on how she approaches, in general, buying food and household necessities. These ruminations suggest that Beatrice's antipathy toward spending time in the store—despite the fact that she is the household's primary shopper—is part of what makes it difficult for her to practice a sustained search for American-made, Michigan-made, or environmentally-friendly products.

> *Interviewer:* For that question about whether you ever buy things for political reasons, I was just curious, what did you mean when you said that you wouldn't ever buy something just because someone told you to do it? What did you have in mind?

> *Beatrice:* Well, I mean, I'd have to have more than one—I'd have to have a whole helluva lot of people tell me, you know, well, like, ah, what's his name, like Al Gore says "this is important to the world, that you gotta buy this kind", or somebody says, "oh, well, you gotta read all the fine print on the back, because you know, yadda yadda yadda" and I'm like, well, I'm sure glad you got all that time in your life to be doing all that crap, uh, no, I don't, I go, I get it done, and I'm done. And I'm outa there. And I make a list, and I put the list in geographical direction, and if you aren't on the list that day, oh well! [laughs] You don't get done! Because I just don't have the time to, I got too much work on my desk that is waaaaaaay behind.

In addition to her part-time job at a county library branch, Beatrice maintains an active schedule of volunteering and charity work—in this, she is following the example of her father, who spent most of his career in public service. In fact, Beatrice's distaste for shopping, as she reckons it, stems from the way in which she and her sister ended up being raised primarily by different parents—and the priorities that were passed down to her from her busy, patriotic father.

> Yeah, um, I've just never been a shopper! I mean, you know, my mother and my sister could go in the mall at nine in the morning, come about at nine at night, not have bought a damn thing. Dad and I, we'd go to the store, get what we needed, and we're out and we're done—that was that! … That's was Dad's theory of shopping, you know: you go in, you buy what you want, and you leave.

Down to this day, "get in and get out" describes Beatrice's approach to buying what she needs. Beatrice is, at the level of abstract opinion, deeply bothered by foreign intrusions into American industry and agriculture, and she fits the profile of the average socially responsible consumer: politically active, college educated, upper-middle class. But the idea of being a "shopper" like

her mother and sister—someone who devotes a great deal of energy to purchasing activities, whether socially responsible or not—is simply anathema to her conception of how she ought to be spending her time.

The relationship between an instrumental attitude towards shopping and the expression of concern for social or environmental problems also plays a role in the purchasing practices of Jennifer—like Beatrice, a conservative activist in Jefferson County. A married mother in her 40s, Jennifer supplements her husband's construction income by working as a home health aid in the county seat of Danville. There are few things more important to Jennifer than being able to enjoy nature. Her survey responses indicated significant concern for water pollution and the loss of biodiversity and open space around the world (an unusual series of answers for self-identified conservatives in my study), and when I asked her to elaborate, her voice dropped to a whisper as she related trips to the woods when she was growing up and the joy of communing with the outdoors. Through her political work, Jennifer has also been encouraged to run for local office, and a main problem with current town government, as she sees it, is that "they don't have anything green going on": "sometimes builders, or people who are having homes built or doing any kind of projects, if they want to do it the green way, they don't have the information there, you know, about what kind of inspections or permits they need, and there should be more of that."

Despite her desire to "do the green thing", and her survey responses that it is "somewhat important" to buy products that are good for the environment and "very important" to buy products that are made or grown in America or Michigan, Jennifer rarely, in practice, incorporates these views into her purchasing decisions. Many of the factors commonly cited in survey-based research on socially responsible consumption are relevant to Jennifer's situation:

she and her husband collectively make about $50,000, and environmental responsibility is not central to the business strategy of the stores—such as Walmart and Meijer (a Walmart competitor in the Midwest)—where she does most of her shopping. But energy-efficient, recycled, and organic products, as well as local produce and American-made goods of various kinds, are available where Jennifer shops, and a full account of why she not only does not buy them, but also did not talk about the possibility, occasionally or at some point in the future, of devoting time and energy to searching them out, benefits from understanding how she feels about shopping in general.

> *Interviewer:* When we were talking about buying things for ethical reasons, you mentioned that you don't like shopping at Walmart. Could you say a little more about that? You kind of backed off it.
>
> *Jennifer:* Well, I go to Walmart because things are cheap there, and I'll always look for a bargain. But the people that are there are, I don't know where they come from or why they gravitate there, but every time we're there, and we don't do this as being snooty or anything—if you just look around though, every once in a while you'll see someone who is just normal; they look clean and fresh and, you know, hair's brushed … But the majority of the store, they look like they haven't had a bath or they haven't washed their hair or they don't brush their teeth, or they've been wearing the same tennis shoes for ten years, and it's like, why does Walmart attract people like this?! … And bad kids, running through the store, knocking produce off … and here comes their mothers around the corner with the cart overflowing, food falling all over the floor, and they're chewing their gum with their mouth open and they're yellin "quit it or I'm gonna beat your aaaassssss!" I'm like, oh my god! Standing in line, that's always, you know, entertainment too … And

> people make fun of me because I go to Walmart, and I never run into anyone I know in there. I think I'm the only Republican that shops there.

For Beatrice, the most salient thing about being a consumer is that her father would not deign to do it; for Jennifer, shopping bring her face-to-face with people whom she finds unsavory and even gross. Jennifer's description of her shopping trips could not be more different from those recounted in studies that emphasize the upscale, enchanting, and wonderland-like experience of being an environmentally-conscious consumer at farm-to-table restaurants and natural foods stores (Guthman 2003; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Johnston and Szabo 2010). Studies such as these make the point that part of buying socially responsible products is the enjoyability of the experience and perhaps a satisfying sense of moral superiority. The case of Jennifer suggests that the opposite may also be true: that an unpleasant shopping experience may reduce the propensity for people with concerns about social and environmental problems to make the investments in time and energy necessary to express their concerns as consumers. Indeed, when I asked Jennifer whether her passion for nature might ever lead her to buy environmentally-friendly products, her answer revealed that, even with greater means at her disposal, changing her actions as a consumer would likely not be part of her personal strategy for "going green."

> Mmmm… I'd like to, but unfortunately it costs too much … But oh, I would be green! I would, I would do—if I didn't live in this scenario, here in this county, and do what I do, my other alternative would be to live in the middle of the wilderness somewhere, and have a stream running through, and drink the water from it. And live off the land. And have some chickens, and um, you know, go into town every now and then and get the things you need, and get snowed in, and you know use the fireplace to heat your cabin. And um, [whispering] I would love that. Absolutely love that.

For Jennifer, "being green" means leaving the world behind—including being a consumer and all of its stresses and humiliations. In real life, one has to suffer through Walmart, where "no other Republican" shops. In her dreams, Jennifer would be able to live off the land, making and growing herself what she needs, and reduce to almost nothing the role of shopping in her life.

Phillip and Heather, while not active in local political groups, share Jennifer's love and concern for nature. And like Jennifer, their sense of shopping as a rushed and purely instrumental activity presents an impediment to the possibility of their concern for environmental problems finding expression through purchasing decisions. Phillip was a troublemaker in high school, but joining the Navy was the best thing that ever happened to him; after leaving the service with an honorable discharge, he worked in corrections and security and hopes to become a police officer soon. Serving in the military also convinced Phillip of the importance of keeping up on current events; he keeps the TV tuned to CNN in the mornings, and has been active in conservation groups such as Ducks Unlimited.

> Absolutely, I'm a nature lover. I love being out there. There was a—right now in Michigan, the one thing that I wish they would, the environmentalists would bring back, is more land. You know, you can only build so many subdivisions in an area before you just get wiped out. They keep taking all these farmlands … I mean, in order for my kids to grow up and have the opportunity to go duck hunting, to go pheasant hunting, to go squirrel hunting, you know, that's why I joined the groups and I do, is to help conserve what we have right now for my kids to be able to grow up and go.

In addition to his interest in conservation, Phillip feels strongly about using his purchasing power to support the local economy; his time overseas convinced him that the U.S. would become like Bahrain or Dubai if we put all our money into big government projects, and fail to support small

businesses. Heather, for her part, moved to Adams County from Florida, where growing up on her family's farm taught her the importance of being close to nature—values that she works to impart to her two daughters through afterschool environmental education, park cleanups, camping trips, and other "green" activities in her "fast-paced" new home.

Despite Phillip's and Heather's commitments to environmental protection, their liberal political outlook, and survey responses indicating high regard for environmentally-friendly, American-made, and Michigan-made products, neither buys such products with any regularity or discussed their stated desire to do so during the interview. But nor did Phillip or Heather express skepticism that these products might actually have the effects that they promise. Rather, both conveyed that the nature of shopping was such that they simply had little time or space to reflect on how they might be able to address social or environmental problems while hustling through a burdensome series of tasks.

> *Interviewer:* When you're at Meijer or Walmart, some of the stores you shop at, do those stores make an effort to have green products or locally-produced goods or "made in the USA"—have you noticed that they have that thing?
>
> *Phillip:* No, I haven't. And I really don't know, to be honest with you. I really don't because I haven't looked, I haven't bothered, you know, to take time off to notice. You know, everything seems to be in a rush nowadays. Everybody's in a hurry to get stuff and then go somewhere else. Hurry up to wait, you know. Hurry up to wait.
>
> *Interviewer:* What brought that kind of thought to mind when you talk about those stores: "hurry up to wait?"
>
> *Phillip:* This is what it is. You hurry up to get all your shopping done, but you're standing in line waiting to check out. The one that gets in and gets out as fast as possible,

but you know I got eight people ahead of me on this line and got you know, four ahead of me on this line. You know, basically you're hurrying to get through all your shopping to get it done and get out of the store, but you got to wait. Just hurry up to wait. You know, so—It's crazy sometimes, you know. I don't know, it's just nothing I really thought about [pauses].

Interviewer: What else is coming to mind right there?

Phillip: Oh, I—it's just you know, when you wander around the stores and you're lookin' and watching people—and people-watch … And it's just everybody you know, somebody's always saying, "come on, we got to go, we got to go," "we got to be here, we got to do this, we got to get this done." You know, and you look and when you get in line and the same people are standing here in line waiting with you.

Interviewer: Right.

Phillip: You know, so and that's what it is. That's all it is. Just a big rush to go nowhere. You know. Maybe if we all slow down and we took our time and looked, you know, paid attention to what was going on around us and saw all those happenings, maybe we wouldn't even be in half the predicament we're in, I guess. I don't know.

Phillip captures the essence of instrumental shopping: everyone in a hurry, without necessarily knowing why. Even as he acknowledges that he does not "take time off to notice" the provenance of what he buys, he cannot put his finger on *why* he does not pause and think about where products come from, when he is in the process of buying them—except that this is how he and everyone else does it. For Heather, currently waiting tables while her husband looks for work, the lack of a sense of social or environmental responsibility in her current way of shopping stands out especially when compared to her upbringing in Florida, where, in her recounting,

bartering and “keeping it local” was part of how community members supported each other. Since moving to Michigan and getting used to buying things at supermarkets and big-box stores, she feels that her shopping is so fast-paced that she has literally forgotten the moral qualities of purchasing practices that used to be second nature.

> *Interviewer:* You mentioned that it was really nice because you would slaughter your own food, and so you knew exactly where it came from … How do you feel about the way you get food up here in comparison to that?
>
> *Heather:* It’s fine. But it’s just not the same to go to the store, you buy and you look at the meat, but you really don’t think about where it came from and what they had to do. I watched a fast-food movie about how they do the chickens and it’s like a million chickens in this one coop and they just go in there and they give them all these chemicals so they grow faster. And they show you how chickens are supposed to grow and how they make animals grow these days just for food. So when you go to the grocery store, you don’t really think about that stuff, unless you watched this video and they show you how to do it. So, it’s really outside of my mind; you don’t think about that kind of stuff, just go to the grocery store and buy it and it’s done.
>
> *Interviewer:* Mm-hmm. Have there ever been times when you feel like you have been able to know what was in your food, like a little bit better, or worried where this food is coming from or what was in it? In terms of what the store was able to tell you or the packaging or something like that?
>
> *Heather:* No. No, not really. Not up here … Up here it’s more fend for yourself kind of, and everyone looks out for themselves; fast-paced, let’s hurry up and get here, get home. At home, it’s very slow—it’s fast up here, so.

There are many reasons why Heather might not buy environmentally-friendly or locally-sourced goods; she and her husband are struggling to get by, with a young daughter to support. But it is significant that during our conversation she did not once cite the cost or question the claims of foods that market themselves as sustainable. Rather, she expressed a kind of wonder that, since unconsciously adopting a "buy it and it's done" approach to shopping, her environmental commitments are simply "outside of my mind"—even having just watched a documentary on industrial farming practices. She does not, during trips to the grocery store, regret not being able to express her concern for environmental problems, because her newly instrumental approach to shopping has no room for that kind of thinking.

The case of Eric, a high school teacher in Mercer County, shows that antipathy towards shopping can be as much ideological as experiential, but that the consequences can be similar. Eric discovered politics in the 1960s, when "everyone was a hippie a bit, you know? And it was sort of anti-consumerism, a lot of it." Having lived in Lincoln, the county's population center, since graduating from an area college, he often speaks on environmental issues in front of city and county boards and writes elected officials. But his association of consumption with consumerism has not waned, and, so far, has left him cold to the idea of making shopping a venue for political action.

> *Interviewer:* In addition to things like going to protests and writing elected officials, when you're shopping for things, spending money, do you find yourself thinking about how purchases are going to affect the environment or support different causes?
>
> *Eric:* Um, to a degree, but it's not a main focus of mine. I'm pretty much a vegetarian. So, you know, I wouldn't, I don't know when's the last time I purchased a steak was …

But, as far as, I would probably not buy stuff from China, if there were stuff not from China [laughs].

Eric went on to mention the farmers market in Lincoln, but his tone was removed and abstract—he had heard of it through a friend, but had not visited it himself, and was not sure how well it was doing. Given his commitment to environmental politics, I was surprised that he did not have more to say about green purchasing (Eric was one of my first interviews, and also a relatively laconic person), and so, several minutes later, I raised the topic again.

Interviewer: Do you ever sort of notice what other people are buying in terms of their groceries or their clothing or things like that, whether it's one of those kinds of [ethical or green] products?

Eric. [interrupts] I am not a big consumer, myself. Um, but, well, I notice it. For example, if McDonalds comes out and says that their, the eggs that they're putting on the Egg McMuffin, have been collected in some sort of certified egg farm, I mean, I don't know how much different that is, but it's a little bit better, you know, for the chicken … So yeah, I think that, um, that sort of purchase power can have an effect.

Eric's example was a hypothetical one: he could not think of a recent time when he had actually bought something out of concern for social or environmental problems. In large part, this is because decisions around food shopping, as well as other kinds of shopping, are not ones that he, personally, often has to make: his partner, he told me, was "probably shopping right now. Anything to do with the kitchen, it's him. It's his domain."

Eric's lack of enthusiasm for socially responsible purchasing does not mean that he has not thought about the social or environmental impacts of what he eats and buys. Rather, Eric's preference for the bonhomie and excitement of activist groups, compared to the superficiality

and blandness of the grocery store or shopping center, is indicative of how the experience of shopping as a means to an end, even for a person who is politically relatively active, can constrain the opportunities for purchasing to become a central venue for political action. Eric’s solution to his distaste for shopping is simply to stay out of stores: he rarely buys anything new, his partner does the majority of the food shopping, he does not have children, and, to the extent that his consumption is socially responsible, it is largely through *avoidance* of shopping in general, as opposed to a deliberative embrace of certain products over others. As he put it in an email to me later (I had sent him a couple of follow-up questions after our interview):

> Well, now that you mention it, I do approach purchasing merchandise with a certain activist perspective … I think the biggest decision about purchases for me would be becoming a vegetarian, as not only is a meat free diet healthier, it contributes much less pollution. I would not ever buy a Hummer, and probably would not buy a new internal combustion powered vehicle. I haven't bought anything at McDonald's in years, and I try to avoid purchasing items fabricated in China, mainly because of the Chinese government's human rights record.

All of the examples that Eric gives of an “activist perspective” in shopping are *negative* examples: *not buying things* is Eric’s way of being a socially responsible consumer. But other people—such as Beatrice, Jennifer, Phillip, and Heather—do not have the option of avoiding purchasing activities in the same way. Their solution to the qualities of shopping that make it an instrumental activity, the same qualities that bother Eric, is simply to get it over with as soon as possible—an outcome whose consequences for social and environmental responsibility have already been discussed.

Eric's remark about his partner having responsibility for shopping and cooking, like Beatrice's memories of her father, hints at a further dynamic: the prominent role of ideas of gender roles in several participants' explanations for why they do not practice socially responsible purchasing. In these discussions, the sense of shopping as a purely instrumental activity, and therefore as something not suited to be a regular vehicle for ethical or political expression, was related to the idea that taking time in the store to read labels and ponder differences between products is a feminine tendency, and not appropriate for someone with more serious things to do. Jack, an information technology supervisor in Mercer county, admitted that he has no patience for searching the shelves of Meijer or Kroger (a Midwest grocery chain) for American-made or environmentally-friendly goods or local produce—all things that he would like to buy. His wife, he said, though a professional like himself, was just better at that kind of thing.

> *Jack:* She's very um, creative and she goes around to, you know, craft shows and stuff like that. That's truly American, you know because you can see the people that made it. Um, she's probably better wired into that than me, but she's more of a—she enjoys shopping, you know. I don't—like I don't know how to describe it to you.
>
> *Interviewer:* … What do you think she enjoys about it that you don't?
>
> *Jack:* I don't know. I think it—this is probably a sexist remark, but I think females have more of a connection to shopping than—I don't know, I don't know really … If you sent an email that said that you and your wife started a new brew pub over here in town, why I'd be happy to go and "let's go try it"—I would be excited about that. But I wouldn't—to go to a men's clothing store that just opened, it would mean nothing to me.

Like Jack, Greg, a machine operator and union steward in Lincoln, attributed qualities to his wife that, in his view, made it easier for her to act on their shared commitment to American-made and locally-produced goods. Several times during our conversation, he mentioned that his wife was very into buying American, and that she had recently bought a book on the subject. He, on the other hand, had little patience for that kind of thing, despite his worries over the fate of unions and the Lincoln economy.

> *Interviewer:* It seems for you that the place to give back to your community … is not with your shopping. Where it seems like your wife thinks more that shopping is the place to do some of that giving. Does that seem right?
>
> *Greg:* I don't like to go to the store when there're a lot of people there. I just, I think a lot of people just—women especially, their cart is sideways, nobody can get in and around them, you know, or they stand there and my wife is one of these—starts gabbing and you know, right in the middle of what you're trying to do, you know. And just—I don't like that. I'm there for a purpose. Get it done, and get out.
>
> *Interviewer:* Right.
>
> *Greg:* Um, that's why we don't shop together. No, really I'm serious. [laughs] So when you ask me that question about shopping, we don't do it very much … And I know we turned some ears before because she's like you said, she's one of these shoppers; she picks it up and looks at it all over and blah blah. Me, I'm like: let's go!

Greg's wife, a "gabby" woman, is one of those shoppers who likes to "pick up" a product and "look at it all over"—a physical manifestation of what he sees as her more reflexive approach to purchasing. Greg, on the other hand, considers shopping a waste of time—even shopping for a good cause; if he is going to make a difference for union workers and American businesses, he

will do it by actually being active in his union, and not by spending time in the store. For Jack and Greg, among others in the study, views concerning gender-based differences in orientation to shopping—men are instrumental, while women are not—are linked to why, as men, they rarely try to address social or environmental problems through purchasing decisions.

4.2. The Dog that Doesn't Bark: When Shopping is Not a Burden

None of the 26 study participants who found everyday shopping to be a fundamentally time-constrained and unenjoyable activity was also a regular socially responsible consumer, and my argument so far has been that these two characteristics are related. Regular socially responsible consumers in my study were a subset of the 31 people who either did not associate negative experiences or meanings with shopping in large, non-independent stores, or found enjoyable elements in this kind of shopping (see Table 2.3). The disproportionate presence of socially responsible consumers in this group makes sense in light of the thesis outlined above: the costs in time, energy, and emotional investment of socially responsible purchasing may be less onerous for people who do not have an explicitly *negative*—that is, mainly instrumental—orientation towards shopping,

For Thomas and Donna, activities associated with unpacking complex situations and applying hard-won knowledge are some of life's great pleasures. To the extent that deciding what to buy and where to shop falls into the category of a puzzle to be solved, socially responsible purchasing acquires the feel of a game that is both difficult to play and satisfying for just this reason. Thomas met me for his afternoon interview with a New York Times still sheathed in blue plastic under his arm. He had been a voracious reader ever since he was four years old and discovered the geography section of the library, he told me, and he could not go a

day without reading his newspaper. As we discussed his encounters with political and social unrest in college in the 1970s, he described once joining a picket line as an effort to understand the world, as much as to change it:

> Looking back at it, I guess I thought of it as more of an intellectual thing as opposed to a social justice thing. And it wasn't that I didn't believe in the social justice. It's just that what really got my mind thinking was the, you know, the intellectual aspect of: what is going on here? And that really was what drove me.

After he graduated, Thomas put protests behind him; for 25 years, he jumped between insurance firms in the Detroit area, gradually wearing himself out. If he had not been so good at his job, he told me, he would have quit a lot sooner; his brain is like a "filing system" for random information.

Like Thomas, Donna, a guidance counselor in the Mercer County school system, attributes many of her choices in life to the pleasure of learning new things. A journalism minor in college, Donna's lifelong love of history has led her to participate in reenactments of periods as diverse as the Civil War and medieval England. When explaining her involvement with town government in Lincoln, where she frequent attends board meetings and volunteers for the Historical Preservation Commission, Donna spoke enthusiastically of the opportunity to become better informed about her community.

Though both Thomas and Donna regularly make purchases based on concerns for social and environmental problems, neither expressed a great love for shopping for food and household goods. But when they talked about what shopping in large, non-independent stores was like for them, their discourse was free of the vitriol that accompanied that of so many participants in this study. Instead, they offered matter-of-fact descriptions of the process of sorting through the

provenance and claims of products on the shelves at Costco, Meier, and other big stores.

> *Thomas:* When I go out and buy things, I always look at where they're made. For a long time I've looked for made in America, because this whole idea that … we don't need to make anything is the dumbest thing I've heard.
>
> *Interviewer:* Can you give me some examples?
>
> *Thomas:* I shop at Costco for some things—not everything, but some things—and one of the things that I've been thinking about is, how do I tell Costco that I want them to carry more American stuff. And how do I tell them that I want to see labels so I can tell that it's American stuff. Like, I would buy paper for printing or whatever, and I would either buy it at Costco or at Office Depot. I had this experience that I bought a case of paper, and it was from Georgia Pacific, and I'd known them as a company and didn't think much of it—sometimes they had Georgia Pacific, sometimes Boise Cascade, sometimes International Paper—but suddenly I was reading something someplace and it was talking about the Koch brothers and … in the last few years they had brought Georgia Pacific. And it was sort of like, oh my god, how did I dare buy their paper! I will never do that again … [Or] when I bought wastebaskets for the office, and I bought a lot of them, I actually looked at them to see that I bought American-made ones.

In light of the negative experiences and meanings that many study participants associated with purchasing activities, Thomas's description of his shopping is unusual for what it lacks. Rather than feeling that a big-box store like Costco is stressful and hectic, Thomas simply relates taking time to look for place-of-origin labels. Rather than feeling driven to buy what is nearest at hand and leave, Thomas pauses to notice the different brands of paper that Costco carries. Many people that I interviewed shared Thomas' concern for the American economy, and his conviction

that Americans need to start building things again. But far fewer talked about shopping in a way that made it seem that turning over products to look at stickers, or thinking about the name on the front of the paper package, was just no big deal.

> *Interviewer:* When you were talking about these decisions [about what products are socially responsible] being complicated, that didn't seem like an unpleasant word.
>
> *Thomas:* Yes. Complicated can be ordinary. As in just, it's just one more thing to work through. I mean it's, it's no, you sit down and you say, well gee whiz I need to, I need to do this, and I look at this or that and I, you know, I guess you just learn to navigate it, I guess … So maybe it's just something that I do.

The dog that did not bark in my discussion with Thomas—the stress, unease, and dismissiveness that many participants conveyed in talking about their experience of shopping—was also silent with Donna.

> *Donna:* I'll try to find something that says 'made in the USA', if possible, because it is important to support American jobs … That's also another reason why, I was reading something that said if you spend 35 dollars a week, something like that, on Michigan-made products, it puts some huge monthly or million-dollar figure into circulation in the state's economy. And so I try to buy as much Michigan stuff as I can.
>
> *Interviewer:* Can you say a little bit about how you find those kinds of goods? What kinds of things do you do?
>
> *Donna:* You know, when I go to Meijer—well first off, I've been a big Meijer shopper for years. My parents went to one of the first ones, so, they have a real tradition. And in fact, I continued that. When I was living in Ohio, I would drive back past millions of Krogers, 'cause Kroger is based in Ohio, and I would drive past all these millions of

Krogers stores to get to the Meijer. But um, Meijer's is good about labeling things that are made in Michigan, you know, Michigan apples, Michigan potatoes, um, that kind of stuff, it's just, you look at the, the brands, it usually says where it's from … and it's like, yeah, so it's just, you just kinda, it doesn't take but a moment to look at the label, cause it's supposed to be on there. I buy, you know, Kogel, Vienna's, and Kowalski, cause those are names that I know—they're meat companies in Detroit, and they've been around for years and years, and they're local, Michigan.

Interviewer: Did it take a while to build up this sort of knowledge base? It sounds like you have a pretty good grasp of where things are made.

Donna: Um, maybe a little bit, yeah, and I was really disappointed to hear now that … anything that's Georgia Pacific you have to stay away from. So it's like, my Northern TP! But fortunately, by the time I had to give those up, Meier's had already come out with a recycled toilet paper, so [laughs] … So, um, I don't know. I mean, like the cheese that's made up in Saginaw—it's just these little, ah, I guess, after a while of looking. Like you say, after a while you accumulate a database. [laughs]

In describing her practices during the kinds of purchasing activities that many participants found practically unbearable, Donna does not mention stress, crowds, or hurrying. In fact, everyday shopping, as with Thomas, is something to which she does not mind devoting extra time, whether that entails driving extra miles to shop at the Michigan-based Meier chain, instead of Kroger, or taking “but a moment” to look at labels on cheese, meats and toiletries. Over time, she has built up “a database” of Michigan brands, but that database is the product of innumerable individual moments of reflection, label-reading, and searching.

Several explanations might be ventured for the relatively unusual behavior of Thomas and Donna, as well as that of other participants who regularly bought products at large, non-independent stores based on social and environmental concerns. One explanation might be that regular socially responsible consumers are simply especially concerned about social and environmental problems. Other explanations could focus on income and education, and thus on the ability of people such as Thomas and Donna to better afford and evaluate the claims of socially responsible products. The relatively small size of my sample precludes systematic tests of these alternative hypotheses, but descriptive statistics can be observed. On average, study participants who never, rarely or infrequently made socially-responsible purchases considered buying American and Michigan-made products to be comparably important, according to the pre-interview survey, as those who regularly incorporated their concerns into purchasing decisions; 70 percent of participants who never, rarely or infrequently made socially-responsible purchases also considered buying environmentally-friendly products to be "somewhat" or "very" important. The income and average education level of regular socially responsible consumers in my study were indeed slightly higher than that of infrequent and non-practitioners of socially responsible purchasing. But I am not, in this paper, suggesting that socioeconomic resources are unimportant factors in socially responsible purchasing. Rather, models based solely on socioeconomic resources—as discussed earlier—leave significant variation in socially responsible purchasing unexplained. In building new theory to account for this unexplained variation, this paper provides support for the idea that meanings and experiences associated with purchasing activities in general affect socially responsible purchasing by modifying the costs, in time, energy, and emotional investment, associated with it. Explanations that incorporate meaning and experience are thus not mutually exclusive of those based solely on socioeconomic

resources or levels of concern; all of these factors together likely explain more of the variation in socially responsible purchasing than any one factor could on its own.

5. Conclusion

For social movements, a large part of the appeal of socially responsible purchasing as a strategy for addressing social and environmental problems is the fact that, as Thomas says, “the complicated can be ordinary” (Jones 2006; Mayo 2005). Unlike voting, volunteering for community groups, and attending protests and political functions, shopping is something that nearly everybody does as part of everyday life. Socially responsible purchasing requires that a normal activity—buying products for personal and household use—be turned to special ends. Obstacles to this process have been widely acknowledged to include the cost, availability, and difficulty in obtaining information regarding socially responsible products. The findings of this paper suggest, however, that everyday shopping, while a normal activity for most people, is not necessarily one on which people want to spend more time than absolutely necessary. The disparaged role of shopping in people’s lives represents a further impediment to socially responsible purchasing that has not been adequately theorized or explored in existing research.

With notable exceptions (Eliasoph 1998), qualitative research regarding political and civic activity has focused on explaining why organizations and individuals *do* certain things, such as protest, join community groups, or buy socially responsible products. This paper, however, suggests that cultural factors are as salient to explaining political *inaction*, as to understanding why political action, when it does occur, takes different forms and enjoys varying degrees of “success.” According to Eliasoph (ibid.), political apathy is rooted in a “civic

etiquette" that discourages engagement with serious issues in "frontstage" social situations. Similarly, for the people who participated in my study, the gap between what their social and environmental concerns inclined them to want to buy, and what they actually bought on a regular basis, was connected to what it felt like, at a visceral level, to be engaged in the social practice of purchasing and to occupy, at specific places and times, the social role of the consumer. When they did not "buy their beliefs," which was most of the time, this was in part because to do so would have been to violate notions both widely shared and deeply personal of what shopping should include, how much time it should take, and how it should feel.

The relevance to socially responsible purchasing of meanings and experiences associated with shopping in general raises questions about the present and future role of purchasing activities in social movements. As noted above, theorists such as Adorno, Baudrillard, Bauman and others have suggested that the seductiveness of consumer culture presents a grave threat to democratic life, by distracting people from pressing social and environmental problems. But the opposite may also be true: many people are not seduced at all by everyday purchasing activities, and it is precisely the *unappealing* nature of much shopping that detracts from the otherwise significant potential of purchasing decisions for effecting social and environmental change. Reducing the concern-action gap may thus require more than better labels and lower prices—though these measures are clearly important. In order for socially responsible purchasing to live up to its oft-cited potential as a market-based force for social change (Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005; Jaffee 2007), the very experience of being a consumer may have to be different: instead of hectic, slow; instead of stressful, enjoyable; instead of anonymous, relational. In this paper, I have focused on shopping in the venues where most people do the majority of their shopping: large, non-independent stores. It may be that other types of venues—such as smaller,

independent markets and stores—involve an experience of shopping that is more conducive to socially responsible purchasing; venues of this kind have recently been associated with "downshifting" and "buy local" movements (De Young and Princen 2012; Schor 2010). This hypothesis might be explored in future research.

There are several other areas where the present study highlights the need for further inquiry. First, *why* do people experience everyday shopping differently, and are these different experiences themselves connected with socioeconomic class, household characteristics such as family size, or geographical characteristics such as distance from stores? People who work particularly long hours, for instance, or face demanding family responsibilities, may find shopping more stressful than those whose time is less constrained by exogenous factors. Developing theory on who is likely to experience shopping, in different kinds of venues, in a way that is conducive to socially responsible purchasing, would continue to shed light on the potential for purchasing as a social movement strategy. Second, in what direction does the arrow of causality run—or does it run in both directions? Do people become regular socially responsible consumers because a relatively less instrumental orientation towards purchasing activities affords them, on average, greater time and energy to focus on shopping in general? Or does shopping become more enjoyable, or at least less onerous, when it is pursued, from time to time, with ethical or political goals in mind? My data suggest that, in many cases, instrumental orientations toward shopping are rooted in a long history of experiences in various stores, the attitudes of one's parents, and ideas about gender roles, among other sources, that cannot be reduced to whether one buys socially responsible products or not. But it is certainly possible that orientations toward shopping and an openness to socially responsible purchasing might share a

dialectical relationship, with developments in either area contributing to developments in the other.

Finally, future work on the relationship of meanings and experiences associated with purchasing activities in general to socially responsible purchasing ought to make use of quantitative as well as qualitative data. This paper is largely devoted to building theory and generating hypotheses. Data from surveys or controlled experiments might be used to test these hypotheses in a systematic way.

As multinational corporations have grown in influence, and as governments have stepped away from regulatory roles, policymakers, advocates and many academics have called on individuals to imbue ostensibly "personal" behaviors with public purpose. From free-trade coffee to hybrid cars to the union label, few such areas of personal life have drawn more attention than decisions about what to buy and where to shop. But the persistence of the concern-action gap in socially responsible purchasing raises questions about the potential for individuals, in their capacities as consumers, to effect social change. Research that situates socially responsible purchasing in people's everyday lives and routines, by contributing to understanding of the conditions under which social and environmental concerns motivate concrete action in the economic realm, is critical to understanding the role that purchasing activities have played, and may continue to play, in social movements regarding a range of pressing issues.

Table 2.1. Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency	Percent*	Mean	S.D.
Age (N=70)			55.18	12.71
Sex (N=71)				
Female	39	55		
Male	32	45		
Annual Household Income, $ (N=57)			67,736	42,161
Less than 25,000	10	14		
25,000 to 49,999	16	23		
50,000 to 74,999	5	7		
75,000 to 99,999	14	20		
100,000 to 149,999	10	14		
More than 150,000	16	23		
Highest Level of Education (N=71)				
Less than high school	1	1		
High School Diploma	6	8		
Some college	18	26		
Associates Degree	4	6		
Bachelor Degree	21	30		
Graduate Degree	20	28		
Buying Products for Ethical or Political Reasons in the last 12 months? (N=69)				
Never	27	39		
Once or twice	16	23		
Three to six times	10	14		
More than seven times	16	23		
Boycotting Products for Ethical or Political Reasons in the last 12 months? (N=70)				
Never	31	44		
Once or twice	16	23		
Three to six times	7	10		
More than seven times	16	23		
Race (N = 71)				
White	65	92		
Non-White	6	8		
Political Ideology, 1-10 scale (N=65)			4.86	2.76
Liberal (1-3)	26	40		
Moderate (4-7)	25	38		
Conservative (8-10)	14	22		
Political Engagement (N=71)				
Activist	25	35		
Frequent Voter (≥ 3 elections since 2002)	33	46		
Infrequent Voter (< 3 elections since 2002)	13	18		

*May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 2.2. Attitudes Regarding Socially Responsible Purchasing

Importance of buying things that are:*	Mean	S.D.
Made or grown in America (N=70)	3.39	.69
Made or grown in Michigan (N=69)	3.28	.76
Products and services from businesses in your community (N=70)	3.24	.82
Good for the environment (N=70)	3.07	.94
Good for workers, like union members or farmers (N=68)	2.88	.94

*On a scale from 1-4, where 1="not at all important" and 4="very important."

Table 2.3. Socially Responsible Purchasing and Orientations Towards Shopping

	Socially Responsible Purchasing in Large, Non-Independent Stores			
Orientation Towards Shopping	Never or Rarely	Infrequent	Regular	Total
Negative	23 (88%)*	3 (12%)	0	26
Neutral	16 (62%)	5 (19%)	5 (19%)	26
Positive	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	5
Bargain-Centered	3 (100%)	0	0	3
Total	43 (72%)	10 (17%)	7 (12%)	60

*All percentages are row percentages.

Chapter Three

Think Globally, Buy Locally?

Consumers and the Politics of Localism

1. Introduction: The Missing Local

Grand Rapids, Michigan is celebrating a big addition to downtown. But the new building is not a corporate headquarters. It is a non-profit food market, recently profiled in the *New York Times* article, "A Michigan City Bets on Food for Its Growth," and described as "a hub for local food innovation and healthy-living education." The new market, boosters believe, will appeal not just to "foodies," but also to people eager to see Grand Rapids grow and thrive. For sale, in other words, is not just a product, but also an opportunity to support home-grown entrepreneurs and the community as a whole.

The Grand Rapids marketplace is emblematic of campaigns around the country to encourage people to see "buying local" as a way to address community-level social and environmental problems. "Locally-focused purchasing," as a political activity, shares the goals of efforts to strengthen local food systems (Abate 2008; Connelly, Markey, and Roseland 2011), make cities the locus of sustainable development (Holmgren 2002), develop independent currencies (Krohn and Snyder 2007), and retain public ownership of utilities (Haney and Pollitt 2010). All are expressions of "localism"—that idea that communities, and individuals within

them, ought to assert greater sovereignty over how goods are produced and consumed (Brenner and Theodore 2002; De Young and Princen 2012; Hess 2008). Locally-focused purchasing is thus, according to many theorists, part of a movement to empower communities to resist globalization, push for higher labor and environmental standards, and lay a foundation for future growth (Lacy 2000; Lyson 2004; Morris and Hess 1975; Shuman 2012).

Given the growing visibility of "buy local" campaigns, and their relationship to policy initiatives and social movements informed by localist ideas, it is surprising that the beliefs, behaviors, and identities of people who practice locally-focused purchasing have received little attention from social scientists. Studies of why people incorporate social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions—a practice that I term "socially responsible purchasing"—have focused almost exclusively on consumption motivated by concerns about human rights, global inequality, and large-scale environmental problems. According to this research, the education level of individuals is strongly associated with purchasing products such as fair trade coffee, organic food, and sweat-free clothing (Cowe and Williams 2000; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Starr 2009), and "ethical consumers" tend to be politically active in conventional ways (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Willis and Schor 2012). But the word "local" does not even appear in the indices of widely-read edited volumes on "ethical consumption" and "political consumerism" (Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005; Micheletti, Føllesdal, and Stolle 2004). Nor does a recent collection of surveys and controlled experiments regarding ethical consumption include a relative of "local-produced" or

"locally-owned" among the qualities of "socially responsible products"[1] whose effects on behavior are put to the test (Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt 2010).

Lack of attention to "the local" has left significant lacunae in existing theories of socially responsible purchasing. We do not know whether locally-focused purchasing is practiced more or less widely than other forms of socially responsible purchasing. We do not know what relationship, if any, exists between locally-focused purchasing and other forms of political engagement. Perhaps most importantly, we do not know *why* different people do or do not "buy local." Until these questions are answered, our understanding of how and why people take political action in the marketplace will remain incomplete.

In this paper, I address these gaps in the literature, and advance understanding of locally-focused purchasing, by asking three questions:

1. Who are locally-focused consumers, in terms of key socioeconomic characteristics?
2. Do people who engage in locally-focused purchasing also engage in other forms of socially responsible purchasing? Why or why not?
3. Do people who engage in locally-focused purchasing also participate in politics in other ways? Why or why not?

Drawing on surveys and interviews with a diverse sample of individuals, I find that many people do indeed practice locally-focused purchasing who do not engage in other forms of socially responsible purchasing or political activities. But I argue that surprisingly widespread support for locally-focused purchasing across socioeconomic and political lines does not reflect, as some have suggested, insular thinking or lack of concern for problems than affect primarily other

[1] "Socially responsible products" are, in this paper, distinguished from "conventional products" by the claims that they make regarding social or environmental benefits, and not—insofar as they could be determined—the veracity of these claims.

people. Rather, exploration of my qualitative data suggests that locally-focused purchasing is experienced, compared to other ways of taking political action both within and outside the marketplace, as uniquely enjoyable, accessible, and—crucially—likely to achieve its desired aims. In a world where much of what goes on in the "political" realm seems frivolous, when not actually harmful, locally-focused purchasing can represent a rare opportunity to have a direct and verifiable impact on issues that hit close to home.

Throughout this paper, I do not submit my own definition of the term "local," despite using it in a variety of ways. The people on whom this research is based subscribed to a range of conceptions of "the local," and these conceptions often seemed key to understanding why they did or did not "buy local," and what their motivations were. Thus, rather than define "local" in just one way, I seek to clarify how this crucial but slippery concept shapes socially responsible purchasing and other forms of political engagement.

2. Explaining Political Participation

2.1. Resources, Incentives, and Networks

Socially responsible purchasing is a subset of all political activity, including such things as voting and volunteering for campaigns; and locally-focused purchasing is a subset of socially responsible purchasing. Therefore, in order to understand why people engage in locally-focused purchasing, as opposed—or in addition—to other forms of political activity, my goal in this section is first to situate the discussion in the context of theories of political participation in general.

In the well-known formulation of Verba, Schlozman and Brady, the question of why people *do not* become politically active can be answered in three ways: "because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked" (1995:15). In the rest of this section, I organize my discussion of the social science literature on political participation by taking these three plain-English explanations as guideposts. By "because they can't," Verba et al. mean resources, in the form of "money, time, and civic skills," whose possession makes it easier for people to do things like keep up with current events, volunteer for groups, and donate money to campaigns and organizations. Verba et al.'s findings of close ties between political participation, education, and other resources generally associated with socioeconomic status (SES) have been widely validated by other researchers, with important implications for whose "voice" is heard in the halls of government (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Jennings 1990; Whiteley and Seyd 2002). Democracies are supposed to represent all people. But generally-accepted models of political participation suggest that elected officials are incentivized to pay most attention to the people who have the financial wherewithal, knowledge of opportunities to shape social change, and time to put their civic skills to work.

Investigations of political motivation—why people do or do not "want to" participate in politics, in the words of Verba, Schlozman and Brady—often take Olson's (1971) "paradox of participation" as a starting point: why would a rational actor join collective efforts to achieve common goals, if she is able to benefit from these efforts whether she joins or not? One way of unlocking Olson's paradox has been to point out that some activities—like voting—are not especially burdensome (Barry 1978; Niemi 1976); another has been to show that individuals in small groups may be subject to sanctions. But many studies have also focused on identifying "selective incentives" to collective action that accrue only to actual participants, and not to free-

riders on the participation of others (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995; Wilson 1973). Most often, such selective incentives have been theorized to involve positive experiences and the emotional rewards of activism that one can only receive by actually taking political or civic action. Participation can provide, for instance, gratifications associated with developing meaningful relationships, being a part of something larger than oneself, and the feeling of "doing one's duty" (Barker 2001; Shepard 2010; Wood 2001). Han (2009) also argues that people who do not fit the stereotype of the high-SES active citizen can be brought into the political system through being personally committed to an issue, such as childrens' schools or a nearby source of pollution. But according to Han, the path from personal commitment to political involvement is a dialectical one, where engagement starts small and builds over time.

Expressing interest in an outcome—be it "material," "solidary," or "purposive" (Wilson 1973)—is one dimension of "wanting" to participate in politics. But no matter how attractive the potential outcomes of participation, one will see little reason to participate if one cannot be reasonably certain that these outcomes will occur. This insight is captured in the literature on political efficacy, in which individuals' feelings about their own capacity to influence outcomes are termed *internal* efficacy, and opinions about the responsiveness of the political system in general are termed *external* efficacy. Both internal and external efficacy have consistently been found to be positively related to political participation (Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009). In other words, political participation is more likely to occur—whether in the form of voting, volunteering, or donating money—when people, generally speaking, feel confident both about their abilities to effect change, and about the capacity of the political system to be changed by the efforts of citizens like themselves. Moreover, the findings of political scientists regarding the importance of the two kinds of efficacy have been echoed in many other domains of interest

to social science. People persuaded of their own effectiveness, for instance, take more chances in work and relationships, and internally efficacious communities are more likely to achieve low crime and good health (Cohen et al. 2006; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001).

The last piece in Verba et al.'s framework—"because nobody asked"— captures the role of social networks in introducing people to activism, keeping them involved, and increasing their commitment over time. Distinct from the "social pleasures" that political activity involves, it is often group memberships and social ties that give people information about opportunities for action (Jenkins 1983) and provide support for their efforts (McAdam and Paulsen 1993). These same ties allow other activists to put pressure on people to stay involved when involvement becomes difficult (McAdam 1986). Indeed, predictors of political participation often seen as characteristics of individuals—such as education level and religious attendance—have social dimensions that should not be overlooked (Campbell 2013).

2.2. Purchasing as a Political Activity

Much of the literature on socially responsible purchasing can be viewed as extending theory about conventional forms of political participation to political action in the marketplace. Explanatory models that emphasize the role of socioeconomic resources in facilitating opportunities for political participation, such as the "Civic Volunteerism" and "General Incentives" models of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) and Whiteley and Seyd (2002), have been found to have wide applicability to social responsible purchasing. Education level, for instance, has nearly always been found to be associated with buying "green," fair trade, and sweat-free products (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Micheletti and Stolle 2005). Findings regarding income have been mixed; some studies have found that income,

independent of education, is related to increased buying of products for political reasons (Neilson and Paxton 2010; Starr 2009), while others find that the effect of income vanishes when education is included (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Shah et al. 2007).

The second and third prongs of the explanatory framework of Verba, Schlozman and Brady can also be seen as organizing principles in the literature on socially responsible purchasing. Research into the role of "selective incentives" in motivating socially responsible purchasing is less developed than that focused on the role of socioeconomic status. Several studies suggest, however, that "enchanting" consumption experiences, such as community-supported agriculture co-operatives and high-end grocery stores, may provide "ethical consumers" with experiential rewards independent of anticipated social outcomes (Johnston and Szabo 2010; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). On the other hand, the frequently stressful and anonymous nature of most everyday shopping may actually *discourage* people from devoting time and energy to socially responsible purchasing (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Schoolman 2013). A large literature on labeling and certification indicates that consumers' doubts about external efficacy are among the most significant impediments to buying products that claim to have social and environmental benefits (Boström and Klintman 2008; Sønderskov and Daugbjerg 2011). Indeed, recent years have seen consumer concerns about the verifiability of the claims of socially responsible products spread to "organic" and "fair trade" certifications. Researchers motivated by these concerns have investigated whether organic foods actually contain fewer contaminants, and whether producers of "fair trade" commodities in developing countries necessarily benefit from their involvement (Low and Davenport 2005; Magkos, Arvaniti, and Zampelas 2006). Such studies arguably illustrate both the importance and the continued vulnerability of even the most well-funded and well-vetted certification and labeling

systems. Finally, ethnographic studies of individuals for whom "being green" is essential show that membership in groups of like-minded people does indeed allow friends and neighbors to monitor and influence each other's consumption behavior (Lorenzen 2012; Shepherd 2002)

The literature on socially responsible purchasing does not directly address the questions that motivate this paper: whether locally-focused purchasing is practiced by different people, to different degrees, than other ways of incorporating social and environmental concerns into consumption decisions—and if so, why. However, researchers writing on *localism*, and on the origins of policies and practices rooted in localist ideas, have indeed developed theoretical frameworks that suggest explanations for locally-focused purchasing. In what I term the *non-reflexivity hypothesis*, critics of localism have suggested that the visceral appeal of "the local" as contemporary *Gemeinschaft* may lead actors to assume, with little evidence, that localist policies and practices are more just and sustainable than alternatives (Allen 2010; Born and Purcell 2006; Purcell and Brown 2005). In the *exclusivity hypothesis*, actors invested in spatially limited geographies may see less need to worry about, and fail to develop conceptual tools required to address, problems beyond the borders of these geographies (Cashin 1999; Hinrichs and Allen 2008; Hinrichs 2003; Szasz 2009; Winter 2003). The flip side of the ontological and motivational potency of "the local," in other words, may be an implicit—if unconscious—license to overlook the shortcomings of localist ideas and declaim responsibility for injustices occurring at wider geographic scales. Viewed in this light, locally-focused purchasing appears less as a particular expression of "social responsibility," and more as consumers assuming that what benefits their own communities is both superior policy and all that one is required to do.

Two overlapping goals drive the rest of this paper. The first is to suggest, based on original survey data and in-depth interviews, that locally-focused purchasing is both more

frequent and more widespread than other forms of socially responsible purchasing. The second is to argue that what is surprising about who engages in locally-focused purchasing, and how often, is better explained by mechanisms first developed for theories of conventional forms of political participation than by the hypotheses, outlined above, put forth by researchers concerned about the implications of localism as an orientation to social change.

3. Research Design

The subject of this paper emerged from a larger project in which I used survey data and interviews to investigate why far fewer people incorporate social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions than express an intention or desire to do so. Locally-focused purchasing emerged from this research as a form of socially responsible purchasing with surprisingly broad support across socioeconomic and political lines, and also where what researchers (Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013) have termed the "concern-action gap"—the gap between attitude and behavior—was unusually small. This paper is in part an effort to understand these unexpected findings.

In recruiting participants for this larger project, my primary goal was to obtain a sample that would be diverse with respect to factors that might affect how social and environmental concerns were incorporated into purchasing and other consumption practices. Three variables were considered in the recruitment process: household income, political ideology, and political engagement. With respect to income and ideology, approximately one-third of participants were recruited from each of three counties in Michigan: affluent, conservative Jefferson County; affluent, liberal Adams County; and economically struggling, politically moderate Mercer

County.[2] With respect to political engagement, two thirds of participants in each county were recruited from a random sample, stratified by voting frequency, of the population of registered voters[3], while one third was recruited from local political groups. Among the 157 registered voters with working phone numbers who received a recruitment letter, 46 (29 percent) participated in the study. I also recruited 25 politically active individuals—called "Activists"—by volunteering with conservative and liberal groups in each county for 8 months beginning in August, 2010.

Prior to each interview I gathered data on the socioeconomic characteristics, civic participation, and purchasing practices of each participant through a 20-minute telephone survey. Individuals in the sample were relatively diverse with respect to income, sex, education, and political ideology (see Table 1). Importantly, 39 percent of individuals said that they had not bought a product for ethical or political reasons in the past 12 months, and an additional 23 percent had made a socially responsible purchase only once or twice during this time.[4] Thus, the sample group answered the main need of the study: it was markedly more diverse, with respect to socially responsible purchasing practices, than that used by most existing qualitative studies of socially responsible consumption.

[Table 3.1 about here]

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[2] All names of places, people and organizations have been changed. I used 2010 average household income (U.S. Census 2010) and results from the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections to classify each county according to its economy and political ideology

[3] Due to motor voter laws and the 2008 national election, over 90 percent of all eligible voters in Michigan were in fact registered to vote when I selected my sample (Hakala 2008).

[4] The wording of the questions addressing socially responsible purchasing ("How often have you bought/boycotted a product for ethical or political reasons in the last 12 months?") was chosen to be nearly identical to that of survey questions used by earlier studies.

Interviews took place in participants' homes (52 percent) or workplaces (13 percent), a local library (18 percent), or a café (17 percent); most interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. My goal was to obtain rich data on concrete, vividly-remembered experiences, and to avoid, to the extent possible, statements of abstract opinion unconnected to specific behaviors (Weiss 1995). In a typical interview, the first 15-30 minutes were spent discussing experiences with political and civic activities in general. The rest of the interview focused on the possibility of addressing social and environmental problems through purchasing decisions or other kinds of consumption practices. I asked participants to "walk me through" typical shopping trips for groceries, household goods, and clothing, and to describe what they were feeling, thinking, and doing when they bought or were aware of the opportunity to buy products or patronize stores that made claims about social or environmental benefits.

Of particular importance for this paper, I also used the interviews to ask questions that would allow me to classify participants according to the frequency with which they practiced four different kinds of socially responsible purchasing. Specifically, I asked participants to describe to me how often, and in what situations, they bought products with the intent of: 1) supporting local businesses and producers; 2) protecting the environment; 3) supporting companies that make products in America; 4) supporting workers, like farm workers and factory workers. Based on their ability to recall specific purchases and to describe in detail their shopping routines and motivations, participants were classified as either *never or rarely* (twice a year or less), *infrequently* (more than rarely, but less than half of all shopping trips), or *frequently* (at least half of all shopping trips) engaged in these different kinds of socially responsible purchasing.

I attempted to reduce the potential for social desirability bias during my interactions with participants by using communications prior to interviews to establish mutual trust with respondents, and—as illustrated above—by emphasizing the importance of recalling specific events and associated emotions, rather than abstract opinions or off-the-cuff estimations of past activity, during interviews (Weiss 1995). In all, I conducted 71 interviews, of which 70 were recorded. Transcripts were coded using HyperResearch.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1. Closing the Concern-Action Gap?

In this section, I show that, among participants in my research, locally-focused purchasing was both more frequent and more widespread, in terms of the diversity of its practitioners, than other forms of socially responsible purchasing. In the following four sections (*§4.2* to *§4.5*), I argue that the relatively high frequency and practitioner diversity of locally-focused purchasing is due to four factors, which I term *enjoyability*, *reliability*, *accessibility*, and *communality*. The role of these factors suggests that the mechanisms described in the *non-reflexivity* and *exclusivity hypotheses* put forth, as outlined above, by theorists critical of localism, are not required in order to explain why and how often people engage in locally-focused purchasing.

Most people in my study expressed concern for social and environmental problems such as environmental degradation, the outsourcing of American jobs, and the decline of local economies, and stated their belief in the importance of buying products that might address these and other problems. These views came through not just in the pre-interview survey, but also during interviews, when many participants related stories of how things that they valued, both

intimately connected to and distant from their own lives, had been affected by pollution problems and the struggling economy.

[Table 3.2 about here]

As Table 3.2 makes clear, differences existed across individuals with respect to the importance attached to different kinds of socially responsible purchasing, and these differences were not unrelated to those variables that I incorporated into the sample selection process: political engagement, ideology and socioeconomic status. With the exception of "products that are good for workers" (mean=2.88), however, the average person considered it at least "somewhat important" to buy products that benefit a range of social groups and living things, from "products that are good for the environment" (mean=3.07) to "products and services that come from businesses and producers in your community" (mean=3.24) to "products that are made in America" (mean=3.39).[5] Moreover, the effects on means of political engagement, ideology[6] and household income—a proxy for socioeconomic status—were not overwhelming. The average importance attached to "purchasing products that are good for the environment," for instance, varied from 3 for Regular Voters to 3.17 for Activists. A similar "bunching" of means occurred with respect to most relationships. The spread of means was widest in the case of ideology and the importance attached to purchasing on behalf of workers' wellbeing, where the mean importance was 2.5 for Conservatives and 3.37 for Liberals, with Moderates at 2.57.

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[5] These were the actual words used in the respective survey questions.

[6] In 65 of 71 cases, the "ideology" variable was based on where the subject placed him or herself on a 1-10 scale, where 1 was "very liberal" and 10 was "very conservative" (1-3=liberal; 4-7=moderate; 8-10=conservative). In five other cases, participants declined to place themselves on the spectrum, but answered other questions regarding their degree of agreement with the Republican and Democratic parties that allowed me to classify them. One participant could not be classified, due to lack of knowledge about politics and political parties.

When our attention turns from statements of importance in the abstract to concrete practices, however, the story is very different—with one key exception. Despite the relatively strong expressions of support for socially responsible purchasing across a range of issues, far fewer people actually engage in most forms of socially responsible purchasing than apparently would like to do so.

[Table 3.3 about here]

Here, as well, there is variation along the lines of key variables (political engagement, ideology, and household income). But what is more noticeable is the consistency of the gap between professed concern and action. Large majorities—in nearly all cases, over two-thirds—of individuals sharing a particular characteristic within a given variable never or rarely incorporated their concerns about environmental degradation, the American economy, or worker wellbeing into purchasing decisions. It is a stark result, but not particularly surprising: the persistence of the concern-action gap in socially responsible purchasing has been documented in many studies (Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt 2010; Flynn, Bellaby, and Ricci 2009; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013; W. Young et al. 2010).

What *is* surprising, and what has not been documented in previous studies, is that the gap between concern and action was smaller for locally-focused purchasing than for other forms of socially responsible purchasing. At least half of all Activists, Regular Voters, individuals of all ideologies, and people whose household income was at least 50k, practiced locally-focused purchasing more than once or twice a year. Moreover, at least 23 percent of Activists, Regular Voters, Moderates, Liberals, and individuals whose household income was at least 50k, were frequent practitioners of locally-focused purchasing. In contrast, many categories of individuals

had no frequent practitioners of environmentally-friendly, American-made, or worker-friendly products.

The group of people who engaged in locally-focused purchasing was also relatively diverse, which can be seen by looked at the row percentages for the frequencies of different kinds of socially responsible purchasing.

[Table 3.4 about here]

Frequent and infrequent practitioners of locally-focused purchasing were spread across all categories of political engagement, ideology, and household income. Within each variable, no category held more than 25 percent of frequent practitioners of locally-focused purchasing, or more than 48 percent of infrequent practitioners. In contrast, there were no frequent or infrequent purchasers of environmentally-friendly, American-made, or worker-friendly products among Infrequent Voters, and the row percentages for ideology and household income, where these kinds of products were concerned, were similarly skewed in comparison with the more evenly distributed row percentages for locally-focused purchasing

The far smaller gap between concern and action for locally-focused purchasing, and the greater diversity of locally-focused purchasers, gives weight to the concerns of critics of localism. Do the results of my research show that most people, when it is time to "put their money where their mouth is," are only really willing to expend money, time and effort when the outcome is in some way directly and immediately connected to their own wellbeing? Do participants in my study assume that "the local" is inherently more just and sustainable? Do opportunities to use purchasing power to benefit one's own community detract from the perceived need to support other causes and social groups? In a word: does localism stem from or lead to *non-reflexivity*, *exclusivity*, or both?

In the following sections, I argue that the concerns of localism's critics are not supported by my research. Rather, data from in-depth interviews suggest that frequent and widespread locally-focused purchasing across socioeconomic and political lines is better explained by reference to concepts and mechanisms previously introduced in accounts of conventional forms of political participation.

4.2. Enjoyability: The Pleasures of Participation

As discussed in *§2.1*, the concept of "selective incentives" for political participation refers to emotional and social gratifications that are inherent in political activities themselves, rather than contingent on outcomes (Olson 1971). Where socially responsible purchasing is concerned, however, academic explorations of emotions and meanings associated with everyday shopping for groceries and household goods have suggested that many purchasing activities may offer just the opposite of selective incentives for political action in the marketplace. The stressful, unpleasant experience of hunting through crowded, anonymous stores may actually present an *impediment* to the purchase of "green," fair trade, and sweat-free products, by reducing the time and energy that people want to invest in looking for and thinking about socially responsible products (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Schoolman 2013).

Locally-focused purchasing, in contrast to forms of socially responsible purchasing investigated in previous studies, emerged from my research as offering selective benefits to a large and diverse group of people. Specifically, enjoyable, memorable interactions with store owners, employees, and actual producers provided participants with additional incentives to go out of their way to support locally-owned businesses and producers. For many participants, including those described below, the selective incentives available for locally-focused

purchasing also appeared to be missing for conventional political activities, such as volunteering for campaigns and civic groups. This finding, in particular, helps to explain the relative diversity, in terms of political engagement, of practitioners of locally-focused purchasing. In this section, I explore several cases of participants who experienced most ways of taking political action to be stressful and unpleasant, but who found locally-focused purchasing to be associated with positive emotions and meanings.

Selective incentives played an important role in the locally-focused purchasing of Melissa, an elementary school teacher in Adams County. Melissa grew up near Kalamazoo, where her parents rarely discussed politics. Shy and soft-spoken, she knew early in life that she wanted to teach, but her distaste for crowds and being the center of attention always led her to steer clear of anything smacking of politics.

> *Interviewer:* When election season comes around, and there is more activity, with people going door-to-door and things like that—is that ever something you thought about getting more involved in?
>
> *Melissa:* Um, I don't know, I guess I think maybe part of it is my parents just never did it so much and my siblings never did it so much, and so I guess there's that fear factor of the unknown … It's not something that I would say I would never do, but um, I just haven't.
>
> *Interviewer:* What do you mean by a "fear factor" with this kind of thing?
>
> *Melissa:* Um, I guess not knowing enough, lack of knowledge, that I'd feel embarrassed or something, say the wrong thing. Does that make sense? … I guess I'm a very laid-back personality, so I tend to not ruffle too many feathers and I just kinda go with the flow kinda thing, so…

For Melissa, political activities conjure images of having to make articulate speeches to strangers—not something she finds at all appealing. But although Melissa does not have an easy time expressing her political views, she clearly cares deeply about leaving a healthy environment and supportive communities for the next generation—including her daughter.

> *Interviewer:* What sorts of things makes you feel like you're more on the left, politically?
>
> *Melissa:* Um, helping the underdog, you know. The poor, the needy, those—helping others, um, getting government involved in certain programs and things like that, versus, you know—I don't mind that big government, everyone's helping and—sorry! [She was worried about being inarticulate.]
>
> *Interviewer:* No worries!
>
> *Melissa:* Um, you know, funding programs that help people, like SOS [a counseling program] or Planned Parenthood; those types of things that, um, are out there for helping people that maybe didn't have a great life or circumstances, that have fallen upon—um, helping them. Where I find that if you lean the other way—those programs, people want to cut those.

As a citizen, what Melissa wants to do—and a big part of why she became a teacher, and why, as she told me, her four sisters all became nurses—is to find concrete ways to make a difference in the world. But getting involved in political or civic organizations is not an option for Melissa, because of the intimidating "fear factor." Locally-focused purchasing, however, is just the right kind of social.

Locally-focused purchasing, for Melissa, is something that is a natural part of her economic life, and operates as an extension of her enjoyment of the amenities and social rewards of dense, urban communities in general. She first realized that the social life of small cities was

something that appealed to her when she left her rural hometown to attend college; living in Kalamazoo's student section, "it was nice, being able to walk in your community and going to the local coffee shop and this local yummy sub shop, and things like that. I enjoyed that and it felt good getting out in the community and walking around." After moving to Adams County, Melissa and her husband bought a house in Hilliard, Collegeville's less affluent sister city, where the shops were less pricey and the neighborhoods were friendly in a way that Melissa found appealing

> *Interviewer:* Was there a period of adjustment, when you moved in from a country setting, or was it something you enjoyed right away?
>
> *Melissa:* Living out in the country, we had neighbors … but they weren't right next to you in the, you know, "living in the city limits" type thing. But I enjoy having neighbors—you know working in your backyard, chitchatting with your neighbor, "how are you doing?," that kind of thing. So I guess I like that the sense of um, almost security … And then with my daughter growing up, there're some kids across the street, she's playing with those kids and just they're a great family and it's nice. And she gets the diversity in the neighborhood, too, as far as culture and ethnicities and things like that. I really like that.

What Melissa likes about living "in the city limits" illustrates what kind of social rewards political activities would have to offer, if they were to prove tempting to her. She appreciates the absence of pressure in her backyard conversations, the security of being able to rely on somebody, the warmth of welcoming places that do not expect one to make detailed arguments on the issues of the day. It is these same social rewards—low-intensity neighborliness—that provide, for Melissa, experiential reasons to "buy local."

Melissa: I never used [Kalamazoo's farmers market], but [in Hilliard] they have one right next door, on the street. That's where I usually go. You know, it's fun and you could see all these people that were enjoying themselves, and then you're getting fresh stuff—that's what I really liked about it. And um, it made them feel good, it made me feel good that I was getting something, you know, good, and helping out them and their business and they're local, too … I guess, you know, it's just like anything: you've got to keep learning, and if you're really into something, it shouldn't stop you from doing what you want and saying what you believe and getting involved. So I guess it's just stepping across that comfort zone for me.

Interviewer: Did the farmers' market feel like a comfortable place?

Melissa: It did. I like it, you know. If I could bake as well, I'd go.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Melissa: If I could bake, as well, I'd go and put up my own stand. Although I might have lots of lettuce this year, maybe I'll put up a stand for some lettuce! [laughs]

The farmers market is so comfortable that Melissa would actually like to increase her level of participation, by setting up her own stand. Nor is the market the only venue for local businesses that has enabled Melissa to "step across that comfort zone" into a place where doing something political—using her purchasing her power to support her community—feels relaxed and fun, and not like a "fear factor."

Interviewer: Are there other kinds of local stores or businesses that you like to support?

Melissa: Um, have you heard of the Play Place? It's this little shop that I got involved with through my daughter's preschool, and one of the parents opened it. It's kind of a place to go take local classes, crafts, arts, things like that for kids and adults. And then

> they also have like a little store in there … Some of the downtown Hilliard stores are really cute and I like to go down there … But it's definitely—if I can buy it locally, I prefer to give money to someone who's working hard in the same community as I am.

There are many reasons why Melissa engages in locally-focused purchasing far more often than any other form of socially-responsible purchasing. But one of the most important of these reasons can be found in the words that pepper her speech whenever she discusses the actual practice of supporting local businesses and producers. Locally-focused purchasing is "cute," "little," in her "comfort zone," and "feels good." Melissa rated buying local, environmentally-friendly, and worker-friendly products as "somewhat important," and buying American as "very important." But she is a frequent practitioner only of locally-focused purchasing—and her tendency to meld descriptions of the experience with affirmations of politics suggests that the experience itself is a large part of why.

Many other participants shared Melissa's enthusiasm for the experiential rewards of locally-focused purchasing. Georgina, a therapist in Hilliard whose mother was active in the civil rights movement, has attended a handful of meetings of the NAACP and other African-American civic groups around Adams County over the years. But she never warmed to conventional political activities: there is too much pressure and divisiveness in it for her.

> [At one group meeting] we were working on a mission statement. There was a big argument … and to me it's stuff that feels personal. But I know that's something *I* have [pats her own chest]. Me, I don't like loud talking, I don't like screaming, I don't like discourses. It's something that I have had to learn to, um, deal with. I don't like shouting, cursing—it just is very emotionally upsetting for me, and that probably comes from things in my childhood. So I, you know, so a lot of politics, words can get up…

Organized political groups evoke in Georgina a kind of "fear factor" similar to Melissa's. But Georgina has also found that focusing her purchasing on Hilliard businesses gives her much the same feeling of satisfaction, of contributing to the community, as more conventional forms of activism gave to her mother.

> *Georgina:* Mmm-hmm, I shop at the farmer's market, and I would say 70 to 80 percent of my food is bought at the farmer's market or co-op. Hilliard Co-Op—I shoulda joined sooner. I just wasn't really sure what a food co-op did … You know, I buy, um, organic food as much as I can—but local trumps organic. So, at first it was organic trumped everything, but now as I'm more involved on the local scene, and so it's local trumps organic.
>
> *Interviewer:* Can you tell me how you learned about the co-op, and how you decided to join that?
>
> *Georgina:* [pause] I'm trying to remember! … You know, 'cause I, I saw people with their carts and a lot of people were members, and then there were people who I would run into that I knew from going to the gym, or something like that. And so um, I asked 'em to tell me about it, and … I found myself that realizing that it was another *community*, like you know, I have a community at the gym, and a lot of us, um, frequent the same places, I mean, so, the gym, and the co-op … And so that's why I say it's like a community, and people talk about their children, their lives, and you know, when anybody gets married, or has a child, or a funeral or whatever, we all get cards, and that kind of thing … And they care, they remember you, they know your name: "hi Georgina!"

As Georgina discussed her practice of buying almost all of her food at the co-op and farmers market, and, on her limited income, getting things from independent craftspeople in Hilliard, it

seemed impossible for her to separate her reasons for locally-focused purchasing from her enjoyment of "the local." That Georgina practiced "buying local" far more often than "buying green" or "buying sweat-free" did not mean, however, that she considered protecting the environment or supporting overseas workers to be unimportant. Indeed, she rated all kinds of socially responsible purchasing as "somewhat important," and, at another point in our interview, exclaimed how happy she was that one of the Saturday market booths sold socks made with fair trade cotton. Rather, hunting in conventional supermarkets and big-box stores for socially responsible products of various kinds, like participating in politics in conventional ways, simply could not offer Georgina the kinds of selective incentives that she associated with locally-focused purchasing.

For study participants from all ideologies, degrees of political engagement, and socioeconomic groups, the *experience* of locally-focused purchasing consistently occupied a prominent place in discussions of its place in their political repertoires. Other examples included Randall, an introverted computer technician who shared both Melissa's reticence and her enjoyment of casual interactions with local business-owners, and Brian, an engineer who characterized shopping in big box stores as almost unspeakably off-putting, but felt that mom-and-pop stores gave him the respect that he deserved. In contrast, the experience of shopping for environmentally-friendly, worker-friendly, or American made products was nearly always described as a stressful burden, even for those who supported the idea of socially responsible purchasing aimed at such issued in the abstract.

The importance of selective incentives for frequent and infrequent practitioners of locally-focused purchasing raises the question: if locally-focused purchasing is so enjoyable, then why do many people—including many participants in my study—*not* engage in it? Part of

the answer may be that locally-focused purchasing is not, in fact, everyone's idea of fun. Aaron, an account manager with the power company in Mercer County, did not share his wife's attachment to local businesses in part because he felt that that Lincoln was not a welcoming place. Where Aaron's wife—as he described her—found local shopkeepers to be friendly, he saw them as standoffish to newcomers. A number of working mothers in my study found *all* shopping exhausting. Such cases show that process-based incentives for political activities ultimately come down to the different things that individuals enjoy—and not everybody enjoys, or has time to cultivate, the casual warmth that Melissa, Georgina, and others clearly welcome. But on the whole, social rewards intrinsic to the performance—as opposed to the outcomes—of certain activities appeared to be an important part of why, for many participants in my study, the gap between concern for social and environmental problems and actual action taken to address these problems was smaller for locally-focused purchasing than for any other kind of consumption-based political activity.

4.3. Reliability: Making It Count

Among social scientists writing on socially responsible purchasing, one of the topics of greatest interest is how to increase confidence in the *external efficacy* of purchasing as a political action. In layman's terms, the question is: under what conditions do people believe that "socially responsible products" will actually accomplish their goals—to reduce pollution, for instance, or help subsistence farmers? Hundreds of labeling and verification organizations currently exist to satisfy the need for guarantees of efficacy. The very existence of so many different certification systems, however, testifies to the fact that the problem of convincing consumers of the efficacy of socially responsible purchasing is not an easy one to solve.

Given the importance of efficacy and trust to the performance of political activities in general, and to politically-motivated purchasing activities in particular, it is not surprising that face-to-face interactions with producers at farmers markets have been cited as a source of trust in the benefits of organic food (Conner et al. 2010; Moore 2006). Establishing consistent patronage relationships supports a degree of trust that, arguably, labeling systems can rarely provide. In this section, I argue that the efficacy-boosting power of personal relationships with local organic farmers represents a special case of a more general phenomenon. Simply put, most forms of socially responsible purchasing require faith in third-party certification systems, and trust that one's money will make its way through a complex chain of purveyors and suppliers to benefit particular groups or aspects of the natural environment. But relatively close network proximity between consumers and the intended beneficiaries of locally-focused purchasing makes it easier for consumers to believe that money spent in support of local businesses, producers, and farmers will have its intended effect.

Some people move slowly because they are not sure where they are going, but that was not the case with Robert. An attorney in Collegeville for nearly forty years, Robert did everything from order coffee to choose his words with careful deliberation. He would not call himself a cynical person, and places firmly on the liberal end of the political spectrum. But in his decades of on-and-off involvement with Collegeville politics and state environmental groups, he has never been reluctant to walk away when the person across the table seemed to be blowing smoke.

> *Robert:* I have resigned in anger three times from the Sierra Club! … The first time was over [a state environmental issue]… I said, we need to keep everybody at the table … [but] at that point the national Sierra Club and quite a few of their regional operations

were in the hands of the no-compromisers. It was the 60s! The ah, if we back up an inch, they're gonna want to take a mile. And I, at one point became sufficiently exercised that I publicly and formally resigned.

Interviewer: When you walked away from the Sierra Club the other times, was it for the same issues?

Robert: Second time was, the Sierra Club had gotten into calendars and books and geographic specials, and were losing their originally quite radical line—I like the calendar, but that's not what we're about.

Robert's commitment to the environmental movement notwithstanding, he is not one to take the claims of idealists at face value. He demands evidence and good arguments, and when these are lacking, he walks away. The same unwillingness to take things on faith, particularly where environmental politics are concerned, strongly shapes his consumption decisions, and in particular his purchasing behavior.

Interviewer: Have there been times when you've bought a product in order to support the environment—because you believed it was better for the environment than the alternative?

Robert: I generally get skunked when I do that.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Robert: You'll find this strange, but my belief is that probably the worst place in the world to try and be an intelligent consumer is Whole Foods.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Robert: Because my belief is that their ideological bent, and their tunnel vision, means that they actually get had more often … [For instance], they're into buying shade-grown

coffee. Well, you know, that's great. And of course it's really expensive, and I want to know how they know that it was grown in the shade. You know, maybe somebody from Austin went to Guatemala, you know, "oh, it looks like it's in the shade!" [laughs] But … I'm absolutely convinced, that Whole Foods, what they call their house brand, shade-grown coffee, it's the same stuff you can buy from Folgers for one third the price.

A mere label, even for one of the most extensively-vetted of fair trade commodities, does not pass muster for Robert; he needs hard proof that the extra money he spends on socially responsible products will not go to waste. Later in our interview, I pressed him again to name some products with benefits for the environment or workers that he sometimes bought, as he had said in the pre-interview survey that buying both was "somewhat important." His reply drew on the same themes as before:

Robert: Hard tradeoff! I'm the kind of consumer that thinks he's being skunked most of the time. [chuckles] I think you have to watch out, you have to be careful. There's a lot of hype in the sort of green consumer movement. Um, and I think, you know, it's a supply chain, they have no idea where the supply chain goes … And so, as I say, it's um, it's very difficult to be a principled consumer. Because they're out to get you!

Interviewer: What do you mean? Who's out to get you?

Robert: The plastics industry, the oil companies, the big mass marketers, Walmart. And they succeed most of the time.

The claims of products closer to home often suffered the same fate, in Robert's judgment. Asparagus in grocery stores labeled "Michigan Grown," for example, was likely rarely grown in Michigan. Most of it came from China.

Led by his doubts about supply chain reliability and his belief in the gullibility of "zealots" like Whole Foods procurers, Robert's political sympathies rarely found expression in the purchase of products intended to benefit workers or the environment. There was, however, one form of socially responsible purchasing that he felt he could trust:

> I try as a general rule to buy local. Don't buy from the enemy. More value than cost. You know, try to be an intelligent consumer.

Robert's substantive reasons for "buying local" did not seem to be more deeply felt than those for, in theory, buying green, buying American or any of the other categories of socially responsible purchasing that we talked about. He wants the see the local economy thrive, but he also wants the American economy as a whole to do well and, as a lifelong outdoors person, for the environment to stay healthy and protected. The difference is that it is actually *possible* for someone like Robert to be an "intelligent consumer" where locally-focused purchasing is concerned, because he can obtain firsthand knowledge of what satisfies his criteria for a "local" business—namely, a business that is locally-owned or else, in a minority of cases, a Michigan-based company that contributes substantially to the Collegeville community.

> *Interviewer:* What are some examples of some ways that you try and buy local?
>
> *Robert:* There's a local directory. One of the major leaders of the group is a fellow named Mike Turkovich, of Turk's Barbershop, and they have a book of local merchants they put out. And they've gotten better at it. They now actually vet the people. And the reason the book is kind of nice is that they've started charging people to be listed in it. He's just got a case of these directories, and just hands them out. Sometimes you see 'em by the library. I use that fairly extensively.
>
> *Interviewer:* Before that directory was available, was that something that you focused on,

as a consideration when you were figuring out what to do?

Robert: Before that I would probably—not probably, I *know*, I'd look for one of my old Jaycee buddies who runs a local business. And that's not terribly reliable!

Interviewer: How good is the vetting process? What do they do?

Robert: They have a fairly sizable committee. And they um, personal knowledge, where they've seen somebody that claims to be a local business, they'll go and talk to them. And I know from talking—Mike is my barber, and I see him twice a year whether I need to or not—um, they have turned people down.

Robert knows if a business is sufficiently "local" or not—if it keeps money in town, if it helps out when needed—because he knows the people who manage the directory that he uses. Before that, he was able to ask friends in one of the city's main civil society groups (the Jaycees). Thus, Robert stocks up on groceries at Busch's, gets his lawn supplies at Main Street Garden, banks at the credit union, and never eats at chain restaurants if he can help it, to name just a few of the outlets for his locally-focused purchasing. He never has to doubt if these places have a "supply chain" problem, and he knows that Mike Turkovich, keeper of the list of local businesses, is not a Whole Foods "zealot." Buying local is a safe—an externally efficacious—way to vote with his money.

Allen, like Robert, is a voracious consumer of information and someone for whom being conscious of his impact on the environment and other people is a basic value. Growing up the son of two white hippies in an African-American part of Cincinnati, Allen had a rough and frequently physical education in racial tension, but also developed a deep appreciation for pervasive inequalities in American society. After leaving the library where he works as a circulation manager, Allen met me at a coffeeshop and shared stories of the volunteer work for

Democratic campaigns that he used to do before he had children. Even before he and his wife decided to separate, Allen did most of the shopping and errands. But despite the fact that he is addicted to newspapers and pays a lot of attention to labels, he rarely buys products that claim to benefit the environment or workers in general. The reason is not lack of commitment to the cause, but perceived inability to know that he is not being duped.

> *Interviewer:* You described yourself as being in the habit of comparing products generally … Can you describe that a little more?
>
> *Allen:* Getting back to the process, I mean, that's what you're asking me about, like, the motive is questioning. Like, can I trust this product? It's a trust issue going down the line. …. You know, if every product came with some very shady character that was sleeping on your couch [laughs], you'd be, like, "I don't think I'll get that product! I like this other one better even though it cost more," kind of thing. And so, the whole green movement has made it very difficult, because you can find out, well, maybe that wasn't as green as I thought, or, there are these other problems that have arisen with trying to shop green or trying to shop to support this cause or that cause. What's the best way to support a cause, you know? That's a tough one.

The last time Allen felt confident about a product whose social or environmental impacts had been externally verified was when he was shopping for a new car. After months of research, he was positive about the "green" bona fides and American provenance of a new Ford. But that is not a feeling he gets very often.

> I'm dubious of the science [that says "green" things are better], you know, not dubious, but what do you call it, vigilant or, um, I don't accept it on face value? I account for it, but I don't let it be the last word.

Allen is well-read, highly educated (with a master's degree in library sciences), and politically liberal. Indeed, it is because of his appetite for the truth, not in spite of it, that he finds it so hard to trust the claims of ostensibly socially responsible products. Among other things, it seems impossible to believe in the purity of supply chains that, for fair trade, sweat-free, and "green" goods, can stretch around the world.

Despite his deep mistrust of product marketing and labeling systems, Allen has found, in the world of purchasing, an outlet for his interest in social justice and the environment that satisfies his criteria for verifiability. He focuses on patronizing local businesses that seem to treat their workers well and that provide a stabilizing presence in Hilliard's often tenuous economy. Elaborating on his philosophy of locally-focused purchasing, he described his preferences for particular food markets, stores for household goods and office supplies, and cafes and restaurants, as motivated by the belief that he was benefiting both the Hilliard community and workers at that particular establishment. As with Robert, believing that he was truly making a difference was crucial to Allen's motivation.

> *Interviewer:* How do you, for yourself, determine what is local in terms of when you know you're supporting something in the community?
>
> *Allen:* Good question, good question. Yeah, because that's like such a conundrum, you know… If I were to be totally honest, it would be the people that are doing the work—the employees, locally. The ones that have to do everything; that you know, that maintain the store, the employees and the managers—the managers have a stake in it too; it would not be the corporate office, obviously. You can have a chain that goes any number of places, but where it lands you know, and the local environment, um, that's what I think about, you know, because it helps to think about it that way. I mean um, these people have jobs

> and I'm helping them keep their job, and start from there and then work your way up, and if you can, obviously, in terms of food, if you can, um, support local farmers… But I think all farmers need support, too. But um—but I guess start from real local, start from right in your own neighborhood and then work your way out, because that's the only way to make sure … I've lived through tons of neighborhoods that have seen tremendous change. But what keeps a neighborhood a neighborhood? What helps it survive? And I try to support whatever's there…

The only way to "make sure" that one is making a difference is to "start from real local … and work your way out." At other points in our discussion, Allen voiced anger at the way that workers are treated in overseas sweatshops and concern about factory farming, among other issues. But the only kind of socially responsible purchasing that he trusts, in terms of believing that his money and effort are not being wasted, is the kind in front of his eyes—the kind that keep storefronts open around the corner and people in his community at work.

Endorsements of locally-focused purchasing as more reliable—more trustworthy—than other forms of socially-responsible purchasing were common across study participants from all ideological, socioeconomic, and participatory backgrounds. For Wendy, an insurance agent in Jefferson County, shopping at mom-and-pop stores and buying Michigan produce when it's in season gives her the same feeling as working with children at her church: the sense that her efforts are going directly to where they will do good. In contrast, "if someone slaps a label on something and says that it's green" she is unlikely to "take that for face value," because, as she puts it, "are there any standards to put 'green' out there?" For Bruce, a sales representative for a major auto supplier, there is no way that "buying organic foods and vegetables is something that I'm going to, just me purchasing them, really affect the environment. Our health, maybe, okay?

But I don't see how it affects the rest of the community." But by patronizing businesses in the small town of Lafayette, where he and his wife have lived for twenty years, Bruce knows for a fact—or believes that he knows—that his actions help to keep his neighbors in business. Like many others in my study, proof of making a difference was an essential attraction of locally-focused purchasing—and a gaping question mark in other ways of incorporating, in theory, social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions.

4.4. Accessibility: Doing What One Can

Verba et al. list "money, time, and civic skills" as resources that help to explain rates of political participation (1995). Money, as well, has often been cited as a reason why people might *not* buy socially responsible products, as these tend to cost more than conventional counterparts. In this section, I argue that money and civic skills also provide reasons for understanding why people *do* engage in *locally*-focused purchasing. This is because the latter is a form of socially responsible purchasing for which the threshold for participation, in terms of the amount required of certain resources, is relatively low.

Where economic activities are concerned, money is the most fundamental of resources, and many study participants had little to spare. Gunshots had recently been heard in the urban neighborhood near Lincoln, in Mercer County, where I met Michelle and her large, deceptively vicious-looking dog. Just getting by on disability payments, Michelle was not sure if she would be able to keep her small house out of foreclosure; any windfalls went to her children or elderly mother up the street. But despite her precarious financial situation, Michelle felt able to make some choices in her purchasing activities that seem, to her, to exhibit a crucial kind of social responsibility.

Michelle: I shop local, if I can. If I'm not spending more, I will definitely shop local. That is the determining factor in it. You know, I have to watch money, obviously. I'm *waaay* broke. But if I can get it locally, I will.

Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?

Michelle: Um, small engine parts. I like to get 'em here in town, instead of having 'em sent from the factory. I have my own accounts at the factory [Michelle is a licensed mechanic], but people need your business, so I was buying 'em in town … And now, I make clothes for my grandkids, so I'll shop locally at the little fabric shops, rather than going into [Collegeville]. Sometimes it costs me a little bit more, but when I go in, I guess I get treated better, cause I'm there constantly. And also, five years ago, there was a little dollar store over here, and in one season I spent over 700 dollars in the dollar store. And I could have gone to the one closer to [the office] where I worked. But I always shopped at the same one. You know, all the product was for the office.

Interviewer: Did you know the person there?

Michelle: I did after I started shopping there!

Interviewer: It was just important for you to keep the money in the area, if you could?

Michelle: Yeah, yeah. Especially around here. Seems like, all the businesses here are all closing down. Um, yeah, the people here have a real hard time.

For Michelle, even if she does not have the resources to spend more on particular products, at least she can choose where to buy the things that she must have. Thus, she tries to shop closer to home, if she can, in order to do her part to keep the local economy from losing even more jobs and businesses. The logic employed by Alice, an unemployed teacher who lived nearby, was strikingly similar: circumstances beyond her control—most recently a chronic illness that had

caused her to leave the workforce—dictate that she has to look, first and foremost, for the lowest prices. But within these constraints, she still finds room, if infrequently, to incorporate social concerns into her purchasing decisions..

Interviewer: Thinking about social and political issues in shopping, and sort of deciding where you do your shopping and what to buy, like we talked about on the phone a few weeks ago…

Alice: American-made, Michigan-made, local?

Interviewer: Right, and the environment … Could you give me some examples of things you buy or places you shop where that is an important of part of your thought process?

Alice: Um, well I do grocery shopping, my husband does grocery shopping, at Meijer [a big-box store specializing in groceries and household goods], which is, um, obviously a Michigan company. I'm not sure if that's the reason we go there or it's because they have the best assortment at the best price, you know, but we have Kroger right down the street, um, which is not a Michigan Company. Um, and so we travel a little bit further to go to Meijer; it's supporting the state. And when we go to buy things, you know, like there's Michigan-grown sweet corn, I may think: 'okay, let's buy some sweet corn this week."

As we discussed throughout the interview, Alice and her husband, a machinist whose fortunes have fallen with Detroit's factories, have never had much money, even before she became ill. They always shopped where they could get the best deal. But in choosing among big-box alternatives—Walmart, Target, Meijer, K-Mart, and others—Alice has always gravitated toward the one that seemed to her, however indirectly, to offer some benefit to the people of her state and community.

Alice: Oh, once again, we can go back to Meijer, you know. Kroger was close to where we

lived [before Mercer County], or there was a country market in another place we lived, but we always went to Meijer. Um, and just knowing that it was part of the state sort of gave you a little bit better feeling that you were helping to, to support things around here … And I think Meijer even has a time, I'm not sure what time of the year, but in their ad they have "Michigan products month," and their ad specifically advertises the Michigan products. You know, it's only on a page or something, but still they make a point of, pointing them out to people.

Interviewer: Right.

Alice: So it's pretty cool—you don't see Kroger doing that.

Not every state has a big-box store that people are able to view as being "local"—where "local" is a relative term employed to distinguish Meijer from comparatively foreign behemoths such as Walmart. If Meijer did not exist, it is possible that Alice would do much less shopping that seemed to her to be "locally-focused." But the fact that Meijer does exist gives someone with Alice's limitations the opportunity to practice what she construes as purchasing that is locally-focused and socially responsible. And for Michelle, what is "local" is literally what is open in her community, providing jobs, lit street-corners, and a modicum of economic hope. Such institutions are a far cry from farmers markets and locavore pop-up restaurants. But they are no less evidence that even people without the means to enjoy amenities that are the face of the "buy local" movement in places like affluent Collegeville will, in some cases, do what they can to be locally-focused consumers.

Michelle and Alice, despite their lack of financial wherewithal, had strong opinions about social and environmental problems and political goings on (although Michelle rarely voted), and both had been sporadically active in community groups over the years. But Derek, a middle-aged

electrician in the Jefferson County town of Pickett, lacked less steady work than what Verba et al. call "civic skills"—"the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life" (1995:304). An Infrequent Voter with no group affiliations or supervisory duties at work, Derek was uncomfortable expressing opinions about social issues or discussing anything related to politics. What Derek did feel comfortable talking about was his commitment to his wife and two young children, and his desire to give them the same kind of small town life with which he had been raised.

> *Interviewer:* When you were talking about "the bigger picture" earlier—what did that mean to you?
>
> *Derek:* I can't remember exactly how I used it, but, um, the bigger picture, as far as my family and the community is concerned… um… [long silence] I guess I was just thinking of, you know, when I'm seventy years old, and, you know, my kids are in their forties and they got their own families—if I had my way, I'd like to see them around here growing up in this place that I grew up in.

Pickett's main street still bustles with a couple of diners, a post office, a public library, and some stores. Derek feels disconnected with and uninformed about what is going on in the state capital, let alone in Washington, D.C. But he is positive that he can do small things to help his neighbors and keep Pickett the way, in his memory, it has always been.

> *Interviewer:* When you guys decide, sort of, where to go shopping, um, do you ever talk about wanting to support businesses around Pickett?
>
> *Derek:* Um, yeah—it doesn't always happen, but the uh, the grocery store that's right in town, at the corner, used to be Frank's IGA. And, my brother worked there all through high school. I know the family that owned it. And they just recently bought it back from

somebody that they had sold it to a few years ago. So, I like to go in there just because I know them, and support them. It's not always as convenient, because my wife … usually wants to go down to Walmart. So, I try to go in there you know, when I can … Or like the hardware store. And, um, I don't know, going to the flower shop occasionally, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: How often would you say you manage to get to Franks, on a monthly basis?

Derek: On a monthly basis? Probably not more than once or twice … I, I guess I just, it's just nice to go in there, and… I know that when I buy this product… you know… it's going to, you know, these people, who I know and have known, and I can trust in whatever else, you know. As opposed to, you know, doing shopping in a big, you know, corporate store, you know…

Interviewer: Mm-hmm… Right.

Derek: So, I guess, in that regard, I guess it… that's kind of community-oriented.

It would be impossible to call Derek political, and he struggled to articulate what community might mean or what the role of small businesses in a town like Pickett might be. For the purposes of motivating infrequent locally-focused purchasing, however, Derek's desire to contribute to the wellbeing of friends and neighbors was enough. Derek's way of acting on social concerns through purchasing practices suggests that locally-focused purchasing simply requires fewer and less developed civic skills than other forms of socially responsible purchasing. And for Michelle and Alice, "buying local" required fewer of other kinds of resources, as well.

4.5. Communality: Building a Unique Good

One of the most stinging critiques of localism is that it represents a license for people to declaim responsibility for problems and injustices occurring beyond the community, region, or whichever geographical unit "the local" is taken to mean. In this section, I will not argue that locally-focused purchasing may not, in some instances, have the consequence of allowing a certain kind of exclusion, or NIMBY-ism, to fester. Rather, I will argue that many who practice locally-focused purchasing instead of, or more often than, other forms of socially-responsible purchasing, subscribe to a two-part view: first, that lack of community is one of the greatest social problems; and second, that one can only help to strengthen community by working where one actually lives—that is simply the nature of the good in question. The appearance of exclusiveness may be, in some cases, a *consequence* of this view; but the view itself does not hold that other people ought to be excluded, or are less important than oneself and one's fellow community members. Rather, my research suggests that many locally-focused consumers are acting on the presumption that community, as a unique good, can only be created when people who share a "local" join together and support each other.

Brisk and friendly, Erin shook my hand, apologized for being two minutes late, and whisked me out of the hospital lobby to the cafeteria where we sat for our conversation. A nurse and mother of two, Erin negotiated her frenetic workplace like a New York bike messenger. But I soon learned that although she thrives on a fast-paced, challenging environment at work, outside the hospital Erin strives for an existence that shares in the best parts of the small town in central Michigan where she grew up. Biking past farms, graduating with just ninety other students, learning to hunt in state forests—those were some of her best memories, and a big part of what she wanted to pass on to her children.

Erin: We're an Amish Burn Hospital—we took that on, like, two years ago—and so we

> take in these burns from anywhere they come from—Pennsylvania, Indiana. It's amazing to see their support network. The Amish … pay their hospital bills as a community, you know, and they get really big hospital bills, because when they send family members here it's when they're really sick. But they're right here, and they're here to help, and they're healers. And I think their network is intriguing and how we as a community can barely take care of our next door neighbor, you know what I mean? Or the homeless shelter down the street can barely get enough food donations, so I think it's just intriguing, smaller communities versus…
>
> *Interviewer:* What was your experience like where you grew up?
>
> *Erin:* Um, a tight-knit community, everybody cares for everybody. I think that's why I still reside in that church as much as I do, because I like that feeling, like you know each other, and people all have your back no matter what … I mean you still have your divisions and your groups**,** but in the end there's more bridges between the groups than there are in other larger groups that I've been in.

For Erin, the good of community—epitomized by the commitment of the Amish to each other—has no substitute, and can only be produced by everyone doing their part. Engineering this kind of lifestyle for herself and her family is not easy: Erin and her husband work full-time, and their suburban neighborhood, which does not have a recycling program, continues to see its share of sprawl. Access to the kinds of mom-and-pop stores that she would like to patronize is also an issue; "downtown" Winchester in southern Adams County, where she lives now, has lost many of its small businesses to the typical onslaught of big-box stores. So Erin is an infrequent locally-focused consumer. When buying groceries and everyday goods, she just goes to where she can get what she needs and be done with it. But when she has extra time, she spends money at small

businesses—the downtown bike shop, the bakery, the "knick-knack" stores, the restaurants—that have proven themselves to be committed to the larger community.

> *Erin:* I think that circle has to be, you know, if I support the business, I hope the business supports the community, and then the community will support the business, kind of, you know what I mean, it's a full circle … So if I see a company support in any sense the community or get involved in that sense, I definitely will try to do as much as I can with that business.
>
> *Interviewer:* Have there been ones in Winchester that you do feel like that?
>
> *Erin:* Yeah, there's a few. There's a few uptown ones like the restaurants are, they try to stay involved and try to do events, and they try to promote Winchester … And they reach out to the small, like, the Kiwanis Club, or, um churches that are looking for fundraisers, or girl scouts or boy scouts. They reach out to them to come help with the event and plan it or do traffic. I think that makes it easier for them to get uptown business as well as support the groups as well as make students, you know what I mean? When the students get involved and they see what they're doing and they help do something and I think pride helps part of the community, pride of building, pride of networking.
>
> *Interviewer:* Do they get more, better businesses as a result of this?
>
> *Erin:* Yeah. I mean if there's events uptown we try to go up and support it and I mean, I would say within the community we spend, if we're going to do something it's 50% to the community, you know what I mean? If the events are up there, we donate, you know what I mean?

Locally-focused purchasing, for Erin, is not an end in itself, but directed at the specific goal of supporting institutions that, in turn, recognize their indebtedness to the community of which they

are a part. Erin has an admittedly high bar for which businesses are adequately involved in the community, and thus qualify as ones that she is willing to go out of her way to patronize. But businesses that do meet that bar—that make connections between youth groups, churches, and other institutions—earn her support.

Sharon and Paul—both, like Erin, randomly-recruited non-Activists—were two more study participants for whom supportive, close-knit communities represented a good on par with, if not more important than, a thriving economy and a healthy natural environment. For Sharon, a stay-at-home mother in Danville, the wealthy seat of Jefferson County, participating in her town's web of small businesses, churches, and charities enabled her to show her children that there is more to life than getting a car for graduating high school—something that seems to be the norm in Detroit's northern suburbs.

> I think it's important to be a part of your community, even if that's your little segment. I think it's just, I think it's important not just for me, but for my kids to see. I mean, this county is a very, for the most part, fairly affluent area, and I work very hard for them to understand that this is—that they are so fortunate to have this life.

Along with her husband and sons, Sharon is active in several charities, as well church groups, which she believes do important things not just for homeless and low-income families in less fortunate parts of Jefferson County, but also for people around the country. These positive organizations could not exist without the support of a thriving ecosystem of businesses and the relationships between community members that lead people to donate their time and money to worthy causes. Exposing her children to the good of community, since moving to Danville, has been one of her prime goals as a mother. This she does by spending time every week around the Main Street stores, not just shopping, but building and maintaining these relationships.

> *Sharon:* I don't know if these are the right things to say or not, but I really think that if you are part of a community, if you live in a community, you should be part of it, and whether that's the library program, you know, or school programs, you should—you're affected by those around you and you should affect, have good—make good choices, too … Like the 3/50 Project.
>
> *Interviewer:* What is that?
>
> *Sharon:* That's um, that you spend $50 a month between three of your local retailers, independent retailers. And I try to do that. And actually I probably spend more than $50. I probably spend $50 a week … You know, if you like all these things and you like that sense of community then you have to support it.

Unlike Sharon, who will probably stay in Danville for the foreseeable future, Paul's job as a manufacturing contractor took him and his wife to a different city every four or five years before he settled in Lincoln, and then retired several years later. Now 71, as he looks back on his life, he realizes that in every place he lived, he made a concerted effort to patronize locally-owned businesses. As a devout Christian and lover of the outdoors, but also someone who depended on the American automobile industry for employment throughout his career, Paul sees much to praise in the idea of environmentally-friendly and American-made products. The trouble, as for so many other participants, is that it does not seem to him that "green" claims can be trusted, and American-made products are nearly impossible to find. But the possibility of helping those nearest to him through his purchasing practices has always appealed. As Paul put it, if everyone did their duty, then the world would be a better place.

> Um, well basic Christian principles: the family is a unit and you take care of the family. Community is the next largest unit outside of the family. And it would follow then if you

> take care of the family and take care of the community, I don't have to worry about the people who live in Lansing, necessarily … So I should just move out one step and embrace the community as, well, maybe not the same as, but to some degree the same as I do my family. And build that relationship, or the relationships, within the community—supporting them. And supporting is not only supporting as far as, ah, you have some merchandise and I am gonna buy it; it's, if you lose your job, and you don't have any food to eat and I've got two freezers full of food, you know, why should I see you go hungry? … And if you need some clothes, then I'll add some length to my trousers and let you wear a pair of 'em! [chuckles] That type of thing.

For Paul—as for Erin, Sharon, and many other participants—practitioners of locally-focused purchasing are not cogs in a zero-sum game, where the gains of one locality are the losses of another. Rather, it is the responsibility of each community to take care of their own—because, as with families, it is the ones nearest to us who take care of us best. Locally-focused purchasing, in this schema, represents a way to promote a good that cannot be created, in any place, by any people save those who actually live there.

5. Conclusion

Enthusiasm for localism in general, and locally-focused purchasing in particular, is not hard to find among people interested in home-grown environmentalism and reviving regional economies. Initiatives like the Grand Rapids Downtown Market are taking root around the country, as mayors, entrepreneurs and civic groups—not to mention social scientists—seek to make commitment to community a foundation for sustainable economic growth. But localism

has also come under significant criticism as a framework for social change. Theorists have asserted that efforts inspired by localist ideas, on the part of organizations and individuals, may either result *from* an unreflective embrace of "the local" as inherently just and sustainable, or result *in* an orientation to political action that overlooks problems distant from one's backyard. Locally-focused purchasing, seen in this light, may depend on the all-to-human conflation of "hometown" with "good," and do little to repair deep inequalities in access to environmental and economic goods.

To date, lack of basic research into why and how often people engage in locally-focused purchasing has made it difficult to evaluate the *non-reflexivity* and *exclusivity* hypotheses outlined above. In addressing this gap in the literature, my argument has been that critiques of localism and locally-focused purchasing, when viewed against rich and complex models of political participation that have developed over the past thirty years, are at the very least incomplete. Individuals surveyed and interviewed for this study were not unreflective about the benefits and drawbacks of different ways of addressing social and environmental problems, or insular in their thinking about what problems matter. Rather, the extent to which participants in my research engaged in locally-focused purchasing appeared to depend more on factors that were equal parts mundane and profound. Opportunities for locally-focused purchasing were more experientially gratifying and accessible than those for other forms of socially responsible purchasing. Outcomes promised by locally-focused purchasing were as verifiable as seeing storefronts on Main Street stay open; the claims of most kinds of socially-responsible products, on the other hand, were easy to doubt. Finally, for those who viewed community itself as a good uniquely worthy of support, locally-focused purchasing had special appeal.

Indeed, the idea that localism may derive from a kind of ethical ethnocentrism, where people shirk responsibilities to do things that will benefit groups outside of their everyday experience, is not itself a value-free point of view. Given the necessity for each person to decide how to allot their particular pool of limited resources, reasonable people can disagree on basic questions such as: For whom are we responsible? How much are we obligated to do for people at different degrees of remove from ourselves? Differences of opinion that divide moral philosophers also exist between "regular" people who confront many of the same questions in their everyday lives. What seems selfish through one lens may appear laudable through another. It is only by investigating the reasons that people give for their choices, and by situating particular thoughts, feelings and actions in the context of an overall life system, that we can begin to understand practices inspired by localist ideas, and what their consequences are likely to be for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole.

This paper suggest several areas for future research. First, findings regarding the characteristics and behaviors of locally-focused consumers must be regarded as provisional until validated by larger, more representative surveys. The sample recruited for this study was significantly more diverse than that used in many investigations of socially responsible purchasing, in particular those that have relied on qualitative methods alone. But it was also necessary for the sample be small enough that every participant could be interviewed, and constraints on funding and time could not be avoided. Taking this paper as a reference point, then, current understanding of determinants of locally-focused purchasing is arguably analogous to where understanding of other forms of socially responsible purchasing was ten years ago, when surveys and interviews on the topic were first being conducted. For this reason, more research is needed in order to confirm or revise the present findings.

Second, a crucial question remains unanswered: whether localism and locally-focused purchasing will ultimately help to address, exacerbate, or have no effect on, major social and environmental problems. Understanding the identifies and motivations of individuals who take action inspired by localist ideas is part of the story. But the full implications of practices and policies rooted in localist ideas cannot be seen in the "why" of actors alone. A great deal of work is needed in order to investigate the effects on the environment, economic growth, and inequality of "buy local" campaigns, efforts to strengthen local food systems, and related phenomena.

What is small is beautiful, declared E.F. Shumacher in 1973, and the current surge of interest in locally-focused purchasing is a direct descendent of these ideas. Forty years after Shumacher helped to inspire the modern environmental movement, however, social science still knows little about *who* finds small to be beautiful, and why, and the extent to which this conviction shapes actual behavior. If the conclusions of this paper are any indication, the answers to these questions may play a role in social movements for years to come.

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

	Frequency	Percent*	Mean	S.D.
Age (N=70)			55.18	12.71
Sex (N=71)				
Female	39	55		
Male	32	45		
Annual Household Income, $ (N=57)			67,736	42,161
Less than 25,000	10	14		
25,000 to 49,999	16	23		
50,000 to 74,999	5	7		
75,000 to 99,999	14	20		
100,000 to 149,999	10	14		
More than 150,000	16	23		
Highest Level of Education (N=71)				
Less than high school	1	1		
High School Diploma	6	8		
Some college	18	26		
Associates Degree	4	6		
Bachelor Degree	21	30		
Graduate Degree	20	28		
Buying Products for Ethical or Political Reasons in the last 12 months? (N=69)				
Never	27	39		
Once or twice	16	23		
Three to six times	10	14		
More than seven times	16	23		
Boycotting Products for Ethical or Political Reasons in the last 12 months? (N=70)				
Never	31	44		
Once or twice	16	23		
Three to six times	7	10		
More than seven times	16	23		
Race (N = 71)				
White	65	92		
Non-White	6	8		
Political Ideology, 1-10 scale (N=65)			4.86	2.76
Liberal (1-3)	26	40		
Moderate (4-7)	25	38		
Conservative (8-10)	14	22		
Political Engagement (N=71)				
Activist	25	35		
Frequent Voter (≥ 3 elections since 2002)	33	46		
Infrequent Voter (< 3 elections since 2002)	13	18		

*May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table 3.2. Importance of Socially Responsible Purchasing (SRP) by Participant Characteristics

	SRP Local	SRP Environment	SRP American	SRP Workers	
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	N
Pol. Engagement					
Activists	3.25*	3.17	3.29	2.83	25
Regular Voters	3.27	3	3.42	2.97	33
Infrequent Voters	3.15	3.08	3.46	2.77	13
Total	3.24	3.07	3.39	2.88	71
Ideology					
Conservative	3.21	2.79	3.21	2.5	14
Moderate	3.32	3	3.57	2.57	28
Liberal	3.19	3.3	3.3	3.37	28
Total	3.25	3.07	3.39	2.88	70
Household Income					
<50k	3.15	3.19	3.5	3	26
50k-100k	3.32	2.89	3.11	2.74	19
>100k	3.28	3.08	3.48	2.87	26
Total	3.24	3.07	3.39	2.88	71

*On a scale from 1-4, where 1="not at all important" and 4="very important."

Table 3.3. Frequency (with Column Percentages) of Socially Responsible Purchasing (SRP) by Participant Characteristics

	Political Engagement Group			Ideology			Household Income			
	Activists	Regular Voters	Infrequent Voters	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	<50k	50k-100k	>100k	Total
	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %	Col %
SRP Local										
never/rarely	48	45.5	61.5	50	46.4	50	61.5	36.8	46.2	49.3
infrequently	32	36.4	23.1	35.7	32.1	32.1	23.1	47.4	30.8	32.4
frequently	20	18.2	15.4	14.3	21.4	17.9	15.4	15.8	23.1	18.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
SRP Enviro.										
never/rarely	68	90.9	100	100	96.4	64.3	92.3	78.9	80.8	84.5
infrequently	24	9.1	0	0	3.6	28.6	7.7	15.8	15.4	12.7
frequently	8	0	0	0	0	7.1	0	5.3	3.8	2.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
SRP Americ.										
never/rarely	84	87.9	100	92.9	89.3	85.7	100	63.2	96.2	88.7
infrequently	12	12.1	0	7.1	10.7	10.7	0	36.8	0	9.9
frequently	4	0	0	0	0	3.6	0	0	3.8	1.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
SRP Workers										
never/rarely	92	93.9	100	100	96.4	89.3	96.2	94.7	92.3	94.4
infrequently	8	3	0	0	0	10.7	0	5.3	7.7	4.2
frequently	0	3	0	0	3.6	0	3.8	0	0	1.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	25	33	13	14	28	28	26	19	26	71

Table 3.4. Frequency (with Row Percentages) of Socially Responsible Purchasing (SRP) by Participant Characteristics

	Political Engagement Group			Ideology			Household Income			
	Activists	Regular Voters	Infrequent Voters	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	<50k	50k-100k	>100k	Total
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %
SRP Local										
never/rarely	34.3	42.9	22.9	20.6	38.2	41.2	45.7	20	34.3	100
infrequently	34.8	52.2	13	21.7	39.1	39.1	26.1	39.1	34.8	100
frequently	38.5	46.2	15.4	15.4	46.2	38.5	30.8	23.1	46.2	100
Total	35.2	46.5	18.3	20	40	40	36.6	26.8	36.6	100
SRP Enviro.										
never/rarely	28.3	50	21.7	23.7	45.8	30.5	40	25	35	100
infrequently	66.7	33.3	0	0	11.1	88.9	22.2	33.3	44.4	100
frequently	100	0	0	0	0	100	0	50	50	100
Total	35.2	46.5	18.3	20	40	40	36.6	26.8	36.6	100
SRP Americ.										
never/rarely	33.3	46	20.6	21	40.3	38.7	41.3	19	39.7	100
infrequently	42.9	57.1	0	14.3	42.9	42.9	0	100	0	100
frequently	100	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	100	100
Total	35.2	46.5	18.3	20	40	40	36.6	26.8	36.6	100
SRP Workers										
never/rarely	34.3	46.3	19.4	21.2	40.9	37.9	37.3	26.9	35.8	100
infrequently	66.7	33.3	0	0	0	100	0	33.3	66.7	100
frequently	0	100	0	0	100	0	100	0	0	100
Total	35.2	46.5	18.3	20	40	40	36.6	26.8	36.6	100
N	25	33	13	14	28	28	26	19	26	71

Chapter Four

Doing Good by Feeling Well?

Socially Responsible Purchasing and the Experience of Shopping

1. Introduction

Why do people incorporate concerns about social and environmental problems into purchasing decisions—a practice that I term "socially responsible purchasing?" This deceptively simple question has inspired a large academic literature in sociology, economics, and consumer studies, as well as considerable interest among social movement organizations and in the popular press. Over the past fifteen years, explanations of who engages in socially responsible purchasing, and why and how often, have revolved around two kinds of causal factors: the beliefs, behaviors, and socioeconomic characteristics of individual consumers, and aspects of the larger economic and political structures that both produce goods of various kinds and certify these goods as satisfying social and environmental criteria. Socially responsible purchasing, most studies using survey data have concluded, occurs when consumers are well-informed about social and environmental problems and have access to affordable products whose claims of social and environmental benefits appear, to consumers, to be trustworthy.

Recently, however, researchers using in-depth interviews, ethnography, and other qualitative methods have begun to explore the possible impact on socially responsible purchasing

of a third kind of factor: how purchasing activities are subjectively experienced by different consumers. The "lived experience" of being a consumer, according to the few studies that have taken this route, is full of powerful and sometimes contradictory emotions: excitement and boredom, pleasure and stress, anticipation and disappointment (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Johnston and Szabo 2010; Johnston 2007; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). In addition, shopping for socially responsible products can require more time and energy than shopping for conventional products, because the former are generally more difficult to find and make unusual claims that consumers need to think about and evaluate (Brown 2009; Connolly and Prothero 2008; Schoolman 2012). Thus, according to what might be termed the *subjective experience hypothesis*, people for whom purchasing activities are, on balance, associated with positive emotions and meanings, may be more likely to devote the extra effort to shopping that socially responsible purchasing involves (Schoolman 2013).

If correct, the idea that the experience of purchasing activities shapes socially responsible purchasing behavior independent of consumers' socioeconomic resources would significantly expand existing theory about why people take political action in the marketplace. At present, however, the subjective experience hypothesis is little more than a provocative idea. Hypotheses regarding the effects of consumers' education level, income, sex, and political engagement have been thoroughly investigated by survey-based studies (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Shah et al. 2007; Starr 2009). The effects of the availability and price of socially responsible products have also been explored through controlled experiments in both laboratory and real-world settings (Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt 2010; Prasad et al. 2004; Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013). But, due to its relatively recent vintage, the subjective

experience hypothesis has not received the same opportunities for systematic, quantitative validation.

In this paper, I use survey data from a large, representative sample of individual consumers to present one of the first systematic tests of the subjective experience hypothesis in the area of socially responsible purchasing. Based on a survey of several thousand students, staff and faculty at a large, public university, I show that variation in feelings about the activity of shopping for food are, in many cases, significantly associated with differences in the purchase of food products that make claims about social and environmental benefits. These results suggest that future models of determinants of socially responsible purchasing must take into account not just who consumers are, but also how consumers feel about the very activities that represent an unavoidable bridge between social and environmental concerns and products aimed at "making a difference" in the world.

2. When is Purchasing a Political Act?

2.1. A Focus on Resources

Owing to numerous survey-based studies conducted in the U.S. and Europe over the past ten years, the relationship of individual-level socioeconomic resources to socially responsible purchasing is arguably well-understood. By "socioeconomic resources," I mean aspects of an individual's socioeconomic or geographic position—such as education level, income, and access to particular products—that are subject to relatively uncontroversial quantification. In particular, the education level of individuals has consistently been found to be associated with incorporating social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions at least once or twice a year

(Andersen and Tobiasen 2004; Diamantopoulos et al. 2003; Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Shah et al. 2007; Starr 2009; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005) The effect of gender has varied across studies, with some finding that women practice socially responsible purchasing more often than men, while others find no effect for gender (ibid.). Income, when compared to education, has often not had a large or statistically significant effect (ibid.)—a fact that has surprised researchers (Andersen and Tobiasen 2004).

The finding that education level is strongly associated with buying products for ethical or political reasons has been interpreted to mean that the key to facilitating socially responsible purchasing is to provide consumers with more and better information (Berry and McEachern 2005). This laser-like focus on education, information, and product labeling, however, risks overlooking two inconvenient truths. First, although education level is a relatively powerful predictor of socially responsible purchasing, when compared to other socioeconomic factors, the absolute amount of variation in socially responsible purchasing explained by existing models is small. In one study that used data from a survey specifically designed to examine determinants of socially responsible purchasing, socioeconomic variables explained less than ten percent of the variance in "political consumerism" (Shah et al. 2007). In another study, just six percent of the variance in "environmental purchasing" was explained by all factors included in the model (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003).[1]

Second, socially responsible purchasing can be practiced as often as every day, or as rarely as once a year; yet variation in the *frequency* of socially responsible purchasing has been subject to little investigation (for a recent exception, see Willis and Schor 2012). In large part,

[1] Many quantitative studies of socially responsible purchasing use logistic regression and report Pseudo-R-squared measures, which cannot be interpreted as a straightforward percentage of variance explained.

lack of attention to frequency can be ascribed to the fact that major periodic surveys—such as the General Social Survey and Eurobarometer—ask only whether individuals buy products for ethical or political reasons once or twice a year. Publicly available research published by non-profit organizations and marketing firms, however, suggests that perhaps ten to fifteen percent of all consumers regularly incorporate social or environmental concerns into purchasing decisions—a number that indicates that most people with a college degree engage in socially responsible purchasing infrequently, if at all (Cowe and Williams 2000; Tallontire, Erdenechimeg, and Blowfield 2001). To date, existing studies have not explained why there is significant variation in the frequency with which even highly-educated individuals express political views through private action in the marketplace.

2.2. Accounting for Experience

If the socioeconomic characteristics of consumers explain only a limited—and perhaps surprisingly small—amount of variation in socially responsible purchasing, then what other factors, or kinds of factors, might be considered? Products cannot be bought that have not been made or cannot be found, and some researchers have argued that the supply of affordable, high-quality "socially responsible products"[2] is simply inadequate to the demand (Prasad et al. 2004; Robinson, Meyer, and Kimeldorf 2013) But a third potential explanation also exists, which I term the "subjective experience hypothesis": other things being equal, people who enjoy purchasing activities may be more likely to invest in these activities the time and energy that socially responsible purchasing can require.

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[2] "Socially responsible products" are, in this paper, distinguished from "conventional products" by the claims that they make regarding social or environmental benefits, and not—insofar as they could be determined—the veracity of these claims.

I base the subjective experience hypothesis on a two-part argument. First, for different people at different times, purchasing activities can range from *intrinsically enjoyable* to purely *instrumental* in nature (Hewer and Campbell 1997; Prus and Dawson 1991). Depending on the person and the environment, shopping for food, household goods, and clothing can be either fun or stressful, socially engaging or socially isolating, intellectually challenging or a burdensome chore—and everything in between (Jansen-Verbeke 1987; Lehtonen and Mäenpää 1997; Prus 1993; Shaw 2010; ibid.). Second, incorporating social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions often requires more time, energy, and emotional investment—not to mention money—than shopping that lacks political or ethical dimensions. Finding stores that carry socially responsible products, finding such products within stores, and reflecting on the relative merits and importance of goods that claim, with varying degrees of credibility, to address a range of problems and issues—each stage of socially responsible purchasing can be time-consuming, difficult and stressful (Connolly and Prothero 2008; Horton 2003; Macnaghten 2003; Schoolman 2012).

Putting these two points together, I would argue the following: to the extent that a person enjoys purchasing activities, the "non-monetary costs" of socially responsible purchasing will be more bearable, and may perhaps, for someone who relishes the challenges and sensations of shopping, not even feel like costs at all. On the other hand, a person who associates purchasing activities primarily with crowded "big-box stores," long lines, unresponsive salespeople, and the everpresent possibility of being duped by deceptive advertisements, will be less willing or able to pay the non-monetary costs of socially responsible purchasing, in terms of time, energy, and emotional investment.

The subjective experience hypothesis, as outlined above, has been developed as a theoretical construct in previous research (Schoolman 2013), but has not yet been subject to systematic investigation through quantitative analysis. In the rest of this paper, I address this gap in the literature by using survey data to test the relationship of the lived experience of one particular kind of shopping on the propensity of individuals to engage in socially responsible purchasing.

3. Research Design

3.1. Data

From 2009 to 2011, the Graham Environmental Sustainability Institute at the University of Michigan coordinated an "integrated assessment" of campus sustainability,[3] through which researchers and staff from a range of departments were engaged to develop recommendations on how university policies and practices regarding sustainability could be improved. As part of the integrated assessment process, it was decided that indicators were needed not just for the environmental impacts of large-scale institutional actions, such as energy purchasing and waste production, but also for the "culture of sustainability" among students, staff, and faculty. A "culture of sustainability" was defined as an environment where "members of the university community are aware of environmental issues, committed to a lifestyle of sustainable practices, and act or behave in sustainable ways" (Marans et al. 2011). On the basis of this recommendation, the Graham Institute launched the Sustainability Cultural Indicators Project

[3] The University of Michigan defined "sustainability" as an "emerging field of problem-driven, interdisciplinary scholarship and practices that seeks to protect the environment and increase quality of life for present and future generations" (Regents of the University of Michigan 2012).

(SCIP)—a multi-year effort to collect information on knowledge, dispositions and behaviors related to sustainability.

The planned centerpiece of SCIP was a longitudinal survey of students, staff, and faculty at the Ann Arbor campus of the University of Michigan. The SCIP survey was designed to encompass several distinct areas of sustainability, including transportation, conservation and waste, food, climate change, and the natural landscape. For the first wave of the SCIP survey, data were collected from random samples of: 1) full-time undergraduate and graduate[4] students; 2) benefits-eligible staff and faculty at all schools, departments, and offices. The survey was open for several weeks, beginning in late October, 2012. Potential survey respondents were contacted several times through email and direct mail; recipients of recruitment messages were encouraged by prominent figures at U-M to complete an online version of the survey. Respondents were also offered a chance to enter a lottery for a $50 gift card.

The survey included nearly 200 questions, including demographic items. Staff and faculty received some questions that students did not; for instance, staff and faculty were asked about property ownership and property care. Eighty percent (4,018) of students who accessed the survey answered enough questions (at least 161) to be considered a completed interview.[5] The response rate was: 1) 40.6 percent for all students (4,470 out of 11,000 invited); 2) 39.8 percent for staff (1,066 out of 2,680 invited); 3) 48.9 percent for faculty (1,100 out of 2,250 invited). Final results were weighted by sex and class for students, and by sex and division of employment (health system or non-health system[6]) for staff and faculty.

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[4] "Graduate" students included those enrolled in masters, doctoral, and professional programs.

[5] Completion rates were similar for staff and faculty, but exact figures are not currently available.

[6] The University Hospital is the largest division at the University of Michigan.

In future years, longitudinal data will be collected from the "panel" of students who participated in the first wave of the survey. In addition, new cross-sections of students, staff and faculty will be invited to become participants in the project. Longitudinal data will then also be collected from new student participants for the estimated six-year duration of the project.

3.2. Variables

3.2.1. Dependent Variables. The practice of socially responsible purchasing can, in theory, occur with respect to any and all kinds of goods, from appliances to vehicles to financial instruments to food. In this paper, I focus on socially responsible purchasing with respect to food, which was the subject of one section of the SCIP survey.

The SCIP survey asked respondents how often, over the past year, they or other household members bought each of seven different kinds of foods on behalf of which claims are often made regarding social and environmental benefits: 1) locally-grown or locally-processed food; 2) organic food; 3) fair trade food; 4) food from humanely-treated animals; 5) food from animals that were not given hormones or antibiotics; 6) grass-fed beef; 7) fish from sustainable fisheries.[7] For each kind of "socially responsible food"—where the phrase "socially responsible," as defined in an earlier footnote, refers to claims made on behalf of the particular products, and not to the objective validity of these claims—respondents were asked whether they purchased it: 1) never; 2) rarely; 3) sometimes; 4) most of the time or always. Respondents were also given a "don't know" option, which for these analyses was recoded as "never." The reason for recoding "don't know" responses was that consumers who genuinely do not know whether

[7] The words used in this list (i.e. "food from humanely-treated animals") were the exact words used on the survey instrument.

they are buying a particular kind of food can be said to never *intentionally* be buying it. Moreover, it seems reasonable to expect that consumers who believed even that they *may have* bought a particular kind of food just once in a while would have at least selected "rarely."

3.2.2. Independent Variable of Main Interest. An item was included in the SCIP survey with the specific intention of testing the subjective experience hypothesis. All respondents were asked, "In general, how do you feel about food shopping?" and then directed to select one of three statements: 1) "I enjoy food shopping;" 2) "I don't like going food shopping;" 3) "I don't feel either positively or negatively about food shopping." Dummy variables were created for *enjoying* food shopping and for *not feeling either positively or negatively* about food shopping, with *not liking* food shopping as the omitted category.

3.2.3. Other Independent Variables. Socially responsible foods are intended to appeal strongly to people who are relatively concerned about the environmental and social impacts of food production and food systems. The likely effect of such concerns on socially responsible purchasing was captured by including a control variable based on a question that asked, "How concerned are you about whether food is grown and produced in a way that is good for the environment?": 1) not at all concerned; 2) not that concerned; 3) somewhat concerned; 4) very concerned.

Categorical control variables for household income and age were included for both staff and faculty. The survey question about household income had six response options, ranging from "less than $50k" to "greater than $200k"; the question about age had seven response options, ranging from "under 25" to "over 70." On the survey, both staff and faculty were asked about their education level; however, as nearly all faculty at the University of Michigan have doctoral degrees, control variables for education were only included for staff. The education controls took

the form of dummy variables for "graduate or professional degree" and "college degree," with the omitted category being "less than a college degree."

Although students did not, for obvious reasons, have a household income or an education level to be included in the models, an effort was made to account for the effects of socioeconomic status. Specifically, students were asked to give the zip code of their primary residence during their last year of high school. These zip codes were then matched with data on median household income, by zip code, from the 2011 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census. A continuous control variable for the log of median household income was then included for all students, according to their pre-college zip code.

Control variables for sex were included for all respondents. For students, a dummy variable for "female" was based on information provided by the university. For faculty and staff, dummy variables were created from a question that asked whether respondents considered themselves to be: 1) female; 2) male; 3) transgender; 4) decline to respond. "Female" was then used as one dummy variable; "transgender" and "decline to respond" were grouped into a second dummy variable; and "male" was the omitted category.

3.3. Methods of Analysis

Ordered logistic regressions were conducted for each dependent variable (i.e. each kind of socially responsible food). In addition, for each dependent variable, regressions were conducted both without and with the variables included to test the subjective experience hypothesis. This was done in order to examine the effect of including a test for subjective experience on the magnitude and significance of the other independent variables. For the purpose of maximizing the clarity of the final tables, only the full regression models are included with this paper; partial

regression models (i.e. without the dependent variables of main interest) are available upon request.

Sets of regressions were conducted separately for three different groups of respondents: undergraduate students living in private (i.e. non-university) housing, staff, and faculty. Regressions were conducted for undergraduates, but not for graduate students, because 31 percent of graduate students did not give a zip code for their last year of high school, making it impossible to impute an indicator of socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status has generally been found to be one of the major predictors of socially responsible purchasing, and so it was not considered advisable to test potential determinants of socially responsible purchasing without being able to control for this essential individual-level characteristic. But including only graduate students for whom income data *were* available would have presented the risk of a biased sample, as there was no way of knowing why some graduate students had given a high school zip code, while nearly one-third had not. Regressions were conducted only for undergraduates living in non-university housing because students who live in university residence halls do not do their own food shopping or cooking.

Regressions were conducted separately for staff and faculty because, for the purposes of respondent recruitment, these two groups were treated as entirely different populations. Different sampling weights were created for staff and faculty, and weighted data from both samples could not be used in the same model. Models for both populations, however, are presented side by side, so that the results of analyses can be compared. Conducting three sets of regression models for three different "groups" (in this case, undergraduates, staff, and faculty) is functionally equivalent to including one ore more interaction terms in a set of "combined" regression models where individuals from all groups would be observed at once. The approach followed in this

paper is unorthodox, as combined models arguably constitute a more efficient presentation of information. But fitting separate models to students, staff and faculty is methodologically sound, as this approach does not bias my estimates in any way (Fox 1997). Indeed, fitting separate models results in fewer degrees of freedom for each regression, and thus arguably constitutes a more conservative test of my hypotheses.

4. Results

4.1. Characteristics of the Samples

Table 4.1 presents descriptive statistics for the dependent variables for all survey groups. For most kinds of socially responsible food, the average frequency of purchase hovers between "rarely" and "sometimes." Staff and faculty bought local food more often than any other kind of socially responsible food, while for students organic food was the most popular.

[Table 4.1 about here]

Table 4.2 presents descriptive statistics for the independent variables for all survey groups. The average household income of staff and faculty, and the average median household income of students' pre-college zip codes, illustrate the fact that the campus population of the University of Michigan cannot be considered representative, in terms of socioeconomic resources, of southeast Michigan as a whole, much less the state or country. In 2011, according to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, the median household income was $59,737 in the county where the university is located, and $48,669 in the state of Michigan. However, of the three groups surveyed, staff and undergraduates are unquestionably closer to most Michigan residents and Americans, in terms of income (and, in the case of staff, education), than faculty.

[Table 4.2 about here]

4.2. Evaluating the "Subjective Experience Hypothesis"

Tables 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 show the results of ordered logistic regressions for undergraduates, staff and faculty, respectively. The results suggest qualified support for the hypothesis that how purchasing activities are experienced is related to how often people engage in socially responsible purchasing. For university staff and undergraduates, the effect of *enjoying* food shopping, as compared with *not liking* food shopping, is significant in the expected (positive) direction for every kind of socially responsible food except for "humane" and, for students, fair trade food. Coefficients in ordered logistic regression can be interpreted as the difference that a one-unit change in independent variable *X* for individual *Z* makes to the odds that *Z* will also possess a value for dependent variable *Y* that is one unit higher than another individual who is, with the exception of *X*, identical to *Z* (Neilson and Paxton 2010; UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group 2013). Thus, for undergraduates, being someone who enjoys food shopping increases the odds of more frequently buying local food by 49% ((EXP[.397 × 1] – 1) × 100) and of organic food by 66% ((EXP[.505 × 1] – 1) × 100). Enjoying food shopping has comparable effects for staff: 67% higher odds of being a more frequent consumer of local food, 56% higher odds for fair trade food, and so on.

[Table 4.3 about here]

[Table 4.4 about here]

In contrast to the strong effects of enjoying food shopping, the effects of *not feeling either positively or negatively* toward food shopping, compared with *not liking* food shopping, never attain statistical significance.

For university faculty, the effect of enjoying food shopping on the odds of engaging in more frequent socially responsible purchasing is significant only for two kinds of food: food that is antibiotic- and hormone-free, and grass-fed beef.

[Table 4.5 about here]

4.3. Effects of Control Variables

Other independent variables included in the models generally have the effects expected of them. Concern for the environmental impacts of food production has the largest and most consistently significant effect of any variable on the odds of purchasing socially responsible food. In fact, environmental concern is statistically significant for all kinds of food for every group surveyed. The effects of concern for the environmental impacts of food production decrease, however, for each kind of food, when the dummy variables for the experience of food shopping are included.

Education level also has large effects for the one group for whom education variables were included. The impact of education on the odds of engaging in different kinds of socially responsible purchasing, where staff are concerned, is consistent with the findings of prior studies: that education level is the most reliable and substantively important socioeconomic predictor of socially responsible purchasing.

The effects of other socioeconomic variables are less consistent. Coefficients for the continuous income variable are significant in the models of student purchasing for three kinds of socially responsible food; the categorical income variable is significant in the models of staff purchasing for three kind of food, and, for faculty, for four kinds of food. Being female has a significant effect on the odds of socially responsible purchasing for about half of the foods

considered for a survey group, but in all cases the coefficients for sex are smaller than those for the nature of the shopping experience.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As one sociologist has written about why people express political views in different ways: “activists [are] principled actors as well as instrumental ones … and as they [choose] strategies and tactics, their instrumental calculations [are] always tempered by their cultural commitments—to nonviolence, say, or to radical democracy” (Polletta 2008: 81). Indeed, according to the “cultural turn” in social movements research, political activities are, independent of their instrumental goals, differentially enjoyable and culturally resonant to different people, and thus more or less appealing as venues for political action.

The analyses conducted for this study offer support for the idea that cultural and experiential factors influence whether individuals practice socially responsible purchasing, as well as engage in politics in more conventional ways. Specifically, undergraduates and staff at a large university who enjoy food shopping, compared to those who do not enjoy or feel indifferent toward food shopping, were found to be more likely to buy a variety of socially responsible foods. The size of the effect of the subjective experience of shopping was comparable to or greater than that of factors that have been extensively explored in previous studies, such as education level, sex, and income.

On the whole, the findings of this paper provide justification for continued investigation into the role that meanings, emotions, and experiences associated with purchasing activities play with respect to the practice of socially responsible purchasing. One reason for the potential

importance of this avenue of research is its relevance to social movements that seek to bring about social change through changes in consumption patterns. Advocates of environmentally-friendly or fair trade food can do little, for instance, to directly boost the socioeconomic resources of potential consumers. Given these limitations, efforts to lower the price, increase the availability, and improve the labeling and certification systems for socially responsible products have been among the most widespread strategies to promote socially responsible purchasing.

The results of this study suggest that shaping the consumption experience itself—making it more enjoyable, more personal, and in general something that people actually want to spend time on—may be another way to create opportunities for average consumers to incorporate social and environmental concerns into everyday purchasing decisions. In this sense, creating more favorable conditions for socially responsible purchasing may thus overlap with recent broad-based developments, in diverse realms of life, related to changes in the modern experience of consumption. The cultures of slow food and DIY (do-it-yourself) handiwork, the rising popularity of pastimes like homebrewing and knitting—movements and organizations related to activities such as these seek to shape not just *what* people consume, but the *way* that objects of consumption are acquired and experienced. The relationship proposed in this paper, between enjoying food shopping and buying various forms of ethical food, might thus be seen as initial steps to connect the dots—or at least to propose a line—between changes in consumption culture and the ethics of what we consume.

Although the findings of this study are provocative, the research methods used carry significant limitations, which ultimately raise questions that can only be resolved through future research. Most importantly, the regression analyses described above do not speak directly to the issue of the direction of causality. The "subjective experience hypothesis" posits that enjoyment

of purchasing activities makes it more likely that individuals will be able to tolerate, or even find some pleasure in, investing extra time and energy in shopping in the manner required by socially responsible purchasing. But the relationship between enjoying purchasing activities and socially responsible purchasing could also go the other way: people who take pleasure in buying products that comport with their political or ethical views may, to the extent that these products are available, enjoy purchasing activities more than people who see shopping simply as a means to satisfy individual or household needs. The relationship between the two phenomena could also be dialectical and self-reinforcing, with greater enjoyment of purchasing activities facilitating, through mechanisms specified earlier, increased buying of socially responsible products, which in turn could make shopping more enjoyable, and so on.

Questions of causality are notoriously difficult to resolve through analysis of cross-sectional survey data. An earlier study that uses qualitative data to explicitly engage with the subjective experience hypothesis does suggest that, in fact, a general "orientation" towards purchasing activities can, and often does, precede and shape practices regarding socially responsible products (Schoolman 2013). But nothing definitive can be said, at this point, about the causal priority of the experience versus the objects of consumption. If this crucial question is to be resolved, a number of options might reward exploration. Additional tests could be performed on the present dataset, including switching the dependent and independent variables. Perhaps more promising, given the inherent limitations of cross-sectional data, future waves of the SCIP survey will produce *longitudinal* panel data. Analyzing data that includes responses from the same subjects at different points in time will offer the possibility of lagging the dependent variable and measuring the relationship through time of *changes* in both feelings about food shopping and the purchase of socially responsible food. Other datasets may be found

or created which are specifically aimed at disentangling the causal connections at issue here. Finally, even if the question of causal priority cannot be definitely answered through analysis of purely quantitative data, supplementary qualitative data might be gathered in which research subjects themselves are provided the opportunity to expound on the dialectic of how they feel about shopping, and what they buy. Ideally, future studies of all types will be able to build on the work of this dissertation, and use a range of data sources to address issues of causality in a thoughtful and comprehensive way.

Second, the variable included to test for the effect of the experience of shopping generally was not found to have a statistically significant effect on the purchasing behavior of university faculty, unlike that of undergraduates and staff. Why? One possibility is that faculty "score" so highly on other factors, such as education level, concern for environmental problems, and income, that the effect of the experience of shopping is simply drowned out. If a person holds a doctoral degree, worries about the environmental impacts of food production, and makes an upper-class income, it may not much matter if such a person dislikes shopping—other vectors are simply overwhelming. If this explanation for the regression results for faculty were to hold, it would actually provide *support* for the idea that feelings about purchasing activities are a crucial influence on the socially responsible purchasing of most people, most of the time. After all, academics are rarely thought to be representative of the general public. But other ways of accounting for differences in the regression results for students, staff and faculty are certainly possible, and sorting among these explanations would be one way to continue to advance understanding of socially responsible purchasing.

Third, the subject of this study is socially responsible purchasing—that is, the practice of intentionally incorporating concerns about social and environmental problems into purchasing

decisions. In the strictest sense, however, data from the SCIP survey only allow for investigation of the determinants of the purchase of socially responsible products (in particular, foodstuffs), regardless of the actual *reasons* for which such purchases are made. Local foods, for instance, may be preferred for freshness as well as benefits to the community; similarly, organic foods may be preferred for health as well as benefits to the environment. Ideally, future research will be better able to characterize research subjects based on their particular admixture of personal and political-ethical motivations, and include appropriate considerations in analyses of quantitative or qualitative data.

Finally, the data used in this study are limited in other ways, as well. In particular, as noted above, students, staff and faculty at the University of Michigan are better educated, with higher incomes, than Michigan residents and Americans in general. In addition, survey respondents were asked only about purchasing preferences regarding food, and not about preferences regarding other kinds of goods. It would be well if data collected in future studies could speak directly to the characteristics and behaviors of broader populations, with respect to more than just food.

For over ten years, quantitative studies of socially responsible purchasing have limited their investigations to standard measures of the socioeconomic characteristics and political opinions of consumers. This paper, in conjunction with a small number of theory-building, qualitative efforts, raises the possibility that the subjective experience of purchasing activities may play an important and overlooked role in shaping whether the world of everyday consumption becomes a venue for the expression of political and ethical values. Shopping for food, clothing and other goods is not a content-free translation of preference to behavior, but rather a social practice that is itself laden with powerful emotions and meanings. Future studies

should take seriously the idea that these emotions and meanings likely matter to political participation in the marketplace.

Table 4.1. Summary Statistics for Dependent Variables

	Undergraduate Students			Staff			Faculty		
Frequency of buying:	Mean	S.D.	n	Mean	S.D.	n	Mean	S.D.	n
Locally-grown/processed food	2.5	0.97	1853	2.93	0.75	1062	3.07	0.66	1098
Organic food	2.58	0.97	1852	2.7	0.83	1060	3.01	0.75	1096
Fair Trade food	1.94	0.99	1831	1.95	0.98	1057	2.4	0.96	1088
Food from humanely-treated animals	1.95	1.04	1735	2.16	1.07	1010	2.49	1.1	1034
Antibiotic/hormone-free food	2.09	1.1	1744	2.45	1.09	1027	2.8	1.08	1040
Grass-fed beef	1.78	0.98	1618	2.14	1.05	954	2.44	1.07	941
Fish from sustainable fisheries	1.69	0.94	1540	1.91	1.04	932	2.39	1.09	1007

*On a scale from 1-4, where 1="never" and 4="always or most of the time."

Table 4.2. Summary Statistics for Independent Variables

	Undergraduate Students			Staff			Faculty		
	Prop./ Mean	S.D.	n	Prop./ Mean	S.D.	n	Prop./ Mean	S.D.	n
Positive feelings about shopping*	0.57	0.5	2089	0.44	0.5	1063	0.42	0.49	1098
Neutral feelings about shopping*	0.3	0.46	2089	0.33	0.47	1063	0.39	0.49	1098
Concern about food and environ.	2.88	0.81	2080	3.03	0.73	1056	3.24	0.71	1093
Median household income of high school zip code, logged	72,523	29,022	1811						
Household income (categorical)				2.63	1.44	1011	4.43	1.44	1037
Female (university data)*	0.55	0.5	2092						
Female (survey data)*				0.66	0.47	1057	0.41	0.49	1087
Trans. or "decline" (survey data)*				0.02	0.15	1057	0.02	0.16	1087
Age				3.71	1.35	1048	4.34	1.17	1082
Graduate or professional degree*				0.42	0.49	1055			
College degree*				0.4	0.49	1055			

*Dummy variables

Table 4.3. Socially Responsible Purchasing by Undergraduate Students

VARIABLES	Local	Organic	Fair Trade	Humane
Positive feelings about shopping	0.397**	0.505***	0.215	0.241
	(0.139)	(0.135)	(0.149)	(0.150)
Neutral feelings about shopping	-0.0661	0.0220	-0.186	-0.0332
	(0.151)	(0.146)	(0.165)	(0.165)
Concern about food and environment	0.716***	0.822***	0.792***	0.856***
	(0.0670)	(0.0659)	(0.0685)	(0.0737)
Med. house. inc. of h.s. zip code, logged	-0.0482	0.329**	0.209	0.265*
	(0.130)	(0.127)	(0.133)	(0.133)
Female	0.369***	0.479***	0.164	0.168
	(0.0981)	(0.0954)	(0.0998)	(0.102)
Constant	8.295***	14.30***	12.64***	8.253***
	(1.610)	(1.783)	(1.856)	(1.506)
Observations	1,622	1,621	1,605	1,513

VARIABLES	A./h.-free	G.-f. beef	Sust. fish
Positive feelings about shopping	0.412**	0.409**	0.340*
	(0.144)	(0.159)	(0.173)
Neutral feelings about shopping	-0.00844	0.00191	0.00578
	(0.158)	(0.174)	(0.191)
Concern about food and environment	0.786***	0.668***	0.743***
	(0.0709)	(0.0760)	(0.0828)
Med. house. inc. of h.s. zip code, logged	0.284*	0.136	0.0116
	(0.127)	(0.137)	(0.148)
Female	0.158	-0.0856	0.0369
	(0.0995)	(0.109)	(0.117)
Constant	7.918***	6.516***	5.582***
	(1.433)	(1.541)	(1.669)
Observations	1,523	1,406	1,329

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 4.4. Socially Responsible Purchasing by University Staff

VARIABLES	Local	Organic	Fair Trade	Humane
Positive feelings about shopping	0.514**	0.484**	0.447**	0.215
	(0.165)	(0.154)	(0.157)	(0.158)
Neutral feelings about shopping	0.0328	0.0338	-0.289	-0.234
	(0.171)	(0.159)	(0.172)	(0.172)
Concern about food and environment	0.993***	0.879***	0.918***	0.862***
	(0.100)	(0.0970)	(0.0949)	(0.0942)
Household income	0.0496	0.0488	0.0528	0.0824
	(0.0525)	(0.0482)	(0.0499)	(0.0469)
Age	0.0322***	0.00630	0.00382	-0.00357
	(0.0075)	(0.0069)	(0.0069)	(0.0067)
Female	0.406**	0.189	-0.152	0.240
	(0.146)	(0.139)	(0.135)	(0.131)
Trans. or "decline“	0.0231	0.441	-0.446	0.615
	(0.617)	(0.588)	(0.570)	(0.516)
Grad. or prof. deg.	-0.0236	0.776***	0.900***	0.654***
	(0.215)	(0.184)	(0.190)	(0.172)
College degree	0.0088	0.612***	0.523**	0.396*
	(0.211)	(0.179)	(0.191)	(0.174)
Constant	5.872***	5.860***	6.799***	5.791***
	(0.414)	(0.388)	(0.401)	(0.388)
Observations	994	992	989	948

VARIABLES	A./h.-free	G.-f. beef	Sust. fish
Positive feelings about shopping	0.366*	0.366*	0.755***
	(0.157)	(0.160)	(0.169)
Neutral feelings about shopping	0.0190	-0.146	0.284
	(0.163)	(0.167)	(0.178)
Concern about food and environment	0.856***	0.667***	0.702***
	(0.0954)	(0.0942)	(0.100)
Household income	0.133**	0.141**	0.188***
	(0.0458)	(0.0506)	(0.0503)
Age	-0.0066	-0.00037	0.0062
	(0.0069)	(0.00706)	(0.0073)
Female	0.339**	-0.0186	-0.256

	(0.127)	(0.131)	(0.141)
Trans. or "decline"	0.129	0.628	-0.429
	(0.607)	(0.537)	(0.439)
Grad. or prof. deg.	0.591***	0.0809	0.267
	(0.174)	(0.173)	(0.190)
College degree	0.490**	0.0574	0.191
	(0.175)	(0.174)	(0.194)
Constant	5.417***	4.807***	5.777***
	(0.374)	(0.366)	(0.413)
Observations	961	893	876

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 4.5. Socially Responsible Purchasing by University Faculty

VARIABLES	Local	Organic	Fair Trade	Humane
Positive feelings about shopping	0.227	0.0431	0.197	0.280
	(0.204)	(0.178)	(0.173)	(0.170)
Neutral feelings about shopping	-0.263	-0.0835	-0.133	-0.0829
	(0.204)	(0.182)	(0.175)	(0.178)
Concern about food and environment	1.024***	1.233***	0.954***	1.165***
	(0.110)	(0.105)	(0.0928)	(0.101)
Household income	0.0715	0.0618	0.0384	0.115*
	(0.0509)	(0.0454)	(0.0446)	(0.0447)
Age	0.0122	-0.0124*	0.0095	-0.0132*
	(0.0064)	(0.0063)	(0.0065)	(0.0062)
Female	0.564***	0.317*	0.329*	0.411**
	(0.148)	(0.132)	(0.128)	(0.132)
Trans. or "decline"	0.0167	0.114	0.358	-0.0219
	(0.428)	(0.437)	(0.674)	(0.500)
Constant	5.626***	5.420***	6.128***	5.927***
	(0.446)	(0.426)	(0.406)	(0.416)
Observations	1,020	1,019	1,011	962

VARIABLES	A./h.-free	G.-f. beef	Sust. fish
Positive feelings about shopping	0.362*	0.361*	0.296
	(0.179)	(0.182)	(0.168)
Neutral feelings about shopping	0.0679	-0.103	-0.162
	(0.185)	(0.184)	(0.174)
Concern about food and environment	1.173***	0.906***	0.778***
	(0.0959)	(0.101)	(0.0982)
Household income	0.129**	0.133**	0.153***
	(0.0463)	(0.0473)	(0.0462)
Age	-0.0193**	-0.00555	0.0004
	(0.00624)	(0.00631)	(0.0064)
Female	0.536***	0.306*	0.135
	(0.133)	(0.136)	(0.132)
Trans. or "decline"	0.298	0.0987	-0.189
	(0.632)	(0.414)	(0.413)

Constant	5.365***	5.357***	5.143***
	(0.405)	(0.418)	(0.425)
Observations	966	876	935

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Chapter Five

Conclusion

The research for this dissertation was conducted in order to advance understanding of socially responsible purchasing in two ways. First, existing quantitative studies have largely failed to expand their models of socially responsible purchasing beyond the socioeconomic characteristics and resources of consumers. As a result, the total amount of variation in socially responsible purchasing explained by these models has remained stubbornly small. Second, while consumer attitudes and behaviors with respect to "green," fair trade, and sweat-free products have been the focus of numerous articles and books, what I term "locally-focused purchasing" has received little attention from social scientists. Consequently, basic questions about locally-focused purchasing—who? how often? why?—remain almost completely uninvestigated.

This dissertation addresses these gaps in the literature on socially responsible purchasing. In Chapters Two and Four, using both qualitative and quantitative data, I argue that individuals' subjective experience of, or personal orientation toward, purchasing activities in general influences their propensity to engage in socially responsible purchasing. To the extent that people find shopping itself to be enjoyable, and not burdensome, the non-monetary costs—in time, energy, and emotional involvement—of incorporating social and environmental concerns into purchasing decisions are reduced. In developing and testing the "subjective experience hypothesis," I demonstrate that researchers ought to include possible differences in the lived

experience of being a consumer in models of how and why people take political action in the marketplace.

In Chapter Three, based on in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of individuals, I argue that the *enjoyability*, *credibility*, *accessibility*, and *communality* of locally-focused purchasing underlie its surprisingly widespread appeal across socioeconomic and political lines. Fulfilling personal interactions, the availability and perceived trustworthiness of products and services, and the connection to community—all of these factors help to explain why many people engage in locally-focused purchasing who do not buy other kinds of socially responsible products or participate in politics in more conventional ways. The findings of this chapter suggest that buying locally-produced goods and supporting local businesses may be a uniquely democratic way of making everyday shopping a form of political participation.

I would like to conclude by suggesting two possible directions for future research. As discussed in Chapter Three, although organizations and campaigns dedicated to "localist" policies and practices—where "localism" is understood as the idea that cities, towns and sub-state regions should assert greater sovereignty over the production and consumption of food and other goods (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Hess 2008; De Young and Princen 2012)—have proliferated in recent years, crucial questions have not been answered, or even taken up, by social scientists. One set of questions concerns the nature and origins of "consuming local" as a social movement. Why do consume-local movements emerge and win support in some places, but not others? Who participates, and who benefits? What is the relationship between place-based consumption movements and environmentalism in general? Efforts to answer these questions would not only shed light on the nature and possible future of "consuming local" as a

principle of social change, but would also help to build theory on the social and political factors that shape the trajectories of social movements overall.

A second path for future research could conceivably focus not only on the origins of consume-local movements, but also on their concrete implications for society and the environment. Indeed, where the buying of "green," fair trade, and sweat-free products is concerned, studies of consumer motivations represent just one part of the *oeuvre*. Equal ink has been spilled—with good reason—on assessing whether socially responsible products in these areas actually have the beneficial social and environmental impacts that they claim. Are organic foods better for the environment? Do recycled goods reduce waste? Does fair trade coffee lead to higher incomes for farmers? Are workers better off in "sweat-free" facilities? Each of these questions has inspired a substantial body of inquiry.

Surprisingly few studies, however, have attempted to evaluate the social and environmental impacts of one of the most visible forms of locally-focused purchasing: the movement to promote local food. In Chapter Three, I pointed to the new Grand Rapids Downtown Market as emblematic of growing public interest in locally-focused purchasing. The just-opened marketplace in Michigan's second-largest city is also a symbol of something else: the hope that vibrant local food systems—involving farmers, entrepreneurs, and a population "hungry" for change—may emerge as linchpins of sustainability, uniting the environmental, economic and social aspects of livable communities (Connelly, Markey, and Roseland 2011; Lyson 2004). This hope, however, belies a surprising fact: profound questions remain over whether local food systems do in fact contribute to outcomes associated with an expansive vision of sustainability. Indeed, a notable interdisciplinary conclave recently proclaimed that the academic community has yet to "quantify the co-benefits of food systems change in terms of

health, environment, and economics" or determine "the full costs and benefits to society of agriculture done in an alternative way" (Story, Hamm, and Wallinga 2009:477). In sum, where the actual impacts of locally-focused purchasing are concerned, new research is particularly needed in order to better understand the relationship between local food systems, the environment, and the quality of life of diverse social groups.

Sociology has performed an important service to both academia and the advocacy community by investigating the causes and consequences of socially responsible purchasing. This investigation can and should continue, as the ability of cultural and experiential factors to shape politically-motivated purchasing decisions has yet to be fully understood. Moreover, with respect to locally-focused purchasing, sociology also has a critical role to play in examining what consume-local movements might mean for the environment and society. In so doing, researchers with interests in this area can continue to pursue the vision of Marx, and seek not just to understand the world, but also to change it.

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