

The Limits of Consumer Activism

An honors thesis for the Department of Sociology

Elaine M. Kim

Tufts University, 2013

The Limits of Consumer Activism

Elaine Kim, Tufts University

Drawing on literature about consumerism and social movements, this article aims to explore the characteristics of a consumer society and the intersection of consumerism and activism. I then present four hypotheses that describe potential limitations of consumer activism. The first is that for consumption-based forms of activism, who can and cannot participate is heavily dependent on the individual's amount of economic capital. The second is that politicized consumption is not a gateway into deeper involvement, but rather encourages superficial, temporary participation. The third is that the conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase, and thus individuals come to only support initiatives that can deliver quantifiable, measurable change. The last hypothesis is that what methods are perceived as an effective way to create social change becomes heavily limited. These hypotheses are tested in a case study of the Fair Trade Movement, based on in-depth interviews of participants in the Greater Boston area. These findings present a critical look at consumer activism campaigns, and add to the broader body of work regarding consumerism and/or social change.

Introduction

Stepping away from the temptation of moral judgment, consumerism is neither inherently evil nor good for society. Consumerism goes beyond the act of consumption and the moment of purchase—it is a mentality, a behavioral motivation, and a process. For this article, consumerism will be defined as the use of consumer goods for a personal or social purpose beyond the utility of the product itself. As the consumption of goods claims an ever-growing proportion of the modern society's industries, more varieties of consumerism are cropping up. An example of consumerism is consumption as expression, in which individuals and groups use the purchase of specific goods to display an aspect of their identity. The body of work acknowledging the intersection of consumerism and politics has proven itself to be a controversial one with proponents celebrating the empowerment of the shopper and the democratization of civic engagement, and critics lamenting the inevitable demise of genuine political activity. Following this article's definition of consumerism, politicized consumption is just one example of "consumerism" as a concept; in this case it is using consumption for the purpose of pushing a political agenda or achieving a change in the realm of politics. The short-term benefits of politicized consumption are hard to argue against; no matter how cynical one's views of consumerism, it is still true that groups that treat consumption as activism make some sort of positive short-term impact. Neither consuming nor being an active citizen, however, can be reduced to occasions when the individual makes choices among alternatives. In both consumer behavior and civic action, individuals enact social rituals that instruct them and others in a set of expectations and values (Schudson 2007; 241). A "consumer society" can be defined as the social context that teaches social rituals that encourages the use of the purchase of consumer goods for personal or social purposes.

Drawing on literature about consumerism and social movements, this article aims to explore the characteristics of a consumer society and the intersection of consumerism and activism. I then present four hypotheses that describe potential limitations of consumer activism. The first is that for consumption-based forms of activism, who can and cannot participate is

heavily dependent on the individual's amount of economic capital. The second is that politicized consumption is not a gateway into deeper involvement, but rather encourages superficial, temporary participation. The third is that the conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase, and thus individuals come to only support initiatives that can deliver quantifiable, measurable change. The last hypothesis is that what methods are perceived as an effective way to create social change becomes heavily limited. These hypotheses are tested in a case study of the Fair Trade Movement, based on in-depth interviews of participants in the Greater Boston area. These findings present a critical look at consumer activism campaigns, and add to the broader body of work regarding consumerism and/or social change.

Literature Review

The works of the classical sociologists of the nineteenth century largely focus on the relationship between consumption and economics. Weber (1958) introduced the concept of the "protestant ethic" to explain how religious believers after the Reformation began to see secular, economic success as a sign of salvation. The religious pursuit of wealth propelled capitalism forward, and introduced the idea of consumption as an important means of marking social status (Weber 1958, Zukin & Maguire 2004). Marx (1972) proclaimed that people are shrouded by what he calls 'commodity fetishism,' in which products are falsely removed from the work of the producer, and goods fulfill the 'needs' produced by capitalism, and social interactions become defined by material, economic exchanges. In his popularly referenced argument, Veblen (1899) coined the term 'conspicuous consumption' to describe how the purchase of goods is used to differentiate between economic classes. The consumption of food, clothing, entertainment and alcohol of high quality and price serves as "a mark of the superior status of those who are able to afford the indulgence" (Veblen 1899).

While the works of Weber, Marx and Veblen are still frequently referenced, the discussion around consumerism has expanded beyond their views. Echoing Veblen's idea of 'conspicuous consumption,' Baudrillard speaks of consumerism as a new cultural language for identity display. Though Baudrillard goes on to make far-reaching arguments about consumerism as a barrier to true satisfaction, he makes an important point in his book *Consumer Society*: "Consumption is a system which assures the regulation of signs and the integration of the group...it is a system of communication, a structure of exchange" (Baudrillard 1998; 47). The marketing and acquisition of commodities is the code with which society speaks of and to itself. Goods have symbolic meanings; wearing a black coat not only keeps one warm, but also hints at one's socioeconomic status, social groups, and weekend plans.

For some, the ubiquity of consumption as a language is something to be celebrated, and consumption is seen as a deliverer of liberation (Fiske 1989, Glickman 1999, Schudson 2000). Since consumption is about choosing between various options, the argument goes, it closes power gaps in society (Fiske 1989). Fiske describes shopping as one of the key factors that allowed women to escape the grips of patriarchy: "the department store was the first public space legitimately available to women, and the fashionable commodities it offers provided a legitimated public identity and a means of participating in the ideology of progress" (Fiske 1989). Those who hold this view of consumption as liberation falsely equate the growing number of options to an expansion of progress and individual agency. The production and purchase of commodities happens under the influence of the primary structures of social differences and inequality of gender, race and class; there is a high level of determinacy in the process of making consumption

choices (Schor & Holt 2000; xv). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls this determinacy ‘habitus’ in his book *Distinctions*, which uses surveys of members of the French society to illustrate how individuals are savvy strategic actors, but still produce predictable class-based consumption outcomes (Bourdieu 1984). In addition to existing power differences, the ever quickening pace of consumption brings with it new inequalities—that between the producers and the consumers. Multinational corporations aren’t the producers of goods and services as requested by the consumers, but the producers of the consumers’ desires and ‘needs’ (Baudrillard 1998, Galbraith 1958, Schor 2007, Lorenzen 2010). Agency is increasingly constructed *by* producers rather than being deployed against them (Schor 2007; 25). Some take it to an extreme and argue that consumerism has robbed people of agency altogether, and that people are consumers who are caught in the unending cycle of trying to satisfy the artificially created needs created by marketing and advertising (Galbraith 1958). While it is crucial to recognize that consumerism maintains and creates new imbalances in power, this explanation of consumerism is overly cynical in its reduction of consumers as passive recipients of the producers’ messages and products.

Once the idea of ‘consumerism’ is distinguished from the action of ‘consumption,’ it is possible to look at the extent to which consumerism benefits and limits other spheres of society. Michael Schudson (2007) explains this idea in his article *Citizens, Consumers, and the Good Society*: “In contrasting consumers and citizens, neither consuming nor being an active citizen can be or should be reduced to occasions when the individual makes choices among alternatives. In both consumer behavior and civic action, individuals enact social rituals that instruct them and others in a set of expectations and values” (Schudson 2007; 241).

Consumption and Politics

The discussion of the intersection of consumption and politics is one full of disagreements surrounding the question of how these two things relate to one another, and whether or not this relationship is limited. Critics of the politicization of consumption argue that citizenship and consumerism are two competing ideologies that can only be temporarily sutured together (Johnston 2007, King 2008, Lindstrom 2011, Szasz 2008, Speth 2012). Even those who oppose the use of consumption as a form of political action do so for different reasons. Some argue that it is turning civic responsibility into an overly individualized matter. Johnston (2007) argues that the incompatibility of consumerism and citizenship comes from consumerism being an ideology of maximizing individual interest while the ideology of citizenship is one of collective responsibilities to a social and ecological commons. Retail stores like Whole Foods Markets (Johnston 2007) or campaigns like the pink ribbon movement for breast cancer (King 2008) sell the idea of a “consumer-citizen” who can buy a product that satisfies an individual’s desire for personal happiness and generate good for society as a whole. In practice, however, the two parts of the “consumer-citizen” hybrid are unbalanced: the desire of the ‘consumer’ for a maximum number of retail choices overrides the desire of the ‘citizen’ to enact positive social and environmental impact.

In contrast to the warnings against the over-individualization of civic responsibility, others criticize the idea of politicized consumption because they see it as limiting one’s ability to make choices on an individual level (Lorenzen 2010, Schor 2007). Lorenzen (2010) argues that since consumption has become integral to the social and economic structure, people are now “locked-in” as consumers who can only engage in activism in ways allowed in the structural frame of consumption choices as the primary method of action. So while people may have gained

the power to use their commodity choices as a method of participating in a campaign for social change, this choice reveals that people have lost their power to reject consumerism as a way of life (Schor 2007; 25). In a study of people who lead “green” or ecologically friendly lifestyles, Lorenzen (2010) found that the main barrier to people reducing consumption for the benefit of the environment was that their family and co-workers saw it as deviant. The acquisition of consumer goods have become such an integral part of society’s system of identity formation that trying to communicate one’s values and beliefs without the use of consumer goods is like speaking a foreign language.

Some push back against this idea, pointing to the separation of ‘public citizenship’ and ‘self-centered consumption’ as a false binary (Glickman 1999, Schudson 2007, Trentmann 2004). To say politics and consumption are related or even homologous processes, it is argued, is not to automatically to reduce the one to the other, or to demean the political (Glickman 1999). In response to the claims that politicized consumption is an inadequate form of citizenship in Cohen’s *The Consumer Republic*, Trentmann asks: compared to what?: “How collective, how public, how open, how shared was politics before the confluence of citizenship and consumption? (2004; 399). He points out that concern about selfishness replacing commitment to collective interests and a decline in political engagement assumes a false trade-off between a sense of personal entitlement and a sense of social entitlement. In other words, why can’t people care about themselves *and* care about others? He also points out the critics of consumption as activism hold an implicit, debatable assumption that prior to the transmutation of consumer politics into consumerized politics, there was a lot more of the public space and common state on which a vibrant democracy stood. If indeed society had such a wonderfully collective sense of citizenship once upon a time, Trentmann prods, is this not somehow at odds with the growing appeal of consumer politics for social movements in the first half of the twentieth century as the very instruments for overcoming barriers to full democracy, social justice and material well-being? (Trentmann 2004; 399). The claim that consumer behavior is self-centered, inferior to public-regarding behavior, and a distraction from their civic obligations is labeled as a silly notion (Schudson 2007; 237). Instead of seeing politicized consumption as a limitation, it could be considered beneficial. A social movement can’t be formed without some popular support, and consumerism can be leveraged to provide that support: “Politics cannot always be convenient, but there are many cases where making it more convenient and more accessible will make it more popular” (Schudson 2007; 243). Schudson contends that consumerism offers a strategic opportunity for increasing the points of entry to political life.

Recent movements like the ‘green’ movement that emphasizes the purchasing of environmentally friendly products or the Fair Trade movement that encourages the certification of ethically produced products to enable the consumer to make better choices demonstrate how “consumer identities have become suffused with questions of civic participation, cultural identities, and social and global justice, as well as with a drive to acquire goods” (Trentmann 2004; 380). In the global justice movement against sweatshops, consumer action has taken on the responsibility of social change since alternative modes of accountability such as governmental action or international policies have failed to keep corporate supply chains ethical (Micheletti & Stolle 2007). According to sociologists Micheletti and Stolle (2007), consumers play four distinct roles in the antisweatshop movement: a support group for a broader cause, a critical mass of fair trade shoppers, a spearhead force of corporate change, and an ontological agent of societal change. Unlike those who argue that corporations control the needs and desires of the consumers, Micheletti and Stolle see consumers as the countervailing power to corporations because they

hold the purchasing power and can demand different production processes. Additionally, consumers are the ones that bear the responsibility of finding out the consequences their choices have on others. As the New York Consumer's League put it, consumers have a duty "to find out under what conditions the articles they purchase are produced and distributed, and to insist that these conditions shall be wholesome and consistent with a respectable existence on the part of the workers" (Quoted in Boris 2003, Micheletti & Stolle 2007; 205). Micheletti and Stolle categorize acts of consumer activism into two categories: episodic and thematic. Episodic activism is most common, and is meant to prompt individual consumers to participate in time-limited campaigns with urgent appeals. Thematic activism is focused on creating a space for consumers to reconsider the role of consumption in their lives to build up capitalism anew from the grassroots level. The vision for thematic consumer activism is to use capitalism effectively to change the corporate "genetic code" and consumers' predisposition and worldview (Micheletti & Stolle 2007; 170). Thematic consumer activism is to leverage the power that consumers, or the demand-side in a market society in order to change the corporations, or the supply-side. Similarly, in 1940, middle-class African Americans living in Harlem led the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns, using their purchasing power to demand that blacks were hired at white-owned shops (Greenberg 1997). Even the Boston Tea Party can be cited as a demonstration of how consumerism enables people to have political pull (Glickman 1999).

In one aspect, these movements can serve as encouraging evidence for how politicized consumption has empowered those who previously did not have any power to fight for their rights. It's difficult to dismiss the positive results of consumerism at different points in history: African Americans in Harlem were given jobs. America is an independent country. The answer to Schudson's question: "could we make our political actions more satisfying in ways that our consumer behavior already often is?" seems to be "yes" (Schudson 2007, 247). I question however, whether constraints come along with the benefits of blurring the lines between political action and consumer behavior. What is the social aftermath of consumption being used as a form of civic engagement? I argue that although politicized consumption may effectively produce mass support and large results, it comes with limits regarding who can participate, what kinds of movements get support, and how the movement grows. Throughout the article, acts of politicized consumption will also be referred to as "consumer activism," a term that appropriately emphasizes that it is a form of activism specifically performed by people acting as consumers.

Other Frameworks

Before presenting the hypotheses regarding the potential limitations of consumer activism, I will outline four existing frameworks that act as the foundations for the hypotheses: (1) McAdam and Paulsen's framework of Social ties and activism, (2) Lubell, Zahran, and Vedlitz's collective action model, (3) Snow, Worden, and Benford's discussion of frame alignment, and (4) Gottdiener's semiotic approach to understanding cultural objects.

Social Ties and Activism

One of the frameworks I will be borrowing from is that of McAdam and Paulsen (1993), which serves to answer questions about the relationship between social ties and activism. Which dimensions of social ties (strength, salience) have the most causal potency in regards to activism? How do competing ties affect the decision of whether or not to participate in a specific act of activism? McAdam and Paulsen explain the disparity between attitudinal affinity and actual

participation in activism by looking at the concepts of recruitment, identity, and social ties. For McAdam and Paulsen, who pull from work on identity salience by psychologist Sheldon Stryker (1968), “identities are conceptualized as being organized into a hierarchy of salience defined by the probability of the various identities being invoked in a given situation or over many situations” (Stryker 1981; 23, McAdam & Paulsen 1993; 646). In other words, the salience of any particular identity is a function of the individual’s “commitment” to it, or, the “the degree to which the individual’s relationships to specified sets of other persons depends on his or her being a particular kind of person” (Stryker 1981, 24). The determination of identity salience is a social process— it is a social product of structural embeddedness in a relevant organizational community that is supportive of that identity (McAdam & Paulsen 1993; 659). For an individual at a university for example, their salient identity is likely to be ‘student’. In a recruitment process, then, the recruiter must show that a) the movement is related to that individual’s salient identity, and b) that the action does not go against the individual’s countervailing identities. According to McAdam and Paulson, the ultimate decision to participate in a movement depends on four factors: 1) the occurrence of the specific recruiting attempt, 2) the successful linkage of movement and salient identity, 3) support for that linkage from persons who normally sustain the identity in question, and 4) the absence of strong opposition from others on whom other identities depend. To summarize, the decision of whether or not to commit to extensive participation in a social movement is mediated by the salience of the identity involved by the recruiting appeal for the individual, and the extent to which the movement continues to support this identity (McAdam & Paulson 1993; 647)

Collective Action Model

Political sociologists Mark Lubell, Sammy Zahran, and Arnold Vedlitz provide a theoretical model that explains the behavioral logic of collective action. How does an individual decide whether or not to participate in collective action towards a public good? What calculations are made in the process? The collective interest model posits that people will participate when the expected value of participation is greater than the expected value of non-participation (Lubell, Zaran & Vedlitz 2007, 394). It is important, however, to consider the possibility of free-riders: if the benefits of a successful social action are non-excludable for the population (actions to improve air quality, for example), it is reasonable, following the logic of this framework, to predict that people will try to free ride instead of actually participating. The key variable in an individual’s calculation of whether or not to participate is the expected value of their participation. Lubell et al. explain that this value is calculated by five variables: 1) the perceived value of the collective good produced by successful action, 2) the increase in probability of success by the individual’s participation, 3) the extent to which the group as a whole is likely to succeed, 4) the selective costs of participation, and 5) the selective benefits of participation. The relationships between these variables are summarized with the following equation:

$$\text{Expected Value} = [(\text{Group Efficacy}) * (\text{Personal Influence}) * \text{Value of Collective Good}] - \text{Cost of participation} + \text{Benefit from participation}$$

The terms in the braces are the variables that acknowledge the logic of free riding by showing that the contribution of a single individual only raises the probability of successfully providing a public good by a small amount. It also shows, importantly, that the total expected value of participation increases as the perceived personal influence increases. Early tests of the model have shown considerable, somewhat encouragingly, that people systematically overestimate their personal influence, and thus are more likely to engage in collective action than

a strict calculation of an individual's actual influence would predict. Additionally, Lubell et al. conceptualize the individual's calculation of the probability the group will succeed (group efficacy) as a function of two elements of the political context: the level of social capital of the community, and the perceived competence of policy elites (2007, 395). The collective action model places primary emphasis on the individual's subjective beliefs about the costs and benefits of collective action. Therefore, the model suggests a methodology of "developing hypotheses concerning what types of individual beliefs and attitudes, demographic characteristics, and situational/institutional variables will lower the expected value of activism" (Lubell et al. 2007). Though strong in its recognition that the individual's subjective beliefs about the costs and benefits are what go into the decision making process, this model is weak in that it treats the behavioral action as a calculation. It makes the questionable assumption that people behave as rational beings, and does not leave room for costs and benefits that cannot be quantified such as emotional investment or relational pressures.

Frame Alignment

Sociologists Snow, Rochford, Jr., Worden, and Benford (1986) further the theoretical understanding of adherent and constituent mobilization by proposing a model that builds on the Goffman tradition of emphasizing concern with interpretive issues in the everyday world. Goffman's term "frame" describes the subjective interpretation that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Snow et al, 1986). Snow et al. offer a framework that explains the way people look at social movement organizations (SMO) through a model that incorporates a consideration of both social psychological and structural/organizational factors. Defining movement participation as a situation and activity-based phenomenon, Snow et al. outline the processes that SMOs use to frame the world in which they are acting in order to mobilize others. Frame alignment is defined as "the linkage or conjunction of individual and SMO interpretive frameworks, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary" (Snow et al. 1986). The underlying premise is that frame alignment, of whatever variety and intensity, is a necessary condition for movement participation, since participation in movement activity is contingent on the actor's subjective belief about that action and its relationship to his beliefs. Additionally, frame alignment is temporally variable, and participation is a dynamic process.

Snow et al. identify four specific processes of frame alignment that SMOs use to mobilize potential supporters: (a) frame bridging, (b) frame amplification, (c) frame extension, and (d) frame transformation. Frame bridging refers to the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent, but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. This involves assuming that a lack of action is due to a lack of information, and that untapped sentiment pools will likely adhere themselves to an SMO if they were introduced. Frame amplification refers to the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue (Snow et al. 1986). This describes the cases in which SMOs attempt to recruit prospective constituents by focusing on a particular value relevant to the issue, and by reemphasizing a particular aspect of the social action in order to lend it a greater sense of efficaciousness. Snow et al. argue that SMOs frequently amplify the framing of the actor and other's efficacy to generate "a sense of necessity" on behalf of potential participants (Snow et al., 1986).

Frame extension describes how SMOs “promote programs or causes in terms of values and beliefs that may not be especially salient or readily apparent to potential constituents and supporters, thus necessitating the amplification of these ideational elements in order to clarify the linkage between the personal or group interests and support for the SMO” (Snow et al., 1986) In effect, the social movement is attempting to recruit more supporters by portraying their objectives in a way that seems relevant to more adherent pools. Snow et al.’s research shows that for the movement participants who initially joined the movement due to the SMOs frame extension efforts typically had different reasons for staying than for joining. This supports their definition of movement participation as a temporally variable and dynamic process—“...just as the interests that prompted investigation of movement activity were not always the same as those that motivated joining, so the latter were not always the same as the interests that sustained participation” (Snow et al. 1986).

The last process employed by SMOs for frame alignment is frame transformation. When the actions that the SMO is promoting are seemingly antithetical to the conventional norms, SMOs may generate alignment by planning and nurturing new values. The goal for frame transformation attempts is to “reframe” some set of conditions—“the objective contours of the situation do not change so much as the way the situation is defined and thus experienced” (Snow et al. 1986). There is a change in the perceived seriousness of the condition, making what was once tolerable or unfortunate seem unjust and excusable. This frame change, however, isn’t enough to motivate action—“the emergence of an injustice frame must be accompanied by a corresponding shift in attributional orientations” (Snow et al. 1986). By “attributional orientations,” Snow et al. are talking about the ways in which the actor interprets as the cause of the problem. There are two distinct types of frame transformation: domain-specific and global. Transformations of domain-specific interpretive frames refers to changes in the way specific domains of life such as dietary habits, consumption patterns, and leisure activities are reframed to be seen as problematic and in need of change. While Snow et al. recognize that many of these domains are often interconnected, they follow Goffman in saying that they can also be bracketed or perceptually bounded. In the case of a domain-specific frame transformation, interpretive change that occurs with respect to one domain may affect behavior in other domains, but the change is not necessarily automatic. Transformations of global interpretive frames refer to changes whose scope is broadened enough to become a kind of master frame. It involves a complete shift in the way the actor thinks, displacing one universe of discourse to replace it with another—they are converted into being an adherent of a social movement. The strengths of the frame alignment model is that it strongly emphasizes and expounds upon the role that subjective interpretation can play in determining whether or not an individual will participate in a social action. Snow et al. also present the valuable point that individual’s reasons for mobilization are temporally bound and subject to change.

A Semiotic Approach

Eco (1976) lays the groundwork for understanding semiotics by defining five ways of considering objects: a) physically, as a material object, b) mechanically, for its use value, c) economically, for its exchange value, d) socially, as a sign of some status, and e) semantically, as a cultural unit that can relate to other cultural units (1976; 991). Of course, a discussion of the semiotic approach would not be complete without mention of Baudrillard’s concept of “sign value.” Krampen (1979) explains Baudrillard’s concept this way: “It is the sign value of the object that superimposes itself upon the sign function of the object, transforming the meaning of

objects that comes from their everyday use into the ideology of consumerism” (1979; 36). Krampen also discusses the idea of transfunctionalization, which draws a distinction between the uses of objects to fill their immediate function and socially sustained uses of the object, which produces a second-order meaning for that object (1976; 36). Commodities are socially redefined—“transfunctionalized”—to hold symbolic meaning. An automobile, for example, holds the immediate function of getting someone from point A to point B, but it is socially “transfunctionalized” to signify class status.

Sociologist M. Gottdiener (1985) brings in an analysis of mass culture that incorporates the symbolic meanings and valuations, and a close look at the three-way relationship among cultural objects, their industrial producers, and social groups of users (the mass audience). Gottdiener observes that sources of meaning for objects and events are specified by the semiotic approach as deriving from three modes of social interaction: a) the ascription of social status through a historical process, b) the use value of objects transfunctionalized to sign value through cultural activities, and c) exchange value transfunctionalized to sign value, especially under capitalist relations of production (1985; 992). Since these are three separate fields of social interaction, it is difficult to control meanings in mass culture, opening up the meaning of any object to the possibility of perceptual polysemy, or the possibility of one object to be perceived in multiple ways.

Gottdiener’s (1985) framework for understanding mass culture places the producer/object/user relation at its core: “the key aspect of mass cultural production and control is the process of transfunctionalization, that is, the production and control of ideological meanings” (1985, 993). Since the meaning of an object is a function of the use of that object in social interaction, the symbolic transformations that constitute mass cultural control can be specified by locating people, objects, and events within social relationships of production, distribution and reproduction (Gottdiener 1985, 993). Gottdiener explains the process of transfunctionalization in mass culture in three stages. In the first stage, producers create objects for their exchange value, whereas users purchase the objects for their use value (Gottdiener 1985, 993). Whereas the use value is determined by a preexisting meaning system, the exchange value is superimposed onto the use value through the advertisements and marketing that sways the value calculations of the purchaser. The second stage involves the creation of culture by the users of objects through processes of personalization and modification. The modification of objects transfunctionalizes the primary use value of the object and turns it into a signal that communicates identity. Members of the Chicano subcultures of the Southwest, for example, modify automobiles to produce a distinctive “low rider” form, transforming the car into a sign of belonging to a subculture (Gottdiener 1985, 994). The third and last stage involves the creation of meanings by the producers—the transfunctionalized objects produced by the personalization of the users become the raw material for cultural production by the mass culture industries. In this stage, the object is transfunctionalized once again from a subcultural signifier into trivialized, marketable meanings. For example, the signifier “punk rock” was sanitized by the Top 40 radio industry and changed to “New Wave” (Gottdiener 1985, 996). Gottdiener’s model is particularly strong because he captures the importance of the user’s role in meaning creation, instead of suggesting that the users are helpless against the sway of the producers and marketers. Even though aspects of semiosis are controlled by industry, “important degrees of freedom remain for the production of meanings that are independent of either the logic of exchange value or the dominant cultural sensibility... because subcultural signs have lives of their own and are meaning concepts at a deep level” (Gottdiener 1985, 998).

Hypotheses: The Limits of Consumer Activism

Out of the frameworks for understanding mobilization and consumerism outlined above, I have pulled four hypotheses regarding the potential limitations of consumer activism: (1) Prerequisites of capital, (2) an exit, not an entrance, (3) the conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase (4) limitations in imagining social change.

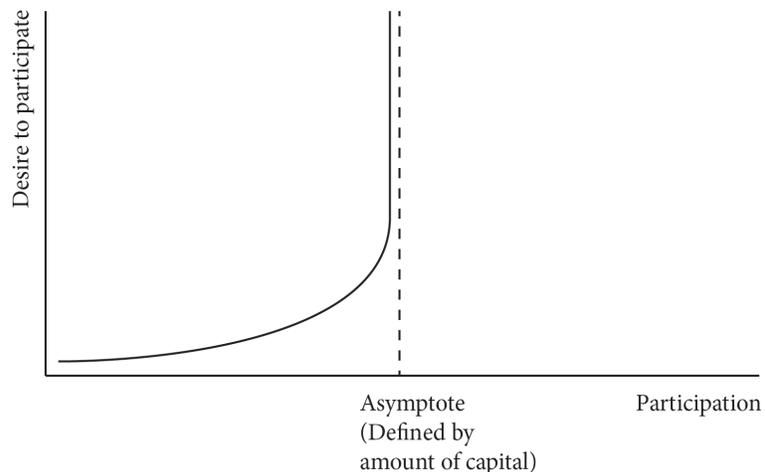
H1. Prerequisites of Capital (Collective action model, efficacy)

For consumption-based forms of activism, who can and cannot participate is heavily dependent on the individual's amount of economic, social, and cultural capital. In response to the idea that politicizing consumption makes activism convenient and accessible to all (Trentmann 2004, Schudson 2007, Glickman 1999), I argue that just because everyone consumes does not mean that everyone can use their consumption as activism. Consumer activism campaigns have a hierarchy of access to participation in social movements that mirrors the hierarchy of possession of capital, creating a "moral economy" (Schor 2007, Bryant & Goodman 2004). The ability to pay the selective costs of "action"—whether it be buying a specific type of coffee, or being able to be selective in what stores you give business to— is related to the availability of the money, time, and civic skills necessary for effective participation. (Brady, Verba, Schlozman 1995, 398; Lubell et al. 2007). I posit that the amount of economic capital acts as an asymptote in the dynamic between the desire to participate in a consumer

activism campaign and actual action (See Figure 1). First of all, an individual must have sufficient capital in order to even begin to see consumption as something that can be used as a tool for activism instead of a necessity for survival. Even if the individual has sufficient capital to begin considering options, he/she may not have the finances necessary to make consumption choices that are tied to activism, which are typically more costly. It may be that the individual has the values and motivation to talk the talk, but simply can't afford to walk the walk.

The limit of economic capital brings along two secondary limitations of cultural and social capital. Cultural and social capital are listed as secondary limitations because they are largely determined by economic capital because one's access to money shapes what kind of education and media they have access to, and also shapes who one comes to have in their social networks. The lack of cultural capital is a limit because even if the individual wants to take action about a certain issue, they cannot unless they possess the education necessary to gain awareness about the

Figure 1: Hypothesis 1



**Line represents a predicted trajectory in consumer activism involvement*

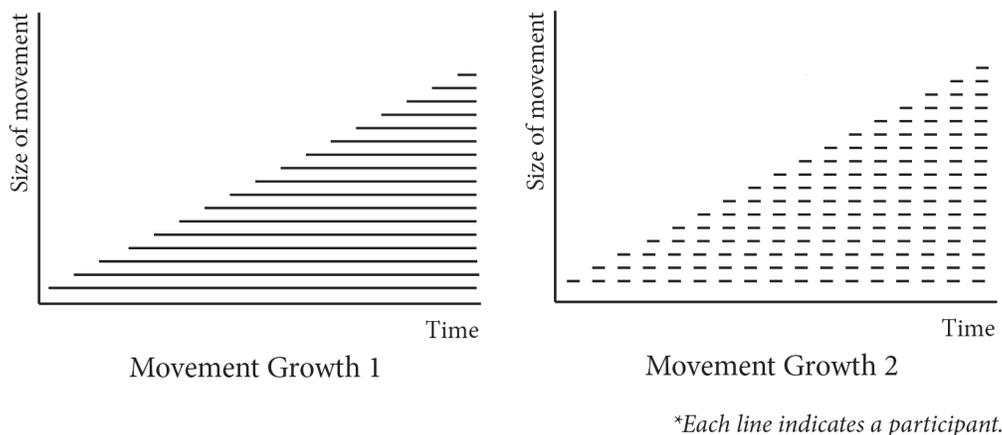
campaigns or to be able to recognize various certification labels. Social capital can act as a limitation because given that the individual has gone past the first barrier, the amount of action they take might be barred by whether or not they are connected to people who also have enough cultural capital to understand their actions and provide support.

H2. An exit, not a gateway

Politicized consumption is not a gateway into deeper involvement. Instead of acting as a low-commitment first step or introduction to sustained involvement in social movements, it allows people to feel like they have already done their part for the good of the world, and therefore discourages further political engagement. As Gottdiener explains in his semiotic approach to objects, the sources of meaning for objects and actions are constantly in flux. In his model, he explains how the producers use the tools of marketing to inject an exchange value into the use value of an object, and how the mass audience uses the tools of personalization to turn an object into a symbol that communicates their identity. Building on this idea, I suspect that the same objects can be used multiple times to represent different symbolic values. A pair of jeans from the Gap tied to The Red Campaign can be used to act as a tool for communicating social status, modified to express personal aesthetics, and still be transfunctionalized to hold symbolic meaning as an act of activism. The same purchase can be “double-counted” to satisfy both one’s identity as a consumer and as a citizen.

In addition, it seems that consumer activism is limited in its ability to act as a gateway to further action because politicized consumption campaigns do not effectively spark deeper or sustained involvement in social movements since the campaigns attract people as consumers, rather than as activists for a specific cause. This hypothesis is born out of McAdam, Paulsen, and Stryker’s framework regarding social ties and activism, specifically the idea of identity salience. If identities are conceptualized as being organized in a hierarchy of salience defined by the probability of the various identities being invoked in a given situation or over many situations, it would not be surprising to find that “consumer” is the salient identity of many, since this identity is frequently invoked in everyday activity. Their framework suggests that whether or not an individual decides to commit to extensive participation in a social movement is largely contingent on the salience of the identity involved in the initial recruitment and the extent to

Figure 2: Hypothesis 2



which involvement continues to support this identity (McAdam & Paulson 1993). The consumption based piece of activism is just a small portion of any social movement, and extensive participation in a social movement usually involves different forms of activism such as working to lobby government, organizing protests, or collecting signatures for a petition. Since the identity of being a consumer is the one invoked in the recruitment, the individual is less likely to stay involved once the activities no longer support this identity. Therefore, I hypothesize that instead of leading to sustained investment in a movement, politicized consumption leads to superficial and temporary involvement. The claim that social movements would grow due to consumption based campaigns, then, becomes more questionable when considering the metrics of what “participant” means— the number of people might increase, but there is a high turn over rate in who is involved, and the depth of involvement is shallow. (See Figure 2). So what? This is a limitation because it calls into question the sustainability of the movement in the long run. If the movement’s growth is based on momentary, low-risk involvement from each participant, can the movement really continue to expand the depth of its impact on whatever issue it’s addressing?

H3. The conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase

The conditions needed for making a purchase become the conditions necessary for taking social action. This hypothesis comes out of the collective action model from Lubell, Zaharan, and Vedlitz (2007) who identify five key variables in an individual’s calculation of whether or not to participate in social action: (1) the perceived value of the collected good produced by successful action, (2) the increase in probability of success by the individual’s participation, (3) the extent to which the group as a whole is likely to succeed, (4) the selective costs of participation, and (5) the selective benefits of participation. For consumerism based social action, I hypothesize that the collective-action considerations are overwhelmed by the influence of private costs and benefits, because while consumption has a social symbolic element, consumption is an individualized activity. In moments of making consumption choices, the factors that come into consideration are centered on the individual—what benefits come out of the costs for the person making the purchase. The same goes for consumption choices that have a political dimension— in considering whether or not to take action, the costs and benefits are not seen as a matter of collective consequence. Therefore, individuals are more likely to take action only if they are able to trace the benefits that result from the individual costs that they incurred for the sake of the cause— individuals want to have a sense of “knowing where their money is going.” This is a limitation because it follows that in order to get someone to take action, the movement or campaign has to be able to promise a quantifiable, measurable change, cutting out the space for taking risks in methods for achieving social change. It follows that instead of a nonprofit organization or other social justice group being able to build up the funds and support necessary to pave the way for research or implement a new program, they need to settle for executing programs with guaranteed success in order to build up the support at all. Product RED, for example is a brand launched in 2006 by celebrity figure Bono that works by licensing its brand to partner companies (Apple, Gap, Nike, Starbucks, just to name a few) in return for a percentage of the profit to be donated to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Though it was met with a surge of media attention and boasted large donation figures, it was found that Red’s contributions make up less than 2 percent of the Global Fund’s total (Nixon 2008). Also, Red’s contributions do not necessarily go to the countries hardest hit by H.I.V. and AIDS; they go only to programs with proven success records (Nixon 2008).

Another limitation is that a lack of participation isn't seen as a hit to the efficacy of the collective. Each individual's participation isn't seen as a crucial piece that adds to the collective push for social change, but instead it represents incremental growth of impact. In this case, opting-out of participating becomes easier to do because it isn't seen as a serious hindrance to the group's ability to succeed. Using the example of the Red Campaign, the individual conceptualizes deciding not to buy the pair of jeans as a small, easily recoverable decline in the impact of the Global Fund rather than thinking that it could impede the possibility of the group's AIDS/HIV relief work. This limitation brings into serious concern the sustainability of support for social movements whose support is driven by consumer activism—the low-cost of involvement may be effective in rapidly garnering widespread support, but the perceived low-cost of ceasing involvement may be just as effective in displacing support.

H4. Limited imagination in what can create social change

The last hypothesis is that the imagination for what can create social change becomes limited, and that the market becomes perceived as the best location for enacting social change both domestically and internationally. Looking at social movement participation through Goffman's idea of frames, Snow et al.'s model of frame alignment discusses the techniques social movement organizations (SMO) use in order to frame the proposed action and the world around it in order to mobilize potential participants. Similar to the way that parents attempt to frame homework as a fun activity that's just like the child's favorite game, SMOs attempt to frame the action that they're pushing to make it seem relevant to the values and desires of the potential actor. The campaigns for a wide range of social problems are similar in their appeal for action. The Red Campaign's The Red

Manifesto states, "We all have tremendous power. What we choose to do or even buy, can affect someone's life on the other side of the world," and their promotional videos make a similar statement visually (See image)

(www.joinred.com).

TOMS, a company that donates a pair of shoes for every pair sold, describes itself as a movement that is

"about people making everyday choices that improve the lives of children" (www.toms.com). The Susan G. Komen foundation for the cure for breast cancer, has an extensive list of "pink ribbon" branded products, explaining that their corporate partners provide them with "the opportunity to reach people where they live, work, and play" (www.komen.org). The products include pink M&M candies, Kodak digital cameras with pink straps, pink buckets of fried chicken at the fast food chain KFC, and even a pink handgun sold at Discount Gun Sales during breast cancer awareness month. Anti-human trafficking organization Not For Sale has a branch that produces bottled teas, based on the logic that starting a for-profit company that sets up a tea production



Image from www.joinred.org

system in the Peruvian Amazon for American consumers offers a more effective reduction of labor trafficking than to rely on circulating donations (www.notforsalecampaign.org).

The prominence of SMOs that mobilize participation through methods of frame alignment that focus on consumption will lead to a skewed perception of how relevant a solution consumption-based action is to social problems. I hypothesize that if individuals are exposed to numerous attempts and campaigns by SMOs that frame problems in terms of how they are relevant to consumption choices, consumption and the consumer market becomes perceived as the most effective location of change, and consequently limits what can be considered a potential method of creating social change.

Case Study: Fair Trade

Fair trade was chosen as the topic of the case study because it is a model of change that is built around the idea of creating an alternative way of producing and consuming products in order to create positive social change. Fair Trade works as a certification system, through which companies are able to use a Fair Trade Certified symbol if the supply chain of that product has been audited by a third party against a set of standards for working conditions, wages, and environmental protection. Slogans typical of Fair Trade campaigns invoke language that centers on an idea of the conscious consumer, and language that defines the purchase as an act of social activism.

Fair Trade USA, the leading certifier in the United States, reports that the amount of Fair Trade Certified products being imported into the U.S. market has been growing steadily since their start in 1998. From 2010 to 2011, coffee imports grew by 32%, tea by 21%, cocoa by 156%, and apparel by 261% (Fair Trade USA 2011). There are 365 producer cooperatives certified by Fair Trade USA alone that export green coffee into the world market (Fair Trade USA 2011). Overall, the sales of products with the Fair Trade USA label rose 75 percent in 2010 (Fair Trade USA 2011). Fair Trade in the US is growing steadily and reaching a large number of the population—during Fair Trade Month 2011, for example, Fair Trade USA and its partners reached nearly 30 million consumers through various communications channels (Fair Trade USA 2011).

Methodology

The data for this case study was gathered over a period of four weeks in 2013. I conducted a total of 16 in-depth, loosely structured interviews with members of the Fair Trade Boston campaign (n=7), managers of stores in Boston that sell Fair Trade products (n=2), employees of Equal Exchange, a worker-owned co-op that sells and distributes Fair Trade ingredients (n=4), employees at a student owned café at Tufts University that sells Fair Trade Certified coffee (n=2), and a leader from the student-led Fair Trade campaign at Bridgewater State University (n=1). The interviewees were selected through the Fair Trade Boston Campaign list-serve, the attendee list from the Fair Trade Universities and Towns Conference hosted by Fair Trade USA in October 2013, through online contact forms for stores, and in person during visits to the student-owned café at Tufts University. The interviewees were selected based on suitability, the extent of their involvement, and willingness to participate. The interviews were conducted at Tufts University, the Equal Exchange Café in the North End of Boston, over phone calls, and with the use of online video chatting programs. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed, then analyzed with open coding. The interviews in average lasted an hour, with the shortest being 32

minutes, and the longest being 69 minutes. The questions centered on the interviewees personal involvement with Fair Trade, how they were first exposed to the concept, and their personal purchasing habits. All interviewees were asked to describe how they see Fair Trade as method of creating social change.

Seven of the interviewees for this study were members of the Fair Trade Boston Network, a group of volunteers from church groups, universities, and businesses working to increasing the availability and use of Fair Trade products throughout Greater Boston. The Network works with Fair Trade Towns USA, a national organization that unites people in cities across the country to organize efforts to make Fair Trade of local-level markets. In August 2010, Boston became the 29th city in the country to achieve the status of being a “Fair Trade Town.” The criteria for this status is set by Fair Trade Towns USA that address the ratio of the number of Fair Trade Certified products available and the population of the city, passing a city council resolution, and hosting events that raise awareness of Fair Trade.

Three of the interviewees for this study were the manager and baristas of the Equal Exchange Café. Equal Exchange is a worker-owned cooperative based in Boston that builds long-term trade partnerships with small-scale farmers of coffee, cocoa, nuts, olive oil, bananas and tea. They are a worker-owned, for-profit company that purchases and distributes the raw products, and also sells coffee and cocoa products in their café in the North End of Boston. The employees for the café are hired based on their interest in Fair Trade as well as their work experience, and are exposed to concentrated education of Fair Trade during their initial training.

One methodological weakness of this study is that the data collected is specific to those involved in Fair Trade in Boston. Though these trends perhaps adequately represent the participants of Fair Trade in the US, it is not able to capture the differences between the US and the UK. Fair Trade products are more widely available in the UK, and general awareness of Fair Trade is estimated to be much higher than among consumers in the US. Though one of the interviewees had been involved with Fair Trade advocacy in the UK, and several of the interviewees understood the condition of Fair Trade awareness in the UK through research, the data is not sufficient to draw direct comparisons. Another methodological weakness of this study is that participants were pooled from contacts through Fair Trade organizations and coffee shops that sell Fair Trade products. This sampling method did not allow for participants who purchase Fair Trade products but are not involved in any other way.

Tailoring the Hypotheses for Fair Trade

H1. Prerequisite of capital.

Fair Trade guarantees minimum prices to the farmer and also pays the farming cooperatives a premium on top of the minimum price to be invested into community initiatives. This means that the final retail prices of Fair Trade Certified products are typically higher than conventional alternatives. The minimum per pound price of washed green coffee beans (the state in which beans are typically imported into the U.S.) gives a basic concept of the price difference for the final retail product. The minimum price for washed Arabica coffee is set by Fairtrade International at \$1.40 per pound in Central America, Mexico, Africa and Asia. In addition to this minimum price producers get \$0.30 per pound for certified organic coffee and a social premium of \$0.20 per pound for all coffee (Fairtrade International 2011). In comparison, the market price for non Fair Trade coffee is highly volatile, with huge differences in per pound prices by the week. Oversupply and threats of shortages have seen international prices fluctuate from a 30-year low of

Figure 3: Prices of Fair Trade Certified and Conventional Goods

Fair Trade Certified	Conventional
<i>Tea (packages of ~18 tea bags)</i> Numi • \$6.99 Choice • \$4.99	<i>Tea (packages of ~18 tea bags)</i> Celestial Seasonings • \$2.50 Bigelow • \$3.00 Lipton • \$1.49 Essential Everyday • \$1.50
<i>Coffee (packages of ~10oz, unflavored)</i> Newman’s Own • \$8.99 Green Mountain • \$8.99	<i>Coffee (packages of ~10oz, unflavored)</i> Maxwell House • \$4.59 Essential Everyday • \$3.79 Starbucks • \$10.49
<i>Chocolate (packages of ~3oz, plain)</i> Green & Blacks • \$4.39 Theo • \$3.99	<i>Chocolate (packages of ~3oz, plain)</i> Ghiradelli • \$3.29 Lindt • \$2.79 Dove • \$2.00 Hershey’s • \$0.83

**Shows products available at Shaw’s retail grocery chain in Boston, MA. All available Fair Trade Certified options are shown. Only a sampling of conventional products are included. (March 2013).*

45 cents per pound in 2001 to a 34-year high of 308.90 cents per pound in 2011. No matter what the market price, however, the price of the green beans are always higher because Fair Trade will pay the market price if it’s higher than the set minimum, and still add on the social premium per pound.

Figure 3 shows a price comparison of Fair Trade Certified and uncertified brands available for coffee, tea, and chocolate at Shaw’s, a retail grocery chain in the Boston area. Since retail prices are determined by each company, it is also helpful to consider the variations within brands. Starbucks, for example, sells the original Pike Place Roast for \$11.95 for 16 oz, and the Fair Trade Café Estima Blend for \$13.95 (www.starbucksstore.com 2013). Peets Coffee sells their house blend for \$12.50 per pound, and the Fair Trade Blend for \$15.95 (www.peets.com 2013). Applying the hypothesis to the case of Fair Trade, I predict that there will be participants who advocate for Fair Trade and have a strong desire to support the movement through changing their purchases, but cannot do so because of economic limitations. I plan to test this hypothesis by asking the interviewees to describe their purchasing habits and how they decide whether or not to buy Fair Trade items when they are actually shopping. I will also ask about their experiences of talking about Fair Trade with friends and family, and about their first introduction to Fair Trade.

H2. An exit, not a gateway

Fair Trade’s recruitment strategy is evident in the slogan of Fair Trade USA, the largest certifier in the US: “Every Purchase Matters.” In other words, they attempt to get more people to join the Fair Trade Movement by addressing their salient identity as consumers. This recruitment

tool has proven to be effective in getting people to “take action,” in so far as individuals have purchased Fair Trade Certified products. There is sufficient proof to show that the Fair Trade Movement is growing in terms of revenue and availability. From 2003 to 2005, Equal Exchange doubled its annual sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee, tea, chocolate, and cocoa from \$10.4 to \$20.8 million (www.equalexchange.coop). Additionally, the Fair Trade Movement is growing in recognition and awareness, with major corporations beginning to offer Fair Trade Certified products. In 2005, Dunkin’ Donuts became the first national brand to sell 100% Fair Trade Certified espresso drinks, McDonalds launched Newman’s Own Organics Fair Trade Certified coffee in 650 of their Northeast restaurants, and Costco converted their private Kirkland Signature label coffee to Fair Trade Certified (www.fairtradeusa.org). My hypothesis is not that the Fair Trade Movement is growing, but rather questioning whether this growth is made up of sustained involvement from the supporters.

Since the actions involved in more committed involvement—such as asking university administration to change purchasing habits or organizing campaigns to push for city policy changes— do not center around consumption, the ‘recruit’ is no longer able to conceptualize a tentative linkage between movement participation and the salient identity that was invoked in the recruitment, and consequently, they are no longer likely to be involved in the movement. In other words, the use of politicized purchases efficiently broadens the number of people who are weakly involved with the Fair Trade Movement since it reaches out to the identity of being a ‘consumer,’ but in comparison does not create many committed movement members. I predict that those who *are* more involved with the Fair Trade Movement—core organizers, leaders of university or city campaigns—became committed members because their identity as ‘labor rights activists,’ or ‘environmentalists,’ not ‘consumers,’ were what drew them towards the movement. I plan to test this hypothesis by asking the interviewees to walk through the circumstances and motivations behind their involvement in Fair Trade from when they were first introduced to their current involvement.

H3. The conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase

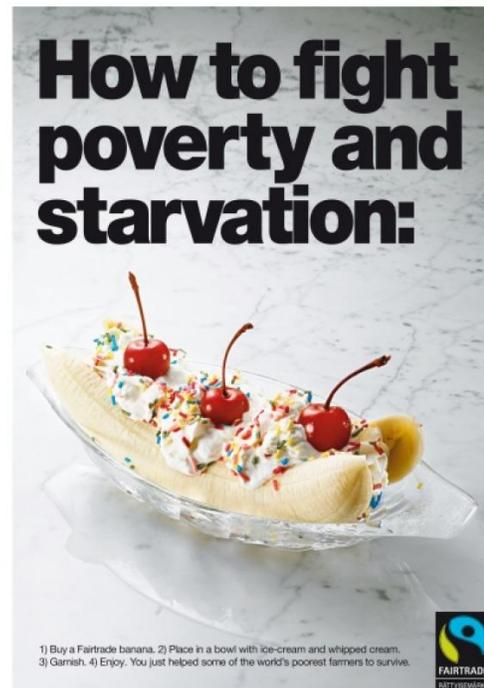
Fair Trade offers potential actors an easy way to connect their personal cost to the potential benefits that will come out of it. Individuals can see the higher price tag, and draw the connection to saying that the extra money that they are paying is going to the farmer. This quantifiable, measurable change makes Fair Trade an attractive form of activism, especially because appeals to participate in the Fair Trade Movement are most often made in contexts centered on consumption, such as grocery stores or coffee shops. In the case of Fair Trade, I predict that the supporters of Fair Trade do so because it offers them a sense of “knowing where their money is going,” and what benefits their individual costs are bringing forth.

Since the conditions needed to take action are more individualized and does not involve looking at the collective costs or benefits, I predict that Fair Trade supporters easily opt-out of their involvement because their personal action is seen to have a small impact in the overall goal. The perceived consequences of choosing to buy the conventional coffee for two dollars instead of the Fair Trade Certified coffee for three dollars is that the farmer gets one less dollar, not that the Fair Trade Movement as a whole cannot continue to build trade partnerships. Since there is a perceived low cost to not participating, I hypothesize that individuals easily decide not to purchase Fair Trade products once the personal costs of money, time, and product variation become too inconvenient according to their personal standards. I plan to test this hypothesis by

asking the participants to describe their purchasing habits, what first stood out to them about the Fair Trade model, and what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of Fair Trade.

H4. Limited imagination in what can create social change

Out of the four methods of frame alignment that Snow et al. present, Fair Trade employs frame extension. In order to promote programs such as increased funds for education in Peruvian co-ops or for health care in Mexico that may not be especially relevant to the potential constituents, Fair Trade frames the action in a way that clarifies the linkage between the personal or group interests and support for the movement. The promotion video for Fair Trade USA asks: “What if the delicious cup of coffee you drink every morning can help build a health clinic in Africa?” (www.fairtradeusa.org). Equal Exchange uses the slogan “By enjoying Equal Exchange products you join a movement to support small-scale farmers” (www.equalexchange.coop). An ad by the Fairtrade International states: “How to fight poverty and starvation,” followed by a photo of a banana split, presumably made with Fair Trade bananas and ice cream (www.fairtrade.net) (See image). I hypothesize that because participants of the Fair Trade movement are exposed to the kind of frame alignment that stresses the linkage between consumer choices and positive social impact, they have a limited imagination in what can be considered a way to achieve social change, and instead see the consumer market as the most effective way to create impact. I will test this hypothesis by asking the interviewees to describe how they decide whether or not to participate in other forms of activism or social movements. I will also ask how they decide whether or not a social movement organization is effective in addressing what they say they are addressing.



Research Findings

H1. Prerequisite of capital.

The first way in which the lack of economic capital presents a limit to consumer activism is that it takes a certain amount of capital to even be able to question conventional products and see consumption as anything beyond an act for purchasing the absolute necessities. In order to even decide to look for the Fair Trade option, people need to have a certain level of knowledge related to trade systems and the ways in which conventional products are produced. Almost all the interviewees described a moment of “awakening” in which they learned about the injustices of conventional supply chains, typically in university level classes, work in nonprofit organizations, or through personal relationships with those who were in the economic standing to have received education about international trade equity.

Many of the interviewees described how they learned about Fair Trade, and how it lined up with their values, but also described how their trip to the grocery store was ultimately guided by the amount of money in their wallet. The cost of the product acts as a barrier—even if

someone's values compel them to choose the Fair Trade option, they may simply not be able to afford participating in this form of activism. Sophie, a barista at The Rez, a student-run café at Tufts University, explains that being able to purchase the type of food that she would prefer is a "treat":

"It's so much a money thing a lot of the time and can I treat myself. That's the thing, to me, Fair Trade is a nice thing that I'm treating myself to when really it's possibly better for everybody involved. I don't have that kind of money... I'd feel better and healthier about a lot of things if I could afford that stuff."

Many participants shared this sentiment of feeling unable to display their values in their actions. Gabe, the manager of The Rez describes being able to support what he would like to as a goal for the future:

"Hopefully one day I'll support the environment with my dollar. Hopefully someday soon. But I just don't earn enough money to do that yet. If I'm paying for my own groceries, I'm not going to splurge on everything because it adds up."

For a social movement, one would expect that the problem of not seeing participation or results would come from the root cause of disinterest or an absence of interest. For Fair Trade, however, the differences in actual purchasing habits didn't come from differences in a desire to participate, but from whether or not they were able to cross the barrier of cost.

The same barrier holds true for people at all different points on the spectrum of being involved with the Fair Trade movement in Boston. Caroline, a barista at the Equal Exchange Café who specifically sought a job there because of her interest in topics of Fair Trade, describes how she was first introduced to Fair Trade:

"I think as an idealistic, younger person really interested in global issues, it sounded like a really interesting thing. But at the same time I felt inherently constrained...it's one thing to buy food that is Fair Trade, but it's an entirely different spectrum when you're in high school or a struggling college student to consider buying all of your clothes Fair Trade. So I think I inherently wanted to believe that it was good, but could I make those purchases myself, at that point, as someone that was pinching pennies, not as much."

Alex, a member of the Fair Trade Boston Network, helps out with outreach events and spends many of his Saturdays handing out flyers about Fair Trade in the downtown Boston area. Based on his values and desire to support the movement, it would be reasonable to expect that he has shifted his own consumption to replace as many conventional goods with Fair Trade options as possible. Instead, Alex is limited in his participation:

"It was...looking into what products were available and whether [my wife and I] could afford to change. It was a gradual change in our purchasing habits. Also researching what will be available in the future and what might be affordable. Just keep up with what is becoming Fair Trade.... Like I said, doing the research and then doing the comparison and then making the decision that this may be a part of our support in supporting these fair practices....Actually saying no we can't make that change, it's not something we can afford to do. Just being very conscious in making the decision of what we can and what we can't buy."

Seth, a former leader in the Fair Trade Boston Network, also describes with a twang of disappointment the ways in which a time of financial hardship has barred him and his wife from being able to put their values into practice:

“What’s been particularly challenging, personally for us is, being in a lot of seasons of transition, so we can’t really practice what we preach.”

Both Alex and Seth have the drive to be consistent supporters of Fair Trade, and are actively looking for ways to increase participation. While they strongly argued in support of the positive impact of Fair Trade products, and described the harms caused by conventionally produced goods throughout the rest of the interview, they still buy conventionally produced instead of Fair Trade products because of their limited budgets. The data shows that the necessity of economic capital is strong limitation of consumer activism— the desire to participate isn’t the deciding factor in how much the participant supports Fair Trade, but rather the amount of money that they can afford to spend.

H2. *An exit not a gateway.*

Interviews with leaders in Fair Trade organizations in Boston revealed that these organizations use methods of recruitment that address people’s identities as consumers. Lucas Britt is one of the leaders of the Fair Trade Boston Network who is extensively involved in organizing the Fair Trade Boston Network’s outreach events. When asked to describe the goals for the outreach event he answered:

“I think that what will get people to pay more is if they know how good the quality is of the product rather than like what the company’s doing. So if you just had some equal exchange chocolate out, but you didn’t, well maybe if you had Equal Exchange or Massachusetts based chocolate company and give out some samples and you know people really enjoyed the chocolate and then you talk about what Equal Exchange does in terms of equitable trade and then I think people would be more willing to pay.”

His response reveals that the Network attempts to recruit new members into the movement by appealing to their identity as consumers. The first hook is the high quality chocolate, and the desired outcome is “to get people to pay more.” The goal isn’t to reach out to people who would take a stand to fight for equitable trade, but rather to reach out to consumers who would be willing to pay more for a better product. Leif, the manager of the Equal Exchange Café in Boston who frequently plans tabling events for Equal Exchange describes a similar approach to outreach:

“One thing that I think about from the café perspective is basically, the best thing we can do to help farmers is buy a lot of coffee from them. And we need to sell a lot of coffee in order to keep buying more from them. So for me, it’s more about selling a ton of coffee or chocolate or whatever product we’re talking about. And if people want to talk about it more that would be amazing, we love to talk about this stuff, but if someone also just wants to get a cup of coffee and wants to go about their business, that’s cool with me too. I just want to move product, and that’s ultimately how we can support farmers.”

For both Lucas and Leif, as representatives of the Fair Trade Boston Network and Equal Exchange, outreach for the movement is seen as a matter of giving consumers another option to consider buying.

The interviewees who were involved with Fair Trade beyond simply buying products in ways such as meeting with the Fair Trade Boston Network or choosing to work with a Fair Trade organization were initially drawn into Fair Trade because of its relevance to their identity as activists for issues such as labor exploitation and trafficking. For example: Katrina, the student leader of the Fair Trade Bridgewater University group and a member of the Fair Trade Colleges and Universities Steering Committee, was first introduced to the concept in a class about Genocide and Political Violence. For Seth, it was something he learned about at a convention he was attending as a representative of his non-profit organization that works to alleviate poverty.

Out of those who had been initially to Fair Trade as consumers, those who were more extensively involved had additional experiences that changed the identity with which they connected to the Fair Trade Movement. Caroline was first introduced to Fair Trade by a sign next to the coffee pot at her University coffee shop that told her why she should pay a little more. Looking back at her first reaction to hearing about Fair Trade, she explains:

“I think the mentality around it was oh, this is supporting someone instead of a brand that is not. But it was simply left at that, no question.”

If that’s how she was first introduced to the movement, why is she still involved? Why did she specifically want to work at a café that serves Fair Trade products? Why does she spend weekends visiting local high schools to teach them about trade equity? Because she was, in a way, *reintroduced* to Fair Trade during Grad school when she went on a research trip to Kenya, and happened to end up living with the farmers of a Fair Trade co-op:

“[my understanding of Fair Trade] was particularly informed last year when I was doing research on Fair Trade tea in Kenya. Looking at colonial injustices with large-scale tea estates in Kenya... and the inadequacies of how that money was then being translated into not only the wages of the workers... based on that experience and that model, I definitely appreciate my definition and my model of how a system works, what I choose to associate with”

Leif, who was also introduced to Fair Trade when purchasing coffee, describes a similar experience:

“I personally did a lot of travel...and got to go to other parts of the world where I saw how luxurious and excessive my life is in comparison. And it just sort of made me want to be a more responsible person when it comes to purchasing or choices in general when it comes to how I’m spending my money....”

For some, the move from just looking for Fair Trade coffee and cocoa to other products marks the start of becoming more involved. It was also found that those who were recruited as ‘consumers’ were only likely to purchase widely available Fair Trade goods of coffee and cocoa, because purchasing less common Fair Trade goods such as clothing or home goods involves the additional investment of research on supply chains and availability. Beyond the basic purchases like coffee, tea, and cocoa that are clearly labeled with a certification label, it is up to the individual to research and compare brands to continue growing in their involvement in the Fair Trade Movement with regards to consumption choices. When asked to describe the process of making a purchase, Julie explains:

“It’s exhausting. Just honestly, it’s, I think in my mind it becomes an exhausting thing...So what I think I’ll do is, if I know I need something, typically I fight it off, I’m like I don’t want to spend money on it, and then I realize I really need it, and then I look

around at thrift stores. Typically I get frustrated at thrift stores, and then I start researching companies....So yeah, I do spend a long time online...It's this, it's a messy messy thing in my mind. It's not a clear-cut thing. And this is with everything I buy...I also try to buy things, the trick I think with these companies is buying things off season, you know, so like getting the better deal. You know, like a consumer, you want the best deal.”

As Julie describes, staying committed to Fair Trade purchasing requires more investment as one moves out of basic goods because certification and availability are more sparse for products like clothing and home goods. This difficulty was echoed by many of the interviewees, who spoke of the extensive research they have to do or far distances that they have to travel in order to find a product that they can know was produced ethically. Those who were first introduced to Fair Trade through recruitment appeals that reached their salient identities as consumers were shown to be less likely to have sustained participation in the Fair Trade Movement beyond simple purchases. When asked about alternative ways that she could be involved in Fair Trade besides drinking the coffee sold at The Rez, Sophie had no trouble thinking of ways:

“I could learn more about it. I know that there is a student group for environmental activism. If I wanted to, I could learn all about it, like really trying to raise awareness about it as an individual. Try and push the school sell it. Or maybe The Rez could push the administration, like ‘we really think everyone should be selling this type of coffee.’”

The desire to go beyond purchase, however, was lacking:

“...but I don't feel the motivation to do it. And its not at least for me in my social activism, my whatever you want to call it. The issue I have chosen is not that.”

For Sophie, buying Fair Trade coffee wasn't a gateway into future action because Fair Trade wasn't presented to her as something she should treat as the next big issue to eradicate, but rather as a choice on a menu.

The second piece of this hypothesis was that people “double-count” same purchases to satisfy both their identity as consumers and as citizens, thus allowing them to feel like they've already done their part, and therefore discourage further political engagement. While purchases did hold multiple meanings for the interviewees— coffee, for example, as a source of caffeine, and a way to show that they care about small-scale farmers—the data did not demonstrate that this discouraged further action. A possible explanation for this finding is the methodological weakness of this study: participants were pooled from contacts through Fair Trade organizations and coffee shops that sell Fair Trade products. The sampling method did not allow for participants who purchase Fair Trade products but are not associated with Fair Trade in any other way. For those included in the study, a purchase of a Fair Trade product is also linked to their identity as an employee or a member of an organization and so buying a Fair Trade product may not just be an “act of consumption” but also “a perk of the job” or “a part of being a member,” which would imbue the act with a different set of meanings.

H3. The conditions needed for action become synchronized with those necessary for purchase

The hypothesis was that Fair Trade supporters easily opt-out of purchasing certified products because their personal action is seen to have a minimal impact in the overall goal. This is because the conditions needed to take action are more centered on measuring individual rather

than the collective costs and benefits. For many of the participants, the key strength of the Fair Trade model was identified as an easy way of being able to make social change, and was praised as a preferred alternative to “just giving to charity” because it gave them a sense of “knowing exactly where their money is going.”

The idea of transaction, and the ability to see the measurable “impact” or “return” of one’s money is the basic premise of making a purchase. In other words, being able to see measurable benefits is a precondition for being willing to pay the cost. These conditions can be heard in Gabe’s description of how he decides whether or not to support an organization when solicited:

“I’m very skeptical about the money going where they say it’s going to go. Even if the person tabling has the best intentions, they aren’t going to follow my dollar to where it’s being promised. They give it to someone who gives it to someone. It feels too indirect. [*Do you have specific criteria to establish how effective a group would be?*] As a theme of what I’ve been saying, visibility and directness of impact. If it’s like, give our basketball team a dollar so we can go to Costa Rica. Buy a cookie so we can go to Costa Rica. Here’s a dollar. Have fun. Really being able to see the impact. Or something local in Boston and not some mega charity, I’m more inclined to give to.”

He goes on to describe the way he shows his support to the non-profit organization, Wikipedia:

“I use Wikipedia so much, I depend on it. I will pretend to be paying for the service. For me, it’s easier for me to pretend that I’m paying for it. Oh, this is a useful thing, would I be willing to pay five bucks for this. Of course, I would.”

Gabe’s description of his support of Wikipedia illustrates the synchronization of the conditions for action and purchase in his explicit statement of preference to “pretend that he’s paying for it.” His mental conversation – “oh, this is a useful thing, would I be willing to pay five bucks” — shows that his decision to support the organization comes from his ability to see the consequences of that support. In talking about Fair Trade, the link between personal cost and the benefit to the farmer was frequently described as “voting with your dollar.” Katrina, for example, explains:

“... you are making a choice with every dollar that you spend, so that is activism in itself because with your money you’re exactly supporting whatever it is that company stands for. Whether it be treating their workers terribly or treating them with respect.”

Katrina’s explanation of “voting with your dollar” helps reveal the individualized nature of consumer activism. The Fair Trade Movement is a grouping of individual actors making a “choice with their dollars” and supporting the respectful treatment of workers. An alternative, more collectivistic view would be that the Fair Trade Movement is only made possible when people come together to push for something as a group. Katrina also uses this same idea of tradeoff between purchase and positive impact to explain her perceived reasons for why others do not choose to buy Fair Trade. In describing her experience talking to students to raise awareness about the Fair Trade Bridgewater University student group, she describes the students that weren’t cooperative:

“It wasn’t that they thought workers should be treated badly. There was no disagreement about that. Workers and farmers should be treated with respect; I think that was with everyone all across the board, but it was more that they cared more about having money for themselves than they cared more about ensuring that workers are treated fairly. And that’s not, they never said that, but that was what it came down to.”

Wendy is the assistant manager of a Ten Thousand Villages shop in Boston that sells hand-made crafts made by women in Fair Trade cooperatives. When asked to describe what she sees as the strengths of the Fair Trade model, she replied:

“...it’s more of a tangible action for someone to go into a store and, say they go into Ten Thousand Villages and they purchase something there...So people know where their money is going. And what’s happening with it.”

While Wendy did see participation in the Fair Trade movement as a matter of individualized costs and benefits, the hypothesis was not true in that this mindset did not always lead to people easily opting-out of making a purchase because it seemed like a small difference. It was found that the participant still saw each person as a necessary piece in building the critical mass necessary to make a large impact. It is important to note, however, that the data did not indicate that the participants considered the costs of collective action. Instead of a collective, that is to say, a cohesive group, the Fair Trade Movement was described more as an accumulation, or aggregate of individual actions adding up to bigger and bigger impact. Christopher, the owner of a food cooperative in Cambridge, describes what he sees as the potential for consumption of Fair Trade products to make change:

“You’re voting with your food dollars. If you choose to buy EE coffee instead of Maxwell House, you’re making very small change. 10 people do it, it’s a little bit bigger. A 100 people do it, and it’s a phenomenal difference.”

Julie gives a similar answer:

“I mean, if we all stopped buying Dole products, if we all stopped buying Chiquita, if we all started saying no to this stuff through our dollar, I think it would revolutionize the systems in this world. I think it really would. If more of us could get on board and say, ‘this is injustice and through my dollar, I’m going to have my voice.’ ...So yeah, I think if we really, if we didn’t just talk about these things, but if we really made the conscious choice every time to just buy only going to buy these sort of things, I think that would really revolutionize the system.”

The hypothesis was that supporters of consumer activism were more likely to stop participating because they saw their participation as having a small impact in the ability of the movement to affect change. As Christopher and Julie’s responses demonstrate, however, the participants did explain the importance of each purchase in being able to demonstrate enough demand for the larger corporations to change their practices. The frequent opting-out of buying Fair Trade products during grocery shopping trips by some participants seems to be better explained by the balance in their bank accounts.

H4. Limited imagination in what can create social change

The hypothesis was that the frame extension methods of Fair Trade and other consumer activism campaigns that stress the linkage between consumption and social impact narrow the imaginations for what can create change. Unfortunately, the data does not provide enough information to say whether or not the hypothesis is true. While the participants do demonstrate a tendency to describe consumption as a preferred method of creating social change, there is no evidence that this is due to being exposed to communications materials that employ frame

extension, or because of their current involvement in Fair Trade. It is plausible that those who participate in Fair Trade do so because they already had this view of social change. The study also lacked a measurement of the participants' interaction and involvement with consumer activism campaigns besides Fair Trade. The participants for this study largely included those who were linked to Fair Trade Organizations through an involvement in another form of activism or through relationships; in order to test this hypothesis, the sample would ideally include people who purchase Fair Trade products because of their exposure to Fair Trade communications materials. Though there was no formal quantification of what framing the interviewees were exposed to, it is reasonable to state that all of the participants have seen and perhaps even distributed materials from Fair Trade Organizations that frame proper consumption as the engine for social change. For this hypothesis, the research findings acts more as a guide for further research than provide definitive conclusions.

The data revealed that consumer activism was seen as a more direct and sustainable way to achieve social change. Nearly all of the participants (n=14) in the study said that they see Fair Trade purchasing as a more effective way to address issues of labor exploitation than working for a change in government policy. Interestingly, the three participants who did not see consumption as a better alternative to policy change were those who first started consuming Fair Trade because their places of employment sold those products. Their Fair Trade purchases are more a result of coincidence and external forces, which suggests that their behavior isn't due to a frame alignment with the Fair Trade Movement. Among the other fourteen, working to change policy was described with cynicism. Lucas, for example, explains what he sees as the strength of the Fair Trade model:

“I think one of the strengths is that it doesn't deal with policy. Like I don't want to get involved in trying to advocate for fair trade with the WTO or like the IMF because a lot of the international organizations kind of push exactly the opposite.

In saying that the WTO and the IMF want the opposite, Lucas echoes a pattern found throughout the data—one of cynicism towards the role of consumption and views toward money in America. Interestingly, the critique of capitalism and the pervasiveness of consumerism are what give individuals a reason to find efficacy in consumption to make change. Ashley describes the power she sees in consumption to create social change:

“...the idea of the consumer blind consumer, that's kind of like a big problem. But if consumers wise up and realize the power they have, I mean, this whole country runs on consumers. Corporations, I mean they don't treat consumers very well, but boy do they need them. The power is immense. I don't know if the will of the consumer matches the power of the consumer unfortunately.”

Ashley's response reveals that she sees a concentration of power in role of the consumer because the consumers control the corporations, which in turn, have a huge role in influencing “this whole country.” When asked what she sees as the role of consumers in Fair Trade, Sarah answered:

“To advocate by being a consumer and pushing. Maybe use the threat of ‘I will stop buying if you use slave labor and don't do anything about it.’ So, really trying to push companies to clean up their supply chain with some positive reinforcement that they will have a larger consumer base.”

Sarah's response illustrates that she finds a sense of authority and power in her role as a consumer. In describing the strengths of the Fair Trade model in comparison to pushing for legislation or policy changes, Wendy explains:

“It means that people can vote with their money. There will always be consumers. Someone will always want to purchase something...the thing with policy or legislation is that you need to be following the day to day things to either the US congress, worldwide, or whatever. [With Fair Trade] you don't have to do that. All you need to do is be the person that goes shopping...and that's it.”

To Wendy, the pervasiveness of consumption is what allows consumer activism and working through the market to be a more sustainable and accessible way to create change, because “someone will always want to purchase something.” She goes on to share about her job training at Ten Thousand Villages, a store that sells handicrafts made by women in cooperatives:

“A lot of the training was to help us understand what, how important it is that we provide effective customer service, so this is how you provide effective customer service because if you do, you can actually make an impact. You can help create change because, one more purchase, for every dollar, that's 30 cents that's reinvested right back, that is real change. That is something that you can take to the bank literally.”

In this response, Wendy identifies the selling another product as “actually making an impact” because the money that comes out of that purchase enables “real change.”

The data presents strong evidence that supporters of Fair Trade find their perceived power to make change in their role as consumers, which definitely presents potential limitations to activism, and further amplifies the ways in which economic inequalities are translated into power inequalities. While the study was unsatisfactory in its ability to test the application of Goffman and Snow et al.'s frame alignment model, it does hint at a possibility that the vast presence of consumerism limits the perceived effectiveness and potency of alternative acts of activism.

Additional Findings – Starting Points for Further Research

Consumption is personal.

Consumption is intricately tied to expression of identity, and consumption choices are understood to be a personal matter. For many of the interviewees, they discussed their option to choose Fair Trade Certified products as something that applies to their own purchasing, but there was a boundary as to how far they thought they could push others to change their purchasing choices. When they did discuss Fair Trade with friends or family, the participants would explain that they try to present it as something that is related to them—“this is something that we sell at the store I work at” or “well, I don't like to drink Dunkin' Donuts coffee, but you can”—instead of presenting it as an act of activism that others should also undertake.

This presents a potential limit to consumer activism: that advocates of consumer activism campaigns are able to push others to change their purchasing choices in so far as they are presenting an alternative, but there is a line that shouldn't be crossed. This line is formed by the necessary respect for other's consumption as their personal choice. Even after having just discussed the harms of buying conventionally grown products and equating it to supporting the exploitation of impoverished workers, Katrina is still careful to respect this boundary:

“For *me* I just tried to just not buy things when I didn’t have the money to get a FT item, I just wouldn’t buy it, but I know for a lot of people, that isn’t necessarily, they need a cup of coffee to go through their day. So I totally understand that. And if they need to do that, that’s what they need to do.”

Leif expresses a similar sentiment:

“...sometimes, not all the time, if you’re getting good, organic, coffee, our prices are usually not much higher, if at all if you look at by the pound prices. So you’re not really paying anymore for FT, so there’s just sort of, no excuse there. Unless you’re on a budget and you’re buying cheap coffee because you need to buy cheap coffee obviously that’s valid too.”

When asked to describe his involvement with Fair Trade, Alex responds:

“I would describe myself as an advocate of it, one who tries to let people know they have options. It’s good to be aware of your options and to have options when it comes to things that you buy.”

It is possible that people are reluctant to push others to participate in an act of consumer activism beyond presenting another option for them to consider because they see it as touching something that is too personal. It could, however, also be that there is a social taboo assigned to talking about others’ finances in general. While there is no definitive pattern, the data presents a worthy starting point for further research.

Faith based motivations.

A handful of Fair Trade advocates in the study (n=5) explicitly pointed to their Christian faith as their motivation for being involved in Fair Trade. Similar to Weber’s observation that the capitalistic work ethic of the Protestants came out of their belief in an all-powerful God, some Fair Trade advocates were motivated to purchase more ethical products because of their belief in a just God that calls people to love others.

Jennie, a member of the Fair Trade Boston Network and an active member of a local church, uses God to explain why she spends the time to go to a grocery store further away to buy Fair Trade bananas:

“...when God calls you to a place to do some work for Him, you have to change who you are. And so a lot of decisions and based on what I feel is representing my savior. And so that’s kind of the process that I went to, I felt like a lot of the Lord was calling me to live a just life because he has called to speak up for those who can’t speak up for themselves...And so I feel convicted if I’m just being lazy, and go out and buy those bananas. You know what I mean? So I want to do what’s right in God’s eyes, and I want to represent him well,”

Julie describes the first time that she heard about Fair Trade:

“...I really felt this, like this call from God saying choose a higher road. Choose, you know, I’ll empower you to do this, and you can, and this is your way to serve and love the oppressed. And there’s scripture I forget where it is, but it says something like, “To whom much is given, much is required.” And I’ve always sort of had that. You know, I’ve been

given a lot, to be in this nation at this time, with the resources I have. You know, I need to really use that. I feel like it's an act of worship, it's an act of worship for me.”

Sarah, Alex, and Seth all find their conviction to support Fair Trade from their belief that all people are God's creations:

“I was born into a family that had a lot of blessings and a lot of stuff that others didn't have. It was just kind of ok, what's wrong with this picture? I believe that God created equally and loved everyone equally, and that we should be caring for each other.” (Sarah)

“It's just recognizing the fact that as Christians that we should love those who are our image bearers and want to serve them in a way that is more reflective of how Christ served.” (Alex)

“So really investing even a small amount in FT, while I don't believe is the cure all to global injustice, is itself is one of the most concrete ways to 'love our neighbor as ourselves.’” (Seth)

While there is evidence there is strong evidence that faith is a strong motivator for members of the Fair Trade Boston Network, it is possible that this is a unique case specific to Boston. The main themes of Christianity highlighted by the interviewees—blessing others with what has been given and treating others as equals—however, together seem to have a strong link to the idea of Fair Trade, which is based on the idea of giving more in order to reduce the unequal treatment of farmers. Although the interviewees for this study specifically identified their views of God as Christian, there is also space for research on how faith has been linked to Fair Trade by other communities of faith. One of Equal Exchange's programs, for example, is to partner with organizations and congregations. Their list of partners include: Presbyterian Church USA, Mennonite Central Committee, Lutheran World Relief, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Church of the Brethren, Baptist Peace Fellowship, and American Jewish World Service (www.equalexchange.coop). This data presents a potential area for research on the role that faith has in the Fair Trade Movement in general.

These results emphasize the weakness of the collective action model in not allowing unquantifiable costs and benefits to be factored in. For those quoted here, the equation offered by the collective action model would not be sufficient in explaining or predicting their behavior because they are not acting as purely rational, calculating people, but rather as spiritual people responding to their understanding of religious texts and teachings. Previous sociological and social psychological research has shown a mixed set of results about the degree to which religion has an effect on political involvement. The existing literature also shows a great variety of theories about how religion would affect political involvement—some look into the difference among denominations and spiritual teachings (Guth et al. 1993, McKenzie 2001), while others seek to explain the effects of the church as an institution (Campbell 2004, Jones-Correa & Leal 2001, Cassel 1999). Campbell (2004), for example, observed that the time members of evangelical Protestant denominations spend in service to their church comes at the expense of participation in the wider community but also builds strong ties that allow them to mobilize quickly. Similarly focusing on the church as an institution, Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) argue that churches matter because of their role as civic associations, which represent “opportunities in non-political settings to learn, to maintain, or refine civic skills” (753). Their analysis of national

surveys from 1990 show that all things being equal, those regularly attending church participate more than those who do not, regardless of whether or not religious experiences are central in their life. Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt, and Green (1993) argue that the religious and not just social aspects of church makes a difference. Using data from a survey of several internet groups, Guth et al. show how theological perspectives influence involvement with environmental activism: "...biblical literalism, End Times thinking, and social pessimism of fundamentalism all contribute substantially to environmental conservatism" (Guth et al. 1993; 379). Similarly, McKenzie (2001) looks at the relationship between religion and civic participation by focusing on the beliefs rather than institutions involved. Based on a representative sample of telephone screener studies by the Public Opinion Laboratory, McKenzie concludes: "...once we account for factors influencing respondents' attendance decisions, the church attendance variable becomes insignificant. This means that a respondent's prior fundamentalism beliefs produced a substantial bias in measuring attendance influence" (McKenzie 2001; 485).

In a recent article (2011) that specifically looks at the role of religion in Fair Trade consumption, Doran and Natale try to answer the question: "why would religious individuals be concerned enough or more so than non-religious to buy Fair Trade to improve the well-being of strangers in distant corners of the World?" Although they trace theological imperatives to buying Fair Trade such as an orientation towards the "oneness of people" and the idea of empathy, they conclude, "what is very clear from this study is that the link between religion and Fair Trade is very very weak" (Doran & Natale 2011). Though their conclusion is that the link is "very very weak," their data is based on online surveys using quantified measures of 'spiritual life.' The relationship between religion and Fair Trade seems to be a worthy area of further research, perhaps with a more qualitative study that delves into the theological imperatives for supporting Fair Trade as expressed by the supporters. There is also room for future research combining literature about religion and political involvement and about religion and consumerism to offer theoretical explanations and predictions about the role of religion in the Fair Trade movement.

Discussion

As previously identified, one of the methodological weaknesses of the case study presented in this article was that the interview sample only included people who were already involved with the Fair Trade Movement in the U.S. to some capacity beyond just purchasing Fair Trade products. Due to this weakness, the data presented in the case study does not allow for supported commentary on the those whose link to Fair Trade is only as a consumer of Fair Trade products. A large body of literature has come out of the U.K., however, where Fair Trade has a significantly larger presence as compared to the U.S.. Just over 8% of all roast and ground retail coffee in the U.K. is Fair Trade compared to 4.6% in the U.S. (Fairtrade International 2011, Fair Trade USA 2011). 96% of consumers in the U.K. reported in a survey that they see the Fair Trade mark frequently compared to just 34% in the U.S. (Fairtrade International 2011). To give one last point of comparison, there are 510 Fair Trade towns in the U.K. with standards set by Fairtrade International, which are comparable to those of Fair Trade Towns and Universities in the U.S. who has given the Fair Trade title to 32 towns so far (Fairtrade International 2011, Fair Trade Towns 2013).

Given the wider reach of Fair Trade there, much research has been done on consumers in the U.K. with regards to ethical consumption. Many of the findings about Fair Trade activists through the case study presented in this article are confirmed to apply to consumers in general by

the literature from the U.K.. The limitation described in the first hypothesis—prerequisite of capital—has been shown to be present for consumers. In a study that compared the behavioral intentions of consumers (n=262) to their actual purchase behavior specifically regarding ethical clothing choices, Shaw et al. (2004) show that there is a “words/deeds inconsistency.” Among the self-categorized ethical consumers with intentions of buying ethical, certified clothing, 68% did not actually purchase sweatshop free clothing (Shaw et al. 2004). The explanation? 90% of the respondents point to the cost as the constraining factor (Shaw et al. 2004). Similarly, focus group and fieldwork on ethical consumers in the U.K showed that like other consumers, ethical consumers had “traditional” credentials like cost and convenience for their shopping list, and that these credentials frequently conflicted with a desire to purchase ethically (Shaw 1999). This quote from one of Shaw’s focus groups is nearly verbatim to words of the individuals included in the case study of this article:

“I would say that always, no matter how many other issues I may think about it always comes down to the cost, ‘cause I’m living on a student grant and loans and things. So I would like to be able to consider more when I buy things, but it just comes down to what I can afford” (Shaw 1999).

Similar findings about the limitation of economic capital in being able to participate in consumer activism are echoed throughout studies on Fair Trade consumers both in the U.K. (Davies 2013, Adams & Raisborough 2010, Berkin, Carrigan & Szmigin 2006, Shaw & Newholm 2002, Boulstridge & Carrigan 2000) as well as the U.S. (Dickson 2001, Fridell 2006, Hudson & Hudson 2003).

There is also existing research that hints at the applicability of the second hypothesis—that consumer activism is an exit, and not a gateway—to ethical consumers in general. In an analysis of surveys reported by consumers in the U.K. asking about their memories of shopping and the extent to which they view the things they buy as reflecting their own personal values, Adams and Raisborough (2010) discuss the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. Mainstreaming in this case is “a term that speaks to widening accessibility and promotion of ethical goods, often through supermarkets” (Adams & Raisborough 2010; 266). Survey responses showed that mainstreaming actually came at the cost of deeper involvement in the Fair Trade movement: “Respondents suggest that even as they ‘do-good’ through ethical consumption, they are not always entirely convinced that ‘good’ is being done and were often skeptical of the ‘big business’ of ethical consumption” (Adams & Raisborough 2010; 265). Although it does not use the same language of a “gateway” or an “exit,” the Adams and Raisborough study does show that while consumer activism does allow for growth in the number of people who purchase ethical products, it does not lead to a growth in the number of people committed to labor rights. In fact, it suggests that it is the widespread growth itself that causes skepticism and makes Fair Trade “just another brand” in the range of consumer choices rather than a form of activism (Adams and Raisborough 2010).

The third hypothesis was that the conditions needed for action become synchronized for those necessary for purchase, more specifically, predicting that participation in consumer activism was seen as a matter of individual costs and benefits, making it easier to opt-out of involvement. In the case study for this article, it was found that those involved in the Fair Trade movement in Boston did not describe feeling like they were part of a cohesive movement, but still had a sense of larger impact beyond their individual involvement. This pattern was also found among a sample of consumers from a shopping event staged by ethical businesses in the U.K. (n=10): “The motivation to act, therefore, was very much one of individual duty, however, while acting as

individual consumers most participants expressed a belief that they were part of a larger collective group of concerned consumers” (Shaw et al. 2006; 1055). Although there are supportive research findings that show that Fair Trade activists and consumers alike see the Fair Trade ‘movement’ as being a collection of individuals, this does not necessarily point to the limitation that the hypothesis originally predicted.

The final hypothesis—that the imagination of what can create social change becomes limited and that the market becomes perceived as the best location for enacting social change—has been shown to be true for consumers of Fair Trade products in the U.K. (Shaw & Newholm 2002, Shaw et al. 2006, Shaw 1999). Looking at the theme of consumption as voting, Shaw et al. found in their interviews that there is a “general notion that consumption choices can be viewed as a vote within the market system and that there was an accepted part of their responsibility as ethically concerned consumers... in many instances participants viewed their market vote as more effective than a vote in a political election” (Shaw et al. 2006; 1059). Focus groups of Fair Trade consumers also revealed that respondents sought to “enact change by consuming, and thus changing the status quo from within” (Shaw 1999). This idea of “voting with your dollar” was strongly echoed in the findings for this article’s case study. The notion that “voting with your wallet” is the most effective way to make change is a limitation because it links individual’s power to make change to the amount they can consume. Consumer activism requires buying power, and following that logic, reducing purchasing would entail a reduction in power: “...it was implicit in the participants stories that consumer power was deemed vital to their responsibility to act in response to the injustices they perceived in society” (Shaw 1999; 1061).

Although the existing body of work about consumer activism and Fair Trade doesn’t directly address all of the hypotheses presented in this article’s case study, the literature on consumers in the U.K. does suggest that the findings from this study can also speak to consumers of Fair Trade beyond those involved with Fair Trade to some capacity in Boston.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, I have presented the potential limitations for consumer activism. While I do call into question the inherent constraints of consumer activism campaigns regarding who can participate, what types of programs are supported, and how people participate, I am not questioning the effectiveness of politicizing consumption for increasing financial impact. I am not arguing, for example, that Fair Trade Certification is a scam that does not actually deliver money to farmers. The purpose of this article was not to say that all consumption-based activism must immediately cease, but to perhaps present some reasons to be cautious about their rising popularity among social movements. Though these campaigns may be successful in raising a considerable amount of funds in a short period of time, it is not worth the greater costs of limiting social activism to only the portion of the population who can afford it, losing a sense of collective costs and benefits in social change, only supporting programs that can deliver individually quantifiable results, and narrowing the definition of effective social change to movements that work through the market system.

It is necessary to look for a method of social change that embraces both sustainability and equity. First, sustainability refers to both the idea of environmental protection and finding a behavior that is not prone to becoming irrelevant due to changing trends. Regarding environmental sustainability, human behaviors and constructions (including society and culture) must be reconceptualized as existing within the boundaries of a finite planet. The earth only has a

certain amount of resources, and methods of achieving economic growth, producing food, and creating positive social change cannot treat the environment as a bottomless box of resources to pull from. Though the production and consumption of material goods are such an integral part of the global economic system and consumerism has made consumer goods necessary for achieving a host of other purposes, we must find alternatives to this product-centric paradigm. While consumption is deeply ingrained into the capitalistic economic systems of the current global political powers, consumption has not been so tightly weaved into activism and campaigns for social justice that it cannot be removed. This points to the second aspect of sustainability, which is that methods of social change should be able to withstand changes in the market. Particularly with Fair Trade, it is problematic to create a solution that is attempting to dismantle traditional neo-liberal economics, and yet also reliant on the existence of capitalistic philosophies of production and financial growth. The concern for sustainability is not just referring to the influence of changing trends in fashion and product styles, but is pointing out that strategies of activism must be able to withstand achieving its goals. Looking at the mission of increasing labor equity, there are methods that are headed in the direction of eventual paradigm shifts away from the goal of endless capitalistic economic growth that can actually end the demand for the exploitation of labor. Promoting voluntary simplified lifestyles that encourages reducing the number of nonessential products purchased, for example, can have a huge impact on turning minds away from the idea that the production industry should grow sans-limits. Promoting collaborative consumption or sharing among neighbors and social networks is another example of a solution that directs society towards a paradigm that values the environment and recognizes its limits. Methods of social change must also embrace equity—though targeting a specific class of people who can afford to pay more for a product can be a quick way to raise money for a cause, it imports the inequalities of economic class into the realm of civic participation. Participating in an act or movement that aligns with one's values and/or desires for change should be equally possible for all citizens, not something that is tempered by the numbers in one's bank account. Instead of having consumer activism campaigns—that is limited in the four ways discussed in this article and in ways explained in other literature—be the method of social change itself, it should be treated as a complement to other forms of activism. Purchasing Fair Trade products for example, should not be seen as consumer activism, but rather as activists' consumption—the purchasing choices made for essential goods by those working against labor exploitation.

Literature Reviewed

- Adams, Matthew, and Jayne Raisborough. 2010. "Making a Difference: Ethical Consumption and the Everyday." *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol.61 No.2
- Agnew, Jean-Christophe. 1993. "Coming Up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective." In *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, edited by Lawrence B. Glickman.
- Andorfer, Veronika A., Ulf Liebe. 2012. "Research on Fair Trade Consumption—A Review." *Journal of Business Ethics* 106:415-435.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1988. "Consumer Society." In *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, edited by Lawrence B. Glickman.
- Brady, Henry E., Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba. "Prospecting for Participants: Rational Expectations and the Recruitment of Political Activists." *American Political Science Review* Vol.93, No.1.
- Bekin, C., M. Carrigan, and I. Szmigin. 2006. "Empowerment, Waste and New Consumption Communities." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 26(1/2):32-47.
- Boris, E. 2003. "Consumers of the World Unite!" In *Sweatshop USA: The American Sweatshop in Historical and Global Perspective*, edited by D.D. Bender and R.A. Grenwald. London:Routledge.
- Boulstridge, E. and M. Carrigan. 2000. "Do Consumers Really Care about Corporate Responsibility?" *Journal of Communication Management* 4(4):355-68.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bryant, Raymond L., and Michael K. Goodman. 2004. "Consuming Narratives: The Political Ecology of 'Alternative' Consumption." *Institute of British Geographers* 29:344-366.
- Campbell, Collin. 1994. "Consuming Goods and The Good of Consuming." *Critical Review* Vol. 8 No.4.
- Campbell, David E. 2004. "Acts of Faith: Churches and Political Engagement." *Political Behavior* Vol.26 No.2.
- Cassel, Carol A. 1999. "Voluntary Associations, Churches, and Social Participation Theories of Turnout." *Social Science Quarterly* Vol.80 No.3.
- Castaldo, Sandro, Francesco Perrini, Nicola Misani, Antonio Tencati. 2008. "The Missing Link Between Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Trust: The Case of Fair Trade Products." *Journal of Business Ethics* 84:1-15.
- Chatzidakis, Andreas, Sally Hibber, and Andrew P. Smith. 2007. "Why People Don't Take their Concerns about Fair Trade to the Supermarket: The Role of Neutralisation." *Journal of Business Ethics* 74:89-100.
- Davies, Iain A. 2009. "Alliances and Networks: Creating Success in the UK Fair Trade Market." *Journal of Business Ethics*. 86:109-126.
- _____, and Andrew Crane. 2003. "Ethical Decision Making in Fair Trade Companies." *Journal of Business Ethics* 45:79-92.
- De Pelsmacker, Patrick, Wim Janssens. 2007. "A Model for Fair Trade Buying Behaviour: The Role of Perceived Quantity and Quality of Information and of Product-Specific Attitudes." *Journal of Business Ethics* 75:361-380.
- Deirdre, Shaw, and Ian Clarke. 1999. "Belief Formation in Ethical Consumer Groups: An Exploratory Study." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 17/2:109:119.

- _____, Terry Newholm, and Roger Dickinson. 2006. "Consumption as Voting: An Exploration of Consumer Empowerment." *European Journal of Marketing* Vol.40 No.9/10.
- _____, Terry Newholm. 2002. "Voluntary Simplicity and the Ethics of Consumption." *Psychology & Marketing* 19(2):167-185.
- Dickson, Marsha A. 2001. "Utility of No Sweat Labels for Apparel Consumers: Profiling Label Users and Predicting Their Purchases." *The Journal of Consumer Affairs* Vol.35 No.1.
- Doran, Caroline J. 2009. "The Role of Personal Values in Fair Trade Consumption." *Journal of Business Ethics* 84:549-563.
- _____, Samuel Michael Natale. 2011. "Empatheia and Caritas: The Role of Religion in Fair Trade Consumption." *Journal of Business Ethics* 98:1-15.
- Eco, Umberto. 1976. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ennis, James G., and Richard Schreuer. 1987. "Mobilizing Weak Support for Social Movements: The Role of Grievance, Efficacy, and Cost." *Social Forces* 66:2.
- Fiske, John. 1989. "Shopping for Pleasure: Malls, Power, and Resistance." In *The Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt.
- Fourcade, Marion, and Healy, Kieran. 2007. "Moral Views of Market Society." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33:14.1-14.27.
- Fridell, Gavin. 2006. "Fair Trade and Neoliberalism: Assessing Emerging Perspectives." *Latin American Perspectives* 151, Vol. 33 No.6.
- Galbraith, John K. 1958. "The Dependence Effect." In *The Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt.
- Glickman, Lawrence B. 2006. "The Consumer and the Citizen in *Personal Influence*." *The Annals of the American Academy* 608.
- _____. 2009. *Buying Power*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1999. *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gendron, Corinne, Veronique Bisailon, Ana Isabel Otero Rance. 2009. "The Institutionalization of Fair Trade: More than Just a Degraded Form of Social Action." *Journal of Business Ethics*. 86:63-79.
- Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Gottdiener, M. 1985. "Hegemony and Mass Culture: A Semiotic Approach." *American Journal of Sociology* 90: 979-1001.
- Greenberg, Cheryl. 1997. "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work." In *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, edited by Lawrence B. Glickman.
- Gronow, Jukka. 1997. *The Sociology of Taste*. New York: Routledge.
- Guth, James L., Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, John C. Green. 1993. "Theological Perspectives and Environmentalism Among Religious Activists." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32(4):373-382.
- Hudson, Ian, and Mark Hudson. 2003. "Removing the Veil? Commodity Fetishism, Fair Trade, and the Environment." *Organization & Environment* 16:413-430.
- Johnston, Josée. 2008. "The Citizen-Consumer Hybrid: Ideological Tensions and the Case of Whole Foods Market." *Theoretical Sociology* 37:229-270.
- Jones-Correa, Michael A., David L. Leal. 2001. "Political Participation: Does Religion Matter." *Political Research Quarterly* Vol.54 No.4.
- King, Samantha. 2008. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Krampen, Martin. 1979. *Meaning in the Urban Environment*. London: Pion.

- Lichbach, Mark I. 1996. *The Cooperator's Dilemma*. The University of Michigan Press.
- Lindstrom, Martin. 2011. *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy*. New York: Random House.
- Lorenzen, Janet A. 2010. *Green Lifestyles: The Process and Practice of Cultural Coherence*.
- Lubell, Mark, Sammy Zahran, and Arnold Vedlitz. 2007. "Collective Action and Citizen Responses to Global Warming." *Political Behavior Issue* 29:391-413.
- Marx, Karl. 1867. "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret." In *The Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt.
- McAdam, Doug, and Ronnelle Paulsen. 1993. "Specifying the Relationship between Social Ties and Activism." *American Journal of Sociology* 99:640-667.
- McKenzie, Brian D. 2001. "Self-Selection, Church Attendance, and Local Civic Participation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40(3):479-488.
- Micheletti, Michele, and Dietlind Stolle. 2007. "Mobilizing Consumers to Take Responsibility for Global Social Justice." *The Annals of American Academy* 611.
- Moore, Geoff. 2004. "The Fair Trade Movement: Parameters, Issues and Future Research." *Journal of Business Ethics* 53:73-86.
- Nelson, Michelle R., Mark A. Rademacher, and Hye-Jin Paek. "Downshifting Consumer = Upshifting Citizen? An Examination of a Local Freecycle Community." *The Annals of American Academy* 611.
- Nixon, Ron. 2008. Bottom Line for (Red). *New York Times*. Retrieved from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/business/06red.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0
- Rosenblatt, Roger. 1999. *Consuming Desires: Consumption, Culture, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Schor, Juliet B. 2007. "In Defense of Consumer Critique: Revisiting the Consumption Debates of the Twentieth Century." *The Annals of American Academy* 611.
- Schor, Juliet B., and Douglas B. Holt. 2000. *The Consumer Society Reader*. The New Press.
- Schudson, Michael. 2007. "Citizens, Consumers, and the Good Society." *The Annals of American Academy* 611.
- _____. 1991. "Delectable Materialism: Were the Critics of Consumer Culture Wrong All Along?" *The American Prospect*.
- Shah, Dhavan V., Douglas M. McLeod, Eunkyung Kim, Sun Young Lee, Melissa R. Gotlieb, Shirley S. Ho, and Hilde Breivik. 2007. "Political Consumerism: How Communication and Consumption Orientations Drive 'Lifestyle Politics'." *The Annals of the American Academy* 611.
- Shaw, Deirdre, Edward Shui, Gillian Hogg, Elaine Wilson, and Louise Hassan. 2004. "Fashion Victim?: The Impact of Sweatshop Concerns on Clothing Choice." Presented by Deirdre Shaw at the 33rd EMAC.
- Snow, David A., Rochford, Jr., E. Burke, Worden, Steven K., and Benford, Robert D. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51: No.4.
- Soper, Kate. 2004. "Rethinking the 'Good Life': The Consumer as Citizen." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* Vol. 15 No. 3.
- Spittle, Steve. 2002. "Producing TV: Consuming TV." In *The Changing Consumer*, edited by Steven Miles, Alison Anderson, and Kevin Meethan.
- Speth, James G. 2012. *America the Possible: Manifesto for a New Economy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Stearns, Peter N. 2006 *Consumerism in World History: The Global Transformation of Desire*. New York: Routledge.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1968.
- Szasz, Andrew. 2008. "The Dangerous Delusions of 'Inverted Quarantine'." *The Chronical Review* Vol.54 No.20.
- Trentmann, Frank. 2004. "Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption." *Journal of Contemporary History* 39(3):373-401.
- Twitchell, James. 1999. "Two Cheers for Materialism." In *The Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. "Conspicuous Consumption." In *The Consumer Society Reader*, edited by Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt.
- Warde, Alan. 2002. "Changing Conceptions of Consumption." In *The Changing Consumer*, edited by Steven Miles, Alison Anderson, and Kevin Meethan.
- Weber, Max. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Zukin, Sharon, and Jennifer Smith Maguire. 2004. "Consumers and Consumption." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30:173-97.

Appendix 1 • Interview Guide

Thank you agreeing to participate in this interview for my research project. I want to remind you that everything we discuss today will be kept confidential. Also, please remember if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you are under no obligations to answer them. During the course of this interview, I would like to talk about your experience with storytelling events in Boston and the ways in which you are involved.

I'd like to begin by hearing about your understanding of Fair Trade...

How do you define Fair Trade?

- If I were someone who had never heard of Fair Trade before, what would you tell me?
- Can you walk me through how Fair Trade works?
- Can you describe what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Fair Trade model?

How did you first get involved with Fair Trade?

- Can you tell me about how you first heard about Fair Trade?
- What was your first reaction to the idea of Fair Trade?
- Can you tell me about why Fair Trade got your attention?
- Could you tell me about how much you knew about the related issues (labor, trade justice, environmental impact) before you learned about Fair Trade?

Can you tell me a little bit more about how you are involved with Fair Trade?

- How would you describe your current involvement with Fair Trade?
- Can you tell me about the different ways you have been involved with Fair Trade?
- Could you walk me through the reasons why you are involved in this way?
- How do you feel about the work that you do involving Fair Trade?
- How would you compare your work involving Fair Trade to work that you currently do or have done not related to Fair Trade?
- Could you tell me about your involvement in a specific campaign?

Can you tell me about your purchasing habits?

- Can you walk me through a trip to the grocery store for you?
- How do you make decisions for big purchases? What about everyday purchases?
- How much of a priority is Fair Trade certification when you are shopping?

I'm really interested in knowing how you feel about social activism and why you're involved...

Could you tell me about why Fair Trade is important to you?

- How do you describe to people what Fair Trade is?
- Could you describe the way people usually respond?
- How do you approach people you don't know about Fair Trade?

What is your motivation for purchasing Fair Trade products?
How do you feel after you've purchased a Fair Trade product?
What is your motivation for advocating for Fair Trade?

Could you tell me about other ways you are involved in social activism?

To what extent are you involved with other forms of social justice or activism?
What is your motivation for being involved in these activities?

How would you describe your role in creating social change?

How would you describe the responsibilities someone has as a citizen?
What do you see as some of the main social problems people are facing today?
How do you think people can best change the conditions of those problems?
Describe specific examples of what people can do to create social change.

When someone introduces you to an organization...

How do you decide whether or not to support that group?
How do you decide whether or not that group is effective at addressing what they say they're addressing?

I'd like to thank you very much for your time. I have asked most of the questions that I had for you today. Would you like to share any additional information with me before we wrap up?

What have I left out?