

PROMISE AND TROUBLE, DESIRE AND CRITIQUE:
SHOPPING AS A SITE OF LEARNING ABOUT GLOBALIZATION, IDENTITY AND THE
POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Educational Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

November, 2008

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ABSTRACT

Adult educators talk frequently about learning which occurs during daily living; however, relatively few explore the breadth and depth of such learning. I contend that shopping, as it is commonly understood and practised in Western societies, is a site of everyday learning. Among people concerned about globalization, this learning connects shopping to the politics of consumption, identity and resistance.

Central to this inquiry are Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concepts of hegemony, ideology, common sense and dialectic. These are useful in understanding the irresolvable tensions between the political, economic and cultural arenas of social life. Informed by critical, feminist and critical race scholarship, I proceed to conceptualize adult learning as “incidental” (Foley, 1999, 2001) and holistic. I then conceptualize “consumer-citizenship.” Social relations of gender, race and class are central in the construction of identity which influences experiences and understandings of consumption and citizenship in the context of Canadian society and global development.

My over-arching methodology, which I call “case study bricolage,” incorporates qualitative case study methods of interviews, focus groups and participant observation with 32 self-identified “radical shoppers” in Vancouver, British Columbia. As well, I employ cultural studies' intertextuality, and include an analysis of popular fiction to further expose discourses of shopping, consumption and consumerism.

Drawing on Laurel Richardson's (2000) “crystallization,” I use various analytical “facets” to respond to three questions about shopping-as-learning: What do participants learn to do? Who do participants learn to be? How do participants learn to make change? Critical media literacy theory illuminates the function of popular culture in constructing a discursive web which shoppers navigate. Through shopping, participants learn how to learn and to conduct research, and how to develop a shopping-related values system, literacy and geography. Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of “imagined community” helps explicate how participants' affiliations with shopping-related movements provide a sense of purpose and belonging. Finally, Jo Littler's (2005) notions of “narcissistic” and “relational” reflexivity clarify that different processes of reflexivity lead to different perspectives on societal change. This inquiry has implications for research and theorizing in adult learning, and the practice of critical adult education.

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PREFACE: A NOTE ON READING THIS DOCUMENT

This dissertation was meant to be printed double-sided. If you are reading a single-sided copy of this text or an electronic copy of it, reading it might take an especially strong imagination. Here is a bit of an explanation to help with that process.

Odd numbered pages contain the dissertation's narrative. Even numbered pages contain excerpts and images from academic and popular publications, news media, websites and photographs to help extend or illustrate a point being made in the narrative. To signal when I think it is most helpful to look for a corresponding image or excerpt, I've inserted this icon in parentheses: . On pages where there is more than one ",

 I've separated the corresponding excerpts or images with a fancy line. This is meant to illustrate a conceptual and methodological point about the complications of determining what and who is inside and outside a text or a group. These complications are central to my thesis, to the field of adult education and to developments in academic research. D'Arcy Martin's (1994) doctoral dissertation and Patti Lather and Chris Smithies' (1997) book *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS* were helpful in my development of this format. Although I otherwise do not draw on these works, I include them in my References. In order to get around the stipulation that all pages contain text (beyond a page number), I have inserted the clause "This page intentionally left blank" on even numbered pages with no other text or image.

At times, I refer to retail corporations. When these references are within my own narrative, I insert the designation for trademark or registered trademark. Although I have attempted to convey the status of a corporate trademark, this can be difficult to do and I apologize if I have not accurately represented it. When corporate names are included in excerpts from my data or from other texts, I do not insert designations which were absent in the original conversations or writings. I have not inserted such designations to accompany non-profit organizations, unless their marketing materials clearly use them.

Finally, I draw your attention to Appendix A entitled "Interludes." I intend for these to be inserted in between certain chapters, as both interruptions and bridges. I have noted the suggested points of insertion for each Interlude to make it easier for you, the reader, should you decide to incorporate them into your reading of this dissertation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The cover page of this dissertation creates an illusion. It indicates that this text was written entirely by me. But that is not true.

There are two individuals who have been central to this project from day one. First in my life and, therefore, in these acknowledgements is my partner, Karen Caithness. While I was still completing my MEd, it was Karen who, when I floated the idea of applying for a PhD, immediately said, "I think you've found your niche." Despite the chance that I would become her financial dependent for a while, Karen's support was whole-hearted and immediate. It also never wavered. Karen eagerly agreed to act as a sort of one-person shadow committee. She carefully read drafts of presentations, papers and chapters, and reviewed the tools that I developed for my study. After I started to clip media materials, it didn't take long for Karen to join in. Some days I would arrive home and find a fabulous addition for my collection on my desk. We tried to save time for play and travel and waterfront strolls, but our conversations often revolved around a concept that I was struggling with or the latest story related to shopping. I count Karen among the very few non-academics I know who can and *will* talk to me about globalization and Gramsci. I know that no student can complete a PhD program without the love and support of others, but I'm not sure that I could have done that without the particular and special love and support you offered me, Karen. I dedicate this dissertation to you.

Shauna Butterwick has worked with me since 2003, when I was completing my MEd and she hired me as her Research Assistant. Four and a half years later, my employment with her ended, but we were still working together as she had become my PhD supervisor. As a supervisor, Shauna has three unique gifts that she shares with all students: patience, curiosity and generosity of time. It was during one of our many after-hours talks about nothing-in-particular when Shauna recognized the potential for me to study shopping as a site of learning. Shauna has opened doors for me, mentored me, and, even in my moments of frustration and confusion, greeted me with encouragement. As important as the role of supervisor is, Shauna has been much more than that: She has invited me to travel the world with her and to collaborate on articles and presentations. From health food shops to duty free stores, we have even shopped together. No student can complete a PhD without a supervisor, but I'm not sure that I would have wanted to do this without your particular and special support, Shauna.

I would also like to thank my other two committee members. I invited Sunera Thobani onto my committee because of her expertise in feminist critical race studies. I am grateful for her commitment to me and my project, which was made all the more interesting and insightful because of her intellectual challenges and steady contributions. I invited Jennifer Sandlin onto my committee because she is one of the few people in the field of adult education researching shopping. From the day we met at an AERC conference, she has been excited about my work. Her own work in this area has been invaluable, and her upbeat energy hugely appreciated.

My thanks also go to the remaining members of my examination committee. The careful reading of my thesis by the external examiners, Pierre Walter and Theresa Rogers from UBC and Christine Jarvis from the University of Huddersfield, and their probing questions and feedback helped me put the finishing touches on this work. In chairing my examination, Thomas Kemple balanced attention to formalities, intellectual engagement and good humour.

Of course, I thank the participants for their time and thoughtful reflection. Tangibly, I was able to offer them only a cup of coffee and a snack during interviews and focus groups. Many of them thanked me for an opportunity to talk about the serious along with the fun side of shopping. I'm glad that I could give them a chance to explore and share their own interests, concerns and opinions, although it seems to me that I got much more than I gave in our exchanges.

Over the four years that I have spent in this program, I have shared good food, good wine, good coffee and questionable accordion playing – but always delivered with gusto and love. I thank friends and family for helping me keep my life as close to balanced as possible, and for humouring me when I quizzed them about shopping. Special thanks go to my parents, Gilda and Donny, for happily agreeing to have their experiences included in this thesis. The encouragement of my Aunt Gilda Freeman in Toronto, who has been an unabashed cheerleader for me, magically continued to reach me all the way in Vancouver.

Finally, I thank the students, faculty and staff in Educational Studies, as well as people who attended my presentations or reviewed my manuscripts. Constructive feedback has reminded me to approach questions with an open mind and a critical eye. In particular, I thank Thomas Sork, the first person I met in the department. Throughout my six years here, Tom has helped me take the next step, be that in studies, publishing or employment. I remember one conversation that we had: I was concerned about lacking a single area of specialization. What I saw as a deficit Tom reframed as the asset of versatility. He, along with so many others, has helped me develop my capacity and my confidence as a student, a researcher and a teacher.

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning. The making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions, and its growth is an active debate and amendment, under the pressures of experience, contact, and discovery, writing themselves into the land. The growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind. The making of a mind is, first, the slow learning of shapes, purposes, and meanings, so that work, observation and communication are possible. Then, second, but equal in importance, is the testing of these in experience, the making of new observations, comparisons, and meanings. A culture has two aspects: the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested. These are the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and we see through them the nature of a culture: that it is always both traditional and creative; that it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort.

– Raymond Williams (1993), “Culture is Ordinary, p. 90

While I am sympathetic to attempts to restore dignity to the everyday practices that, in the past, have been equated with false consciousness by elite academics, I am reluctant to elevate these activities to guerrilla warfare in a new politics of consumption. At a time when even the Left has embraced the celebration of consumption as a form of resistance by the subordinated, it seems appropriate to explore the popular pleasures of consumption as a serious arena of critical feminist analysis.

– Dawn Currie (1999), *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*, p. 6

[Insert Interlude 1 here.]

CHAPTER ONE IN THE BEGINNING...

Shopping is an important part of my life. Thinking back on when and how it became so integral to my identity, I see in my mind's eye the first material thing that I remember wanting *desperately*. Perhaps six or seven years old at the time, I convinced my mother that I *had* to have an apricot-coloured lacy dress with a sash tied in a bow around the back to wear to my cousin's *bar mitzvah*, the first formal event to which I'd been invited. Never a "girly girl," and not remotely interested in fashion until my early adult years, I still wonder at my insistence on that particular item.

Fast forwarding to my own *bat mitzvah* several years later, I now recognize that day as pivotal in bringing consumption together with citizenship in my own life. According to Jewish culture, the *bar/bat mitzvah* marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, the point at which responsibilities are assumed and rights are accorded – the very hallmarks of citizenship. Post-Second World War British sociologist T. H. Marshall (1992) defines citizenship as

a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed. (p. 18)

Feminist, postcolonial and other critical scholars note that citizenship is a much trickier concept than Marshall suggests, complicated by social divisions and competing interests. The "vocabularies of citizenship' and their meanings vary according to social, political and cultural context and reflect historical legacies" (Lister, 2003, p. 3), and citizenship becomes an "essentially contested concept" (p. 14). Despite the importance of local and temporal context, certain types of relations seem amazingly, persistently important in differentiating and categorizing groups of citizens.

Within Judaism, the person becoming *bar/bat mitzvah* carries out certain rituals for the first time, becoming a full participant in the congregation. In the Conservative synagogue where I celebrated my *bat mitzvah*, girls were allowed to conduct these rituals only on that day; in this way, we girls were unlike boys who could return to synagogue and continue to engage in those rituals. This is an example of how gender is evident in the structuring of social relations, within and beyond Jewish communities, and distinguishes some citizens from others as established rules and practices continue to favour boys and men over girls and women.

[W]omen are not given any formal role in the construction of the state; they are instead seen as keeper and cultivators of it. This implies a certain responsibility which is placed upon women to reproduce and cultivate in democratic subjects those dominant cultural values that are endorsed by those who dominate the political machinery (and indeed political memory) of the state. This 'reproductive' process leads to a cultural privileging that exalts not only the state's position on national identity but also women's position within it. In so doing, nationalist rhetoric not only privileges the dominance of male super-ordinance in state hierarchies but also represses, both epistemically and politically, the many cultural and national understandings that reside on the margins of the state. This legitimised practice of privileging also means that women who oppose or resist the dominant view of culture and nationhood are viewed as 'non-persons' or 'non-citizens'. The non-citizen ultimately comes to signify difference.

– Jo-Anne Dillabough and Madeleine Arnot (2000), "Feminist Political Frameworks" p. 29

The urge forward along the path thus plotted is an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed. Social class, on the other hand, is a system of inequality. And it too, like citizenship, can be based on a set of ideals, beliefs and values. It is therefore reasonable to expect that the impact of citizenship on social class should take the form of a conflict between opposing principles.

– T. H. Marshall (1992), "Citizenship and Social Class," p. 18

Whiteness carries privileges; non-whiteness carries disadvantages. Despite differences in culture and history, all people of colour share one thing – they are racialised on the basis of skin colour, devalued as persons, and their histories and cultures are distorted and stigmatized.

– Vanaja Dhruvarajan (2000), "People of Colour and National Identity in Canada," p. 157

In my European Jewish-Canadian community, part of the acknowledgement of the *bar/bat mitzvah* comes through presents. For people who choose to give a monetary gift, there is even a practice to help determine the amount: Cheques are often made out in multiples \$18, representing the numerical equivalent of the word “*chai*,” the Hebrew word for life. Not surprisingly, the wealthier the family and the family’s acquaintances, the larger the cheques and the more valuable the other gifts tend to be. Class is a second way in which relations are structured so that citizens are differentiated from one another. Even Marshall (1992) recognizes the extent to which capitalism is accompanied by class-based barriers to equality in societies where everyone has the “right” to almost everything – from food to housing to transit to toothpaste – as long as she or he has the means to pay for it. Still other characteristics which are defined in order to divide citizens might have been less obvious to me on the day of my *bat mitzvah*, but are persistently evident across societies and cultures; they include race, ethnicity, (dis)ability and sexuality. As these divisions are manifest, struggles ensue. (👁)

Whether by design or by accident, on the day of my *bat mitzvah*, shopping and consumption came together with citizenship in my social identity. On the day that I became *bat mitzvah*, for the first time in my life, I had enough money to make what were, to a twelve-year-old girl from an aspiring-to-middle-class family, significant material decisions. With the funds in my bank account, I made my own consumer decisions. (Today, I understand my choice of a stereo, but my choice of an orange vinyl bean bag chair mystifies me only slightly less than the apricot dress.) Becoming a full-fledged citizen was tied to becoming a full-fledged consumer.

As Zukin (2005) notes, across the Global North,¹ one of the first ways that young people assert their own identities, separate from their parents’, is through shopping and consumption:

In our society, teenagers begin to break free to their parents when they start to shop for themselves....Chatting with friends, handling both goods and money, dealing with the outside world without parents to run interference: teenagers’ shopping experiences are both exhilarating and scary, centered only on themselves, their friends, and the few stores where they can afford to go....We learn to be adults by learning to shop. (p. 30)

Now as frequently conflated as the ideologies of consumerism² and neoliberalism, consumption and citizenship are portrayed as inter-changeable sets of rights and responsibilities. As I trace in

¹ Aiming for both consistency and conciseness in this thesis, I generally use “Western” to refer to post-Enlightenment culture or to talk about societies in the context of that cultural ideal. When talking about contemporary geo-political issues and divides, I use “Global North” to refer to so-called “Western,” “developed” or industrialized countries and regions, and “Global South” to refer to so-called “Third World” or “developing” countries and regions.

² Consumerism is used to refer to consumer rights movements and organizations, as well as an ideology which informs cultural, political and economic practice and structure (see Gabriel & Lang, 1995). I use consumerism in this ideological sense, in distinction to what I refer to as the consumer rights movement.

Tomorrow, both City Hall and the New York Stock Exchange – two powerful symbols of America, one of freedom, the other of free enterprise – will be open for business.

– Statement made by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in “Mayor Giuliani Announces Details on Further Opening of Lower Manhattan for Monday, September 17, 2001” (September 16, 2001)

When they struck, they wanted to create an atmosphere of fear. And one of the great goals of this nation’s war is to restore public confidence in the airline industry. It’s to tell the traveling public: Get on board. Do your business around the country. Fly and enjoy America’s great destination spots. Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed.

– Statement made by President George W. Bush in “At O’Hare, President Says ‘Get on Board’” (September 27, 2001)

We cannot let our way of life be compromised by acts of terrorism. I encourage you to take advantage of all the things that make our City the Capital of the World. New York’s restaurants, theaters, stores, and museums are all open for business, and there’s never been a better time to participate in the cultural and economic life of our City. And if you are traveling, take a plane with the confidence that our skies are safe.

If you have friends or family who were planning on coming to New York City in the near future, tell them to come now. Not only will they have a great time at our world-renowned restaurants, shops, museums, ballparks, and theaters, but they will be making an important statement that terrorists cannot stop us from being the land of the free and the home of the brave.

– Statement made by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in “Moving Forward with Courage” (October 10, 2001)

the following chapters, consumption and citizenship have a long and inter-twined history in Western societies; however, they seem to have become especially fused and confused over the past two decades. Following 9/11, the comments of President Bush and Mayor Giuliani linking the Stock Exchange to City Hall, Disney World to the American way of life, had what Antonio Gramsci (1971) refers to as an obvious, “common sense” resonance with American consumer-citizens. (☞) Moreover, consumption has increasingly become a way of talking about shopping and purchasing, rather than its older meanings of eating and using.

Having grown up in a kosher household, I learned from an early age to think about what was in the food that I ate, about what I consumed in that most literal sense. Back then, I read labels to check for lard, beef tallow, gelatine, rennet, whey powder and other potentially problematic ingredients. Today, I still read food labels, but now I am more likely to look for fair trade and certified organic logos, locally grown designations, or ingredients which do not include hydrogenated fats. I also read manufacturers’ labels on clothes and electronics and household furnishings and toiletries and....My traditional Jewish upbringing taught me to be mindful of consumption; somewhere along the line, I learned that there is more to consumption than the centuries-old guidelines of *kashrut* address.

In large part, changes in my personal shopping and consumption practices have been accompanied by larger social, economic and political changes, and changes in my own affiliations by which I am identified. From my birth and early years in Canada’s post-Second World War social democracy of the 1960s and early 1970s, to the increasingly neoliberal democracy of contemporary globalization, consumption and citizenship have been tied together in constant, yet changing, ways. The function of government policies – including war – as economic drivers can be juxtaposed with “a kinder but not always more efficient means of increasing demands for goods [which] has transferred the responsibility from government’s hands to those of consumers” (Zukin, 2005, p. 15), evident in the closing decades of the twentieth century. This has occurred in the Global North, alongside an enforced spread of capitalism across developing and previously communist states (see, for example, Bello, 2002; Bocoock, 1993; Kiely, 2005). The claims that this structural shift threatens the viability of small-scale producers and the environmental sustainability, and is especially devastating for producers and consumers in developing countries (Bocoock, 1993; Shiva, 2005) ring true to me, as I notice local stores close and battles over Wal-Mart® ensue.

I am scared and angry about our world.

About Walmart – the prices are not equivalent to the USA, relevant [sic] to wages and costs of living. They just can't get the costs **that** cheap, when almost everything is produced here. I've seen two different stores now – the one which I went into had 4 floors, very department store/Woolworth feeling, not the sprawling monsters that would be in the States. The same “friendly Walmart greeters” exist, at every flat escalator, though they weren't old people, but young college looking kids. Disappointingly, I did not run into many “local products” I had heard Walmart aims depending on location [sic], like frog legs or incense. Most products were very western.

I also went into Carrefours, a French superstore very similar to Walmart. Same deal, multi-floors, very new and clean (as most things in Kunming currently are). Ironically, large superstores like these may actually find it harder to compete, pricewise, because they're trying to sell to the very same population whose workforce they exploit. Unlike in the States, I don't necessarily see them putting out small and local businesses based strictly on price (unless they find an even cheaper place to move their production to). Other factors, I'm not so sure – Walmart running the classy, vogue driven salespath? Hard to imagine, but hard to ignore. Some locals I've spoken with say they shop at Walmart because it's cleaner. Walking around both stores, I was shocked. I bought a notebook, and soap from Carrefours (probably only slightly better than shopping at Walmart), while others were buying cartfuls of things. Mostly middle to upper class folks, from the looks – though looks can be deceiving, since Chinese, and Asians, in general, are some of the sharpest dressing people I've seen. Still, with the relatively high [prices], I don't see most lower waged Chinese shopping here yet. Having been travelling for some time and living on so little, I couldn't help but notice all the packaging that surrounded all the products – even the small cardboard box around my bar of soap. Then I started looking at everyone around, essentially pushing around cartfuls of packaging, and the immensity of the commercial [sic] problem that is, struck me. The packaging and transport of commercial products seems like such a large, sweet, low hanging fruit for the environmental engineering community to tackle. What progress has been made?

– “Globalization Up Close” (2006, March 9), from *Ray's Journal: Travel, Reading Thoughts*, personal correspondence

These observations and understandings have led me towards the inquiry detailed in this thesis. In it, I explore multiple, often contradictory, discourses and practices of shopping, consumption and consumerism, in an attempt to learn more about how people who are concerned about globalization and consumption learn about these issues through their shopping and act on that learning in an attempt to change the status quo. This is a deeply personal inquiry, because I am one of those people. I have come to share something important with people who are anxious about their local communities or regions. Sometimes, these are people whom I have never met; sometimes we live in entirely different parts of the world; nonetheless their thoughts resonate with me and my experiences. I find them in all kinds of places, from media reports to documentary films to online forums. I count Ray, one of a growing number of otherwise anonymous bloggers around the world, among these people. In a single entry to his own blog, which he maintained to keep in touch with friends and family while he was living abroad, he described a reality that seemed familiar, despite the fact that I had never met Ray and that he was describing China, a country where I had never been. (👁)

I also take note of Vandana Shiva's (2005) and Maria Mies' (1986) point that, because much of women's work has been conducted in what patriarchal academic and social systems have categorized as the "private" sphere of the home and unpaid, low paid or casual labour within and outside the home, women – and poor women in particular – bear much of the brunt of globalization. I recognize that I am experiencing globalization within the context of my gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion and nationality. At the same time, globalization's large-scale social and economic forces alter the meaning of gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion and nationality, and the particular trajectory of my life options and considerations.

For over 20 years, my academic, paid and voluntary work has engaged me in women's, community service and environmental organizations and advocacy movements. I try to surround myself with people who hold progressive social outlooks. I try to shop in areas of the city and stores in those areas that seem consistent with the person I see myself as, in terms of substance as well as style. The problem is that corporate mergers and social complexities make it difficult to figure out "who" a store or a product is and which progressive practices have primacy over others. When I go grocery shopping, should I go to the nearby Choices™, part of a locally owned chain which often offers little locally grown or produced inventory? Should I go to Capers™, now part of America's largest conglomerate of health food stores, which has fostered strong relationships with local growers? Or should I drive across town to the locally owned and

In the 1980s a striking new political rhetoric gave the consumer a new place a long way from the sales or the supermarket. No longer a silly shopper, he or she acquired a grand new exemplary stature as the very type of rational modern citizenship. This consumer-citizen was an individual of no particular sex, with interests and rights and choices. Yet in the light of this character, personally seeking the best deal for himself or herself in every department of life, some other features of the...consumer ideal are revealed. It involves ideas of collective responsibility (as well as feminine culpability), and includes a concern for social welfare (as well as anational interests).

– Rachel Bowlby (2001), *Carried Away*, p. 133

controlled food co-operative and health food stores on Commercial Drive? At what point do my concerns and considerations about shopping pull me into the contorted position of trying to solve problems of global magnitude through my consumption – turning me into a new kind of “silly shopper” (Bowlby, 2002, p. 133)? (☹) How do I learn to make sense of all this and begin to answer these questions?

Breaking into the Ivory Tower

Although adult education scholars and practitioners speak often about the everyday as an occasion for learning, at the outset of this inquiry I saw few examples of empirical research within the adult education field which attempts to explore what that means. Starting out in my doctoral program, I was centrally interested in globalization, which I conceptualize formally in chapter two, and in how adults learn to understand and respond critically to it. Finding it difficult to pinpoint a way to talk to people about a phenomenon like globalization, which can seem abstract and overwhelming, I began to see shopping and consumption as processes through which each and every one of us comes to experience and know globalization in a very intimate way. Shopping became an example of how the mundane is not necessarily simple, of how taken-for-granted habits can be occasions for learning, of how the personal really is political.

It seems that my decision to undertake this inquiry coincided with a virtual explosion in public interest in and concern about shopping, consumption and consumerism across and well beyond Canada. The word shopping is routinely applied to a growing number of settings and processes. Not long ago, the word referred to what people did in markets or stores. Individuals now talk about shopping for people, places and things – from doctors or life partners, to vacation destinations or homes, to the stuff of everyday life. For those with access to technology and credit, commercial websites have, to some extent, eliminated the physical boundaries of the store. Even before the widespread popularization of technology, transitions from community markets and neighbourhood shops to speciality shopping areas and stores, to the department store and, finally, the big box store have been accompanied by shifts in relationships between producers, vendors, marketers and shoppers. In this dissertation, I outline how shopping has evolved in the context of historical and social developments. Because the focus of my empirical research is the Canadian city of Vancouver, British Columbia, my consideration of shopping is confined to its evolution in Western societies and, often, more specifically to middle class practices in urban areas.

Plenitude is American culture's perverse burden...More than anything else, it is our mediated, consumption-driven culture that's making us sick.

– Kalle Lasn (1999), *Culture Jam*, p. 11



Clearly, the strong, self-actualized woman is an image that sells....It strikes me as hypocritical, though, to push this limited, you-can-do-anything vision of feminism on women when even Vogue admits that part of the reason why women have self-esteem low enough to need to hear that we can do anything is that this same industry goes around telling us we're too fat/too dark/too loud/too aggressive in the first place, and thus need retail therapy to make ourselves feel validated again....Furthermore, this sort of pro-woman scholck isn't even about feminism at all. It's not like we're all supposed to get together and think about the ways gender roles have created artificial barriers between people, or how sexism keeps us from reaching our goals. Oh, no – we're supposed to race out to the mall and buy things. Yeah, that's going to help women secure their rights to choose.

– Rita Hao (2006), “And Now a Word from Our Sponsors: Feminism for Sale,” p. 113



This book is not, however, another account of the power of the select group of corporate Goliaths that have gathered to form our de facto global government. Rather, the book is an attempt to analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule, and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of that opposition inevitable.

– Naomi Klein (2000), *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, p. xxi

Of course, even before I fell upon an interest in shopping, there were voices speaking out about these issues. Kalle Lasn, founder of the magazine *AdBusters* and the annual Buy Nothing Day, has gained widespread attention with his sustained critique of consumerism. (☉) Edgy feminist cultural publications have explored how gender, race and class come together in shopping and consumption, and how social politics seem so easily “bought out” by apparently progressive corporations in the name of profit. (☉) Community activists and activist-journalists have been so busy at their investigations of relevant issues that, in recent years, non-fiction writing and documentary films have become regular fixtures on best-seller lists and mainstream theatre releases. Canadian contributions include Naomi Klein’s (2000) international blockbuster, *No Logo* (☉), and Mark Achbar and Joel Bakan’s film released in 2004, *The Corporation*, both of which continue to circulate in their original forms as well as through slick websites (see <http://www.naomiklein.org> and <http://www.thecorporation.com>).³

After I began to read about shopping and consumption earnestly in 2005, I found that, indeed, I was far from alone in my interest. There were news stories about toxins in goods for sale and the impact of travel on global climate change, as well as the possibility of buying ethically produced and marketed items. The alternative online newspaper, *The Tyee*, offered a platform for J. B. MacKinnon and Alisa Smith as they developed their now well-known “100-Mile Diet” (see <http://www.thetyee.ca/Series/2005/06/28/100Mile/>). One of my favourite radio shows, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s (CBC) current affairs show *The Current*, has aired segments on global climate change, genetically modified food, organics and fair trade, among other relevant topics. In 2006, Al Gore came to the attention of millions of people, not in his role as an American politician, but as the spokesperson in and for the documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth* (see <http://www.climatecrisis.net>). On a more local level, California Governor Arnold “The Governator” Schwarzenegger visited Premier Gordon Campbell in June 2007. The two politicians discussed the idea of building a “hydrogen highway” which would stretch along the Pacific Coast and support the development and use of environmentally friendly hydrogen-fuelled vehicles (McCarthy, 2007).⁴ Although they preceded the start of my study, the

³ Both Naomi Klein and Kalle Lasn have come under attack for their approaches. Klein’s website suggests that her objective is to brand and market herself as much as her message, while Lasn’s *AdBusters* and “Blackspot” fairly made and traded canvas running shoes suggest that the ultimate resolution to the problems of consumerism lies in more consumption. See J. Heath & A. Potter’s *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can’t be Jammed* for one critique of Klein, Lasn and other anti-consumerist activists.

⁴ Given the concepts that I will go on to discuss in this dissertation, including ideas about the connections between political and cultural spheres, it seems worth noting here that Al Gore and Arnold Schwarzenegger themselves illustrate the links between politics and culture. The former is an ex-politician-turned-“infotainer,” while the latter is an ex-actor-turned politician. Both have used the political and cultural spheres alternately to guide public opinion and secure their own status.

Being a “savvy” consumer is not about continually finding the best bargains, although that is a useful skill. Being a savvy consumer is to be aware of the contradictions between the marketing and advertising imposed on us, but still consuming items in intended and unintended ways in order to articulate something else – a sense of self-identity, of difference, or to express a social identity, that sense of belonging to a group based on shared tastes and values. Often the sense of belonging to a group is defined in terms of resistance, as Stuart Hall argues, this being a pervasive or even seductive attitude. Using a notion from Antonio Gramsci concerning the contested “terrain of culture”, wherein ideological struggles take place, Hall continues:

The people versus the power-bloc: this, rather than “class-against-class”, is the central line of contradiction around which the terrain of culture is polarized. Popular culture, especially, is organized around the contradiction: the popular forces versus the power-bloc.
(1981: 238)

– Mark Paterson (2006), *Consumption and Everyday Life*, p. 152

public education and advocacy efforts of Building Better Neighbourhoods to keep Wal-Mart out of the City of Vancouver in 2002 left their mark on consumer politics in this city.

As I was writing sections of this dissertation, I became curious about the extent to which these popular concerns had been identified as legitimate academic interests. On January 21, 2008, I searched the ProQuest database for doctoral dissertations which contained the keyword “shopping.” Granted I narrowed my search to dissertations written in English within the past five years; still, I was surprised to find a total of only 67 titles. Except for two dissertations, one completed at The University of British Columbia and the other at McMaster University, my search returned titles of dissertations written at American universities. Of these 67 documents, the vast majority were produced by students in the subject areas of marketing, finance or business; smaller numbers were produced by students in subject areas such as home economics, geography, architecture or history. The titles of 31 of these dissertations indicated a central concern with online shopping. The only study which was overtly interested in education investigated consumer education from a business management perspective. Clearly, few doctoral students across North America are studying shopping from a critical perspective, and even fewer are looking at shopping itself as a process of ongoing, informal learning.

The result of this quick search of North American doctoral dissertations both belies the fact that there has been a great deal of recent critical interest in shopping in Canada and many other countries, and confirms the limited extent to which it is being taken up in the academy as a site of learning and academics' research. The work which most directly deals with consumer education does not tend to approach these topics critically. Although this is beginning to change, as some marketing faculty are engaging critically with the ideology of consumerism, traditionally consumer education has focused on helping consumers find information and make rational consumption decisions (Pollay, 1986; Paterson, 2006; Sandlin, 2004, 2005a).

Although shopping and learning have been connected in academic scholarship, little work focuses on shopping as a site and process of learning and on shoppers as learners. Robert Bock (1993) recognizes that “[t]here is nothing natural about modern consumption; it is something which is acquired, learned; something which people are socialized into doing” (p. 54). In his discussion of the “knowing consumer” (Paterson, 2006, p. 141), Mark Paterson distinguishes between ignorant “suckers” who are manipulated by marketing and structural forces (p. 142), good consumers whose skill is in “continually finding the best bargains” (p. 152), and sophisticated, “savvy” consumers (p. 152). (☞) Roberta Sassatelli (2006) warns that unless

Nicole: [pause] Uh, I would think I'm a good shopper for myself because I'm aware of, I feel like I need to be aware of why I'm buying things. So, um, I don't necessarily go out and spend my money, uh, because I feel like that's what is, um, expected of me, I feel like when I go shopping I, uh, question what I'm doing. And, uh, and I know when I buy stuff, say, such as like, you know, clothing or, um, material [items], it makes me feel good and I know that I do it because it makes me feel good. But at the same time, when I'm doing that, uh, when I go out and shop and I, and I say to myself, Am I doing this just because I know that I, that I will feel better about myself? Uh, I might stop and say, No, I can't. And I won't spend that money. Or I won't necessarily buy that product. It's not about spending money, I think money is, it's about whether or not I need that material item. Because I don't, I don't, I try not to find value in those material items such as, you know, um, emotional value. Because emotional value is not a, it's not, there is no emotional value, those materials cannot give you what you need. So I try to find those elsewhere. Eh, I'm not sure if I'm a great shopper when it comes to the advertising. Because I'm part of the loophole, or I would hope that I'm part of the, of the, um, of the hole of their marketing scheme where I'm, I don't want to be those people in the advertisements.

Kaela: Right, right.

Nicole: I don't want to bind myself in that specific model that, like, stressing this lifestyle that looks really good, uh, because I know what they're getting at, you know, and it, it's a.... sort of emptiness.... And that's a very scary thing because a lot of people are drawn into that.... So we've created these categories. You know, even the person that does wear second hand clothing and tries their best to, like, you know, avoid the system is still part of the system and they're just creating a specific, there is a specific style to that and a specific lifestyle to that....

– interview excerpt, February 17, 2007

shopping is explored in the full array of its purposes and meanings – economic, cultural, social, political and personal – “we prepare the ground for a normative rather than a critical analysis” (p. 224). This suggests one reason why it is important to involve participants in research related to shopping as a site of learning. As I explore in later chapters, participants in this study articulated the reality that shopping can become a site of reflexivity, as well as intellectual, emotional, spiritual and sensual learning. (☞) My inquiry places shopping and shoppers in the foreground of an exploration of what I will, in the next chapter, conceptualize as “holistic learning.” In this way, it complements American adult educator Jennifer Sandlin's (2000, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2007) work on consumer education, which connects consumer-citizenship to adult learning. Like Sandlin's (2007) most recent work, my inquiry makes a unique contribution to this growing but still-small body of work in the field of adult education, shifting from a question of how consumers can be educated to how shopping can be educational.

This inquiry extends the abstract analyses and historical accounts of consumer-citizenship which comprise much of the existing academic scholarship. My empirical research contributes to contemporary studies of and writing on these topics which are emerging among sociologists and anthropologists (see, for example, Bhachu, 2004; Bocock, 1993; Grewal, 2005; Hilton, 2003; Mies, 1986; Ong, 2004), historians (see, for example, Rappaport, 2000), and literary and cultural studies scholars (see, for example, Baudrillard, 1998; Bowlby, 2001; Nava, 1999; Paterson, 2006). I touch on some of that scholarship especially in chapter two, where I develop a conceptualization of consumer-citizenship. My particular focus on an activity of everyday life also takes up the feminist interest in lived experience. Perhaps most importantly for an inquiry in the field of adult education, this study clearly positions adult learning alongside consumption and citizenship as a central and relevant concern. Even sociologists and cultural studies scholars recognize the link between shopping or consumption and learning, in one case describing them “as situated learning practices which are co-productive of consumers desires and objectives” (Sassatelli, 2006, p. 223). Finally, it begins to fill a void in Canadian scholarship on these topics. In the remainder of this section, I offer an overview of some of the recent research about contemporary shopping and consumption, often from disciplines and fields outside adult education, which has helped inform the development of my own thinking and research.

Sharon Zukin's (2005) study of shoppers and shopping, primarily in her own home city of New York, combines historical, sociological, anthropological and geographic questions and approaches. Zukin's title, *Point of Purchase*, is a play on words, suggesting a focus on both

J [an aspiring rap performer] looks serious, and I notice that none of the rather quiet clothes he's wearing today – a dark blue turtleneck, blue jeans, and boots – is sporting a logo.

He points to the turtleneck. "Armani," he says. He points to the jeans. "Guess." Finally he nods toward his feet. "Timberland."

Not a logo in sight. J settles back in his chair and gives me an appraising glance to see whether I appreciate his taste, now that he has pointed it out to me.

"We rebel," he says, in answer to my question. "But we're socialized."

– Sharon Zukin (2005), *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, p. 142

...[M]any of us can't afford to buy the things we would like to have. Through magazines, television, and books, we gain cultural capital by vicarious consumption. Looking at goods in stores or on the Internet, reading reviews, and talking about them train us...to appreciate their subtle differences. And once we have developed a fine eye for differences among the goods, we can make distinctions among the people who use them. This is a different approach to shopping from the early years of mass consumption, when most mass market products were homogeneous and most people didn't spend so much time thinking about them.

– Sharon Zukin (2005), *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, pp. 41-42

shopping places as points-of-purchase, and the meaning of shopping or the point of (the) purchase. Her book traces the development of marketing and retail trends in the US, from the rise of department stores and mass marketing to their replacement by “big box” discount stores, segmented or niche marketing and the importance of branding, and is unique in its purpose of explaining contemporary American shopping and shoppers. Herself a sociologist, she draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu in talking about shopping and consumption, and their importance in the development of cultural capital and social status. In the context of my inquiry, Zukin’s book is also important for its overall emphasis on adult shoppers.

While at times Zukin (2005) pinpoints some of the profound tensions and paradoxes of shopping and consumerism, at other times her reflections are limited to observations such as American men prefer shopping online while women continue to prefer in-person shopping (p. 228). She notes that racialized youth experience discrimination during their shopping, relaying the experiences of one black teenager who goes to Tiffany & Co.’s™ Manhattan flagship store, and that lower class citizens have been and remain restricted in their shopping and consumption options. (☹) Contemporary consumerism holds out the illusion of equality, but clearly “five-and-dimes, supermarkets, and superstores don’t want to eliminate social classes [or other social divisions]. They just want all of us to keep shopping, every day” (Zukin, 2005, p. 88).

At the same time as all shoppers are confronted with rhetoric of shopping and consumption as pathways to equality and the pressure to shop ceaselessly, some develop a critical stance about shopping, consumption and consumerism. Among these shoppers, some people put this knowledge to use primarily in changing their own practices and becoming healthier, more ethical individuals. Zukin (2005) feels good about shopping at the Greenmarket – the local farmers’ market in Union Square, Manhattan – where only locally grown and produced food items can be sold, and I feel similarly good when I go to one of the local farmers’ markets. On the other hand, what about Vandana Shiva’s (2005) and Maria Mies’(1986) more radical questions about capitalism, patriarchy, racism and imperialism? How do concerns about gene and species patenting or privatization of the commons enter into the picture of what I see at the farmers’ market or how agricultural production and consumption are practised by other farmers and shoppers? What about shoppers who cannot find the money or the time to shop at farmers’ markets? Do I celebrate or protest Wal-Mart’s® intention to introduce organically grown produce into its stores? Even as it might spread the option of organic food consumption across classes, is it another example of how the ideologies of consumerism and neoliberalism, at work under

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the structure of capitalism, enable the appropriation of resistance by big-business? What does it mean for a critical consumer-citizen to both “rebel” and be “socialized” (Zukin, 2005, p. 142) through consumption? These sorts of questions, which imply the limitations to consumer-citizenship and begin to connect shopping to broader social critique and engagement, are largely lacking in Zukin’s (2005) work; they are central in my inquiry.

There has been some research which has taken a more overtly critical perspective, and connected adults' shopping to globalization and resistance. Much of this research has focused on the environmental impacts of globalization. John Connelly and Andrea Prothero (2008) examine “how green consumers engage with environmental issues at an everyday level” (p. 117). Their study centred on the assumptions that individuals are engaged in political or resistant movements and discourses, such as environmentalism, on a daily basis, and that shopping and consumption are processes with deep cultural, as well as material, meanings and impacts. It is noteworthy because it attempts to fill “a gap [which] remains as to how environmental concerns are tied up with the emergence of an apparently more individualized and globalized society” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, pp. 120-121). They draw heavily on the theoretical work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck around globalization, individualization, risk and self-identity in their exploration of the practices adopted by environmentally conscious consumer-citizens in Dublin, Ireland. As they explain, the reflexivity which is accompanying globalization means that “green” shoppers are continually reflecting on both the effects that consumption can have on them as well as the effects that their consumption can have on the world. They outline an environmentalist discourse which features the idea of “co-responsibility” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008) of consumers and producers for these effects. That idea is both useful to my inquiry because it bridges the distance traditionally established between production and consumption, and problematic because it echoes a mainstream or “hegemonic” (Gramsci, 1971) discourse of neoliberalism as the individual is viewed as holding powerful decision-making power.

Connelly and Prothero's (2008) study involved a relatively small number of participants (i.e., seven people), all of whom self-identified as environmentally conscious or “green” consumers. They were recruited from environmental organizations and through participant referrals (i.e., “snowballing”). The researchers conducted two sets of interviews with participants, and gathered biographical details from them. They note that participants had relatively high degrees of education, identified as middle or working class, and attended to food shopping and consumption in particular as part of their environmental commitment.

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Although this was a small study, it offers some useful insights for me. Connelly and Prothero (2008) approach shopping and consumption as processes “fundamentally embedded in social relations” (p. 125). Environmental consciousness is only one factor which determines shopping and consumption habits, and a common identity as a green consumer is only one dimension of potentially diverse and complicated identities. They make the following point:

One of the difficulties with this is that if people now believe they are central to environmental solutions through their own individual consumption, invariably particular practices and material goods will become identified as bad, yet these very same practices and material goods may be central (meaningfully) in social relations. Much environmental writing has not helped in this regard. (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, p. 128)

This reality creates tensions for shoppers who want to develop certain practices and habits. One participant in their study, Anne, who struggles to balance her own opposition to the fast food and high status brands with pressure from her children to shop for and consume these items. As they note, “Green beliefs and attempts at greening specific practices co-exist alongside a more ambivalent attitude towards consuming....In this study, we found a range of inconsistencies, ambivalence and dilemmas in relation to a variety of consumer practices” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, pp. 126-127). Although participants in their study might have felt guilty about some of the shopping and consumption decisions that they made, such as owning a car, they also accepted “that compromise was inevitable” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, p. 127).

In their article, Connelly and Prothero argue that a discourse of environmentally friendly shopping and consumption has combined with an ideology of individualization and a constant reflexivity during contemporary globalization, at least for middle class consumer-citizens living in an urbanized Western setting. Green shoppers interpret this discourse and ideology, and fit them both into their lives, according to their own material and cultural circumstances. Connelly and Prothero (2008) conclude that “feelings and thoughts (of personal responsibility) are *real* for people” (p. 142, emphasis added), rather than external impositions. Although they take issue with the argument offered by other scholars that these thoughts and feelings distract conscientious, politically minded shoppers from the consideration of power relations and structural issues (see, for example, Smith, 1998 in Connelly & Prothero, 2008, p. 141), I think that these two positions are actually compatible: Feeling and thoughts can be real and meaningful in the construction of identity, as well as a distraction from other important elements of social life. An ideology of individualization, developed by scholars such as Beck (1992), might advise that shoppers are reflexive, choice-making individuals, but shoppers are also always embedded in social structures.

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Although it is not centrally concerned with shopping, Deborah Barndt's (1999, 2002) accounts of her "Tomasita Project" have also been very helpful to me in this inquiry. That project explored globalization, food production, largely in the Global South, and consumption, largely in the Global North, and popular education. Barndt (1999) explains that she

traced the journey of a tomato from the Mexican field to a Canadian fast-food restaurant....I chose the tomato as a code for globalization and as a device for exploring the shifting role of women (as both producers and consumers) in this long and twisting journey, and called her Tomasita. Using a Spanish name and a female character emphasizes the fact that the continental food system similarly exploits Mexicans, women workers and the environment. In other words, the continental food system deepens inequalities between North and South as well as between men and women (with class and race complicating the picture); at the same time, it perpetuates human domination of the environment. (pp. 14-15)

Working from a feminist historical materialist perspective, which puts forward the position that knowledge is built over time from experiences of complex material relations, Barndt employs the tomato as a metaphor and a pedagogical tool. This resembles my use of shopping in this inquiry. She follows the path of this basic food item and its construction as a global agricultural commodity from seed to field to store. The story that she tells helps "demystify globalization, revealing the role of corporations in creating and maintaining a global food system dependent on genetically modified seeds, pesticide packages, expropriated Indigenous land, cheap peasant labor, and environmental racism" (Barndt, 2002, p. 2). In framing her research, Barndt draws on the work of Gramsci-inspired adult educator dian marino (1997), and marino's attempt to discern "cracks in consent," the everyday expressions of resistance which arise in response to the always-present inconsistencies and problems with the status quo. Barndt's research account attempts to "weave examples of 'cracks in consent' into the stories of women workers following the tomato's trail" (Barndt, 2002, p. 231). I discuss some of the educational and activist projects outlined in one of the books which came out of the Tomasita Project, *Women Working the NAFTA Food Chain* (Barndt, 1999), in chapter two.

Barndt (2002) outlines "four levels of resistance: individual responses, local/global education, organized collective actions, and transnational coalitional initiatives" (p. 231). As I will outline in chapters five, six, seven and eight which detail my analyses, individual responses and local/global education are especially relevant to my inquiry; references to the final two levels noted by Barndt are also present in the data that I analyze, but to a lesser extent. Overall, it is Barndt's epistemological and methodological assumptions which are most helpful to me in this inquiry. Like me, she adopts a feminist historical materialist perspective in her attempt to explore how people learn about and experience the complex phenomenon of globalization. Often

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expressed in abstract, technical terms, globalization can seem overwhelming; however, by focusing on the everyday moments and processes which make globalization's presence in people's lives evident, researchers and adult educators can advance a critical analysis of and response to it. I conceptualize globalization more fully in the following chapter but, like Barndt, I understand it as a phenomenon which links people and places around the globe in chains of production and consumption, even as the local and national manifestations of economic, gendered and racial structures maintain rifts between the Global North and the Global South and between classes or groups of people within a society.⁵ Her adoption of a feminist understanding of the role of emotions and the senses, as well as intellect, in learning is similarly consistent with the conceptualization of informal adult learning that I develop in the following chapter.

Within the field of adult education, much of the relevant research and theoretical writing centres on the environmental and other social movements as sites of learning, which I discuss in chapter eight, or on media consumption, which I discuss in chapter five. An important exception is Sandlin's (2004, 2005a, 2005b) work, which more directly relates to shopping. Working from a critical cultural studies perspective, she explores formal and informal adult learning, shopping, media consumption and "culture jamming" or the "remixing of advertisements in an attempt to unmask (rather than ornament) corporate evils" (Haiven, 2007, p. 85). As Sandlin (2005a) surmises, "The focus of traditional consumer education for adults has been on teaching technical skills that create savvy and knowledgeable consumers able to navigate a complex consumer marketplace" (p. 166). Although this is true of much of the traditional consumer research based in marketing departments (Pollay, 1986), some of current writing within marketing or business schools is beginning to treat consumerism and consumption more critically (see Connelly & Prothero, 2008; Shaw, 2007). Sandlin frames consumption as an inherently political, rather than simply utilitarian, process. She then reconceptualizes consumer education "to include a variety of informal sites of learning including those focusing on curbing consumption, fighting consumer capitalism, and 'jamming' corporate-sponsored consumer culture" (Sandlin, 2005a, p. 166).

In a more recent article, Sandlin (2007) reviews the educational potential of culture jamming. She presents culture jamming as a form of "critical public pedagogy" (Sandlin, 2007, p. 77) through which activists "reject the passive consumption of consumer culture and seek to

⁵ The meaning of the word society itself is somewhat debated, because it is also seen as implying a cohesiveness which is undermined by structured social divisions and the ensuing sense of diversity. I use the word to refer to the population of people living within a territory recognized and governed as a nation-state. The concept of "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), discussed in chapter seven, is helpful in understanding the role of culture and values in society.

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be active creators who live authentically.” She further outlines several educational functions of culture jamming, including its ability to create “transitional spaces through cultural production” (Sandlin, 2007, p. 77) for new discourses; inspire communities for learning and resistance; encourage affective and sensual, as well as intellectual, learning and expression; construct an impromptu forum for the enactment of politics and values; and as a forum for transformational learning on individual, cultural and social levels. These points appear in chapters five and eight, in which I discuss, first, cultural forms and narratives and, then, learning to make change.

Aside from Sandlin's adult education work, much of the research which links shopping and learning has been conducted by sociologists of education and has concerned children and youth, rather than adults. Lydia Martens (2005) summarizes the extent to which such scholarship “heralds the idea of the market as a primary pedagogue” (p. 345). Through their shopping for and consumption of both cultural and explicitly educational products, people learn about the rules and processes of economic and of social organization in their societies. Again, because my focus is on shopping as a site of informal adult learning, rather than on the more commonly explored questions of how young people learn to shop and identify as shoppers or on the corporatization of the school, I include here a summary of two books which focus on ties between schooling or formal education and shopping or consumption, but raise points relevant to my inquiry.

Educational sociologists Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen (2001) discuss their research completed over the closing decade of the twentieth century in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. Their book summarizes three projects which, cumulatively, involved a policy and documentary analysis of materials referring to the marketization of education; an archiving of technologically based educational projects and materials; and school-based interviews and in-class observations with children and staff at several schools in Victoria, Australia. They discuss the role of “consumer-media culture” which blends consumption with information and communication media and has infiltrated children's and parents' lives entirely, both through schools and at home.

At least two paradoxical trends are discussed in their book: one trend towards the (re-)construction of children and youth as consumers with a certain amount of power, and the other towards the commercialization and commodification of schools and schooling. This is manifest in a range ways: curriculum materials developed by for-profit corporations; corporate sponsorship of sports teams; computer equipment or athletic and cultural events; corporate-sponsored schools and institutes (often tied to summer and part-time jobs for older students); and

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parents' (and typically mothers') fundraising for miscellaneous items. Ironically, even though the lives and work of the children, parents and teachers are all infused with consumer-media culture, a wedge is driven between adults, who attempt to distance themselves from that culture and retain a sense of serious purpose, and the young people who are captivated by and enjoy that culture. Kenway and Bullen (2001) conclude that,

The students are informed and agential in this context, partly because they draw on the consumption skills learned outside schools. They know how to put on *best face*, they know what the education market values and that it does not value difference (particularly social class difference) and genuine student agency. They know it is two-faced. [page end] They know what they have to sell and give away in exchange for the image and reputation necessary for school success; they know how to *comply with illusion*. However, they learn as they go up through school and become more sophisticated, disenchanted and cynical that more things are lost than gained in this schizophrenic process. (pp. 148-149, emphasis in original)

Looking for the possibility of critical responses among teachers and parents, Kenway and Bullen (2001) suggest that schools incorporate the techniques and tools of consumer-media culture in a purposeful, critical, even subversive manner. Schools can, for example, engage students in critical study of what they find attractive and fun, for example, the culture of “cool.” Or, they can facilitate the development of children as “*cyberflâneurs*,” “spectators at the corporate bazaar, both real and virtual, but they are spectators of the 'watchdog' variety – they look back, not in wonder but with a sceptical and quizzical eye. Their object of inquiry is consumer-media culture” (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 178). They can also encourage young people to use and respond to media creatively and critically, through online publications or, as Sandlin (2007) discusses, culture jamming.

Kenway and Bullen (2001) contribute greatly to the research-based scholarship on shopping, consumption, learning and education, especially as these topics relate to young people; however, there are also critiques of some of their analytical conclusions. Martens (2005) makes a point with which I agree: Although they generally work from a critical feminist perspective, Kenway and Bullen occasionally seem to lose sight of the social diversity of children, parents and teachers, and the diverse ways in which social groups, as well as individuals, can consume and make sense of media and material culture. As Martens (2005) explains,

As consumers, parents and their children are treated as generalised and uniform groups, rather than as materially positioned individuals belonging to differentiated social groupings and communities in which consumption patterns vary. The corollary is that children are conceptualised as framed and integrated in consumer culture in the same way... This book does not address the possibility that parents may value consumer culture in different ways (and that not all of them are necessarily critical of the efforts of commerce in relation to their children), neither do we get a sense that domestic consumer cultures may vary. (p. 350)

As noted in this chapter, while proponents of ideology begin from the study of social texts, their power is seen to lie outside, or beyond, the text itself. Specifically, power is located in social formations which are deemed the beneficiaries of the social order that these texts purportedly reproduce. To thus view women's magazines as ideological is an important move because it contextualizes cultural representations by placing them, analytically, within the social world which produced them. Such a move exposes cultural naturalizations as historical and political, questioning the interests served by representations of women as homemakers and sexual objects [and shoppers].

– Dawn Currie (1999), *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*, p. 88

Beyond the work already outlined, I also draw on Canadian sociologist Dawn Currie's (1999) book which focuses on media consumption rather than shopping, and details her study of Canadian adolescent girls' magazine-reading. Like Barndt (1999, 2002), Currie works from a feminist historical materialist perspective which is consistent with a Gramscian approach. She also incorporates some of the insights of poststructuralism about the importance of language, text and the production of culture. Her study used an intertextual methodology to juxtapose the texts of magazines, transcripts of interviews with teenage girls, and previously published research accounts. In her conclusions, Currie (1999) notes that "girls' lived experiences of adolescent femininity exceed the categories of its textual representation" (p. 302). This conclusion is consistent with Currie's insistence that there are differences between the cultural and the social. Currie further finds it problematic that mainstream magazines tend to neglect accounts of girls' social lives, by constructing a cultural accounting of problems as personal experiences with individualized solutions. (👁)

Currie's methodological approach is especially helpful and relevant in my inquiry, as I am similarly interested in intertextuality. Her analysis of cultural products in conjunction with social relations exemplifies the cultural materialist perspective consistent with Gramsci's (1971) writing and my own approach. In particular, I juxtapose texts comprised of transcripts, academic and popular scholarship, and novels in my analyses which are presented in this thesis. I also suggest how these texts can be linked to other available texts, including online conversations or "blogs," media reports, political speeches and commentaries, as well as images available through advertising, political cartoons and protest graffiti. These texts and images are inserted throughout this dissertation and, although some are analyzed more fully and formally than others, they all suggest the preponderance of possible data sources related to my central topic of shopping as a site of informal adult learning about the politics of consumption, citizenship, globalization and identity.

Throughout the chapters which follow this introduction, I continue to cite and draw on scholarship which explores, to some degree or another, the topics of shopping, consumption and informal adult learning, as well as globalization and social identity. Most of the scholarship that I have summarized here relates to recent empirical studies; however, much of the work that I incorporate in later sections focuses on conceptual development, philosophical argumentation or historical cases. This additional scholarship, as I assert in the next chapter, has been crucial to

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this inquiry because it indicates the complexity of my research purpose and questions, and locates them in diverse but – I contend – related scholarly traditions.

Research Purpose and Questions

Seeking to build understanding of how people – including me – experience, interpret and navigate a complicated social life, this inquiry illuminates how everyday, mundane activities can become opportunities for informal adult learning. I investigate shopping for its potential as a site and process of learning about the links between consumption, citizenship, globalization and resistance, and I am especially interested in how the impetus for societal justice and change surfaces as part of that learning. Drawing on various strands of critical scholarship, including feminist, postcolonial, critical race, cultural studies and adult education (both academic and popular), I explore my own life and the lives of other participants who help constitute Canadian society. Borrowing from the techniques of cultural studies scholars, I also incorporate other sources of information and evidence, including fiction, online “blogs,” public notices and graffiti, and political rhetoric. The inclusion of such materials is consistent with the central argument of this inquiry that learning occurs informally, as well as formally, and that evidence of social phenomena can be found in unexpected times and places which are often ignored.

This exploration focuses on one corner of Canada: Vancouver, British Columbia. Like any research environ, Vancouver is both similar to and different from other parts of this country, and places in other countries. Vancouver shares a certain urban culture and sensibility with other cities. A service such as public transit disrupts – if only for a short time – the anonymity and invisibility of urban life by bringing strangers together, and then reinforces those qualities as people go their separate ways. Like other cities in this period of globalization, Vancouver and its surrounding area has a growing population and changing ethno-racial composition. In a time when choice is summoned as an intrinsic value of both liberalism and consumerism, and operates to join these two ideologies, the preponderance of stores and the variety of goods available in those stores helps that rhetoric resonate in a particular way. Vancouver also has typical big-city problems such as traffic congestion, a disparity between rich and poor, and crime. To some extent, then, Vancouver resembles other contemporary urban settings within and beyond Canada.

On the other hand, as a North American West Coast city, Vancouver is decidedly different from other places. Having grown up in Toronto, I have encountered differences between the two cities, some of which I had not imagined before I moved here. I knew that I was coming to a place where the relative ease of year-round outdoors activities was important to the city's image

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and culture. Like many others who are drawn to Vancouver, I admired the vista of mountains and sea. In contrast to Vancouver, which rejected the idea of building a highway through the city, Toronto has faced decades of criticism for cutting off its bit of waterfront from the rest of the city by building the raised Gardiner Expressway. What I did not anticipate was the degree to which history has left its mark here, as it has in Toronto. As a relatively new city, even by Canadian standards, Vancouver has never been one of Canada's corporate centres; from its early days as the site of the British Fort York, Toronto evolved to become a major arts and culture centre, and home to the headquarters of several large corporations. Vancouver, by contrast, grew out of the logging industry and the gold rush, and the forest, the sea and natural resources continue to exert strong cultural and economic influences. In some ways, Toronto shares more with New York City than it does with Vancouver, which likewise shares many things with Seattle.

Finally, in some ways, Vancouver is a microcosm of contemporary social life in the Global North. Like other parts of the Global North that were colonized, colonization seems to be more or less a permanent state. The fact that this has become home for the colonizers and, for a much longer time, has been home to the First Nations peoples, has created cultural, social and material tensions and struggles. In recent decades, Vancouver has experienced a strong and steady influx of people from Asian countries such as China/Hong Kong/Taiwan, India, Korea and Japan. Vancouver's neighbour, the City of Richmond, has an especially high level of Asian residents. Unlike earlier waves of Chinese and Japanese immigration, many of these more recent immigrants are relatively well off. Richmond's Aberdeen Centre and Yaohan Mall are two large, glitzy malls catering to Asian consumers. The economic success of Vancouver and the province of British Columbia more generally is often used to mask the depth of the poverty that is being exacerbated here by policies of neoliberal globalization. Vancouver is a city with some of the costliest real estate and one of the poorest postal district in the country.

The ethno-racial and material diversity in this city means that there is no one way in which people understand and practise shopping. In this inquiry, shopping represents the complexities and tensions in daily life which can become opportunities for learning, including a form of learning which can help instigate societal change. Numerous tensions are apparent between the material and the cultural, the rational and the emotional, the collective and the solitary, notions of the familiar and the Other, ideals of consumer and democratic choice, messages to consume and conserve, the myth of the “free” market and the reality of class constraints. These tensions are present in everybody's life, but look different depending on local

Localized global citizens asserting their voices through identity-coded products, they [i.e., British Asian clothing designers and marketers] are at the same time reinscribing the nation. Whether using a diasporic inheritance of improvisation, or newly negotiating migrant status, they are working to constitute a dynamic sense of self in their British contexts. In so doing, they create new signifiers which are about negotiating migrant status, they create new signifiers which are about negotiating a new nation, new forms of Britishness, new ways of being European.

– Parminder Bhachu (2004), *Dangerous Designs*, p. 170

Masses of young people dissatisfied by U.S. imperialism, unemployment, lack of economic opportunity, afflicted by the postmodern malaise of alienation, no sense of grounding, no redemptive identity, can be manipulated by cultural strategies that offer Otherness as appeasement, particularly through commodification.

– bell hooks (2001), “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” p. 427



The proximity of feminist, commercial, and illicit spaces on London’s West End meant that there had long been a confusion about how to identify shoppers, prostitutes, and feminist activists. Though many observers worried about how to separate one type of public woman from another, this proved to be an impossible task. Instead of lamenting this problem, however, the Suffragettes delighted in and used the ambiguities of metropolitan life....The militants’ protest highlights how the political West End also abutted the commercial realm....The point, then, is not that political public spaces became commercial or vice versa. Rather, these two meanings were both present and necessary to each other.

– Erika Diane Rappaport (2000), *Shopping for Pleasure*, p. 218

contexts and individuals' particular circumstances. The best that I can do here is to present a sense of how those global tensions are experienced by some individuals in this local setting.

Understood as a process of looking for and deliberating options, acquiring goods, services and experiences, and, sometimes, deciding to forego a purchase, shopping for me typically involves going into a store. One exception is when I go to a seasonal farmers' market or a craft sale. On occasion, I go to garage or yard sales or speciality fairs. I have purchased books, airline tickets and vacation accommodation online. Having worked for some 15 years in the not-for-profit community service sector, often in revenue development, I have come to enjoy fundraising events, and have a collection of items that I bought at various auctions. Although I imagined that my conversations with participants would revolve centrally around shopping in stores, I was open to talking about these other types of shopping settings and experiences. Still other things that participants or other people mentioned to me during my inquiry include bartering, swaps, the free-cycle movement and even organized theft.

Because this is a critical inquiry, it also challenges dominant portrayals of globalization and focuses on questions of how shopping, consumption, citizenship and learning can be understood and experienced as examples of resistance in the name of societal change. The following questions have guided this inquiry:

- How do individuals understand and manifest the idea of “learning” and the potential to learn both instrumentally and critically in the course of daily life?
- How do individuals learn to find and respond to complicated, obscured consumer information? How is this learning, and shopping and consumption practices more generally, integrated into other parts of their lives?
- How do individuals living in Canada society, in which a postmodern sensibility of partial, fractured identity and the phenomenon of globalization converge, understand and articulate the implications of their “location” (within cultural milieus, social structures and geographic places) for their shopping options, constraints and preferences? (👁) Further to studies of the relationships between consumption and citizenship in earlier eras, how do individuals relate this learning and their consumption to citizenship in the nation-state and “global” citizenship? (👁)
- How do individuals concerned about the status quo develop and demonstrate their resistance through activities of daily living such as shopping? Where does the notion of radicalism fit into shopping-based resistance?

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As I have learned throughout this inquiry, responses to these questions can in turn be framed by three questions which maintain a steady focus on informal adult learning, in this case the learning possible and evident in the process of shopping: What do people learn to do? Who do people learn to be? How do people learn to make change?

Moving through the research process, another topical area became apparent in this inquiry. It concerns methodology. In dealing with it, I consider the implications and lessons of doing critical adult education research on and during contemporary globalization. What new meaning might arise for case study methodology, which typically contains a study within a community setting or a specific site, in light of a phenomenon which claims to unbind social and economic relations within and across nation-states? In an era which emphasizes multiple levels of experience – the individual, the local, the national, the regional and the global – and gives rise to terms such as “glocalization” or “global citizenship,” where and how is evidence to be found? How can critical research respond to postmodernism’s dismantling of groups and categories? These are additional questions which I have pondered during the research process and address later in this document.

Metaphorically Speaking

Before I delve into my research account, I will make one more point about myself and my project: As I hinted in my Prologue, I learn metaphorically. Research is, first and foremost, a learning process, and I have found metaphors helpful in working my way through and in talking about this project. Such metaphors clarify and explain the questions that I am asking and the answers that I am developing. They help me, as a writer, focus or extend a point in my narrative. This introductory chapter, for example, focuses largely on my cultural and religious background. Its title, the opening words of the Jewish Bible, brings forward the importance of my own social location and history as I begin to write about my research project. Titles of several of the remaining chapters continue to make such metaphorical references.

These metaphors also function to bolster epistemological and methodological claims that I make (see chapter three). The metaphors that I use here juxtapose existing texts and images with the text that I am creating, offering a constant reminder that this is an interdisciplinary work which does not stand alone but is being inserted into existing traditions. The back-and-forth reading that they elicit illustrates my understanding of research as conversation – between the text under construction and existing texts, this study and other studies, one discipline and another, researcher and participants. They challenge the line between what (or who) is inside and

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what (or who) is outside a culture, a community or a text. My references to content, technologies and structures of literature, visual art, media (both new and old) and science suggest the extent to which my central concerns surround me, and the extent to which educational research is a creative undertaking which can utilize diverse forms and sources of data. It is scientific, as well as artful and crafted. These metaphors are evidence of the internal conversations that I have had, and the ways that I have come to understand my inquiry *as* I wrote it (see Richardson, 2000).

These metaphors also reinforce the analytical arguments that I will go on to make throughout this dissertation. My use of both sides of the page provides a visual representation of the tensions inherent in consumption, citizenship, globalization, learning and research. In part, I aim to suggest the alternating conceptions of these processes as individual and shared, inclusive and exclusive, constrained and open. The Interludes (see Appendix A) are like the commercials during a television show or advertisements in a magazine which both interrupt a program or an article and reiterate its cultural messages. As I have written, I have thought about the ideas in the foreground and the background of my analysis and I remember how slippery these distinctions can be. In asking you, the reader, to read both top to bottom and left and right, to consider both images and words, to disrupt conventions of sequence, and to reflect on this text both literally and metaphorically, I am inviting you to think about and experience these tensions with me.

When Sharon Hu, a talented website designer who worked in my department, saw my thesis proposal, she compared it to a website. The icon functions like a hyperlink, offering readers a chance to get more information about something. It creates multiple pathways to move through this document and disrupts the linear reading that readers have been trained to do. Here is another metaphor, then, for the choices that consumer-citizens make every day – always there, but always constrained. And here is a metaphor for the challenges *and* opportunities emerging during globalization through the consumption of technology which appears to obviate materiality, *and* the continued reality of material production and relations. It is, as I go on to explain in chapter two, also a metaphor for an argument made by Antonio Gramsci, the theorist whose writing anchors the conceptual framework of this inquiry: that, in contemporary usage, language and other cultural forms are themselves metaphors for previous expressions (Ives, 2004), an argument implied today by the colloquial use of the word “virtual” to characterize anything online. This argument has been taken up by feminist poststructural scholar Laurel Richardson who maintains, “Power is, always, a sociohistorical construction. No textual staging is ever innocent. We are always inscribing values in our writing. It is unavoidable” (Richardson,

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1990, p. 12 in Marvasti & Faircloth, 2002, p. 762). Although I do not consider my scholarship poststructural, her ideas have resonated strongly with me throughout this inquiry.

Outline of this Dissertation

Despite this flexibility, my inquiry is firmly anchored by theories, concepts and values. Based largely on Gramsci's (1971) writings compiled in the *Prison Notebooks*, these also include feminist, critical race and postcolonial and other critical scholarship on consumption, citizenship, globalization, resistance and learning. Notable within the adult education scholarship is Griff Foley's (1999, 2001) writing on incidental learning, as well as writing on how emotion, sensuality and spirituality complement intellect in adult learning (Dirkx, 2000; English, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998, 2000). In chapters two and three, I review the analytical concepts which have been central in this inquiry, as well as the ontological, epistemological and methodological principles – what Yvonne Lincoln and Egon Guba (2000) refer to as paradigmatic “axioms” – that underpin my research. In describing my methodology, I have settled on “case study bricolage,” which I explain in chapter three. In short, the “case” here is shopping as a site of informal learning; the bricolage allowed me to look for evidence about the case in interesting and unusual ways and places, to include evidence found as I went along, and to employ a variety of analytical and theoretical approaches in interpreting it all.

Following these two chapters, I turn in chapter four to the empirical research conducted in this project, identifying the methods that I used. In the following four chapters, I offer my data analyses. I examine two qualitatively different forms of data: cultural texts, and conversations with participants. I also introduce a distinct analytical tool in each chapter to examine the data in varied ways, in an attempt to reach a fuller understanding of the case under investigation. These analyses reflect the breadth of discourses, practices and pedagogies that are routinely encountered and constructed by Canadian shoppers who are concerned about how their personal consumption implicates them in complex phenomena such as globalization, social relations and citizenship. Chapter five offers a literary analysis of a selection of popular novels focused on shopping, consumption and consumerism. In chapters six, seven and eight, I discuss my analysis of the empirical data that I gathered with the help of participants.

I draw on Laurel Richardson's (2000) notion of “crystallization” as an expansive understanding of methodological and analytical validity. In contrast to the more common term “triangulation,” crystallization recognizes that there are more than three ways to explore and interpret a phenomenon. These do not always yield consistency, but they produce fuller, deeper

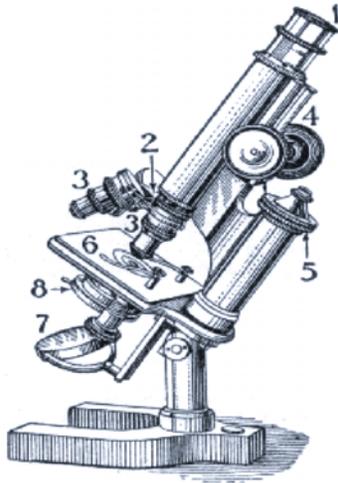
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knowledge about complex phenomena. In each of the four analytical chapters, I make use of what I call a particular “analytical facet” – a theory-guided viewing of data. In order to retain a critical stance throughout this inquiry, I have limited my use of theories and concepts so that they are compatible with one another, even as they help me look at the data differently, or see different things within the data. Finally, chapter nine discusses some of the limitations, contributions and implications of this study for adult educators, social policy advocates, and people who aspire to use shopping as part of an agenda for societal change.

Interspersed with these chapters is a series of reflections on my own experiences. As I explained in my introductory note, I call them “Interludes.” They are meant to bridge one chapter to another, and to remind myself and you, the reader, of my presence throughout this inquiry. Operating as another kind of metaphor related to shopping and consumption, they are also like advertisements which interrupt an increasing number of activities in contemporary Canadian culture, and remind citizens that they are also consumers. I compile these Interludes in a single appendix, and note the points in the text where I think each one is best inserted. Like the even numbered pages throughout this document, they need not be read in the recommended sequence and places in order to make sense of the document.

The conceptual territory that I cover in this text ranges from consumer-citizenship (itself a conceptual amalgam) to globalization, identity to resistance and radicalism. Even methodology surfaces as an analytical concern. Such diversity and complexity are not superfluous pretensions; they are, rather, a reflection of the complexity of the case that I set out to examine. My focus on adult learning is the thread that stitches these topics together. Likewise, my departure from conventional dissertation-writing is not superfluous or, I hope, pretentious; it is, rather, the way that I developed to organize and present the complications that became apparent as I read about and listened to and witnessed people’s attempts to tie their consumption to citizenship and globalization, their shopping to their resistance, and all of this to continual learning.

[Insert Interlude 2 here.]



Basic optical microscope elements:

1. ocular lens, or eyepiece
2. objective turret
3. objective lenses
- 4. coarse adjustment knob**
- 5. fine adjustment knob**
- 6. object holder or stage**
7. mirror
8. diaphragm and condenser

Figure 2.1: Optical microscope, retrieved February 18, 2008 from *Wikimedia Commons*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mikroskop.png>

CHAPTER TWO UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: CONCEPTUAL MAP

Research in the field of educational studies can be artistic, creative and spontaneous, but, for the sake of ongoing usefulness, it also requires a purpose and a degree of rigour. The metaphor of the microscope that I use here recognizes that educational research has grown out of and challenges scientific traditions. Part of the rigour in research lies in developing and clarifying the concepts which anchor an inquiry and are used in making sense of phenomena under investigation. Borrowing from the physics of the optical microscope, I discuss the central concepts of my inquiry in this chapter. (👁) In many dissertations, this chapter would refer to “theoretical framework”; however, I avoid that phrase because I think that, as I discuss in the following chapter, the theories which are brought together to “frame” an inquiry are evident in its ontology, epistemology and methodology, as well as in its anchoring concepts and the analysis which comes later. Over the course of my doctoral program, understanding and attending to the inter-related processes of conceptualization, methodology and theorization in this way has helped me organize my thoughts and develop my inquiry.

The conceptual starting point for this inquiry is Gramsci's (1971) writings, especially those known as the *Prison Notebooks*. Returning to the metaphor of the optical microscope, I use his concepts to provide a “coarse focus” in my analysis of the “object on the stage” – shopping as a case of learning about the links between consumption, citizenship, globalization and resistance. In using the *Prison Notebooks*, I am mindful of the fact that they were compiled during Gramsci's years of incarceration, a period when he had curtailed access to existing scholarship (especially Marxist work) and other individuals. He wrote largely to keep himself sane, and did not have the regular advantages of cataloguing and publishing his writings, consulting a library of existing resources, or communicating with other theorists or activists. The *Prison Notebooks* is an unavoidably incomplete, ambiguous, inconsistent collection of thoughts. The “fine focus” is provided by more contemporary critical adult educators and critical scholars in related fields who help sharpen my view of shopping as a case of informal, political adult learning about consumer-citizenship during contemporary globalization. Because they are central to experiences of consumer-citizenship and globalization, and to the guiding questions of this inquiry, conceptualizations of gender, class and race are also included in this chapter. In relating these

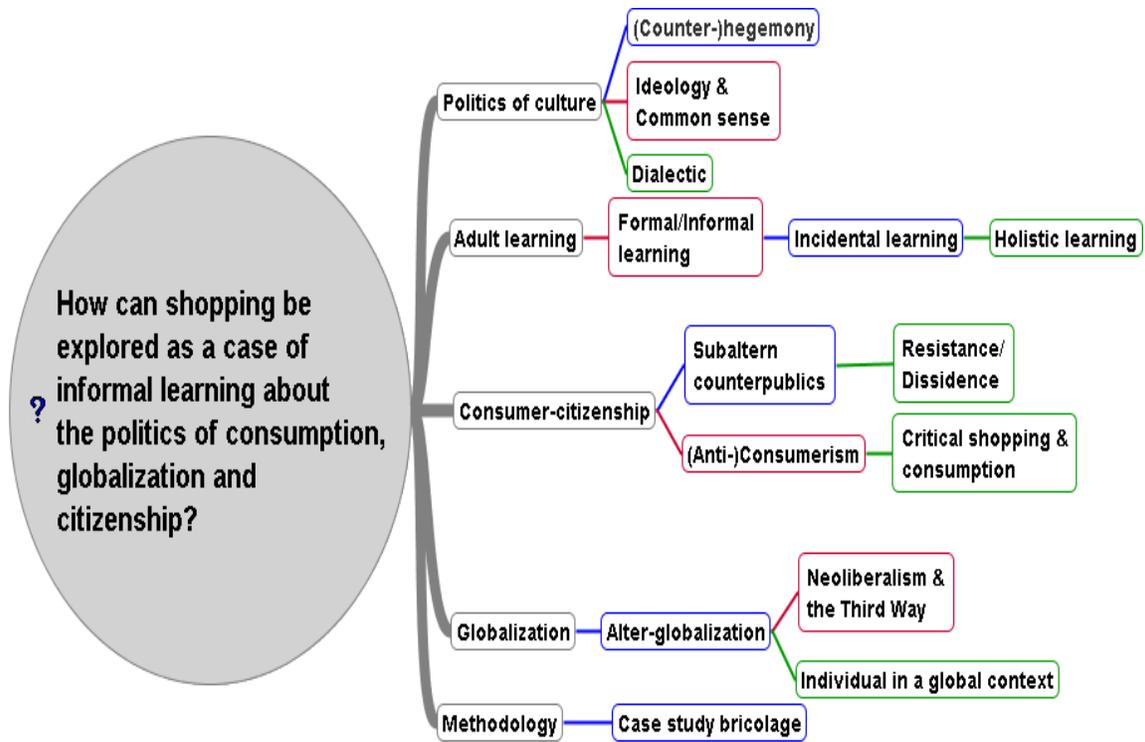


Figure 2.2: Conceptual map

social categories to identity and status, I am then able to continue with a critical analysis of shopping, globalization, adult learning and, perhaps most importantly, resistance. Together, these ideas comprise a conceptual map of my inquiry. (👁)

The map is divided into topical sections, most of which I explain throughout the remainder of this chapter and explore in the chapters which follow this one. This distinction between concepts is essentially a process of analysis, or examining the constituents of the whole. The colour coding within the map brings concepts together again across topics, and represents a simultaneous process of synthesis. Consumerism, anti-consumerism and neoliberalism are all examples of ideologies active in contemporary Canadian culture. The ideas that I explore and develop in this chapter about holistic learning, critical, resistant or possibly even “radical” shopping, and the individual in a global context are all examples of the dialectics of the individual and the collective, culture and social life. Even the methodology of case study bricolage, the explanation of which I leave for the next chapter, can be understood as an example of a dialectic within the culture of academe. Returning now to the metaphor of the microscope, I outline the central concepts in this inquiry and their mutual importance in addressing its underlying question.

Coarse Focus: Gramscian Theory and Concepts

The first step in bringing an item into view with a microscope is to use the coarse focus, which gives shape to what initially seems indiscernible. Gramsci's (1971) concepts provide this inquiry with that basic, preliminary focus. In trying to answer his own question – why the proletarian revolution predicted by Marxism did not spread beyond Russia in the early twentieth century – Gramsci assembled several conceptual pieces. The resulting theory combines culture, economics and politics to explain how leaders in all democratic societies manifest a central paradox: Using a balance of persuasion and force, they achieve popular consent for the maintenance of power relations, even when those relations oppress the very citizens who are consenting to them. Gramsci's return to a Hegelian notion of the dialectic helps explain this paradox, and his use of the notion of “philosophy of praxis” and Marxist “historical materialism” set the tone for his theoretical development.

While Gramsci's use of the phrase “philosophy of praxis” acted as a code in his writing for Marxism, a way to get his letters past the scrutiny of prison officials (see Crehan, 2002; Ives, 2004), it also recognizes the general role of theory and practice in understanding and changing socio-economic relations. Practice – the work of achieving societal change – is directed by

The true fundamental function and significance of the dialectic can only be grasped if the philosophy of praxis is conceived as an integral and original phase in the development of world thought. It does this to the extent that it goes beyond both traditional idealism and traditional materialism, philosophies which are expressions of past societies, while retaining their vital elements. If the philosophy of praxis is not considered except in subordination to another philosophy, then it is not possible to grasp the new dialectic, through which the transcending of old philosophies is effected and expressed.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 435-436



Figure 2.3: Eric W. Weisstein, “Young Girl-Old Woman Illusion.” Retrieved August 25, 2008 from *MathWorld – A Wolfram web resource*, <http://mathworld.wolfram.com/YoungGirl-OldWomanIllusion.html>

theory, and theory is informed by practice. Because this back-and-forth relationship between theory and practice develops over time, historical analysis is central in understanding current society and moving towards change. Gramsci's primary contribution to Marxism is the assertion that a similar tension also exists between ideas and experience, politics and culture, and economic structures and ideologies. These are seen as irresolvable, necessary tensions of social life in which one side actually helps to define, rather than contradict, the other side. (A famous visual illusion might be seen as a young woman or an old women, depending on the viewer's perception; both images comprise the picture at the same time so that one cannot exist without the other.) (👁)

From this notion of philosophy of praxis, Gramsci develops his ideas about the role of intellectuals and ideology in civil society, and of civil society in politics and the economy. For Gramsci, democratic society is comprised of three elements: the economy, the political (or state) and civil society. Civil society includes educational, religious, cultural and media institutions, processes and products. Unlike civil society, government has access to authorized force; like civil society, its institutions and discourses justify, reflect and reinforce economic structure. In Gramsci's theory, civil society is important because it is the sphere where ideologies and their associated common sense through which hegemony, the consent of sufficient groups of citizens, is constructed. Likewise, it is in civil society where counter-hegemonic ideological discourses can germinate among marginalized groups – whom Gramsci refers to as “subaltern” classes – and movements for societal change can emerge.

One of the criticisms levelled today against Marxists and other materialists is that, in their focus on socioeconomic class, they overlook the role of culture and discourse in developing identity or subjectivity. Neo-Gramscians extend the original focus on class to other forms of inequalities and oppression, and to sites of inquiry beyond formal workplaces. Roger Simon (1991), for example, notes that the family is a unique institution of civil society because it is where women's unpaid and informal labour has traditionally occurred. Some scholars extend Gramsci's focus on class by arguing that “Gramsci was, in a sense, developing (in relation to social classes) a special case of a general theory” (Holford, 1995, p. 103). Civil society is a diverse constellation of social groups and “reflects the inequalities of class, race and gender which structure the society in which it is embedded” (Blakeley, 2002, p. 94).

Civil society, like its political counterpart, is shaped by ideology, defined by Gramsci (1971) as “a specific 'system of ideas' [which] needs to be examined historically” (p. 376).

One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or “willed”. To the extent that ideologies are historically necessary they have a validity which is “psychological”; they “organise” human masses, and create the terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc. To the extent that they are arbitrary they only create individual “movements”, polemics and so on (though even these are not completely useless, since they function like an error which by contrasting with truth, demonstrates it).

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 376

Ideologies that are “historically organic” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 376) develop in conjunction with and support social and economic structures in particular societies. (👁) For example, the current ideology of consumerism accompanies and props up capitalist, patriarchal and racist structures as they operate during globalization.

Gramsci discusses two types of intellectuals who lead the production and maintenance of ideology: traditional and organic. For Gramsci (1971), “[a]ll men [sic] are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9). The purpose of intellectual activity is to build ideologies which operate through culture and politics. Hegemonic ideologies justify and bolster the status quo in economic and social structures which oppress certain groups of citizens; counter-hegemonic ideologies put forward an alternative vision of societal organization. Revolution, in the sense which most interested Gramsci, is a slow, educative process of fostering organic intellectuals to lead the adoption of alternative ideologies in order to generate a fairer society. Organic intellectuals are linked to a specific class (or, more broadly, social group) which develops in a particular society. Kenway (2001) explains that “Gramsci sees organic intellectuals as functioning to elaborate ideologies, to educate the people, to unify social forces, and to secure hegemony for the fundamental class to which they are organic” (p. 52). In contrast, traditional intellectuals are unattached to any class and appear “as representatives of an historical continuity uninterrupted by the most complicated and radical changes in social and political forms” (Gramsci, 1957, p. 119 in Mayo, 1999, p. 41).

Some Gramscian scholars associate traditional intellectuals with the mainstream and organic intellectuals with the margins, in an apparent nod to Gramsci’s interest in marginalized groups (see, for example, Strine, 1991); however, this is an example of how Gramsci’s vagueness can come into play. I concur with Peter Mayo’s (1999) understanding that “organic intellectuals can, if they are organic to the dominant class/group (e.g., managers), serve to mediate the ideological unity of the existing hegemony” (p. 41). It is also possible for traditional intellectuals to join the ranks of citizens who work for change. To align intellectuals with the types of social groups they lead, we can then distinguish between “conservative,” and what Diana Coben (1998) calls “revolutionary” or “radical” or what Noam Chomsky (cited in hooks, 2003) calls “dissident” intellectuals.

It is through the work of the intellectuals that hegemony is produced, first in civil society and then politically. Although this concept did not originate in Gramsci’s work, he developed it in a new, sophisticated way (Adamson, 1980; Coben, 1998; Ives, 2004; Kenway, 2001; Simon,

The methodological criterion on which our own study must be based is the following: that the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 57



[M]atter should be understood neither in the meaning that it has acquired in natural science..., nor in any of the meanings that one finds in the various materialistic metaphysics. The various physical...properties of matter which together constitute matter itself...should be considered, but only to the extent that they become a productive “economic element.” Matter as such therefore is not our subject but how it is socially and historically organised for production.”

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 465

1991). Although, as Gramsci (1971) notes, democratic governments have access to force, what distinguishes them from totalitarian societies is hegemony, which requires and produces citizens' consent to accept existing power relations and structures. (☉) As Coben (1998) states, "Gramsci recognized that the state successfully maintains hegemony insofar as it succeeds in articulating dominant class interests as if they were universal" (p. 15). Those in power make concessions to secure citizens' consent; if they cannot achieve consent with certain groups, they dominate through the exercise of force. Hegemony in this sense is fluid and constantly (re-)negotiated between leaders and citizens, "a tool for understanding society so that we can change it" (Simon, 1991, p. 23). Gramsci's (1971) theory considers three ways in which change can be effected. Revolution can occur as a forceful, swift event (Gramsci's "war of position") or as a slow, intellectual process of recruiting citizens into a challenge of existing ideology and common sense (Gramsci's "war of movement"). Change can also be imposed from above, when a new force replaces an existing one by way of struggle between the two forces, rather than through mobilization of citizen consent (Gramsci's "passive revolution").

In the context of today's globalization, neo-Gramscian scholars argue that "acceptance of or acquiescence to globalization cannot be explained as merely the result of the domination of powerful economic and political forces without considering real improvements in people's lives" (Sassoon, 2001, p. 8). This recalls Coben's (1998) point that hegemony succeeds to the extent that it accommodates, rather than ignores, the interests of varied groups, in rhetoric if not always in practice. Although contemporary globalization is a distinct era and phenomenon, it bears similarity to Gramsci's time and many of the projects that he discussed, including free trade and, perhaps most prophetically, Americanism (Gramsci, 1971; Sassoon, 2001). Gramsci's emphasis on culture, rather than the more orthodox Marxist emphasis on economy alone, is useful in an inquiry such as this one which explores shopping as a site of learning.

Shopping is clearly a process involving both the symbolic and the material; hence, it straddles the divide typically erected between materialist and poststructural perspectives. As Peter Ives (2004) states, "Culture is such an interesting concept because it travels on both sides of this distinction. My contention is that among other attractive features of Gramsci's writings is his refusal to accept the assumed opposition between the materiality of the economy and commodities versus the non-materiality of language, signification and communication" (p. 127). (☉) Following a conceptualization of adult learning which draws largely on Gramsci's concepts

But the educational relationship should not be restricted to the field of the strictly “scholastic” relationships by means of which the new generation comes into contact with the old and absorbs its experiences and its historically necessary values and “matures” and develops a personality of its own which is historically and culturally superior. This form of relationship exists throughout society as a whole and for every individual relative to other individuals...Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship....

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 350



Domination originates in, and is constructed in, relationships of production and power, but it is also constructed in ideologies and discourses, i.e. in the ways in which people make meaning of situations and speak about them. So hegemony comes to be internalized, to be embedded in people’s consciousness. But if domination is universal, it is also continually contested, so history may also be seen as a continual struggle by ordinary people to maintain or extend control over their lives....The story of this struggle is one of gains and losses, of progress and retreat, and of a growing recognition of the continually contested, complex, ambiguous and contradictory nature of the struggle between domination and liberation. This struggle also has a learning and educational dimension which emerges when we examine concrete situations. I say “emerges” advisedly, because the learning is often embedded in other activities and has to be uncovered.

– Griff Foley (2001), “Radical Adult Education and Learning,” p. 77

and is used in this inquiry, I return to a discussion of how Gramscian concepts can help focus an exploration of the links between consumption, citizenship and resistance in contemporary times.

Fine Focus: Holistic Incidental Adult Learning

Gramsci's (1971) ideas about societal change contribute to the tradition of critical adult education (Brookfield, 2005; Coben 1998; Foley, 1999, 2001; Mayo, 1999). Foley (2001) speaks of “a tradition which is in danger of being forgotten, at a time when it is sorely needed” (p. 71). According to Gramsci (1971) and the critical adult educators who take up his ideas, both hegemony and revolution are processes of constant learning. Mayo (1999) clarifies further that “The notion of critical appropriation of existing knowledge is central to the emergence of a new 'subaltern' and, in Gramsci's case, proletarian culture” (p. 51). In the metaphor of the microscope, my conceptualization of education serves as the “fine focus” of this inquiry. Education, for Gramsci and for me here, is more than schooling; it is the development and popularization of understandings that reflect or challenge a social order. (☞)

Gramsci's adult education project was exemplified by the Factory Councils of workers, which engaged workers in critical analysis of mainstream ideologies and economic structures and to generate new alternatives. In such a project, education involves “an analysis of common sense in order to retrieve and develop the elements of good sense inherent in it” (Coben, 1998, pp. 35-36). When adult educators discuss “critical,” “emancipatory” (Foley, 1999) or “radical” (Foley, 2001) adult education, they invoke Gramsci's legacy and refer to the political nature of education and learning. (☞) Among feminist educational studies scholars, this work has been part of an agenda to move gender and other persistent social categories alongside class. In this way, feminist critical adult educators “consider the educational implications of ongoing and new forms of socioeconomic and symbolic injustice – how contemporary education is implicated in, and might yet challenge, economic exploitation, marginalization, deprivation, and cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect” (Kenway, 2001, p. 62).

While others have written about incidental learning as accidental and tacit (see Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2002; Marsick & Watkins, 2001), Foley's (1999, 2001) writing on adult education is especially helpful in this inquiry. He agrees that such learning is typically overlooked and “has to be uncovered...[because it is] informal, incidental and embedded in other activities” (Foley, 2001, p. 77); however, his particular interest lies in the unintended, politically charged learning which occurs in the course of collective action. In his adult education research and practice, Foley expounds an expansive, Gramscian notion of learning (and teaching) which

My definition of “adult educator” will also be expansive. Radical adult educators are those who work for emancipatory social change and whose work engages with the learning dimension of social life. Fewer and fewer people, even those whose primary work role involves the education of adults, see themselves as “adult educators” (rather they see themselves as “human resource developers” or “literacy teachers” or “nurse educators” and so forth). But social life requires learning, and a range of roles, from manager to activist, involve the facilitation of learning.

– Griff Foley (2001), “Radical Adult Education and Learning,” p. 72

is ever-present. He explains that, “As people live and work they continually learn. Most of this learning is unplanned, and is often tacit, but it is very powerful” (Foley, 2001, p. 72). Attached to this concept is the understanding that educators are not always professional teachers. Community activists and “radical” (Coben, 1998) or “dissident” (Chomsky cited in hooks, 2003) intellectuals are types of progressive adult educators, while advertisers, journalists and public relations professionals serve a similarly educational function, but more typically in support of the existing hegemony. In tracking incidental learning in settings ranging from a women's reproductive health clinic to a public school and from neighbourhood houses to an environmental action group, Foley (1999, 2001) returns to Gramsci's (1971) thoughts about the potential of all citizens to become intellectuals. Collective mobilization and action create opportunities for incidental, critical “learning in hegemonic struggle” (Foley, 2001, p. 76). (👁)

In addition to Foley's work, within adult education there is a body of work which focuses on social movements as sites of informal learning about societal transformation. Building further on Gramsci's (1971) thoughts on the role of intellectuals in culture and critical learning, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1991) describe social movements as “epistemic communities” or sites of “cognitive praxis” whose work is guided by “movement intellectuals.” Viewing knowledge as socially constructed, John Holford (1995) explains,

This approach clearly holds possibilities for the study of adult education, by enabling us to move from the appreciation that social movements are important phenomena in the learning process of the individuals (and even collectively of the groups and organizations) which compose them, to a view that they are central to the production of human knowledge itself. The forms of knowledge which exist in any society are, it is held, the products in part of the social movements which have emerged in, or had an impact on, that society. (p. 101)

Shirley Walters (2007) adds the further point that social movements function as sites of learning both for individuals heavily engaged in activism and for people who remain on the periphery.

Recently, the environmental movement has served as the basis for theorizing and research about adult learning. Exploring the “Clayoquot Summer” of 1993, when environmentalists converged in British Columbia's Clayoquot Sound to protest logging of old growth forests, Pierre Walter (2007) outlines the efforts of organizers, many of them women involved in the feminist movement. Their aims extended beyond building awareness of the devastation of the forests, to developing non-violent resistance and consensual decision-making. Consistent with the notion of holistic learning that I will develop, Walter's study indicates that social movement learning has intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions. In my inquiry, I also establish that such learning is instrumental and radical, formalized and informal, and content-based and process-based.

Rather than embodying the conventional false assumption that the university setting is not the “real world” and teaching accordingly, the democratic educator breaks through the false construction of the corporate university as set apart from real life and seeks to re-envision schooling as always a part of our real world experience, and our real life. Embracing the concept of a democratic education we see teaching and learning as taking place constantly. We share the knowledge gleaned in classrooms beyond those settings thereby working to challenge the construction of certain forms of knowledge as always and only available to the elite.

– bell hooks (2003), *Teaching Community*, p. 41

Critical learning within the arena of shopping is ironic because it relies on a tool of globalization to oppose globalization. On the one hand, shopping and consumption are manifestations of hegemonic ideologies. Marketers, economists and politicians alike proclaim the benefits of these processes for individual consumer-citizens, local and national economies, and the advance of democracy itself. On the other hand, new social movements are heightening concerns about the environment, social justice, personal health and community well-being among consumer-citizens. Using tactics such as boycotts and buycotts, “the conscious choice of goods for ethical and political rather than economic reasons because of their ethical convictions” (Micheletti, 2003, ¶4), these movements are fostering critical, incidental, holistic learning in the arena of shopping. In this way, it is possible to highlight some of the central dialectical tensions which infuse learning about the politics of globalization, consumption and citizenship.

Although I begin with Foley's (1999, 2001) ideas on incidental learning, I back up from his starting point of the political learning that emerges in highly organized settings. My starting point is non-organized, apparently solitary activities and my focus is on how individuals can, in the process of such activities, engage in incidental learning which contributes to their political analysis and social engagement. In this way, my inquiry highlights an under-studied type of incidental learning, and extends the adult education field conceptually by using shopping as a case of such learning. The process of shopping, which is undertaken in the context of economic constraints, cultural affiliations, political regulations, histories of imperialism and national development, and advertising and media discourses which convey ideals of gender, race, class and nationality, can spur incidental learning about many things: consumer rights and choices; the impact of globalization on understandings and experiences of citizenship and consumption; the role of gender, race and class in determining social divisions; and the connection between the material and the cultural. As Marino (1997) writes, the connection of Gramscian concepts, notably hegemony, to adult education provides a flexibility “to move between the individual and the social; it tells me that consent can be both personal and social” (p. 20).

Working from a feminist critical race perspective, hooks (2003) offers a similar view of adult education as ongoing and ever-present, unbound by classroom walls, and focuses on its transformational purpose. Although she does not draw explicitly on Gramsci's work, her notion of “democratic” or “progressive” education focuses similarly on the aim of socially just transformation through adult education. She refers to “the world as classroom” (hooks, 2003, p. 1) and to “classrooms without boundaries” (p. 13). (☹) What she and other feminist scholars add

Many of our students come to our classrooms believing that real brilliance is revealed by the will to disconnect and disassociate. They see this state as crucial to the maintenance of objectivism. They fear wholeness will lead them to be considered less “brilliant.” Popular ideas of what constitutes academic brilliance continue to perpetuate that the critical thinker is unfeeling, is hardhearted. The assumption seems to be that, if the heart is closed, the mind will open even wider. In actuality, it is the failure to achieve harmony of mind, body and spirit that has furthered anti-intellectualism in our culture and made our schools mere factories.

– bell hooks (2003), *Teaching Community*, pp. 180-181



I argue that personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and is derived from the adult's emotional, imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world. The meanings we attribute to emotions reflect the particular sociocultural and psychic contexts in which they arise. This process of meaning-making, however, is essentially imaginative and extrarational, rather than merely reflective and rational. Emotionally charged images, evoked through the contexts of adult learning, provide the opportunity for a more profound access to the world by inviting a deeper understanding of ourselves in relationship with it.

– John Dirkx (2001), “The Power of Feelings,” p. 64



There is a perceived ideological fit between the self-managing, enterprising, choosing self and the model citizen of neoliberal societies who shoulders the responsibility for maintaining social order through his or her “good” choices (Cronin 2000, Entwistle 2000, Slater 1997). In addition, there is the troubling capacity of consumer industries to commodify – and disarm – dissenting voices, recruiting issues of women’s empowerment, environmental sustainability, and racial equality into the service of product promotion, thus reducing social justice to the freedom to choose between products (Cohen 2003, Talbot 2000).

– Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Smith Maguire (2004), “Consumers and Consumption,” pp. 182-183

to a critical conception of adult learning and to Foley's (1999, 2001) concept of incidental learning is an explanation of the role of affect or emotion, sensuality and spirituality in learning, whether formal or informal (see also Barndt, 1999, 2002; English, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 1998; Tisdell, 1998, 2000). (☞) Elizabeth Tisdell notes that these non-intellectual dimensions of learning are, generally, a contribution from feminist scholars to adult education. The work of John Dirkx (2001) is consistent with feminist scholars, as he argues that emotions affect motivation to learn and deepen intellectual understanding in the learning process. These dimensions of learning are seen as complements to, not replacements of, critical thinking. (☞) Tisdell's (2000) and hooks' (2003) writing on this matter is especially useful, as it consolidates ideas about spirituality and ideas about learning for societal change, rather than treating spirituality as a distinct, and largely individualistic, quality.

For an inquiry into shopping, which bridges material and cultural considerations, emotion seems especially important in coming to understand how people engage in critical or radical learning through their shopping. Today's mainstream Western consumer movements might emphasize availability of information and intellectual decision-making based on considerations of value-for-money (Hilton, 2005; Zukin, 2005; Zukin & Maguire, 2004), but shopping and consumption are also emotion-laden and sensuous processes. For middle class shoppers in the Global North, shopping creates myriad, often conflicting emotions and sensations, from temptation to stress, awareness to confusion, satisfaction to frustration. (☞) Shopping is often a hurried and stressful interruption in daily life, accompanied as much by learning moments when the “penny drops” as by deliberate reflection. Gramsci's (1971) connection of daily life in civil society to learning, politics and economics is a starting point for understanding why shopping might be considered as a site and process of learning. Building on that central premise, Foley's (1999, 2001) notion of incidental learning helps me focus on unintended, politically charged learning, even though I use his concept in a qualitatively different kind of setting and process. The recognition of emotions, senses and spirituality in learning completes my working conceptualization of a form of adult learning which is incidental, critical and holistic.

Having adopted this multi-dimensional understanding of learning, for the sake of consistency and clarity in this document, when I use the word “radical” I do so to discuss socially transformative learning or learning which is accompanied by a commitment to societal change. Consistent with adult educators interested in environmental education (Barndt, 2002; Clover & Hall, 2000; Walter, 2007), I include the “natural” environment and non-human life

Radical has the sense of fundamental or extreme, of the root, foundational, root and branch. Radical education is a fundamental departure from dominant practice or experience at one or more of the following levels: content, process, outcome, the relationship of education to other social processes. The word “dominant” directs our attention to the relative nature of radicalism. One's learning, or educational experience, is radical in relation to the way things are. This means, of course, that radical education and learning can take us as speedily in the direction of reaction as revolution. Neoliberal educational developments are testament to this, as are the hegemonic effects of the mass media. But in adult education radical education is generally taken to mean critical and emancipatory education, and it is this sense that I will work with in this paper.

– Griff Foley (2001), “Radical Adult Education and Learning,” p. 72

forms in my consideration of societal organization. Canada's West Coast has a history of environmentalist action and education (Walter, 2007), and environmental concerns such as global climate change, food security and peak oil have great currency within and beyond my local area. At the same time, I think that there is a social environment which is being overlooked by the environmental movement. Like Foley (1999, 2001) and a few of the participants in this inquiry, I use radical to infer a concern about the root or the basis of social problems. (☹) Such learning is also always grounded in lived experiences and social contexts. I am, however, aware that terminology is always tricky, and that this word is accompanied by its own scholarly and popular traditions. I explore participants' understandings of radicalism and what they contribute to thinking about radical learning further in chapter eight.

The Object on the Stage: Shopping as Learning in and about Contemporary Globalization

In this section, I introduce the site and process central to this investigation – what I might call shopping-as-learning or learning-in-shopping. I draw heavily on scholarship in the field of cultural studies and critical consumer studies. I also note that shopping and consumption are not the same things; shopping is one element of consumption but, increasingly, consumption involves shopping. Summarizing ideas explored in greater detail elsewhere (Jubas, 2007), I outline the historically developed links between consumption and citizenship in Western societies, contained by the conceptual term “consumer-citizenship”; the phenomenon which has become known as globalization; practices of resistance among consumer-citizens concerned about globalization; and the movement from the notion of consumer-citizenship to that of critical or radical shopping as part of a societal change agenda.

Consumer-Citizenship

In his now famous essay on citizenship, T. H. Marshall (1992) focused on the elements of citizens' rights, or status, and responsibilities. Keith Faulks (2002) expands Marshall's elements, delineating five elemental “Rs” which comprise democratic citizenship. His additions to rights and responsibilities are resources, recognition and residence. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's (1992) notion of “subaltern counterpublics” and Holloway Sparks' (1997) concept of “dissidence,” I add yet one more “R,” that of resistance. As I outline below, these are six dimensions on which citizenship is contested, as issues of entitlement, obligation and identity determine who qualifies for the status of citizen and who embodies and practices “good” citizenship.

I contend that in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public....I propose to call these *subaltern counterpublics* in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs....In general, the proliferation of subaltern counterpublics means a widening of discursive contestation, and that is a good thing in stratified societies.

– Nancy Fraser (1992), “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” pp. 122, 123 & 124 (emphasis in original)



I conceptualize dissident citizenship as the practices of marginalized citizens who publicly contest prevailing arrangements of power by means of oppositional democratic practices that augment or replace institutionalized channels of democratic opposition when these channels are inadequate or unavailable. Instead of voting, lobbying, or petitioning, dissident citizens constitute alternative public spaces through practices such as marches, protests, and picket lines; sit-ins, slow-downs, and cleanups; speeches, strikes, and street theatre. Dissident citizenship, in other words, encompasses the often creative oppositional practices of citizens who, either by choice or (much more commonly) by forced exclusion from the institutionalized means of opposition, contest current arrangements of power from the margins of the polity.

– Holloway Sparks (1997), “Dissident Citizenship,” p. 75

Struggles over rights and responsibilities can seem abstract, but the struggle over limited material resources, Faulks' third "R," inserts a more concrete consideration into this mix. In the history of modern Western democratic citizenship, since at least the French Revolution (Riesenberg, 1992 cited in Faulks, 2002), democracy has developed in concert with capitalism, and economic resources have been centrally tied to debates about citizenship rights and responsibilities. In recent years, with the rise of postmodern thought about fluid, partial identity, and neoliberal politics favouring the so-called free market and individualism, some theorists are concerned that recognition has gained ascendancy in academic, activist and political discourse. For Fraser (2003), this shift risks creating a "vulgar culturalism" (p. 25) which displaces arguments in favour of social democracy and the redistribution of resources in the name of fairness and equity. On the other hand, Fraser acknowledges the poststructural concern that some strands of materialist analysis, including orthodox Marxism, risk creating the opposite problem: reducing social oppression to financial inequities and overlooking the reality that members of a single social group have multiple and varied affiliations and identities. I share Fraser's conclusion that a balance between redistribution of resources and recognition – what feminist scholars refer to as a "logic of encompassment" (Werbner & Yuval-Davis, 1999) or "differentiated universalism" (Lister, 2003) – is vital for social justice; for critical shoppers, as I explore later, achieving this balance is often the crux of the problem.

The fifth "R" in Faulks' (2002) framework is residence. This refers broadly to control of territory, and is evident at local, national and regional levels. Locally, struggles over residence are apparent in community planning, as political, commercial and citizen groups press for policies and practices which promote their interests and priorities (Bender, 2003; Satterthwaite, 2004). From debates over building height restrictions to placement of public parks and recreational facilities to development of shopping centres, divergent arguments infuse municipal planning with politics. Nationally and regionally, such struggles appear in combination with rights and resources, as governments, corporations and citizen groups battle over things such as rights to water, natural resources and development (Shiva, 2005).

I add resistance as the sixth "R" to this framework. Based strongly on Fraser's (1992) concept of subaltern counterpublics (☉) and Sparks' (1997) concept of dissidence (☉), I limit myself to a consideration of non-violent resistance. Sparks does not include politically motivated boycotts in her list of possible tactics of dissidence, but such tactics can be associated with a collectivity, even if loosely organized, and often aim to educate and pressure others in the name

Rosa Parks's performance of courageous dissent, however, relied on, invoked, and reinforced a number of gender, race, and class norms, even as it challenged others. Although Parks was, we have seen, a courageous dissident long before her arrest, she was a dissident who epitomized quiet, middle-class respectability. She was demure, feminine, heterosexual, married, family-oriented, hard-working, and churchgoing. Because of the risks she chose to face, she was indeed a “courageous heroine,” but her dissidence was performed in a manner that did not conspicuously threaten traditional gender norms, sexuality norms, or class norms.

– Holloway Sparks (1997), “Dissident Citizenship,” p. 99



In fact, the consumer is sovereign in a jungle of ugliness where *freedom of choice has been forced upon him*. The revised sequence (that is to say, the *system* of consumption) thus ideologically complements and continues the work of the *electoral system*. The drugstore and the polling booth, the loci of individual freedom, are also the system's two mammary glands.

– Jean Baudrillard (1998), *The Consumer Society*, pp. 72-73 (emphasis in original)

of change. Social movements can be seen as sites in which subaltern counterpublics and their allies forge shared identities and assert themselves and their interests. They are the basis of the incidental learning outlined by Foley (1999, 2001). As Sparks (1997) establishes, using the example of American civil rights figure Rosa Parks, the resistance which they foster manifests the important quality of courage but is complicated, as it both opposes and reiterates elements of the status quo, in much the same way as hegemony accommodates and quashes change. (☞)

Consumption is one plane on which these six “Rs” of citizenship are enacted. Like citizenship, consumption is a contested concept. Jean Baudrillard's (1998) theory of consumption argues that capitalism has turned consumption into a “system of needs” (p. 75). This system bestows on objects and, presumably, services an importance which exceeds the enjoyment and satisfaction that they provide on their own. Consumables and consumption become the measure of happiness which, when combined with formal politics, function as common sense ingredients in the idealized recipe for equality. Consumerist culture and politics come together in constructing a pair of myths: that “growth means affluence” and that “affluence means happiness” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 51). (☞)

Jeff Hearn and Sasha Roseneil (1999) offer the following definition of consumption which is useful in my inquiry because of its comprehensiveness and clarity:

Consumption is one of the basic ways in which society is structured and organised, usually unequally, sometimes incredibly so. Differential powers, resources and life chances are routinely produced and reproduced by and through consumption patterns. Consumption not only takes place within culture and thus within specific cultures; it also produces culture and cultures.... Furthermore, consumption also constructs, even consumes, the consumer. Just as production produces both products and the producer, the worker, so too consumption has a dialectical form. People do consumption, are “done to”, constructed, consumed by that consumption. *Consumption is a structure, process and agency.* (p. 1, emphasis added)

Hearn and Roseneil further explain that consumption is itself productive – of meaning, personal and group identity, and culture. It exemplifies the constrained choices that individuals deliberate, enact and embody daily. How individuals are identified in relation to others, how they are able to resist these identifications and construct alternatives, how they are included and excluded in society and community – these are all at play in one's consumption options and decisions, in addition to the immediate pleasure and satiety that consumption can provide.

It is the ideology of consumerism which helps create a culture emphasizing shopping and consumption as central to the embodiment of good citizenship. The common sense associated with this ideology advises that, in contemporary Western societies, shopping and consumption function alongside work and morality to accumulate and manifest one's social status. As several

More specifically, I want to show how, during the 1950s and 1960s, both Marxists and conservative critics expressed their condemnation of mass consumption in similarly elitist terms, and how, partly in reaction, this produced during the 1970s and 1980s a very different body of work in which the consumer and consumption are defended and even celebrated.

– Mica Nava (1999), “Consumerism Reconsidered: Buying and Power,” pp. 45-46

scholars point out, though, there have been different iterations of this ideology (Cohen, 2003; Jacobs, 2003; Hilton & Daunton, 2001; Mort, 2006; Nava, 1999). (☹) Each iteration has made sense within a particular social and economic context. Writing about the decades following the Second World War in Britain and the United States, Frank Mort (2006) makes the following concluding remarks about the coinciding changes in politics and consumer culture:

This was not, of course, the first time that intellectuals and politicians had debated such a relationship and its consequences. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries witnessed related discussions about the connections between the new political subjects of mass democracy and the impact of popular leisure and entertainment across Europe and the USA. During the period after the Second World War projects dedicated to understanding this relationship were prioritized by a group of intellectuals who were central to both social democratic politics and commercial culture. (p. 240)

Lizabeth Cohen (2003) and Meg Jacobs (2003) outline the development of distinct discourses of consumer-citizenship throughout the twentieth century in the United States. In the early part of that century, consumers were regarded as individual customers. Government encouraged the development of consumer associations which argued that citizens' rights as both workers and consumers had to be ensured, and lobbied for both fair prices and wages. During the economic and social hardship of Depression years, the individualistic conceptualization of consumers was replaced by a nation of “citizen-consumers” (Cohen, 2003), who pressed for rights through price controls, agricultural subsidies and similar protective policies and programs. Interestingly, Cohen (2003) also notes that oppressed groups in the United States, notably African Americans, used their consumer-citizenship to express their power as they organized boycotts and buycotts to protest racist business practices and support black-owned or black-friendly businesses. Here, then, is an example of a social movement which brought together a subaltern counterpublic (Fraser, 1992) and encouraged resistance through shopping.

Finally, in the post-Second World War decades, a “Consumers' Republic” (Cohen, 2003) developed, in which consumer-citizens were once again reconceptualized, this time as participants in a so-called “free” market. Their function in American society was deliberately invoked in the post-War years, when the image of the loyal American consumer-citizen – especially the idealized middle class (and white) suburban housewife – was summoned in the service of anticommunist posturing (Spring, 2003). At the same time, the American civil rights movement of the 1960s, of which Rosa Parks herself became an integral part, continued to employ tactics of consumer-citizenship, and additionally began to call for integration of minority groups into representations of the good consumer (Spring, 2003).

Understood as a process of looking for and deliberating options, acquiring goods, services and experiences, and, sometimes, deciding to forego a purchase, shopping for me typically involves going into a store. One exception, for me, is when I go to a seasonal farmers' market or a craft sale. On occasion, I go to garage or yard sales or speciality fairs. I have purchased books, airline tickets and vacation accommodation online. Having worked for some 15 years in the not-for-profit community service sector, often in revenue development, I have come to enjoy fundraising events, and have a collection of items that I bought at various auctions. Although I imagined that my conversations with participants would revolve centrally around shopping in stores, I was open to talking about these other types of shopping settings and experiences. Still other things that participants or other people mentioned to me during my inquiry include bartering, swaps, the free-cycle movement and even organized theft.

– “Chapter One: In the Beginning...,” p. 35

Writing about the version of consumerism which has come to characterize contemporary Western societies such as the United States, Britain or Canada, Joel Spring (2003) points out that, “Inherent in consumerist ideology is the dictate that commercial leisure, such as movies, radio, and TV, should spur people to consume more, work harder, and live moral lives” (p. x).

Contemporary consumerism in a Western society such as Canada combines materiality and cultural products and processes, and instructs consumer-citizens that they are defined and recognized according to the work they do, the things they buy and use, and the values they hold.

Shopping, the arena which has contained my focus throughout this inquiry, is one element of consumption. In chapter one, I summarized my understanding of and experiences with shopping, and how I tried to pay attention to other understandings and experiences that participants brought into the inquiry. (☹) Following most of the scholarship in this area, I alternate my use of the word consumption with the word shopping throughout this document.

During the hundred years from Marx until globalization was firmly underway in the late 1980s, shopping and consumption were dismissed as concerns secondary to production or paid labour (Hilton & Dauntun, 2001; Mort, 1990; Rappaport, 2001; Zukin & Maguire, 2004). Today, as Aiwaha Ong (2004) notes, citizens are “constructed in definitive and specific ways... – taxpayers, workers, consumers, and welfare dependants” (p. 157). Contemporary globalization moves the primary site of identity construction from production to consumption for several reasons. First, the stability of occupation, or the citizen’s role in production, is being increasingly undermined by corporate global portability and technological developments (Bocock, 1998).

Secondly, groups other than the traditional classes, around which identity can be constructed, are asserting themselves. Characteristics such as gender and race, to which I pay particularly strong attention in this dissertation, as well as age, sexual orientation and (dis)ability, have become bases for social identification. Marketers are seizing these identities as new opportunities to advance their own brands and products (Bhachu, 2004; Bocock, 1998; Bowlby, 2001; Grewal, 2005; Hearn & Roseneil, 1999; hooks, 2001; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Spring, 2003; Zukin, 2005).

Thirdly, the mass production, retailing and marketing which industrial capitalism first made possible has led to the increasing separation between production and consumption of goods, turning them into a “*harnessing of power*, rather than...products embodying work” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 32, emphasis in original). If shopping and consumption become the measures of power, then citizenship must be either compromised or reconceptualized. Yiannis

The system only sustains itself by producing wealth *and* poverty, by producing as many dissatisfactions as satisfactions, as much nuisance as ‘progress’. Its only logic is to survive and its strategy in this regard is to keep human society out of kilter, in perpetual deficit.

– Jean Baudrillard (1998), *The Consumer Society*, p. 55 (emphasis in original)

Consumption no more homogenizes the social body than the educational system homogenizes cultural opportunities. It even highlights the disparities within it.

– Jean Baudrillard (1998), *The Consumer Society*, p. 58



As generations of social historians have demonstrated, class and group identities are always subjective, constructed categories. They result not just from social construction, but they are also politically constructed. At key moments, politicians have sought to win elections and influence public policy by politicizing pocketbook issues and appealing to citizens, especially housewives, as consumers.

– Matthew Hilton and Martin Daunton (2001), “Material Politics: An Introduction,” p. 251

Gabriel and Tim Lang (2006) assert that “[c]urrently, political culture is poised between giving primacy to voting or shopping. Consumerism has encroached core citizenship terrain, including housing, healthcare and education” (p. 172). Variations in terminology, including “consumer citizenship” (Grewal, 2005; Hilton, 2003), “consumer-citizen” (Baudrillard, 1998; Bowlby, 2001; Zukin & Maguire, 2004), and “economic citizens” (Jacobs, 2003), reflect the growing attempts by scholars to articulate and explore the convergence of citizenship and consumption.

Democratic citizenship might promise equality, but its reality in the context of social structures is one of inevitable divisions and inequities. As a central ideology in contemporary Western hegemonies, consumerism exacerbates, rather than alleviates, these divisions and inequities. (☹) Even within a single society, discourses of consumer-citizenship are constructed, understood and used in an array of ways, reflecting the diversity of interests and identities. For example, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British abolitionist movement brought together various interests in boycotts of slave-produced sugar. Members of religious sects opposed to slavery on moral grounds, and men trading in “freely” produced sugar from India who opposed slavery because it created competition with artificially lowered prices joined women who used their responsibilities as shoppers to assert their power and agitate for formal political rights (Midgley, 1992; Sussman, 2000). Again, Gramsci’s (1971) ideas are useful here: Hegemony, the constant balancing act between efforts at persuasion, the threat of force and citizens’ consent is an expression of the conflicting interests which emerge whenever all groups have some degree or form of power, but power is unequally distributed. Ideologically based common sense, including the ideas that democracy produces equality and the “free” market increases choice, has become pervasive. Such discourses circulate throughout civil society, as well as political and economic institutions, and help secure broad consent among citizens for social structures which inevitably maintain, more than challenge, unequal social relations. Specific discourses of consumerism and the consumer-citizen are used for economic and political ends, and are brought into both marketing and election campaigns. (☹)

As a sociologist of education interested in consumption, Spring (2003) ties shopping and consumption to both citizenship and learning, formal and informal. He talks about the use of censorship and the “purging of so-called *radical teachers*” (Spring, 2003, p. x, emphasis in original) during periods of conservatism, and the eventual development of a youth market, starting with preschool-aged children, which merged shopping, consumption, media and learning. He mentions the television show *Sesame Street* and its spin-off toys which, by the

“Hand-crafted applewood,” he says. “Took a week to make.”

Well, it was a waste of a week, if you ask me. It’s shapeless and the wood’s a nasty shade of brown.... But as I go to put it back down again, he looks so doleful I feel sorry for him and turn it over to look at the price, thinking if it’s a fiver I’ll buy it. But it’s eighty quid!...

“That particular piece was featured in *Elle Decoration* last month,” says the man mournfully, and produces a cutout page. And at his words, I freeze. *Elle Decoration*? Is he joking?

He’s not joking. There on the page, in full color, is a picture of a room, completely empty except for a suede beanbag, a low table, and a wooden bowl. I stare at it incredulously.

“Was it this exact one?” I ask, trying not to sound too excited. “This exact bowl?” As he nods, my grasp tightens round the bowl. I can’t believe it. I’m holding a piece of *Elle Decoration*. How cool is that? Now I feel incredibly stylish and trendy – and wish I were wearing white linen trousers and had my hair slicked back like Yasmin Le Bon to match.

It just shows I’ve got good taste. Didn’t I pick out this bowl – sorry, this *piece* – all by myself? Didn’t I spot its quality? Already I can see our sitting room redesigned entirely around it, all pale and minimalist. Eighty quid. That’s nothing for a timeless piece of style like this.

– Sophie Kinsella (2001), *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, pp. 50-51 (emphasis in original)

1970s, were having a notable effect on young children's early learning about the subjects that they would soon encounter in school as well as their identities as media consumers and shoppers.

For adults, he goes back in history to the Chicago World Fair of 1893, where “fast food” was introduced through the exhibits of prepared foods. The accompanying narratives built a case for their use in school cafeterias and workplaces. He agrees that women had a special role in shopping and consumption, and discusses the emergence of home economics as a educational field aimed at women and offering a message for society-in-general: “Along with saving society, home economics was to liberate women from household drudgery and make them active participants in shaping society” (Spring, 2003, p. 33). This new, “scientific” field expanded women's role as coordinator of shopping and consumption, by charging them with implementing a new discourse around diet and food management and the newly available commercial food products into institutions such as schools and hospitals, as well as the home.

During the 1970s, the notion of choice, which has been instrumental in linking consumption to citizenship, had entered the lexicon for children, youth and adults. Children and youth had school text books which featured women working in a variety of occupations, and popular media portrayed women similarly. Girls were able to participate in new sports teams and vocational courses. Advertisers began to take notice of niche interests in the environment, feminism and race relations, and co-opted those issues into the service of marketing. By the 1980s, consumerism appeared more seamless with citizenship and the educational project, as corporations opened child care centres, high school academies and after-school or summertime recreational programs. As Spring (2003) explains, “An important advance in consumerist ideology was the attempt to create a spontaneous association in the public mind among consumption, democracy, free enterprise, and Americanism” (p. x).

In contemporary Western societies, directions for unbridled shopping to fulfil personal desires and support the economy play against cautions to use credit responsibly. Whether or not goods and services available in the free market are affordable brings resources to the forefront. Recognition, the fourth “R,” has lain at the heart of status shopping since the development of department stores in the nineteenth century first offered growing numbers of citizens an opportunity “to participate in an image of the aristocratic life” (Bowly, 2001, p. 10). Today, a status-based consumerist culture plays on consumers’ emotions and, combined with neoliberalism, encourages a form of status-based, competitive consumption recognized in the title and content of Sophie Kinsella’s popular series of novels about “shopaholics.” (👁)

Fair trade creates a bridge between the peoples of the developing nations and those of the developed ones. For consumers in First World countries, fair trade gives people the opportunity to not only purchase products that support their values of a more socially just and equitable world trade order, but to also learn about the producers' lives, their struggles, and our mutual interdependence.

– Kimberly M. Grimes (2005), “Changing the Rules of Trade with Global Partnerships,” pp. 237-238



Yet the essence of capitalism is that the basic means of production are not socially but privately owned, and that decisions about production are therefore in the hands of a group occupying a minority position in the society and in no direct way responsible to it.

– Raymond Williams (1980), *Culture and Materialism*, p. 186

Even as marketing pressures individuals to consume in certain ways, there are indications that consumers of all ages respond with their own ideas about consumption (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Mort, 1990; Paterson, 2006). Resistance within civil society is evident in growing interest in critical shopping, and in the social movements which feature discourses of critical shopping and consumption. For example, the fair trade and environmental movements indicate how resistance can be undertaken by consumers (Grimes, 2005). (☞) As the developing terminology which connects consumer and citizens suggests, consumption may be viewed as a marker of citizenship. Ultimately, though, the relationship between citizenship and consumption is itself one of a paradoxical tension, because they have developed in tandem even as they undermine each other, particularly in the context of capitalist structures. (☞)

Gender, Race and Class: Consumer-Citizenship as a Social Construct

The previous discussion explicates how both consumption and citizenship can be described as “contested” on the grounds of the six “R” that I have laid out. The contests occur as hegemony structures relations between consumer-citizens and creates social categories. Struggles in the arena of shopping reflect the complications of consumer-citizenship. They are based on diverse social groups and interests, as well as political divisions between government and citizenry and material divisions between capitalist-producers and proletarian-consumers. Ideologies such as consumerism or neoliberalism have emerged historically, as capitalism and democracy have developed in concert with each other, and now combine in nationally and locally particular ways.

Like all ideologically based structures in all democratic societies, patriarchy, racism and capitalism have been both evolving and persistent. The result in Canada – one Western society in today's Global North – is an ideologically based presentation of the “good” consumer-citizen, who is idealized in terms of gender, race and class. This individual is envisioned as white – the embodiment of a mythical Canadian heritage which identifies British and, to a lesser extent, French colonization as Canada's starting point. This idealized good consumer-citizen is also envisioned as middle class – the representative of the gainfully employed Canadian whose combination of work and consumption supports the national economy and a common sense understanding of this country's “way of life.” The limits of consumer-citizenship are also apparent when discourses of citizenship and consumption are heard separately. While citizenship retains a certain masculinization, shopping and consumption retain a degree of feminization.

Ghosting both the projects of British sociologists and American liberal theorists [in the 1950s and 1960s] was an understated debate about gender and especially about how the core concepts of democracy, leisure and culture were differently inflected by masculine and feminine access to the structures of modern political and social power...Gender was empirically present but structurally absent in much of the work..

– Frank Mort (2006), “Competing Domains,” p. 231

When consumption and citizenship are brought together, gender often receives vague attention, especially in mainstream study and writing. (👁)

In exploring social categories and inequities, feminist, critical race and other critical scholars have been at the forefront of work arguing that gender, race and class have real material effects in the lives of all consumer-citizens, but are based in social, rather than natural or universal, determinations. Understandings of these categories might be fluid, but the categories themselves are persistent. This acknowledgement of the social construction of these categories in no way diminishes their cultural and social importance. As Ruth Frankenberg (1993) explains,

Race, like gender, is “real” in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences, and life chances. In asserting that race and racial difference are socially constructed, I do not minimize their social and political reality, but rather insist that their reality is, precisely, social and political rather than inherent or static. (p. 11)

Gender is the social categorization produced by and in response to patriarchy. Elisabeth Hayes and Danielle Flannery (2000) write that “gender [is] a type of social relation that is constantly changing, created and recreated in daily interactions as well as on a broader scale through such institutions as school, work and the family” (p. 4). Patriarchy not only divides the social world into male and female, masculine and feminine; it values the male and the masculine over the female and the feminine.

The increasingly evident connection between citizenship and consumption has benefits and drawbacks for marginalized groups, including women. Since the late nineteenth century, by which time industrial capitalism was well entrenched in Western societies, consumption and shopping have been seen as the purview of women. Capitalism, along with patriarchy and racism, developed in the context of earlier iterations of imperialism, including colonization, to separate the masculine from the feminine, and the developed West from the primitive East. As men increasingly were understood as producers and women as consumers, a process of what Mies (1986) calls “housewifization” began to unfold in the eighteenth century among the upper classes. It was made possible by the convergence of colonial capitalism and patriarchy, and was characterized by three tendencies: the domesticity produced by privatized wealth and luxury in the home; the expression of wealth through objects, rather than the number of loyal subjects; and the contraction of time apparent in the new availability of luxury items year-round. Wealthy women were encouraged to define themselves as good mothers, good wives and – despite their lack of economic and political rights – good citizens by buying and consuming items produced by their husbands or in colonies.

Currently, the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization.

– bell hooks (2001), “Eating the Other,” p. 431

Although consumerism has not arisen exclusively in capitalist societies, it has developed alongside technological innovations which made possible new manufacturing, transport, promotional and retail options. Increasingly, consumption has become associated with shopping for goods rather than using goods that one has produced (Bocock, 1993). In a social world of dichotomies, shopping has been construed as a predominantly feminine activity disassociated from masculine labour in formal workplaces (Bocock, 1993; Bowlby, 2001; Mort, 1990; Rappaport, 2000). This does not mean that men have not shopped or enjoyed shopping, just as the masculinization of production does not mean that women have not worked within and, often, outside the home. The feminization of shopping builds on the attachment of femininity to family caregiving, and much of women's shopping and consumption has been seen as what they do on behalf of their husbands and families (Bowlby, 2001; Rappaport, 2000). Despite the idealized image of women as thoughtful caregivers, their portrayal as emotional rather than intellectual has had a demeaning impact on both women and shopping. Women have been characterized, alternately, as "purchaser consumers" (Cohen, 2003) for whom shopping expresses duty to family and the national economy, and "flighty" (Bowlby, 2001, p. 119), impulsive shoppers.

As industrialization took hold, men's work and women's work were seen increasingly as separate realms. Over time, housewifization spread to other classes, establishing the nuclear family and gendered work as social norms (Mies, 1986). With the emergence of shopping areas in nineteenth-century Western cities, shopping became portrayed as a "'natural' feminine pastime" (Rappaport, 2000, p. 5). As feminist scholars explain, the attention being paid to consumption can be as a correction to the problem of omission of women's labour and experiences, and as a challenge to the traditional academic emphasis on class as it introduces associated considerations of gender and race (Bowlby, 2001; Rappaport, 2000; Zukin & Maguire, 2004). In its discussion of social relations and revolution in binary terms, especially the realms of public labour in the industrialized workplace and private consumption in the home, Marxist theory can both challenge capitalism and reinforce social inequities made possible by patriarchy and racism. As I discuss later, this is an example of the complications of resistance, which itself exemplifies a dialectical relationship between radicalism and conservatism.

Since Mies' (1986) writing about housewifization, critical race, postcolonial and other feminist scholarship has continued to link consumption and citizenship to social relations. For hooks (2001), racism divides the American society so that certain groups are constructed as rulers and consumers and others as the ruled and the consumed. (☹) Ong focuses on the

At this time in U.S. history, whiteness as a marked identity is explicitly articulated mainly in terms of the “white pride” of the far right. In a sense, this produces a discursive bind for that small subgroup of white women and men concerned to engage in anti-racist work: if whiteness is emptied of any content other than that which is associated with racism or capitalism, this leaves progressive whites apparently without a genealogy. This is partly a further effect of racist classification that notes or “marks” the race of nonwhite people but not whites.

– Ruth Frankenberg (1993), *White Women, Race Matters*, p. 232



The political landscapes of race are quite particular. This is not just a matter of looking at national differences, although this is relevant. There are significant microclimates in some places. There are important differences across Canada, for example, in terms of migrant populations, individual and collective histories or migration and settlement, and the relationship between migration and nation building. Vancouver looks to the West and the Pacific rim for its arrivals and historic exclusions. Its current migrants are wealthy. Toronto traditionally leans towards the Caribbean and the less affluent, but now has a substantial Chinese population in the suburb of Markham hedging its bets on the long-term effects of government in Beijing on Hong Kong. Quebec with its own forms of nationalism is quite different again. Often...I bring together material and examples from Britain and the United States and so it is important to underscore the differences between these *race*-political landscapes when they are wielded in this fragmented form to make a point. Even though they are historically linked (as are Canada and Australia) through empire and migration, Britain and America had quite different relationships to empire business and to the (Black) Atlantic slave trade. Each made and sustained whiteness by different routes: even if the migrants of one provided nation building material for the other.

– Caroline Knowles (2003), *Race and Social Analysis*, p. 16

socio-political basis of race in her exploration of how Asian immigrants to America are racialized on a “white-black continuum” (p. 159), in part on the basis of their ability to shop and consume. In her research on British Indian culture, Parminder Bhachu (2004) notes that “consumption of ‘orientalist’ material culture was an integral part of the British Empire” (p. 26). hooks (2001) makes a similar observation about the treatment of African American culture – regarded as exotic and desirable – in mainstream, white America.

Frankenberg (1993) also describes how progressive individuals in the American racial centre think about race as a characteristic belonging only to those in minority or marginalized groups, rather than a type of relation which involves all community members and citizens. (☹) In the 15 years since the release of Frankenberg's book, this tendency seems to have broadened. Liberal rhetoric of global citizenship emphasizes the humanity that unites all peoples and equalizes us all. Ultimately, though, whiteness remains the presumed norm in Western societies. Labels such as “ethnic foods” or “world music” are used to refer to cultural products and processes outside the centre, reducing difference to a matter of style and taste (Dhruvarajan, 2000). This creates the paradox of reiterating centuries-old racism which opposes whiteness and blackness, and appearing to erase racism through the discursive erasure of whiteness. At the same time, members of racialized minority groups are portrayed in reductionist, stereotypical terms. Ann DuCille (1999) refers to this paradox as “concurrent racing and erasing.”

In response to these discursive tendencies, critical race scholars such as Frankenberg (1993), Caroline Knowles (2003), France Winddance Twine (2000) and Vanaja Dhruvarajan (2000) clarify that race, too, is defined and lived out relationally. (☹) Like all social categories, it is a persistent construct *and* must be understood in terms of specific times and places. Since the height of Canada's social welfare state in the 1970s, for example, the idealized version of a white, middle class consumer-citizen has been juxtaposed with a policy discourse of tolerance and multiculturalism which, as Dhruvarajan (2000) writes, “has helped to manage diversity, but it has not addressed the issue of inequality in power relations” (p. 169). If anything, she argues, Canada's multiculturalism policy and the increase in ethno-racial diversity in this country serves European ethnic groups (in addition to British or French) who are able to preserve their cultural traditions; meanwhile, “this symbolic pluralism does not help people of colour find jobs, housing or child care” (p. 170). This social reality can be understood in terms of “discursive repertoires on race” whose inherent contradiction between the human right to equality and structures of racial inequality “can be exposed or obscured linguistically, but not resolved. Thus, one reaches

The lowest positions are designated by the fact that they include a large – and growing – proportion of immigrants or women...or immigrant women....Similarly, it is no accident that the occupations in personal services – the medical and social services, the personal-care trades, old ones like hairdressing, new ones like beauty care, and especially domestic service, which combine the two aspects of the traditional definition of female tasks, service and the home – are practically reserved for women.

– Pierre Bourdieu (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p. 108

here...the limit point of the value of a focus on discourse, and attention is drawn once again to the crucial interplay of discourse and material life” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 190). This resembles the outcome of policies and discourses which address gender-based discrimination without changing the structure of patriarchy. Norms of masculinity and femininity change, but the social world continues to be divided into men and women, and to value the masculine over the feminine.

Like gender and race, class is a persistent social construct which is fluid across time and place, and has become a complicated consideration in contemporary scholarship. Unlike gender and race, though, class cannot be represented as a source of welcome diversity. As Walter Michaels (2006) states, “White is not better than black, but rich is definitely better than poor” (p. 47). A discourse of multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance might mask ongoing racism and patriarchy, but it ignores class entirely.

I find Bourdieu's ideas on class useful in this piece of my inquiry. Living as he did in the early twentieth century, Gramsci maintained an older Marxist understanding of class in terms of relations of production, although he did broaden his consideration beyond the proletariat to other subaltern classes such as the peasantry. Several decades later, Bourdieu (1984) began to broaden the notion of class further, inserting an emphasis on the social, cultural and symbolic to match the economic. The now-familiar term “socioeconomic class” reflects this expanded understanding, as Bourdieu's notions of social and cultural capital are added to economic capital in determining class. In Canada today, a doctor, a real estate agent, a plumber and a lottery winner might have access to the same economic capital, but they do not necessarily share a class position. Gender is also implicated in class, as some historically feminized professions such as teaching might offer less income than historically masculinized trades such as plumbing. Although class structures have tended to value the professions above the trades, gender structures have tended to value the masculine above the feminine. Similarly, members of minority racial groups become associated with and are often slotted into occupations with relatively low social status and economic value. (👁) These examples illustrate how social categories intersect with and bisect one another. Another way in which class is intersected and bisected is through what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as “social trajectories,” the means by which individuals develop their capital(s) from their socioeconomic starting points. These trajectories distinguish factions of classes even when they have commonalities in their economic wealth.

Bourdieu was instrumental in ensuring that class was maintained as an important construct in social theory and research (Nesbit, 2006). Class is particularly relevant to this

The mobility of choice of the affluent British middle-classes, conducted in relative ease, is quite different from the mobility of the international refugee or the unemployed migrant.

– Beverley Skeggs (2004), *Class, Self, Culture*, p. 49

inquiry which explores a society underpinned by consumerist and neoliberal ideologies, and common sense promises of freedom of choice and individuals' ability to construct identity and status through shopping and consumption. In rebuttal to the argument made by scholars such as Beck that contemporary “individualization” diminishes the relevance of class, scholars such as Rosemary Crompton and Beverley Skeggs, both of whom adopt Bourdieu's perspective in their British work, argue that individualization is a hegemonic discursive thread in neoliberal globalization. In that discourse, the image of the middle class (white man) is simply employed as a stand-in for the universal ideal of the good citizen. Like race, class relations might be increasingly complex, but they are presented in increasingly simplistic terms. Writing within Canada, Tom Nesbit (2006) begins to suggest the irony at play: “Especially in the United States, one commonly hears either that class has ceased to exist or, alternatively, that everyone is middle class” (p. 175). Crompton (2006) cites Beck's characterization of class as “a 'zombie category' which is 'dead but still alive’” (p. 663). At the same time, the lower, working and middle classes are under concerted attacks through globalization's tactic of privatization which transfers jobs from workplaces in the unionized public sector to workplaces in the non-unionized private sector. As Bourdieu (1984) states, “what the competitive struggle makes everlasting is not different conditions, but the difference between conditions” (p. 164). Skeggs (2004) explores how studies in topics such as mobility dilute interest in and analysis of class; however, such conceptual framing of globalization studies overlooks the reality that different people have access to and enact mobility in different ways – a point which I raise again in my conceptualization of globalization. (👁)

Crompton (2006) acknowledges that “although there has indeed been considerable and extensive social change, and individuals may indeed appear to have more 'choices' to make than in the recent historical past, the concept of class is by no means redundant” (p. 659). Her term “positive pluralism” encompasses a notion of class which is multi-faceted and complicated, and includes “both economic resources and social behaviours (and even other axes of differentiation such as gender and race)” (Crompton, 2006, pp. 659-660). Occupational categories remain useful in discussing class, but “are better regarded as useful proxies for the economic dimension of class, rather than as encompassing the complex realities, material and cultural, of concrete classes” (Crompton, 2006, p. 660). While I think that Crompton's passage under-estimates the extent to which occupational categories also operate as “useful proxies” for the cultural dimension of class, I take her point that there is more to its determination than occupation.

For Beck, “the individual himself or herself becomes the reproduction unit for the social in the lifeworld” (Beck 1992:130). And, “...class loses its sub-cultural basis and is no longer experienced” (1992:98). Individuals, Beck maintains, although unable to escape structural forces in general, can decide on which ones to act and which to ignore. This, he argues, does not create a “free” individual; rather, it creates individuals who live out, biographically, the complexity and diversity of the social relations that surround them. This self, this biographical production, Beck calls “reflexive modernity”. Central to this theory is an incredibly voluntarist individual who can choose which structural forces to take into account and which to act upon. However, as Savage (2000) points out, individuals still need to situate themselves socially in order for them to assess what kind of risks they are likely to encounter. They also need access to social resources, including forms of interpretation such as discourse, by which they can make sense of the “risks” that surround them and act upon them. In this sense they are always/already implicated in a process of positioning, cultural differentiation and resource access, that by necessity involves the making of social distinction. Thus individualization cannot be anything but a cultural process involving differentiation from others and differential access to resources.

– Beverley Skeggs (2004), *Class, Self, Culture*, pp. 52-53

In a similar vein, Skeggs (2004) aims “to capture the ambiguity produced through struggle and fuzzy boundaries, rather than to fix it in place in order to measure and know it. Class formation is dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic” (p. 5). In an era when class struggles are ongoing, class boundaries are “fuzzy,” and hegemonic discourse asserts a singularly valued and idealized middle class, it becomes more difficult for individuals to self-identify clearly and purposefully with class categories. Class identification is made even more difficult, Skeggs argues, by the growing tendency to affiliate with a middle class which, in its contemporary iteration, stresses individualization. In her conclusion, Skeggs (2004) makes the noteworthy point that

Class struggle is not just about collective action, for when are we aware of physically encountering a class? But it is also about the positioning, judgements and relations that are entered into on a daily and personal basis. Living class, which I'd argue is different from class-consciousness, is very much part of how class is made. (p. 173).

These arguments follow Bourdieu's thinking and are largely consistent with a Gramscian framework. Skeggs explicitly notes her agreement with Gramsci's approach (see Skeggs, 2004, p. 45), as Bourdieu does himself (see Bourdieu, 1984, p. 386). These are dialectical understandings of class. They retain the concept of class in order to avoid “vulgar culturalism” (Fraser, 2003, p. 25), or overlooking of material disparities in favour of struggles for cultural recognition; at the same time, they expand the concept in order to avoid simplistic economic determinism or the individualistic emphasis of some other sociologists. (☺)

As this discussion establishes, gender, race and class are constructs which are developed, adopted and challenged in particular historical, geographic and social contexts. They are both fluid and persistent, reiterating how social divisions are structured even as their precise meanings and roles are debated and changed throughout civil society. Because members of any one social category are also members of varied other social categories, it is impossible to speak definitively about the impact of one social construct on all its members. A more useful approach, then, is to regard genders, races and classes as distinct but intersecting categories which every individual embodies. Barndt (2002), for example, describes “an interlocking analysis of power” (p. 62) to account for how individuals experience any given type of social relation in the context of other types of social relations and factors.

For over a century, entire industries and marketing campaigns have been built around idealized notions of feminine white beauty. Race and gender have been used to promote products by tempting consumer-citizens. Images of the primitive or exotic in early marketing materials

Whether explicitly named or not, the four categories of sex, class, age and race have retained their position as the primary advertising differentials throughout the twentieth century. As well as offering the possibility of infinite detailed variations and combinations, each of them leads itself to dualistic, hierarchical schemes – man/woman, higher/lower, older/younger, white/black (or western/colonial, indigenous/immigrant, and so on). It often happens that subordinate categories get lumped together as likely to share some particularly unsophisticated (which may also mean exploitable) predilections.

– Rachel Bowlby (2001), *Carried Away*, p. 113



Like rap music and professional basketball, certain designer labels have made a racial crossover. Identified as “black,” they enjoy enormous commercial success among all shoppers, but especially among teenage males; their advertisements in fashion magazines play on the dubious dangers of the streets and the outward signs of criminal cultures; and, as their sales in department stores and speciality shops increase around the world, they attract the interest of Wall Street analysts and investors. No doubt about it, black is hot these days, but only if it sells.

The financial value of these fashions rests on the curious ability of mass-manufactured clothing to represent the cultural value of cool. Jeans and logoed sweats, baseball caps worn backwards, gold chains perhaps, and definitely athletic shoes: these have long since been elevated to their own fashion category of “urban wear” a business that is worth several billion dollars a year. That so much money is at stake signals a paradoxical triumph of both countercultural symbolic coding and corporate decision-making, which hangs, in turn, on creating a fragile balance between the changing body images of two volatile groups – teenagers and blacks.

– Sharon Zukin (2005), *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, p. 146



The car heads out on a long stretch that heads toward the highway and Claire hugs one of the dogs that has edged its face in between the two front seats. It is a face that now grovels politely but insistently for attention. She lectures into the dog’s two obsidian eyes: “You, you cute little creature. You don’t have to worry about having snowmobiles or cocaine or a third house in Orlando, Florida. That’s right. No you don’t. You just want a nice little pat on the head.”

The dog meanwhile wears the cheerful, helpful look of a bellboy in a foreign country who doesn’t understand a word you’re saying but who still wants a tip. “That’s right. You wouldn’t want to worry yourself with so many *things*. And do you know *why*?” (The dog raises its ears at the inflection, giving the illusion of understanding. Dag insists that all dogs secretly speak the English language and subscribe to the morals and beliefs of the Unitarian church, but Claire objected to this because she said she knew for a *fact*, that when she was in France, the dogs spoke French.) “Because all of those objects would only mutiny and slap you in the face. They’d only remind you that all you’re doing with your life is collecting objects. And nothing else.”

– Douglas Coupland (1991), *Generation X*, pp. 10-11 (emphasis in original)

and advertisements conveyed imperial conquest and connections, while images of wholesome white girls on soap packaging intimated ideas about the inherent cleanliness of white people (Bowlby, 2001; Paterson, 2006; Spring, 2003). In recent decades, age has become similarly exploited by advertisers (Bowlby, 2001; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Martens, 2005; Paterson, 2006; Spring, 2003). (☹) Understanding the connection between identity and consumption in a consumerist society, as well as consumers' desire to be something other than part of the "mass," consumerism encourages the commodification, sale and consumption of difference (hooks, 2001; Skeggs, 2004; Zukin, 2005). In tension with this impulse to consume difference, the structures of patriarchy, racism and capitalism place limits on what is considered normal and desirable. From the commercialization of an initially political project such as hip hop to the popularity of bhangra (Bhachu, 2004), consumerism churns acceptable difference through a marketing machine, stripping culture of its temporal and geographic roots and promising that *everything* is available to *everyone*. (☹)

On the other hand, despite the "common sense"(Gramsci, 1971) emerging from neoliberalism and the associated capitalist ideology of consumerism that citizens' equality is best assured within a socio-economic system of competition and self-reliance, the "free" market system does not seek to and cannot eliminate social divisions. So-called consumer choice does not empower marginalized citizens. Like all hegemonic ideologies, neoliberalism and consumerism are designed to maintain existing ranks of status and privilege, rather than to alleviate power imbalances, while appealing even to citizens on the social margins (Baudrillard, 1998).

What has become additionally problematic, as I have suggested above, is that mainstream discourse in Western democratic societies, which are able to exert force internationally because of their economic power, has begun to equate consumption with citizenship, and consumer choice with democratic freedom. Consumerist ideology is being used to bolster a "myth of equality"(Baudrillard, 1998, p. 49) and a two-part example of common sense emerges: First, "growth means affluence" and, secondly, "affluence means democracy" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 51). This explains the statements made by President Bush and Mayor Giuliani cited in chapter one, as well as the contrary analysis of consumerism articulated throughout Douglas Coupland's novel, *Generation X*, whose main characters represent the first generation raised under the iterations of neoliberal consumerist ideologies in contemporary globalization. (☹) No longer the attempt to dismantle injustices or upset the existing balance of power, "revolution," according to

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Figure 2.4: Air Canada Multi-trip Flight Passes, retrieved July 25, 2006 from <http://www.aircanada.ca>

these ideologies – and Canada’s national airline – becomes the unending presentation of options for consumer-citizens-of-means. (☹)

Globalization

For critical, feminist and other radical adult educators, contemporary globalization is a troubling phenomenon because, among other outcomes, it encourages capitalism’s “progressive colonization of new dimensions of human life” (Foley, 2001, p. 81). These educators hold that a strategic form of radical adult education is required to respond to this deliberately executed project. The concerns raised by these adult educators, other critical scholars and activists outside academe imply that globalization, like citizenship and consumption, is an “essentially contested concept” (Lister, 2003, p. 14). William Carroll (2002) also characterizes globalization as a “problematic term.” Regardless of how one understands it, there is a consensus that globalization has far-reaching political, economic, social and cultural implications. In this section, I outline the historical development of what is now recognized as globalization, and some of the explanations of this phenomenon.

Many scholars trace the beginning of the period known as globalization to developments following the Second World War, notably the major international agreements that have become known as “the Washington Consensus” (Bello, 2002; Kiely, 2005). The stated objective of the Bretton-Woods agreement was to build stability after half a century of turbulence and violence. It linked the American dollar to the price of gold and set the dollar as the standard for all currency valuations, and established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to regulate “[s]hort-term balance of payment problems” for trading states (Kiely, 2005, p. 51). For some twenty-five years, Bretton-Woods seemed to have been having the intended outcomes. Enjoying buoyant economies, governments in the Global North pre-empted radical shifts by funding social programs for marginalized citizens, and compiled an international development agenda based on national currency and economic regulations, and investment in public services. In effect, these policies and programs helped solidify America-led Western hegemony internationally by ameliorating broad concerns about social welfare and marginalizing more radical voices.

Despite a discourse of fairness and democracy, the new institutions – including the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the United Nations (UN) – were weighted unevenly, so that certain states held more power than others. This imbalance was evident from the initiation of the Bretton-Woods agreement, which (corresponding to Gramsci’s predictions) affirmed America’s

Every relationship of “hegemony” is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 350

position as leader in a new, international hegemony (Kiely, 2005). (☹) From the end of the Second World War until the late 1970s, the underlying aim behind this hegemony was to secure the corporate interests of the Global North. A key strategy in fulfilling that aim was “the co-optation of Third World elites” (Bellow, 2002, p. 40). When the American economy began to falter, experiencing a trade deficit and large military expenditures associated with the Vietnam War, the Nixon administration unlinked the American dollar from the price of gold. As debt, inflation and unemployment climbed, the affordability of social programs was questioned. In America and other industrialized countries, political change at the state and global levels in the late 1980s was led by the right-wing British Thatcher/Major governments and the American Reagan/Bush governments. These administrations introduced a neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility and potential coupled with a neoconservative social platform, and began the process of dismantling the post-Second World War social and so-called interventionist policies and programs (Kiely, 2005).

By the 1990s, New Labour emerged in Britain under Tony Blair's leadership and New Democrats in America under Bill Clinton's leadership; they brought a kinder, gentler Third Way discourse to electorates rocked by two decades of economic and social turbulence. In the Global South, the IMF and the World Bank replaced conventional loans with “structural adjustment loans...intended to push a programme of 'reform' that would cut across the whole economy or a whole sector of the economy” (Bello, 2002, p. 43). These reforms included reduced public spending and increased privatization; liberalized import, foreign investment and labour standards; and currency devaluations. Their explicit aims were to enhance the competitiveness of exports from the Global South and enable those countries to repay their World Bank loans, and to cut international development spending by countries in the Global North (Bello, 2002).

Although Gramsci's (1971) general focus is on the nation-state, his references to the international or global level suggest how his theory and concepts can be applied to a critical analysis of globalization. The hegemonic conception of globalization is well represented by British sociologist Giddens. He dismisses critics of globalization as “sceptics,” and describes globalization as an unavoidable, new “runaway world” in which new technologies are combining with capitalism and democracy to create “a global order that no one understands fully, but is making its effects felt upon all of us” (Giddens, 1999a, p. 7). This has also been characterized as the “strong version of globalization” (Tabb, 1997 in Holst, 2007). According to Giddens (1998, 1999b), the combination of these new forces, traditional social values, and the

Appealing to such a wide constituency, the Third Way represents a new modernising movement of the centre. While accepting the central socialist value of social justice, it rejects class politics, seeking a cross-class base of support. It sets itself against authoritarianism and xenophobia. On the other hand, it is not libertarian. Individual freedom depends on collective resources and implies social justice. Government is not, as neoliberals say, the enemy of freedom; on the contrary, good government is essential for its development and expansion.

– Anthony Giddens (1999a), “After the Left’s Paralysis,” ¶8

No rights without responsibilities, no authority without democracy: if these are the basic principles of the Third Way, they must apply to the business corporation as elsewhere.

– Anthony Giddens (1999a), “After the Left’s Paralysis,” ¶14

An emphasis on community seems to some critics out of line with the impact of globalisation. In fact it is consistent with it, since globalisation not only pulls away from the local arena but it “pushes down” on it, too, creating both new pressures towards and new opportunities for the restoration of community.

– Anthony Giddens (1999a), “After the Left’s Paralysis,” ¶17

The reformed welfare state will be a social investment state, establishing a new relationship between risk and security on the one hand and individual and collective responsibility on the other.... The main guideline of the social investment state can be simply stated: wherever possible *invest in human capital rather than the direct payment of benefits.*

– Anthony Giddens (1999a), “After the Left’s Paralysis,” ¶23

evolution of institutions and discourses beyond twentieth-century “left and right” politics offer a “Third Way” of genuine progress. The assumptions hidden in Giddens’ Third Way discourse have become the mainstream “common sense” of globalization. (☹)

Despite his enthusiasm for a strong version of globalization, even Giddens has some concerns. He admits that, although globalization affects all regions, countries and groups of citizens, often in unpredictable ways, “[i]t is led from the west, bears the strong imprint of American political and economic power, and is highly uneven in its consequences” (Giddens, 1999a, p. 4). He also recognizes that the global movement of capital and production threatens local economies, especially subsistence economies in the Global South. Still, he is convinced that globalization is both unstoppable and the source of new forces which, when combined with social values to create Third Way politics, provides an opportunity to move beyond previous economic, social and political systems. For Giddens, the urgency for Third Way politics lies in the reality that older structures and allegiances have become irrelevant. Movement to his new political vision is necessary for the inclusion of social justice and economic well-being.

Critical adult educators who adopt a strong version of globalization tend to offer their critiques from what John Holst (2007) and others refer to as “civil societarian perspectives.” They do not share Giddens’ ultimate optimism about globalization and Third Way politics. They argue that, given globalization’s erosion of both the power of national governments and the currency of class-based politics, people who are concerned about globalization must turn

to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and new social movements operating in what these adult educators call civil society (a sphere generally seen, to varying degrees, as relatively autonomous from the state and the market) as the agents best situated to protect and perhaps expand this social realm of civil society in the face of increasing “colonization” from new economy forces.... (Holst, 2007, ¶10).

I note that this understanding of civil society’s relation to formal politics and economic structure is inconsistent with the Gramscian notion of dialectic. An understanding more consistent with Gramsci’s thinking would avoid splitting civil society and culture from the state and the market.

In contrast to this strong version of globalization, other critics adopt what is referred to as a “long version of globalization” (Tabb, 1997 in Holst, 2007). Those who adopt this perspective on globalization see it as a phenomenon which encompasses new forms and uses of technology, but not one which is entirely new and unknown. Among those who work from this perspective, Marxist scholars argue that capitalism has always had a globalizing impetus, and is prone to the turbulence that characterizes today’s globalization (Callinicos, 2001; Harrison, 2002; Kiely,

It is certainly worth bearing in mind that global economic structures are hardly novel. The late 1800s saw heavy international investment, buoyed by imperialist rivalries. World systems theorists date the origins of the modern world system to the mercantilist trade networks established in the fourteenth century.

– Graham Harrison (2002), “Globalisation,” p. 17

2005). (☞) Furthermore, most foreign direct investment (FDI), which bolsters globalized corporate development and profit, comes from the Global North and most of its pay-off flows to corporations and economies in the Global North. As Holst (2007) explains, “The fact that Northern economies still dominate FDI and invest it largely among themselves sheds light on the fact that the nation-states attached to these economies are still strong and in fact vital to the continuation of historical expansion of capitalist relations” (§11).

Holst supports adult educators' attempts to incorporate critical analyses of and responses to globalization in their work and, to that end, he compares the strong and the long versions of globalization. Although he agrees with much of the Marxist-initiated critique in the long version of globalization, he raises four limitations to it. First, he explains that “it misses the mark in understanding the dialectical process of change within capitalism. The fundamental contradictions within capitalism are not external relations (global/local), but contradictory relations internal to the process of capitalism itself” (Holst, 2007, §15). To be effective, opposition to globalization must understand and incorporate this aspect of capitalism, rather than portraying the tension between the global and the local as unique to contemporary globalization.

Secondly, he points to the lack of theorizing of the nation-state and formal politics, especially among adult educators in the Global North. He attributes much of the reluctance to undertake such theorizing to the tendency of adult educators to return to a civil societarian perspective on the diminished role of the state even if they reject the idea, also associated with civil societarianism, that globalization is inevitable. This is despite recent examples of strategies of resistance to hegemonic globalization in the Global South, including Venezuela and Bolivia, based on popular democracy and popular control.

Thirdly, Marxist analyses might offer persuasive critiques of hegemonic globalization, the strong version of it, and the civil societarian response which they see as “a form of left-wing neoliberalism” (Holst, 2002 in Holst, 2007, §20); ironically though, given their conclusion that the nation-state retains an important role, Holst concludes that they have generated few viable alternatives for political organization. Fourthly, and related to the previous point, with no new options for political organizing, Marxist analyses maintain their focus on traditional class-based structures of resistance, notably trade unions and labour-affiliated political parties. Writing from the United States, Holst (2007) points out that organized labour is in severe decline in that country and traditional political alliances are being challenged. Here, he draws on Gramsci's political writings which pre-date his incarceration and penning of *The Prison Notebooks*:

Globalization is a force that rides on the back of earlier waves of global exploitation, including European colonization spanning the previous 500 years. A new kind of globalization began to emerge in the years following World War II. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank were created. As the process of decolonization moved across nations, capital became institutionalized in all but the remaining socialist and communist countries (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 298). Through colonization and decolonization, countries which had been previously oriented towards self-sustainability became, instead, export-oriented.

– Susan Hawthorne (2004), “Wild Politics: Beyond Globalization,” p. 244

The period of history we are passing through is a revolutionary period because the traditional institutions for the government of human masses, institutions which were linked to old modes of production and exchange, have lost any significance and useful function they might have had....But it is not only bourgeois class institutions which have collapsed and fallen apart: working-class institutions too, which emerged while capitalism was developing and were formed as the response of the working class to this development, have entered a period of crisis and can no longer successfully control the masses. (Gramsci, 1977, p. 175 in Holst, 2007, ¶21)

On the one hand, Holst (2007) rejects the strong version of globalization consistent with a civil societarian perspective, and maintains that effective opposition to hegemonic globalization involves formal politics. On the other hand, he does not dismiss the importance of the new movements and organizations which are emerging in civil society, and the so-called globalization from below which these instigate. His critique reinstates a Gramscian appreciation for the dialectical relationship between civil society, the political and the economic. Like Gramsci, he recognizes the ability to build new alliances in the struggle for societal transformation and the ability of such alliances to forge multiple sites of resistance. As he states, “While the civil societarian perspective has rightly identified qualitative changes at the level of the economic and the social, it has done so at the expense of the political” (Holst, 2007, ¶26), and the Marxist responses to the long version of globalization have largely neglected to consider the qualitative changes that globalization has brought to political and social institutions.

Outside the field of adult education, scholars such as James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2001) or Walden Bello (2002) who adopt an analysis of globalization as imperialism argue that it is a project which continues to advance capitalism within a broader framework of imperialism, with the United States positioned as the new hegemonic imperial power. For that matter, there have been streams of Marxism, notably the most radical stream supported by Rosa Luxemburg in the early twentieth century (see Scott, 2008) which tie imperialism to capitalism, and both to a version of globalization. Today, scholars who take up elements of these analyses additionally argue that globalization reinforces socio-economic divisions between and within states, maintaining and even exacerbating, rather than ameliorating, inequalities and oppression (Barndt, 1999, 2002; Dhruvarajan, 2003; Hawthorne, 2004; Shiva, 2005). As they have in other historical periods, gender and race continue to act alongside class in constructing social divisions, and geographic location continues to reinforce the power of the already powerful. (👁)

With no overall governance to demand and structure accountability, international bodies promoting free markets “are assumed to be objective and value-neutral, operating without human agency” (Dhruvarajan, 2003, p. 183). According to Graham Harrison (2002), “Orthodox globalisation theorists portray globalisation as an economic process, relying on the standard

In a transnational age, with millions of displaced and migrant subjects, questions of identity and citizenship became both crucial and vexed, since these subjects questioned the legitimacy of the nation-state while also reinforcing its ability to endow rights.

– Inderpal Grewal (2005), *Transnational America*, p. 11

liberal separation of the state and the economy to present globalisation as immanent, or embedded in an economic logic which states can only react to” (p. 24). Other scholars explore the changing meaning of the nation-state from another perspective, focusing on globalization as a producer of subjectivities which develop with transnational migration and ethnic, cultural and racial hybridities (Bergeron, 2001; Bhachu, 2004; Grewal, 2005; Ong, 2004).

As scholars explore the movement of people, culture, goods and capital across state borders, globalization proponents such as Giddens (1998, 1999a, 1999b) argue that the result of these processes is the declining authority of the nation-state. People who question that conclusion and the general “discourse of inevitability” (Giddens, 1999a, p. 182) are portrayed as “lacking in common sense. Such people are often called globophobes, Luddites, and protectionists” (p. 182). In response to these arguments, critical scholars point out that the state retains central authority over areas such as protection of property and deliberation over new multinational agreements; moreover, international bodies remain constellations of state-level representatives, without the accountability to citizens of any state (Bello, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Panitch, 2004).

Even feminist postcolonial scholars such as Inderpal Grewal (2005), who explore the transnational identities that are constructed as people and cultures move across state borders, acknowledge that the role of today’s nation-states might be changing and complicated, but persists. (☹) If identities are increasingly hybridized, they also remain tied to nationality, including its expression through the status of citizenship. Moreover, the transnational migration of people, often for the purposes of paid work, has financial repercussions beyond individual workers and their families, as remittances from abroad offer an important source of capital to buoy national economies in developing countries (Parreñas, 2001). Sylvia Walby (2003) takes a somewhat different tack in disputing the demise of the nation-state during globalization, arguing that the very concept of nation-states is a historical fiction. Nation-states “may be widespread as imagined communities, or as aspirations, but their existence as social and political practice is much over-stated” (pp. 529-530). Histories of colonization, warfare and other reasons for human migration have resulted in states with multiple nations and nations which cross state borders.

This discussion confirms that globalization, like citizenship and consumption, is highly contested. It can be seen as a project, a process, a period, an outcome or even a myth. It can be seen as directed purposefully by corporate and political powers, or constructed unpredictably through civil society activists and so-called ordinary citizens. Many scholars combine interpretations, acknowledging the multiple levels on which globalization is conducted and

From this alternative perspective, “globalization” is neither inevitable nor necessary. Like the projects of capitalist development that preceded it – modernization, industrialization, colonialism and development – the new imperialism is fraught with contradictions that generate forces of opposition and resistance and can, and under certain circumstances will, undermine the capital accumulation process as well as the system on which it depends.

– James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2001), *Globalisation Unmasked*, p. 12



As we crack open the globalization mystique, we begin to realize that globalization from above and globalization from below are, in fact, completely intertwined, like the tangled roots, each feeding and defining each other.

– Deborah Barndt (2002), *Tangled Routes*, p. 56



The more nuanced interpretation recognises the capacity of the state to act as an agent, and to adopt effective policies of its own choosing, despite the impact of structural forces from an internationalized economy. Nor should all states be seen as having an identical relationship with the world economy, as individual states are differently inserted into the global system depending upon their reliance upon exports.

– Brendan Evans (2002), “Globalisation,” p. 157

experienced. Scholars who pursue globalization as imperialism talk about the role of capitalism in globalization, and scholars who focus on globalization as producer of subjectivities might talk about capitalism and imperialism. Analyses of globalization do not always fit neatly under one label – it is a complicated, complex concept with analytical threads from multiple perspectives.

Given this multitude of perspectives and analyses, how do I conceptualize globalization in this inquiry? I outline four points central to my conception. First, like other critical scholars, I reject both the notions that globalization is undirected or apolitical, and the idea shared by orthodox Marxists and globalization proponents that globalization is unfolding with no meaningful interjection by citizens. (☞) Invisibility doesn't reduce certain groups to victims; rather, these people “are also agents, courageously carving out their families' survival; while forced to work within a system that benefits but also exploits them, they constantly find ways, both individual and collective, to resist it” (Barndt, 2002, p. 57). Previous iterations of imperialism such as colonization constructed and depended on social divisions such as gender, race and class. Mies (1986) argues that the structures of patriarchy and capitalism actually are so intertwined that they are inseparable. Scholars from a range of disciplines establish that politics of gender and race, as well as class, continue to operate during and guide the development of contemporary globalization, within and across state borders. As even Giddens (1999a) recognizes, globalization is distinctly Western in its embrace of capitalist structures and neoliberal democratic ideology, which build on rather than overcome histories of imperialism.

Secondly, globalization, as both a project and an outcome, is replete with paradoxes or, in Gramscian language, dialectical tensions. Among these paradoxes is that the ideological rhetoric of democratization – particularly in its neoliberal form – serves to extend the hegemony of globalization, even as it invites new opportunities for dissent. (☞) Accompanied by capitalist strategies such as the free market and privatization, this ideology produces a common sense which reinterprets democratic choice as consumer choice and gains broad – albeit far from unanimous – consent among citizens across states.

Thirdly, I understand globalization as a worldwide phenomenon which is experienced with local variations. As Brendan Evans (2002) clarifies, globalized forces affect all nation-states, but nation-states continue to enact policies; moreover, globalization is reiterating, rather than eliminating, power differentials between nation-states. (☞) Set against a discourse of cosmopolitanism, local particularities are not dissolving into a singular culture, despite increases in privatization and transnational corporations which constrain citizens' and consumers' choices.

It is more interesting to me to examine the intersecting effects and material consequences of so-called globalization in a particular place, not to vaporize either experience of the local, but, quite the opposite, to reveal a local that is constitutively global but whose engagements with various global imperatives are the material forms and practices of *situated knowledge*. Examining these effects and practices as such is a means to develop a politics that works the ground of and between multiply situated social actors in a range of geographical locations who are at once bound and rent by the diverse forces of globalization.

– Cindy Katz (2001), “On the Grounds of Globalization,” p. 1214 (emphasis in original)



A few statistics on the consumption of...raw materials underline the point: in the UK, iron consumption has increased twenty-fold since 1990; the global production of aluminium has risen from 1.5 million tonnes in 1950 to 20 million tonnes today. In the decade 1984-1995 (during a period in which we should have seen the “weightless” effect becoming visible, if the theorists are to be believed) aluminium consumption rose from 497,000 tonnes to 636,000; steel consumption increased from 14,330,000 to 15,090,000 and wood and paper consumption more than doubled, from 41 million to 93 million tonnes.

– Ursula Huws (2004), “Material World,” p. 226

Cindi Katz (2001) focuses on the role of locality to illustrate how globalization affects people and places worldwide, but yields effects which are evident in material experiences and practices which remain highly localized. (☹) Reversing geographer David Harvey's (1989 cited in Katz, 2001) notion of "time-space compression," Katz speaks of "time-space expansion" which is evident in the increasing size and scope of the physical world encountered by people living in previously remote areas. For people who are prospering and succeeding, new opportunities for travel, communication, investment, production and consumption might seem to make the world smaller; however, for many others, globalization is escalating the physical distance between their work and their home communities, and the social distance between globalization's "winners" and themselves (Hawthorne, 2001). In short, globalization maintains patterns of material inequality created by earlier phases of colonization, which were structured by capitalism, patriarchy and racism. The point, as Skeggs (2004) says, "is not who moves or is fixed, but who has control – not only over their mobility and connectivity, but also over their capacity to withdraw and disconnect" (p. 50).

Fourthly, the importance of the local and the cultural complements, rather than displaces, the continued importance of the material in how individuals experience and respond to globalization. For Harrison (2002), "against the arguments of orthodox globalisation, capital is not footloose; nor is it, against the liberal arguments of counter-globalisation, 'disembedded'. For all of the complex and unstable financial architecture created liberalisation in the early 1980s, capital relies on workers to produce surplus" (p. 30). Globalization is surely accompanied, and even made possible by, a production, trade and currency deregulation, as well as a host of technological developments. These developments enable the instantaneous transfer of funds and the speedy transit of people and goods; however, they have not eliminated the material reality of human existence and social relations (Huws, 2004). (☹)

Rather than eliminating materialist concerns, the technologies and regulations which ease the global movement of capital actually exacerbate the material divisions and problems associated with capitalism. These four points – that globalization is a political, social and economic project which reiterates imperialist objectives and tactics; that, like all hegemonies, it is supported by a set of ideologies (e.g., consumerism and neoliberalism) and associated common sense (e.g., a "free" market creates democratic choice) which help secure popular consent; that it is a worldwide phenomenon with local, national and regional variations; and that it involves both materiality and culture – are central to my conceptualization of globalization. Positioning this

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discussion in the field of adult education, I return to the writing of Holst (2007), and his conclusion that the potential for critical adult education exists in the realization that

there is no solution to the day-to-day survival issues of a growing sector of humanity within the capitalist relation or working for a wage to buy what you need. This basic relation is breaking down and there is no resolution outside of cooperative socio-political economic relationships: the “big utopia” of socialism....The dialectic of the objective and the subjective realization of big utopias resides quite mundanely in the day-to-day needs of the growing sector of the world's population increasingly on the margins of capitalism. Here is where a new radical adult education needs to and must reside. (Holst, 2007, ¶26)

From Shopping and Consumption to Learning and Resistance

Having reviewed the conceptual pieces of this inquiry – the politics of culture, incidental and holistic adult learning, consumer-citizenship as a social and cultural phenomenon, and globalization – I can now return to the central question of this inquiry: How can shopping be seen as a site and process of learning about the politics of consumption, citizenship and globalization? Following Gramsci's (1971) understanding of societal transformation as an inherently ideological and educational process, I attach the concept of consumer-citizenship and the site and process of shopping to my conceptualization of holistic, incidental learning. Sociologists of education establish ties between formal education and consumption. While Kenway and Bullen (2001) and Martens (2005), whose work I have already reviewed, concentrate on children, youth, schooling, media and consumption, Spring (2003) discusses learning and consumption more broadly, dealing with both formal and informal learning as well as both children or youth and adults.

Until the final stage of writing, the working title of this dissertation used the phrase “radical shopper” in an effort to be consistent with the language that I had decided to use around learning. Because I was going to investigate shopping-as-learning, radical shopping and radical learning suggested a similar interest in social analysis and transformation. I was interested in the extent to which radical shoppers shared discourses, purposes and practices coordinated by shopping-related social movements. Like all social movements, critical shopping can then be seen as an example of Fraser's (1992) counterpublics in which people are able to develop critical analyses, and learn how to think about and enact resistance or dissidence (Sparks, 1997). As this inquiry proceeded, I faced questions from my committee members as well as from prospective and actual participants about the meaning of the word radical in the context of this inquiry. I explore these questions in greater detail in chapter eight, but until then when I use the word “radical” I do so with the adult education writing of Foley (1999, 2001), Coben (1998) and

Although many Americans have a particular mind-set about trade, their multiple roles in society may make it difficult for them to be ideologically consistent. As an example, most Americans are simultaneously consumers and producers. From a consumer's perspective, freer trade can be good because it can yield a greater supply of good at lower prices. However, freer trade also may endanger consumer welfare. For example, the United States bans the use of certain pesticides at home but allows U.S. manufacturers to sell some of these pesticides abroad. These banned pesticides may eventually show up in imported food, creating a "circle of poison."...Finally, from a worker's perspective, trade may stimulate job creation. But foreign competition may reduce the market share of U.S. companies, and these companies may be forced to trim their staff or worker benefits to increase competitiveness.

– Susan Aaronson (2001), *Taking Trade to the Streets*, pp. 9-10

Holst (2007) in mind. In the context of this inquiry, radical shopping infers a process of critical, incidental, holistic learning about the links between shopping, consumption, citizenship, identity and globalization, and using that knowledge in the name of transformation. It extends the concept of consumer-citizenship in the particular direction of social analysis, critique and action.

As I have already illustrated, many theorists have separated production from consumption and producers from consumers; however, workers who worry about their livelihoods are also consumers who worry about financial limitations, personal health and ecological threats (Aaronson, 2001). (☞) Attempting to narrow the gap between producer and consumer and the Global North and the Global South, activist-educators who are troubled by the hegemonic version of globalization press for an alternative way forward, an “alter-globalization.” Some of these activist-educators use the realm of shopping as a pivotal part of their radical strategies.

For marginalized citizens, consumer-based resistance to globalization is often manifest through collective action and projects. Because shopping is so frequently tied to women and poor women are especially marginalized, women play a central role as organizers of and participants in many of these projects. Locally, community kitchens and bulk buying or distribution projects help poor women get affordable, nutritious food for themselves and their families. These projects also bring these women together to learn not just about cooking and nutrition, but also about how an apparently abstract phenomenon such as globalization is actually present in their lives (Moffett & Morgan, 1999; Villagomez, 1999).

From Mexico, Maria Villagomez (1999) describes a community kitchen project in an urban community, as well as projects for women in rural communities which included savings clubs, and credit and sewing cooperatives. From their participation in a local community kitchen, participants were encouraged to start a social enterprise and join women’s organizations concerned with social and global issues. These projects have reinforced women’s traditional roles, even as they have provided women with some material stability and “transformed their positions within the community, their relationships with other community members as well as with community authorities. Through this experience, the women of Valencianita are beginning to take part in the public sphere and to claim a political space” (Villagomez, 1999, pp. 202-203). Fostering both societal transformation and social conformity, the projects reiterate the dialectical nature of resistance which Sparks (1997) explicates so clearly.

From Canada, Deborah Moffatt and Marie Lou Morgan (1999) describe two projects initiated by the Toronto-based anti-hunger organization FoodShare which “bring to life examples

Shopping & Country of Origin Effect: Does it matter where your money goes?

Comment posted by Jules, Tue, 2006/05/09

When you go shopping, does it matter to you where the item you are buying was made? Do you deliberately go out of your way to buy Australian/American/Canadian/your own country of origin items, over items made by another country? Even if they are more expensive?....

The “Buy Australian Made” campaign has been running in Australia for YEARS – I cannot remember when it started since I can’t remember NOT seeing the triangular green & gold kangaroo tag on products. And even though I know that buying Australian made items means more money staying in Australia and more jobs for Australians, I don’t find it enough of a reason to change my purchasing habits....

So if the sweater or jeans that I like says Made in China, I’ll buy them.... And I’ll buy Kraft Peanut Butter (made in Australia, owned by an American company) because I like it better than the brand that is both Australian-owned and Australian-made.

But then I realised that there is a line that I draw with buying Australian made, and that is with fresh produce and meat, when I will always buy locally grown. Even if it is ridiculously expensive....

So how far does your patriotism extend when shopping?

Patriotism isn’t the only reason...

Comment by Pam posted Wed, 2006/05/10

I’m a million miles from a You-Ess-Ay screaming flag waver but I do think carefully about where my goods are made.

It’s not about patriotism, however. It’s about workers [sic] rights. USA made goods used to primarily come from union shops where the workers were treated fairly. With the unions weakened and nearly all of our manufacturing jobs moving overseas, it’s nigh impossible to get US made underwear anymore – for example. So now, I look for union shops. Often, I just skip the shopping because I can’t stand the moral conundrum and get my clothes second hand. (Okay I DO draw the line at second hand underwear and socks.)

I buy my produce from a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) not because I think my strawberries should be American, but because the produce from close to home and from organic CSAs has a lower environmental impact than factory farm produce from somewhere across the planet. It’s got nothing to do with my lettuce being American, it’s to do with it being local.

– Postings on *BlogHer – Where the women bloggers are*, Retrieved June 14, 2006 from <http://blogher.org/node/5200>

of how women use food as a catalyst for personal and political change” (p. 221). The Good Food Box is “a community-based non-profit fresh-fruit-and-vegetable distribution system” (p. 226), and Focus on Food was a one-year training program which provided life-skills training “as well as opportunities to learn about food through gardening, food preparation, cooking and catering, and nutrition education” (p. 230) to a group of women on social assistance. According to Moffatt and Morgan (1999), “Each food project demonstrates how women have, in one way or another, taken back some control over the food supply from large corporate players and in the process have redefined who has access to healthy food and how it is accessed” (p. 222). Focus on Food utilized an especially strong popular education approach, building on participants' experiences and knowledge as immigrants, women and people living in poverty. Like the Mexican projects discussed by Maria Dolores Villagomez (1999), these two projects illustrate how, through collective action and incidental, holistic learning, consumer-citizens can issue a radical challenge to assumptions about and practices of everyday shopping, consumption and citizenship during contemporary globalization.

Among members of the middle or upper classes in the Global North, resistance to the hegemonic version of globalization seems more unorganized and solitary. Their resistance might also be based in shopping and consumption practices, and it might be heartfelt, but it does not seem to engage them in the tightly knit collectivities described above. (☹) A reflection of the neoliberal, consumerist ideologies which envision an idealized middle class consuming citizen, this tendency also reflects the realities that, in capitalist societies, wealthier people have greater individual freedom and choice – in shopping as elsewhere – than poorer people. It is precisely this more solitary, unorganized learning and resistance which has gone largely unnoticed, or at least unstudied, by scholars in the adult education field and is at the centre of this inquiry.

Still, there are attempts to bridge the solitary and the collective aspects of shopping and consumption by building global movements focused on shoppers and their shopping. They promote ideological alternatives to unfettered consumerism, and practical alternatives to harmful consumption. The organic movement combines concerns about consumers' and farmers' health and ecology, while the local consumption movement, popularized by the original 100-Mile dieters here in Vancouver, combines concerns about the local economy, food security and the environmental impact of transport. The voluntary simplicity movement rejects rampant consumerism, and aims to reorient consumers' priorities so that “our most authentic and alive

Social activist groups often try to structure their organizations and activities to be models for, or to prefigure, the kind of ideal society they are striving to create. Culture jammers participate in the creation of culture and knowledge, enact politics, open transitional spaces, create community, and engage their whole selves—intellect, body, and emotions.

– Jennifer Sandlin, “Popular Culture, Cultural Resistance, and Anticonsumption Activism,” pp. 80-81

self is brought into direct and conscious contact with the living” (Elgin, 1993, p. 25). The fair trade movement attracts consumers who want “to bring their values and beliefs into alignment with the way they live. And part of this transition includes changes in people’s purchasing habits, switching to fairly traded goods, organic foods, items made from recycled materials; alternative health products; and spiritual goods” (Grimes, 2005, p. 241). Concerns typically raised in the fair trade movement include exploitive labour, environmental sustainability, social justice and peace. Fair trade has had “rapid growth, even as the annual growth of world trade declines” (Grimes, 2005, p. 242). Tracing the development of the fair trade movement from its beginnings in American Mennonite and Brethren shops in the 1940s to today’s network of religious and secular associations, producers and stores, Grimes (2005) links this movement to citizenship and consumption, explaining how it is “exemplary of participatory democracy”:

Fair trade creates a bridge between the peoples of the developing nations and those of the developed ones. For consumers in First World countries, fair trade gives people the opportunity to not only purchase products that support their values of a more socially just and equitable world trade order, but to also learn about the producers’ lives, their struggles, and our mutual interdependence. (pp. 237-238)

Culture jamming (see, for example, Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Lasn, 1999; Sandlin, 2007) is another response which attempts to encourage consumer-citizens – both culture jammers (👁) and their audiences – to learn about and change their shopping and consumption. Moreover, it works by reclaiming space from corporate control for the benefit of public pedagogy and even enjoyment. By doing so, it challenges the infiltration of corporate-consumer ideology and a consumerist version of globalization, and demands a reconsideration of ideas such as the commons.

For some people, social justice extends beyond relations among human beings, and incorporates animals of all sorts; part of the radical agenda of societal transformation for them is the promotion of vegetarianism and animal rights (see, for example, Connelly & Prothero, 2008). For others, adopting a vegetarian diet, like an organic diet, is a matter of personal health rather than societal transformation. This holds true for the burgeoning interest in environmentalism, manifest in the “100-Mile Diet.” These can all be forms of resistance to some aspect of globalization; however, they do not necessarily challenge hegemonic gender, race and class relations. Conceptually, they reiterate Sparks’ (1997) caution that resistance to one social relational structure is likely to involve complicity in other structures. As scholars such as Roberta Sassatelli (2006), Deirdre Shaw (2007) and Connelly and Prothero (2008) point out, different consumers often do the same thing for different reasons or do different things for the same

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reason. This reality leaves consumption choices “fragmented and potentially conflicting” (Sassatelli, 2006, p. 224), and makes it difficult – if not impossible – to discern when consumers' decisions are politically motivated and exactly what politics are behind a shopping practice. On the other hand, this kind of confusion can also surface in the realm of formal politics. Citizens might vote a certain way because of long standing affiliations with a political party; or, they might cast so-called “protest votes” to ensure that the party in power is not returned to office; or, thinking that their first-choice candidate cannot win, they might cast defensive votes for their second choice in order to avoid, what is for them, an even worse outcome. Formal politics are, it seems, no less confusing and complicated than consumer politics, even if citizenship and consumption retain important distinctions.

In many Western societies, the historical and social connection between consumption and citizenship has been surpassed, and these two concepts are increasingly conflated. Various perspectives on and practices of conscientious consumption are seen “as a form of political activity...or as a new form of political participation” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, p. 130). Additionally, a great deal of consumption in the Global North now takes place through processes of shopping, so that shopping provides an entrée into an exploration of understandings and experiences of consumption, citizenship and globalization. According to Sassatelli (2006), “People are increasingly and explicitly asked to think that to shop is to vote and that ethical daily purchases, product boycotts and consumer voice may be the only way that men and women around the world have to intervene in the workings of global markets” (pp. 219-220).

In this inquiry, I combine a critical perspective on consumption and consumerism with a notion of holistic incidental learning (Dirkx, 2001; English, 2000; Foley, 1999, 2001; hooks 2003; Tisdell, 1998, 2000). At the same time, I reject a simplistic conflation between citizenship and consumption, or democracy and capitalism. Sassatelli (2006) issues the important reminder that, contrary to a discourse of the free choice provided to shoppers through capitalist globalization,

the social sciences have shown that the *de gustibus non disputandum est* which seems to make of consumption a space where subjects can and must freely express themselves is more a wish than a social reality. In reality, tastes are anything but indisputable. Judgments are made on the basis of taste, and people are preferred and rewarded because of their own tastes and those of others. (p. 220)

I also contextualize shopping and learning, as well as citizenship and globalization, in terms of the setting in which this study has been based: the area in and around the City of Vancouver, British Columbia. As I discuss further in chapter four, my participants and I have

The counterculture has always protested against excessive consumerism, bemoaning the effects of excessive waste and greed on the environment. Riding on this discussion is the final, concluding and contentious observation: that the counterculture has now become consumer culture. Any alternative lifestyle or anti-consumerist ethic has become co-opted, been branded, marketed and sold back to us. This is the thesis of Heath and Potter (2005), and perhaps will leave a slightly nasty taste in the mouth in the last few pages. Although not a novel thesis, it is worth considering here since it revisits the contested “terrain of culture” that Gramsci (1971) and Hall (1989) describe. Thus the idea of the counterculture itself becomes oxymoronic, for no real countering is being achieved, only more consumption.

– Mark Paterson (2006), *Consumption and Everyday Life*, p. 225

enjoyed many social privileges. During this study, we were, overall, members of Canada's middle class, and many of us described ourselves as white. My use of shopping to frame an exploration of learning about globalization underscores the continual influence of gender, race and class on this study.

Shopping is generally a topic of interest and concern to “middle Canadians” – those who self-identify as middle class and in the racial mainstream. The understandings and experiences of shopping discussed in this thesis reflect and are limited by the social locations of participants and me. It is the potential to tie them to the understandings and experiences of people in other social and geographic locations which makes them useful and important. All of the participants in this inquiry described their engagement in politicized shopping practices, whether or not they also considered themselves and their practices to be radical. Trying not to presuppose anybody's understandings, motivations or purposes, I welcomed individuals into my study as long as they identified with the terminology that I used in my call for participants. Ironically, although they had responded to my call for “radical shoppers,” most participants quickly rejected the word radical as a descriptor of themselves or their shopping practices in their conversations with me.

As this inquiry has progressed, I have been encouraged to question the meaning of the word radical and the potential for radicalism in the arena of shopping and, for that matter, elsewhere in contemporary social life. Recognizing the limitations of shopping as a strategy of resistance, I nonetheless have attempted to move beyond cynicism about shopping and consumption. (👁) This is, when all is said and done, a study of learning. I view shopping as a first step, rather than an endpoint, in critical learning about globalization and citizenship, and how gender, race and class are implicated in these concepts and practices. Shoppers cannot buy their way out of the margins, nor can they use shopping and consumption to fully realize all of the rights and status accorded in discourses of citizenship. What remains of interest to me in this inquiry is, first, how shopping can function as a site and process of informal learning, especially critical, holistic learning, and, second, how it can spur action for Canadian consumer-citizens concerned about contemporary globalization and its connections to ongoing social divisions and newer threats.

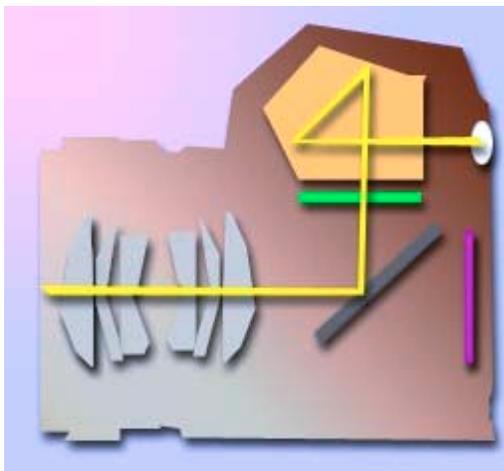


Figure 3.1: Single lens reflex camera. Retrieved and adapted February 18, 2008 from *Wikimedia Commons*, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:SLR_luz-visor.png



ontology ...Any way of understanding the world, or some part of it, must make assumptions (which may be implicit or explicit) about what kinds of things do or can exist in that domain, and what might be their conditions of existence, relations of dependency, and so on. Such an inventory of kinds of being and their relations is an ontology. In this sense, each special science, including sociology, may be said to have its own ontology (for example, persons, institutions, relations, norms, practices, structures, roles, or whatever, depending on the particular sociological theory under consideration).

– John Scott and Gordon Marshall (Eds.) (2005), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, p. 463

CHAPTER THREE

SNAPPING THE PICTURE: ENVISIONING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Having laid out the analytical concepts that I will use in this inquiry, I move now to a discussion of what Lincoln and Guba (2000) outline as the axioms of any research paradigm: ontology, epistemology and methodology. Largely guided by what they call a critical theoretical paradigm, this inquiry also shares some of the elements of what Lincoln and Guba (2001) consider a constructivist paradigm, as the following discussion will clarify. Once again, I use a metaphor to structure the discussion in this chapter. This time, it is the technology of photography. (👁)

Although the camera is often considered a technology that captures reality, the camera's mirror refracts light and flips images, and the presence of a viewfinder and a variable shutter speed clarify that any pictures it takes represent choices made by the photographer, just as any inquiry represents choices or understandings of the researcher about the world, knowledge, and how to conduct research. This seems like an apt metaphor, a nod to my incorporation of visual and other unconventional forms of data into this proposal and my inquiry. As visual sociologists acknowledge, "the photographic image is 'true' in the sense (physical or electronic manipulation aside) that it holds a visual trace of a reality the camera was pointed at. But more fundamentally, all images, despite their relationship to the world, are socially and technically constructed" (Harper, 1998, p. 29).

Ontological Lens

My lens in this research is the *ontological stance* or worldview that I adopt. (👁) While a wide angle lens might be akin to quantitative research, both of which attempt to "see" the world in terms of breadth, a telephoto lens is more like the qualitative research that I undertook. The telephoto lens and the qualitative study both attempt to see details in pictures or hear details in individuals' life stories. This qualitative study conceptualizes human life and meaning as experienced and constructed within the context of both persistent social structures (e.g., capitalism, patriarchy, racism), and variations in time, place and personal circumstances. The combination of persistence and variability makes possible my understanding of hegemony, ideology and common which are being constantly adjusted but always retain traces of power relations from different times and places. As Williams (1980) states, "It would be in many ways preferable if we could begin from a proposition which originally was equally central, equally authentic: namely the proposition that social being determines consciousness" (p. 31).

Thus, the Gramscian notion of struggle within popular culture not only emphasizes the agency of individual readers/viewers[/shoppers], but equate cultural consumption with the making of history. Everyday activities...are associated with the political rather than the private realm, elevating their status within academic inquiry.

– Dawn Currie (1999), “*Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*,” p. 66



epistemology The philosophical theory of knowledge – of how we know what we know. Epistemology is generally characterized by a division between two competing schools of thought: rationalism and empiricism. Both traditions of thought received their most systematic philosophical expressions in the context of the scientific revolution of the 17th century. Both approaches were concerned with finding secure foundations for knowledge, and clearly distinguishing such well-grounded knowledge from mere prejudice, belief, or opinion. The model of certainty which impressed the rationalists (Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza) was that found in the formal demonstrations of logic and mathematics. They sought to reconstruct critically the total of human knowledge by the employment of such “pure” reasoning from indubitable axioms or foundations (hence Descartes’ “I think therefore I am”). The empiricists (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) took direct acquaintance with the “impressions” of sense-experience as their bedrock of infallible knowledge. Disputes between rationalists and empiricists centred especially on the possibility of innate knowledge acquired a priori, or independently of experience.

The 18th –century German philosopher Immanuel Kant is widely held to have achieved a transcendence of this conflict of ideas, insisting that a framework of basic organizing concepts (space, time, causality, and others) could not be acquired by experience alone, yet was necessary for us to be able to interpret the world of experience at all. These concepts were therefore prior to experience, but nevertheless (a nod in the direction of the empiricists) they could only be used to make objective judgements within the bound of possible experience....

– John Scott and Gordon Marshall (Eds.) (2005), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, p. 193-194

In their discussion of ontological paradigms, Lincoln and Guba (2000) discuss the emphasis on social structures as an element of the critical theory paradigm, while an emphasis on individuals' meaning-making is seen as consistent with the constructivist paradigm. They also acknowledge that, although paradigms are useful in outlining central features and purposes, paradigmatic boundaries are often breached in contemporary scholarship. Within their framework, my ontological stance combines critical theory and constructivism, as well as emerging feminist and critical race paradigms. This often uneasy combination of some elements typically regarded as structural and other elements typically regarded as poststructural reiterates Gramsci's (1971) understanding of dialectic, and applies this concept to questions of the social and the cultural, structure and agency, materiality and discourse. (👁)

Epistemological Prism

The understandings that I have about knowledge and learning – my *epistemological stance* – are analogous to the prism of a camera, through which information passes. (👁) As the researcher, I act as a sort of intellectual prism, turning information selectively into knowledge. Depending on the shape and angles of my prism, which informs the theoretical, conceptual and methodological choices that I make (Harding, 1987b; Letherby, 2003; Morrow & Brown, 1994; Naples, 2003), information assumes meaning and usefulness. Returning to Gramsci, Killian Kehoe (2003) notes that his epistemology resonates with later poststructural and postmodern scholarship which disrupts traditional Western conceptions of knowledge. Gramsci's writing also resonates with Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) on the Aristotelian concepts of phronesis, or context-specific, experientially based knowledge, episteme, or universal knowledge developed through “analytic rationality,” and *techne*, the “technical knowledge and skills...[derived from] pragmatic instrumental rationality” (p. 56).

Taking up Dreyfus' five-stage learning model, Flyvbjerg outlines how learners progress from novice to expert, but only reach the deepest levels of knowledge, evident in intuitive problem-solving, through phronesis. In adopting the sciences' insistence that epistemic knowledge is purest form, social scientists have largely abandoned the search for phronetic knowledge. Such an approach to building knowledge is mistaken “in the study of human affairs, [where] there exists only context-dependent knowledge, which thus presently rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 71).

What are the implications of Flyvbjerg's (2001) and Gramsci's (1971) methodological arguments for my inquiry? In investigating shopping-as-learning, I incorporate feminist, critical

Once we undertake to use women's experience as a resource to generate scientific problems, hypotheses, and evidence, to design research for women, and to place the researcher in the same critical plane as the research subject, traditional epistemological assumptions can no longer be made.

– Sandra Harding (1987a), "Conclusion: Epistemological Questions," p. 181



The idea of 'objective' in metaphysical materialism would appear to mean an objectivity that exists even apart from man [sic]; but when one affirms that a reality would exist even if man did not, one is either speaking metaphorically or one is falling into a form of mysticism.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 446

Foreshadowing poststructuralism and other critiques of structuralism, Gramsci argues that history and the historical residues within language are fundamental in operations of power, prestige and hegemony. Gramsci emphasizes that meaning is created by language in its metaphorical development with respect to previous meanings. New meanings replace previous ones in a continual process of development.

– Peter Ives (2004), *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, p. 88



Since the mid-1980s we have witnessed the rise of postmodern theorizing in much educational and feminist scholarship. Such scholarship has long been fascinated with Michel Foucault in particular, and Gramsci is no longer a fashionable theorist. This theoretical move has seen an eroded interest in the economy and social class, and intensified concern with discourse, difference and subjectivity and with consumption rather than production. Throughout this period there has been much more interest in mini-narratives rather than metanarratives, multiple identities rather than political identities, positioning rather than repositioning, discourse rather than the politics of discourse, performance rather than poverty, inscription rather than political mobilization, and deconstruction rather than reconstruction.

– Jane Kenway (2001), "Remembering and Regenerating Gramsci," p. 60

race and critical cultural studies scholarship, and the assumptions associated with those bodies of scholarship must be incorporated into my methodological framework. Two important perspectives, which are often presented as incompatible rather than in tension with each other, are feminist materialism, often represented by feminist standpoint theory, and poststructuralism or postmodernism. In its later iterations which I tend to draw on here, feminist standpoint theory contends that knowledge is subjective and multiple, and that marginalized groups – such as women in a patriarchal society – yield especially deep knowledge. In her Marxist version of standpoint theory, Nancy Hartsock (1987) extends her analysis to class position which, she explains, “not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations...[so that] in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse” (p. 159). Feminist standpoint theorists, like other feminist materialists, challenge “authorized” knowledge (Letherby, 2003), by legitimating women's knowledge and validating experiential, disparate knowledges. (☞)

Given the period when he lived and his affiliation with Marxist politics, Gramsci's writing pre-dates poststructural and feminist writing about the social construction and mutability of identity and knowledge. Still, in his writing about the role of civil society, intellectuals, ideology and common sense in producing hegemony, Gramsci (1971) moves away from the notion of power as residing in government, toward the notion of power relations, “so that power is diffused throughout civil society as well as being embodied in the coercive apparatuses of the state” (Simon, 1991, p. 28). His ideas can be seen as approaching later poststructural or postmodern theories of power relations. Moreover, Gramsci's initial education in linguistics and his break with the structuralist theories of language popular at the time indicate a seemingly poststructural sensibility (Ives, 2004). (☞)

On the other hand, many scholars poststructural or postmodern eschew an attachment to Gramsci and other theorists regarded as materialists (Kenway, 2001). (☞) One of their main objections to critical theory, including feminist standpoint theory, is that the notion of collectivity, suggested by gender- or class-based groupings, is inconsistent with the local and personal contexts in which identity is constructed (Hekman, 1997). Pointing to intra-group differences, they ask who is capable of understanding and speaking for whom. They also look to textual, rather than material, sources of meaning and difference. In response to this critique, feminist standpoint theorists contend that theirs – like Gramsci's – is a political project (Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1997; Smith, 1997). “Knowledge,” in the context of their work, is constructed

Notice that it is “women’s experiences” in the plural which provide the new resources for research. This formulation stresses several ways in which the best feminist analyses differ from traditional ones. For one thing, once we realized that there is no universal man, but only culturally different men and women, then “man’s” eternal companion – “woman” – also disappeared. That is, women come only in different classes, races, and cultures: there is no “woman” and no “woman’s experience.” Masculine and feminine are always categories within gender, since women’s and men’s experiences, desires, and interests differ according to class, race, and culture.

– Sandra Harding (1987b), “Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?,” p. 7



Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

– Laurel Richardson (2000), “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” p. 934

on the basis of experiences of socio-economic privilege or marginalization, and valued for its potential to create “accounts of society that can be used to work for more satisfactory social relations” (Hartsock, 1997, p. 370). Unpredictable intra-group differences are present but do not eliminate structurally created divisions which have operated in social life and influenced socially constructed knowledge. Particularly in later iterations of their ideas, feminist standpoint theorists respond to challenges by and insights of poststructuralists and postmodernists, even as they insist that social groupings such as gender, race and class remain present in society and that focusing research on marginalized groups can help produce knowledge that is useful in building socially just understanding and change. (👁)

Some of the feminist poststructural or postmodern scholars hold to the possibility of incorporating a political purpose within their research, in spite of the trouble that they see with social collectivities. Within that process, political resistance is newly “defined as challenging the hegemonic discourse that writes a particular script for a certain category of subjects. Resistance is effected by employing other discursive formations to oppose that script, not by appealing to universal subjectivity or absolute principles” (Hekman, 1997, p. 357). For Richardson (2000), “a postmodern position does allow us to know 'something' without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing” (p. 928). Knowledge and resistance are possible, but only in a tentative manner, restricted by a limited understanding of both problems and solutions. She even uses the image of crystallization – similar to the metaphor of epistemology as prism – in discussing how ways of knowing and knowledges that can be produced by research are multiple. As researchers make even slight changes in how they gather and interpret information, a range of learnings become possible – just as looking through a moving prism or crystal produces changing views. (👁)

So, how do I bring together strands of thought that are often presented in opposition or, at least, contrast with, each other? How does Gramsci (1971) continue to contribute to my project which is both intellectual and political? In response to the first question, I find poststructural and postmodern writing often philosophical and abstract, yielding few concrete suggestions for research which aims to facilitate societal change. For example, poststructural discourse analysis offers the possibility of social critique, but how (and, indeed, whether) this methodology proposes to change social relations remains unclear (see Naples, 2003, p. 68). Like Nancy Naples, a self-described feminist materialist who draws on the work of the feminist standpoint theorists, I aim to maintain a dialectical relationship between materialist concerns with

Certainly the philosophy of praxis is realised through the concrete study of past history and through present activity to construct new history. But a theory of history and politics can be made, for even if the facts are always unique and changeable in the flux of movement of history, the concepts can be theorised. Otherwise one would not even be able to tell what movement is, or the dialectic, and one would fall back into a new form of nominalism.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 427

structures of gender, race and class, and poststructuralism's insistence that language and culture, and the localized contexts in which they are used, are important in the construction of identity. I have already noted that Gramsci's writings pre-date feminist standpoint theory and poststructuralism or postmodernism. How he might have stretched his ideas in response to these perspectives is itself an unanswerable question. What is evident is that, from his initial motivation to understand why Marx's prediction of proletariat revolution failed to materialize beyond Russia, he developed his theory of the role of ideology, civil society and consent in maintaining and challenging social relations and knowledge that remains useful (Hall, 1991; Morton, 1999; Sassoon, 2001), and an epistemological perspective that seems, at times, amazingly contemporary. Writing in isolation and ill health as a political prisoner in Mussolini's Italy, Gramsci was undeniably rooted in particular partisan politics and personal circumstances. Still, as cultural studies scholars recognized after they began reading Gramsci's work when it was made available in English in the early 1970s, Gramsci's ideas on knowledge, as well as on culture and social relations, have a usefulness beyond their roots. As Stuart Hall (1991) advises, "I do not claim that, in any simple way, Gramsci 'has the answers' or 'holds the key' to our present troubles. I do believe that we must 'think' our problems in a Gramscian way – which is different" (p. 114). (👁)

Taking Hall's (1991) suggestion, I return to Gramsci's (1971) work in determining my epistemological stance, in "thinking" the problems central to this inquiry. Here, I find the work in critical cultural studies, as well as the feminist and critical race scholarship already reviewed above, helpful. Knowledge, in this perspective, is understood as emerging and constructed (by both participants and me) in the telling, hearing, seeing, reading and sharing of various conversations, texts and found objects or images. There are elements of phenomenology and subjectivism in the epistemological assumptions of this inquiry, as I emphasize people's lived experiences, and their understandings of and feelings about them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Saukko, 2001). At the same time, I remain convinced that social divisions continue to influence how individuals experience and understand cultural phenomena. This is the epistemological position of scholars such as Currie (1999) who combines questions of the social and the cultural in her work, and develops a critical cultural studies perspective which "aims to make visible and put into crisis the structural links between the disciplining of knowledge and larger social arrangements" (p. 93). Although this current inquiry does not focus on marginalized groups, it retains the critical assumption of feminist standpoint theorists that gender, race and class have

methodology ... The principal concern of methodology is wider philosophy of science issues in social science, and the study of how, in practice, sociologists and others go about their work, how they conduct investigations and assess evidence, how they decide what is true and false. The topics addressed include whether the social sciences are in fact sciences; whether the social scientist needs to understand a sequence of social actions to explain it fully; whether there are laws in the social sciences which can predict as well as explain; whether research can be, or should be, value-free; causation and causal powers; inductive and deductive theory; verification and falsification; and other problems in the philosophy of knowledge and science (most of which are treated under separate headings in this dictionary).

– John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2005), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, pp. 406-407



It has to be established that every research has its own specific method and constructs its own specific science, and that the method has developed and been elaborated together with the development and elaboration of this specific research and science and forms with them a single whole. To think that one can advance the progress of a work of scientific research by applying to it a standard method, chosen because it has given good results in another field of research to which it was naturally suited, is a strange delusion which has little to do with science. There do however exist certain general criteria which could be held to constitute the critical consciousness of every man [sic] of science whatever his “specialization”, criteria which should always be spontaneously vigilant in his work. Thus one can say someone is not a scientist if he displays a lack of sureness of the concepts he is using, if he has scant information on an understanding of the previous state of the problems he is dealing with, if he is not very cautious in his assertions, if he does not proceed in a necessary but in an arbitrary and disconnected fashion, if he cannot take account of the gaps that exist in knowledge acquired but covers them over and contents himself with purely verbal solutions and connections instead of stating that one is dealing with provisional positions which may have to be gone over again and developed, etc.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 438-439

epistemological effects. According to this perspective, social categories and relations “are produced and enacted in historically [and geographically] specific situations” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). Finally, my concentration on discourses and practices of shopping inserts an element of cultural studies into this inquiry. As I discuss in later chapters, the dialectic between these perspectives creates constrained possibilities for knowing and acting during contemporary globalization in Vancouver, Canada.

Releasing the Shutter: Research Methodology

The last step in taking a photograph with an SLR camera is releasing the shutter, so that the image already viewed by the photographer and manipulated by other parts of the camera can be captured on film; this is like *methodology*, the third axiom of the research paradigm and the final consideration in designing a research project (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). (☹) As Gramsci (1971) again conveys, any understanding of social relations requires inquiries based in particular settings, because social relations are enacted in the context of particular historical processes and local situations. This means that social sciences require different methodologies from the natural or physical sciences, and that no single methodological approach is desirable or possible across the social sciences. (☹)

Within social science disciplines, case study methodology is often proposed as one sound option for researchers. Beyond the agreement that case study places real life context in the foreground of the inquiry, however, “there are virtually no specific requirements guiding case research” (Meyer, 2001, p. 329). Raymond Morrow and David Brown (1994) include within their understanding of this methodology the approaches of historical analysis, ethnography, participant action research and discourse analysis. Andrew Sturman (1999) provides a similar list of research “styles,” including ethnographic, action research, evaluative and educational case studies. Alternatively, other scholars discuss case study, ethnography and action research as distinct methodologies (Darke & Shanks, 2002; Meyer, 2001). Characteristics that are regarded as common to case study research include use of multiple information-gathering techniques; a concern with relationships between elements of the case; the case’s usefulness in investigating new or little understood phenomena; and its basis in the concrete (Darke & Shanks, 2002; Meyer, 2001; Sturman, 1999). Critical research also values self-reflection or reflexivity, and is “not only distinctive in its concern with reflexive methods but also dialectical in its use of empirical techniques” (Morrow & Brown, 1994, p. 245).

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Flyvbjerg's (2001) emphasis on phronetic, experiential learning leads to his endorsement of case study methodology (including ethnography) in the social sciences. He identifies and rebuts five “misunderstandings” about case study methodology: that it produces less valuable knowledge than positivist research; that its lack of generalizability means that it “cannot contribute to scientific development” (p. 66); that it is most useful for developing preliminary theories about new or under-studied phenomena; that its subjective nature makes it easy for researchers to verify their own assumptions; and that it is difficult to develop concise summaries and general theories from case studies. As I have already asserted, the social sciences are distinguished from the natural or physical sciences by the importance of context and the impossibility of timeless, formulaic generalizations; therefore, the first two objections to case study methodology demonstrate the mistaken preference for positivist, generalizable research models rather than faults with case study methodology.

In addressing the third objection, Flyvbjerg draws on the argument of Karl Popper to illustrate the value of case studies: “Popper himself used the now famous example of 'all swans are white,' and proposed that just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition and in this way have general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory-building” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 77). The fourth misunderstanding is disputed with the explanation that all methods impose researchers' biases and assumptions, evident in the selection of variables and the construction of categories. Finally, Flyvbjerg (2001) sees the “irreducible quality of good case narratives” (p. 84) as a reflection of the complexity of the case studied, rather than a fault of the methodology. Summarizing the clash between qualitative and quantitative research, Flyvbjerg (2001) says, “The advantage of large samples is breadth, while their problem is one of depth. For the case study, the situation is the reverse. Both approaches are necessary for a sound development of social science” (p. 87). Here again, Flyvbjerg's argument is consistent with Gramsci's (1971) derision of scholars of the social who overlook qualitative research.

If Flyvbjerg (2001) shares Gramsci's (1971) support for qualitative research, feminist standpoint theorists share Gramsci's politically driven research agenda. Among the standpoint theorists, Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990) provides a notably complete “methodological guidepost for investigation” (Naples, 2003, p. 198), which she calls “institutional ethnography.” Although I did not conduct an institutional ethnography in this study, I note Smith's (1987) proviso that, to be of value, any case has to contribute to a larger project.

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Attempting to integrate materialist and poststructural perspectives in her methodological work, Naples (2003) offers additional points for researchers interested in societal transformation. Just as study participants embody social locations, so too do researchers (a point discussed further in the following section). These positions “influence what questions we ask, whom we approach in the field, how we make sense of our fieldwork experience, and how we analyze and report our findings” (Naples, 2003, p. 197). Naples also notes that, as agents, participants can be engaged in interpreting their own experiences and, especially in participant action research, can be involved in collaborative analysis and report-writing. Finally, Naples draws on Patricia Hill Collins' (1997) thoughts – which recall the thoughts of hooks (2003) – about the value of emotions (for both researchers and participants) and empathy in producing and interpreting data (see Naples, 2003, p. 61), as well as the recognition of a distinct standpoint for black women.

Responding to standpoint theory, especially the notion of racial standpoint developed by Collins (1997), Twine (2000) raises several cautions. In practice, standpoint theory can lead to the conclusion that racial “insiders” – researchers who are also members of the group being investigated – are best able to understand and elicit information from their participants. “Racial matching” is problematic because, as Twine (2000) notes, “race is not the only relevant 'social signifier'” (p. 9). Insider status can mislead researchers into bringing their own experientially based preconceptions and expectations into their inquiries and analyses or, conversely, can create expectations among participants that researchers will “conform to cultural norms that can restrict them as researchers” (Twine, 2000, p. 12). Although participants who share an identification with a researcher might feel more comfortable sharing information, they might also withhold information that they assume is already known by the researcher. Finally, as feminist standpoint theorists now readily acknowledge, “[a] standpoint is a project, not an inheritance; it is achieved, not given” (Weeks, 1996 in Hartsock, 1997, p. 372). What is problematic is the simplistic expectation that “whites, as members of the dominant racial group, ... [are not] knowledgeable about race and racism. In contrast, racial subalterns are assumed to possess a sophisticated understanding of racism” (Twine, 2000, p. 21). Even critically minded marginalized participants who share a racial identification do not necessarily attach the same meaning to that identification. Social divisions such as race (and gender and class etc.) are constructed differently in different societies; hence, geography is reinstalled as one determinant of social location. These issues complicate the determination of who is capable of representing which racial or social group and of “one’s authority to make certain knowledge claims” (Twine, 2000, p. 22).

The qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* or maker of quilts uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand (Becker, 1998, p. 2). If new tools or techniques have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choices as to which interpretive practices to employ are not necessarily set in advance. The 'choice of research practices depends up on the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context' (Nelson et al., 1992, p. 2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting.

– Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2000), “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” p. 4

In attempting to cope with this particular methodological issue, Naples (2003) refers to the work of Collins and Smith, who talk about the importance of dialogue “to decenter dominant discourse, and to continually displace and rework it to determine how power organizes social life and what forms of resistance are generated outside the matrix of domination or relations of ruling” (p. 53). From the former, she takes the idea of including participants of “diverse social locations” (p. 53); from the latter she takes the idea of engaging in dialogue between researcher and participants, in effect inserting the researcher into the inquiry in a self-reflective or reflexive way. Both of these strategies complicate the notion of “insider/outsider” status, at the same time as they recognize the reality and impact of differences. I attempt to use both of these tactics, albeit with limited success, throughout my inquiry.

Attempting to bring together these and other central points of different perspectives, Naples (2003) views hers as a “materialist feminist standpoint theory that incorporates important insights of postmodern analyses of power, subjectivity, and language as a powerful framework for exploring the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, region, and culture in different geographic and historical contexts” (p. 5). Also working from a feminist materialist perspective, Currie (1999) asks questions central to cultural studies. Her feminist/critical cultural studies approach stresses the importance of “a materialist analysis [which] discovers ideology and its working in the everyday activities of actual people. Within this context, systems of representation and processes of meaning-making are material expressions of ideology which make available as preferred meaning a 'frame of intelligibility,' or way of knowing” (Currie, 1999, p. 142).

Other methodologists have extended attempts to combine perspectives and insights in different ways. Joe Kincheloe (2001, 2005) builds on the writing of Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and outlines a new methodological direction which attempts to bridge critical purpose with poststructural thoughts about ontology, epistemology and methodology: bricolage. (☹) Although the design technicalities and ramifications of bricolage remain unclear – Kincheloe (2005) himself recognizes that bricolage is still being conceptualized – his call to multidisciplinary opens new possibilities for researchers interested in societal transformation. Well before bricolage was put forward as a methodological option in the social sciences, Gramsci seemed to embrace its spirit of multidisciplinary, drawing on his studies and knowledge of linguistics, philosophy, politics, sociology, history, drama and literature (Ives, 2004). Even Kincheloe (2005) refers to “the dialectical relationship between knowledge and reality” (p. 326), using language

On one level, the bricolage can be described as the process of getting down to the nuts and bolts of multidisciplinary research. Ethnography, textual analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, historiography, discourse analysis combined with philosophical analysis, literary analysis, aesthetic criticism, and theatrical and dramatic ways of observing and making meaning constitute the methodological bricolage. In this way, bricoleurs move beyond the blinds of particular disciplines and peer through a conceptual window to a new world of research and knowledge production.

– Joe Kincheloe (2005), “On to the Next Level” p. 323



To account for their cognizance of such complexity bricoleurs seek a rigor that alerts them to new ontological insights. In this ontological context, they can no longer accept the status of an object of inquiry as a thing-in-itself.

– Joe Kincheloe (2001), “Describing the Bricolage,” pp. 681-682

that recalls Gramsci's (1971) thoughts. Perhaps this is an example of how Gramsci's incarceration and isolation contributed to, rather than detracted from his scholarship: Although the harsh conditions of imprisonment doubtlessly took their toll on Gramsci's health and state of mind (Crehan, 2005), he was able to commit a great amount of time to contemplate his diverse interests. His inclusion of knowledge from several disciplines in developing his social concepts and arguments seems to correspond with the understanding of the bricoleur developed by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as someone who uses whatever tools are available to address a problem.

Kincheloe (2001, 2005) expands Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) notion of the bricoleur and bricolage methodology in his subsequent articles. (👁) The requirement of researcher multidisciplinary is stretched to include comprehensive knowledge of individual disciplinary research traditions and assumptions, a kind of “Foucauldian genealogy where scholars would study the social construction of the discipline’s knowledge bases, epistemologies, and knowledge production methodologies” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 683). As he also notes, such a bricolage is so time consuming and intellectually demanding that some scholars have questioned the potential for researchers – especially student researchers – to put it to meaningful use. Here I think that Kincheloe moves away from the sense of bricolage articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and, indeed, the usefulness of this concept initially brought to the fore by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his descriptions of how members of one cultural group adopt and adapt tools from another cultural group in novel and unanticipated ways in dealing with their environments (see Kincheloe, 2001, p. 680).

In contrast to Lévi-Strauss' initial focus on the cross-cultural uses of tools in producing context-specific, practical knowledge, Kincheloe (2005) focuses on intended uses of intellectual tools in producing academic knowledge. This shift seems to keep research and knowledge construction situated as a traditional, academic, elite pursuit. Ironically, given Kinchleloe's declared interests in opening up qualitative research to contemporary insights, especially from poststructuralist scholarship, it also seems to treat research and knowledge-construction as a pursuit which retains the limitations of specific disciplinary assumptions and more general academic privilege. In the name of complexity, Kincheloe's (2005) bricolage issues some important rebuttals, including one to “monological forms of knowledge” (p. 326), as he portrays bricoleurs as researchers who “envision forms of research that transcend reductionism” (p. 327). (👁)

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I agree with Kincheloe when he draws on Denzin and Lincoln's image of "the bricoleur as intellectually informed, widely read, and cognizant of diverse paradigms of interpretation" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 327) and open to using a range of research strategies; however, his increasing reliance on complexity and chaos theories and his proposal that bricolage assume the quality of a Foucauldian genealogy seems to move his notion of bricolage away from what he maintains is a critical purpose for two reasons. First, as Peter McLaren (2001) notes, the ideas that occupy Kincheloe's attention detract from, rather than contribute to, an agenda of societal transformation. A complex phenomenon is not necessarily best explained by complexity or chaos theory and, while I will not delve into either of these of these theories here, I will say that, in my limited exposure to them, I do not find them helpful in directing research with a political, transformational purpose. Secondly, the expectation that the bricoleur build expertise in the history and rationale of a wide variety of disciplinary methodologies and retain a political purpose seems overwhelming, unless the purpose of the research is to discern methodological traditions. In his conceptualization of bricolage, partly in response to accusations of superficiality and lack of rigour, Kincheloe (2001, 2005) burdens bricoleurs with untenable demands of knowledge and perhaps above all, time and energy. Kincheloe (2001) asserts that an object of inquiry must be seen as more than a "thing-in-itself" (p. 682), that it must also always include a reflexive approach to ontological and epistemological assumptions and methodological processes. I concur with these assertions; however, I think that it is important for me, as a researcher, to be clear in my own mind and my writing about my political stance and purpose. There seems to be a certain irony in Kincheloe's poststructuralist-inspired advice that researchers avoid set conceptualizations, even though it is poststructuralists who argue that there is no such thing as neutrality.

Still, I think that bricolage makes a useful contribution to methodology in the social sciences. As Kincheloe (2005) notes, it requires a high degree of researcher reflexivity and conscious connection between the ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies and analytical concepts informing inquiries. Bricolage also offers a way of dealing with the multiple ways of knowing which have been explored in postcolonial, critical race, feminist and poststructural or postmodern scholarship. In mixing not just methods but methodologies, it supports new ways to combine concepts, and formulate both questions and at least tentative or partial answers to important contemporary research problems. Finally, it is designed to accommodate the numerous tensions and paradoxes which accompany today's globalization and, in keeping with my use of

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Gramsci's (1971) concepts and ideas, it understands human existence and issues as complex and dialectical in nature. Intrigued by the potential of bricolage, and understanding shopping as a case of informal learning, I use what I call “case study bricolage” methodology in this inquiry.

In addition to the traditional case study methods of interviewing and focus groups, I incorporate a form of participant observation, as I went on shopping trips with some participants. In the spirit of cultural studies, a field of study often associated with shopping and consumption, I also include popular culture, exemplified here by fiction, in my analysis. Finally, I have included visual images and texts that I have come across in the course of my inquiry. From graffiti in public spaces to blog entries, these items contribute to the evidence that I have gathered and helped construct. Their substantive differences invite different methodological approaches, from literary/narrative analysis to content analysis, or from semiotic analysis to intertextual analysis. I discuss these approaches and techniques in further in chapter four, as well as in the individual chapters detailing my analyses. Some of this material, particularly images and texts that I found in physical and virtual space, is never formally analyzed; its inclusion extends the analyses that I do conduct and suggests the breadth of data available to researchers.

Aperture, Speed and Focus: The Final Adjustments

As I planned and prepared to undertake my study, several epistemological and methodological questions arose. Sometimes, these related to matters that are likely common to qualitative research processes. At other times, these seemed more unusual and particular to this study. They were concerned with me as a researcher and in relation to participants, to participants themselves, and to the nature of the case under study and its unit of analysis.

What is a Case and where is the Evidence?

In this inquiry, I use what I call a case study bricolage methodology to investigate shopping as a case of critical, incidental, holistic learning. Shopping has not been explored often in this way and, as case study advocates claim, that methodology is especially well suited for studying new or rarely explored phenomena (Darke & Shanks, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Sturman, 1999). As Michael Patton (2002) further explains, “Cases are units of analysis” (p. 447). Although it is possible to view every participant in this inquiry as a distinct case, I do not tend to approach my data-gathering and analysis in this way. I do not, for example, systematically contrast one participant's comments against the comments of other participants; rather, I use participants' comments about shopping, as well as other data sources such as my

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observations during shopping trips and my reading of works of fiction, to establish the breadth of messages and learning strategies present in the arena of shopping.

In using shopping as a unit of analysis, this inquiry presents a case in an unconventional way. Unlike most case studies, this one is not tied to a particular setting, although it ultimately has been bound by geography, my own linguistic limitations and time. In this way, it has engaged in its own methodological dialectic, as it has both adopted and challenged mainstream rhetoric of case study methodology. My study's use of shopping, rather than a single shop or shopping area, illustrates the potential to stretch the understanding of what it means to define the boundaries of a case. Methodologically, this inquiry reflects and responds to a hegemonic conceptualization of globalization, which claims that a new status of global citizen has emerged as borders of the nation-state have become largely irrelevant. As my analytical discussion concludes, though, boundaries and their meanings might change but they have not disappeared.

I have already suggested that, as a bricoleur, I draw on Richardson's (2000) notion of crystallization and make use of ideas, methods and resources from various disciplines in social sciences and humanities. Bricolage demands a degree of “emergent design flexibility” (Patton, 2002, pp. 41-42). Investigating a complex question – How shopping can be a site and process of critical learning about the links between consumption, citizenship, social relations and learning during contemporary globalization? – I looked for evidence where it seemed most likely to be found, chiefly among shoppers, but I also incorporate evidence found along the way.

These research practices give rise to questions of validity. In contrast to traditional, positivist emphases on objectivity, universality and reliability, I borrow from poststructural and cultural studies scholarship in moving from “validity” to “validities.” Paula Saukko (2003) outlines three approaches to validity, which overlap somewhat. “Dialogic validity” (Saukko, 2003, p. 20) emphasizes a version of truthfulness achieved through researcher-participant collaboration, researcher self-reflexivity and inclusion of a broad range of possible stakeholders or participants. “Deconstructive validity” (Saukko, 2003, p. 20) emphasizes the “postmodern excess” (p. 20) of possible truths about a phenomenon under study, the socio-historical basis of taken-for-granted “common sense” (Gramsci, 1971) and “deconstructive critique” (Saukko, 2003, p. 21) which aims to question and break down binaries of social organization. “Contextual validity” (Saukko, 2003, p. 21) emphasizes “sensitivity to social context” (p. 22) and “awareness of historicity” (p. 22). Several elements of each approach are present in this inquiry. My incorporation of self-reflexivity is consistent with dialogic validity. My use of critical



Figure 3.2: M. C. Escher, "Hand with Reflecting Sphere"
Retrieved June 14, 2006 from <http://blogher.org/node/5200>
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I mean that one must conceive of man [sic] as a series of active relationships (a process) in which individuality, though perhaps the most important, is not, however, the only element to be taken into account. The humanity which is reflected in each individuality is composed of various elements: 1. the individual; 2. other men; 3. the natural world. But the latter two elements are not as simple as they might appear. The individual does not enter into relations with other men by juxtaposition, but organically, in as much, that is, as he belongs to organic entities which range from the simplest to the most complex. Thus Man does not enter into relations with the natural world just by being himself part of the natural world, but actively, by means of work and technique. Further: these relations are not mechanical. They are active and conscious. They correspond to the greater or lesser degree of understanding that each man has of them. So one could say that each one of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the hub....If one's own individuality is the *ensemble* of these relations, to create one's personality means to acquire consciousness of them to modify one's own personality means to modify the *ensemble* of these relations....It is not enough to know the ensemble of relations as they exist at any given time as a given system. They must be known genetically, in the movement of their formation. For each individual is the synthesis not only of existing relations, but of the history of these relations. He is a *présis* of the past.

– Antonio Gramsci (1971), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, pp. 351 & 353 (emphasis in original)

scholarship, my own critical reading of fiction and my conversations with participants (and later analysis of them) suggest an attempt to dismantle hegemonic binaries, which is consistent with deconstructive validity. My conceptualization of globalization, consumer-citizenship and learning as socio-historical constructions is consistent with deconstructive and contextual validities. Finally, my continual positioning of myself and this inquiry within the context of a contemporary Canadian West Coast urban setting indicates contextual validity of my data and analysis.

Primary data largely emerged from and were constructed within interviews, accompanied shopping trips and focus groups with participants who came forward in response to my call for individuals who had begun to connect their own shopping and consumption with an uneasiness about how they see globalization playing out. During this inquiry, I also picked up data that I happened to find. As I outline in the next chapter, I also draw on sources as diverse as popular scholarship, fictional narratives, postings to websites, and graffiti or other images in conducting this inquiry; for me, these are all sources of evidence as they articulate contemporary hegemonic or resistant ideologies and confirm or challenge “common sense.” They do not necessarily confirm one another but, with the aims of crystallization and bricolage in mind, they provide squares of fabric for my quilt.

Where am I in this Picture?: Researcher Reflexivity

Associated with questions of epistemology and methodology is the question of how researchers locate themselves in their research. Do they view themselves as inquisitive observers outside populations being studied, or as value-laden actors who cannot help but enter into their studies? Decades before this question, and the related question of insiderness/outsiderness was generally incorporated into social science research, M. C. Escher (1935) suggested a similar awareness of the artist’s presence in his own art. (👁) Gramsci (1971) too wondered about these issues. Like the intellect that, according to him, is evident in everyone, subjectivity develops organically. Gramsci’s (1971) insistence that relations between people, and between people and the world are “active and conscious” (p. 361) suggests why reflexivity is regarded as so important. (👁) We are, all of us, socially embedded, and our experience and knowledge of life is possible only within the context of historically based social relations.

Reflexivity begins with an awareness that researchers are always involved in the outcomes of their own research. Not only am I writing this dissertation; I have also had a hand in constructing data through conversations with participants. Although I developed a series of questions and exercises to guide interviews and focus groups, I was active in these interactions.

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When participants searched for words to complete their thoughts, I offered what I thought were good possibilities. I often tried to summarize participants' comments as we moved through a conversation, so that I was confident that I could represent their views. Sometimes participants asked questions of me and, although I tried to postpone my answers until we were close to the end of a meeting, I thought that it would be disrespectful to decline to answer their questions altogether. At other times, I repeatedly tried to engage participants in a discussion of a particular topic. I recognized participants in this inquiry as individuals who have thought carefully about the issues raised. Their responses to my call for radical shoppers implied that they were not easily intimidated. I assumed that they would stand up to me if I misunderstood them; indeed, there were several times when various participants corrected my understanding of their comments or pursuit of a line of thought which was inconsistent with their points of view.

In excerpting segments of conversations, I try to prevent the abstraction of data and to overcome the anonymity of research by retaining a sense of both conversational context and the cadence of individuals' speech. I include participants' and my own vocal inflections and imperfections – the “ums,” “likes,” “okays,” as well as the chuckles and pauses which are injected into talk. I acknowledge three ways that my presence becomes evident in this practice: first, through my obvious and active involvement in conversations; second, through my choices about how to code conversations; and, third, in my decisions about where to begin and end excerpts while coding data and inserting them, in a limited way, into this document.

This approach to conversation, text and writing is often associated with poststructural or postmodern scholars who advise “that writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our Self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but only partially present, for in our writing we repress parts of ourselves, too” (Richardson, 2000, p. 930). Researchers join participants as subjects of study as they attempt, in part, to understand themselves/their Selves. Michelle Fine (1998) suggests “that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations” (p. 135). By “working the hyphens” (Fine, 1998) between insiders and outsiders or Self and Other, researchers discard the positioning of the researcher as a neutral observer. Fine (1998) presents three possible strategies for working the hyphens: inserting “uppity voices” (p. 146) which challenge researchers' privilege and social anonymity; “probing the consciousness of dominant others” (p. 146); and engaging in research for with activists societal change.

The best feminist analysis...insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint.... This requirement is no ideal attempt to “do good” by the standards of imagined critics in classes, races, cultures (or of gender) other than that of the researcher. Instead, it is a response to the recognition that the cultural beliefs and behaviors of feminist researchers shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and andocentric researchers. We need to avoid the “objectivist” stance that attempts to make the researcher’s cultural beliefs and practices invisible while simultaneously skewering the research objects beliefs and practices to the display board.

– Sandra Harding (1997), “Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Whose Standpoint Needs the Regimes of Truth and Reality?,” p. 9

Although I did not set out in this inquiry to investigate a particular social group, I recognize the presence and importance of social groups in cultural processes and products, such as shopping and the consumables that shoppers buy. How I understand myself, how participants understand themselves, and how we understand ourselves in relation to one another, this project and our social world is part of my analysis. The extent to which I insert information about myself and my background, and personal reflections about my experiences and understandings throughout this text represent attempts to remember and remind my reader of my own active involvement in the construction of this project and its findings. Reflexivity, including the careful consideration of Self-Other and the disruption of “scientific neutrality, universal truths, and researcher dispassion” (Fine, 1998, p. 131), is an increasingly shared goal of feminist and critical scholars working from varied perspectives. (👁)

In response to these points, I have paused throughout this inquiry to consider my own social location. Starting with my reflections about my own background and experiences, acknowledging my active role in conversations with participants, and both recognizing and interrupting my interpretations are steps that I took as I moved through this inquiry. Like many participants in my study, I found it difficult at times to place myself categorically in a social spectrum. Gender seemed fairly straightforward, but race and class seemed trickier for me and, as I discuss more fully in a later section, for participants. I explore these issues in greater detail in later analytical chapters, as well as in Interlude 5.

If the Personal is Political, is the Private Public?: Notes on Ethics and Methodology

The empirical portion of this inquiry entailed my talking to shoppers. Shopping was the case here, a case of informal adult learning about the politics of consumption and their links to citizenship and globalization. The unit of analysis was the individual shopper and her shopping choices, understandings and practices. The shopper and the shopping was the subject of the inquiry, not the shop or the shopped-for; my argument followed the feminist line of reasoning that the personal is political.

I discuss my methods more fully in the following chapter; for now, I will say that I used a combination of interviews, focus groups and what I called modified participant observations. This latter technique, which involved my going shopping with individual participants, is the most relevant here. Initially, I envisioned this as a flexible, unpredictable exercise which would have me joining participants as they shopped in varied places and ways: sometimes task-oriented and focused, other times leisurely window shopping. Shopping with participants in these varied ways

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was ruled out quickly by the University's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, which saw my study as something like an ethnography and saw the shops as sites of research. The Board insisted that I receive permission from shops before I went on shopping trips.

The implications of this requirement were both methodological and ethical. Methodologically, it limited where I could go and constrained the spontaneity that shopping can have. It removed the "naturalistic" from my observations. Of course, even in the most realistic everyday settings, participants might alter their behaviour and edit their own speech when they are aware of a researcher's presence, a possibility which the constraint on shopping locations only seemed to exacerbate. While I had initially treated shops as a kind of public space in which I was entitled to accompany participants who were actually shopping, the Ethics Board treated shops as private spaces whose owners had the right to allow or deny my presence. (Interestingly, I did not need consent to conduct interviews in a coffee shop or focus groups in a neighbourhood house, even though I might argue that going shopping was less of an infringement on normal operations of a store than conducting and recording an interview was to a coffee shop.) Neoliberalism seeks to commodify goods, services and resources, and privatize the public. On the one hand, I have long understood that retail spaces are private places, and my concern about the disappearing public sector and the remaining commons helped spark my interest in this topic from the outset; on the other hand, my initial inclination to go to stores freely seems consistent with the neoliberal, consumerist impulse to view the shop as the new public space and shopping as the new public sphere. This is an illustration of the ethics of methodology.

Ultimately, I see a certain irony in the Ethics Board's insistence on permission by store owners or managers, as this seemed to introduce a new ethical issue into my study. Ethics protocols proclaim a central concern with the welfare of participants. Usually, this entails an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity; however, the requirement for store permission identified me and, by extension, participants to store personnel. Participants became more exposed rather than protected, although I was careful to include a reminder about the importance of confidentiality in my letter to store owners and managers. I also concluded that it was unlikely that the well-being of participants would be jeopardized in the course of a shopping trip, and decided that securing permission from the stores, even if it did identify participants, would not pose a serious threat to them. Still, this is an illustration of the methodology of ethics which, undoubtedly, has affected the course and outcome of this inquiry.

[Insert Interlude 3 here.]

Metaphor in general creeps up on you, surprises you. It defies the one-size-fits-all approach to a topic....Choreography is about the art of making dances. Because dance and choreography are about lived experience, choreography seems to me the perfect metaphor for discussing qualitative research design. Because the qualitative researcher is the research instrument, the metaphor is even more apropos for this discussion, as the body is the instrument of dance.

The qualitative researcher is remarkably like a choreographer at various stages in the design process, in terms of situating and recontextualizing the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study.

– Valerie Janesick (2000), “The Choreography of Qualitative Research Design,” p. 380

CHAPTER FOUR

CHOREOGRAPHY, IMPROVISATION AND STARS OF THE SHOW: RESEARCH STEPS AND PARTICIPANTS

In my proposal, I asked a series of questions that seemed relevant to my purpose and methodology: How will I step through a process of case study without clearly apparent boundaries? Given my focus on shoppers, rather than one shop or consumer organization, whom will I invite onto the stage of my study? How will I capture the complex patterns of shopping-as-learning, given that it has both solitary and social qualities, and is both purposeful and “incidental” (Foley, 1999, 2001)? In responding to these questions, I incorporate multiple sources of data. Consistent with bricolage, these (re)sources and my analysis of them worked their way into the study in different ways.

Throughout the previous two chapters, I have used the scientific metaphors – the physics of the microscope and of the single lens reflex camera – to frame my discussion of the topics of key concepts anchoring this inquiry, and its ontological, epistemological and methodological bases. In this chapter, I move from methodology to methods, and review the steps that I have taken in this inquiry. Remembering my earlier assertion that qualitative research in adult education can combine the (social) sciences and the humanities, I also move from scientific metaphors to an artistic metaphor: that of choreography. As I discovered after I titled this chapter and began drafting it, I am not alone in thinking about research in terms of dance. I came across a chapter written by Valerie Janesick, in which she explains the value to qualitative research of metaphor in general, and the particular usefulness of the metaphor of choreography. (👁) To Janesick's (2000) explanation of why choreography is such an apt metaphor to qualitative research generally, I also note that this metaphor allows me to talk about taking steps without implying a straight-line progression; instead, steps can be understood as movements.

Although all of my methods or, borrowing from the metaphor of dance, techniques were choreographed, some have been planned according to rules and forms, while others have been more spontaneous and improvised. More rule bound methods include interviews, focus groups and accompanied shopping trips. Participants in the study were asked to choose between completing an interview or a shopping trip, and I invited them to attend a follow-up focus group. Improvised methods include an intertextual analysis of fiction, as well as incorporation of what I think of as the “found objects” -- graffiti, blog entries, graphic images, news reports and documentaries – to bolster the case that I make through formal analysis of other data. In this chapter, I review the methods, both choreographed and improvised, that I use in this inquiry.

Consent Form for Participation

Title of Research Project: Trouble and promise, desire and critique: Discourses, practices and pedagogies of radical shoppers

Researchers: Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies, The University of British Columbia, PH: 604-822-3897; email: shauna.butterwick@ubc.ca

Ms. Kaela Jubas, PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Studies, The University of British Columbia, email: kaelaj@interchange.ubc.ca

Purpose and Contributions of the Study: This study is part of the doctoral work of Kaela Jubas, and is conducted under the Supervision of Dr. Butterwick. Its purpose is to explore and document shopping as one example of how everyday activities can involve and invite a political form of informal adult learning. It investigates how adult “radical shoppers” (age 19+ years) deepen their understandings of the links between consumption, citizenship, globalization and resistance. This study will make several practical and theoretical contributions. Practically, it will help inform the development and delivery of consumer and citizenship education and activism. Using a qualitative methodology, it will offer an opportunity for participants to engage in reflection and learning about their own experiences of, understandings of and responses to what it means to be a consumer and a citizen in Canadian society during contemporary globalization. In terms of policy development, it might yield implications and recommendations in areas such as consumer information and product labelling. Theoretically, this inquiry continues to expand ideas about informal, “incidental” adult learning which unfolds in the course of daily life. Finally, as an interdisciplinary study, it extends these contributions to research and scholarship on several topics (e.g., citizenship, consumption, globalization) and in multiple disciplines or fields (e.g., adult education, sociology, anthropology, women’s studies, environmental studies, family and consumer studies). Data gathered in the course of this study will be discussed in Kaela’s thesis, as well as in academic journal articles and conference presentations.

Procedures: The following procedures will be adhered to in this study:

- All participants will be asked to participate in one focus group. You will also be asked either to participate in a follow-up individual interview or to allow Kaela to accompany you (individually) on a shopping trip. Focus group and interview guidelines will be provided to participants prior to focus groups and interviews.
- Focus groups and interviews will occur at a time and place convenient for participants and the researcher. Focus groups will take approximately 2 hours, and interviews or accompanied shopping trips will take between 1 hour and 2 hours.
- With the consent of all participants present, focus groups will be video taped and interviews will be audio taped. Recordings will be used solely to facilitate transcription; no segments of these recordings will be played during presentations and no images from them will appear in publications. Kaela will take brief written or audio notes during shopping trips which will be written up into more formal field notes.

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Figure 4.1a: Consent Form

The production of a dissertation implies a certain orderly progression, and my methods are laid out here as a series of steps; in reality, though, their execution was not always as graceful or sequential as the dance metaphor implies. Often, I abruptly stopped mid-step or I stepped in more than one style at the same time – as if I had been wearing one tap shoe and one ballet slipper. I did not complete all of the interviews or shopping trips before starting the focus groups, and I was reading and analyzing fiction throughout the study. I also reversed the order of some the methods steps outlined in my proposal. For example, participants always completed an interview or a shopping trip prior to, rather than after, a focus group. Even the writing of this dissertation has involved an improvisational approach to its design and structure. With these qualifications in mind, in the sections below I review the steps taken in this inquiry – both formally choreographed and improvised – as well as the participants who danced, walked and sometimes tripped their way along those steps with me. Any story-teller imposes a certain amount of sequence and order to a series of events that, in all likelihood, unfolded in a more happen stance manner. For the purpose of clarity, I tell the story of this research performance in a somewhat artificial, after-the-fact order.

Step 1: Ethics Approval

In accordance with the requirements for all students at UBC, I began my empirical research by preparing and submitting the necessary materials for approval from UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). This involved development of an interview schedule and focus group outline, as well as a consent form. (👁) (A quick glance at those materials indicates that I have changed the title of this project since then, a decision which I discuss in chapter eight.) I outlined how I would manage my study in an ethically responsible manner. I would assure participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer a particular question and their right to confidentiality. I would repeat these assurances at the beginning of interviews, shopping trips and focus group sessions. Participants would be given a copy the consent form for their own records. In all writing or oral presentation related to this study, I would replace participants' names with pseudonyms and remove any identifying references in the data to themselves, their family member or friends, and their workplaces. Contact information for me as well as my supervisor was provided on the letter of consent, and I encouraged participants to contact either one of us at any point with any questions or concerns. For focus group participants, I included specific clauses pointing out some of the

With your consent, digital photographs might be taken during the focus group and, if you choose this option, during or following the accompanied shopping trip. Your face will not be visible in these photographs. A digital camera will be used, and you will be able to delete any photographs of yourself that you want eliminated immediately after they are taken. With participants' further consent, these images might be used in presentations and/or articles.

- Following the focus group, interview or shopping trip, the researcher might contact participants for clarification of statements or questions. This will help ensure that data collection and transcription are as complete as possible. If you participate in an individual interview, you will be offered a copy of the transcript. You will be given time to review the transcript and request deletions or amendments to it before it is finalized. At the end of the study, all participants will be sent a summary report of the research.
- Information will be gathered by and be accessible only to the research team which consists of Kaela Jubas and Dr. Shauna Butterwick. Assistants might be hired to assist with video recording of focus groups and transcription of interviews and focus groups; however, those individuals will not have access to participants' personal details other than those divulged during focus groups and interviews. They will sign an agreement outlining the importance of maintaining confidentiality, and requiring that all recordings and transcript material be returned to the research team. We encourage participants to be cautious and sensitive in discussing their focus groups with others, and to refrain from identifying other participants; however, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.
- A code number will be assigned to your focus group and interview or shopping trip, and a pseudonym will be used to refer to you in any presentations or publications.
- Electronic data will be password protected, and paper records will be kept in a secure cabinet.
- You can decide to withdraw at any time throughout the research process without any consequences or reprisals.
- You do not waive your legal rights by consenting to participate in this research.
- If you agree to participate in this study and, at any time, have questions about it, you can contact the researchers.

If, at any time, you have questions about your treatment or rights as a research participant/subject, you may telephone The University of British Columbia's Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent: By signing below, you indicate your consent to participate in this study with the procedures outlined above.

Signature of Participant

Date

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Figure 4.1b: Consent Form (continued)

ethical issues and sensitivities particular to group meetings and urging their respect for the confidentiality of other participants in the group. I asked participants to exercise caution in discussing focus group conversations and to avoid disclosing the identity of other participants.

Following interviews, shopping trips and focus groups, I have taken reasonable measures to secure data which relates to participants. Signed consent forms, transcripts and my field notes from shopping trips or taken during interviews and focus groups are being kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. I have assigned passwords to protect electronic files.

Further to the requirements of the BREB, I also considered the ramifications of this study with the range of people who have helped inform it. For example, in this thesis, I include copyrighted images and cite the writings of “bloggers.” Some corporate websites include a clause indicating that readers may copy, reproduce and/or link to content freely. For images from such sites, I acknowledge the source in my citations. Other corporate websites stipulate that content may only be reproduced with the express permission of the website publishers. In those cases, I sent e-mails to the appropriate contact people explaining my project and requesting permission to reproduce the images. On only one occasion was I denied permission to reproduce content from a commercial website; for any content that I have used, I have attempted to conform to the requirements of the its publishers. For online content from non-commercial websites, usually blog entries, I sought permission to reproduce text from both authors and, if relevant, blog publishers or site managers. In response to all such requests, I received permission – usually enthusiastically – to include their content in my dissertation.

After I thought that I had everything in order, I submitted the materials to the BREB. Not long afterwards, I heard from the Board’s representative. For the most part, the materials which had been submitted were fine; however, the Board asked that I draw up some additional materials before I proceeded, namely a consent form that participants could sign agreeing to be included in digital photographs that I took and a letter of permission which store owners or managers would have to sign before I could conduct an accompanied shopping trip. While the former seemed straightforward, the latter, as I have already noted in the previous chapter, struck me as problematic because having to approach store owners or their staff would identify me as well as participants. This requirement seemed to compromise participants’ anonymity and contradict the primary purpose of the BREB. Coming from the BREB, this request also seemed somewhat puzzling. The only UBC policy referred to by the BREB in its website is Policy 89 on Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects, which intends

Permission for In-Store Observations

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Researchers: Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies, The University of British Columbia, PH: 604-822-3897; email: shauna.butterwick@ubc.ca

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Purpose and Contributions of the Study: This study is part of the doctoral work of Kaela Jubas, and is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Butterwick. Its purpose is to explore and document shopping as one example of how everyday activities can involve and invite a political form of informal adult learning. It investigates how adult “radical shoppers” (age 19+ years) deepen their understandings of the links between consumption, citizenship, globalization and resistance. This study will make several practical and theoretical contributions. Practically, it will help inform the development and delivery of consumer and citizenship education and activism. Using a qualitative methodology, it will offer an opportunity for participants to engage in reflection and learning about their own experiences of, understandings of and responses to what it means to be a consumer and a citizen in Canadian society during contemporary globalization. In terms of policy development, it might yield implications and recommendations in areas such as consumer information and product labelling. Theoretically, this inquiry continues to expand ideas about informal, “incidental” adult learning which unfolds in the course of daily life. Finally, as an interdisciplinary study, it extends these contributions to research and scholarship on several topics (e.g., citizenship, consumption, globalization) and in multiple disciplines or fields (e.g., adult education, sociology, anthropology, women’s studies, environmental studies, family and consumer studies). Data gathered in the course of this study will be discussed in Kaela’s thesis, as well as in academic journal articles and conference presentations.

Procedures of In-store Observations: Some participants in this study will choose to participate in an observation session, when they will be accompanied by Ms Jubas on one of their regular shopping trips. This is being referred to as a “modified” observation because the researcher will actively engage with the participant through conversation; it will, however, be much less formal than an interview. The following procedures will be adhered to:

- Ms Jubas will take notes during the observation/shopping session.
- Participants who agree may have digital photographs taken of themselves; participants’ faces will NOT be included in any photographs. Because digital photography will be used, participants will be able to delete any pictures of themselves that they do not want included in the study’s records immediately after they are taken.
- Photographs will also not include the faces of other shoppers or store staff. Photographs may be used in presentations, articles and/or Ms Jubas’ thesis. You can stipulate that photographs not be taken in your store during participant observations.
- Accompanied shopping trips will last for 1 hour to 2 hours. Participant observations will be conducted discretely, without imposing on the store’s staff or other shoppers.
- You can stipulate that the identity of your store as a research site not be shared in written or verbal reports of this study.

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Figure 4.2a: Permission for In-store Observations

to create a research environment in which human subjects are protected, and to ensure responsibilities are discharged according to the relevant ethical standards, by promoting awareness of research ethics amongst faculty, staff and students, establishing an independent research ethics review process, and putting in place mechanisms for the protection of human subjects in ongoing research including monitoring. (UBC, 2006, ¶2)

This policy clearly focuses on the ethics of participation, but stores were not intended to be *participants*. This was not an ethnography, and I was not studying the stores. Whether or not stores permitted me to conduct shopping trips seems to me to be an issue of legal liability rather than research ethics. On the other hand, the stance adopted by the BREB on this matter certainly points to one of the central dilemmas in a society characterized by consumerism and privatization, in which “public” spaces are increasingly privately owned and operated for the purpose of selling things, and the question of who has a right to be where is increasingly difficult to answer.

I also wondered about the difference between conducting accompanied shopping trips in stores and interviews in coffee shops. Stores and coffee shops are both private retail spaces, and both became, in some ways, sites of research. Although I was not studying stores, per se, it is true that during shopping trips participants and I talked about the qualities of the stores where we were; it is also true that during interviews in coffee shops, participants and I might have talked about fair trade coffee or disposable coffee cups. Often, coffee shops were chosen as interview sites for the sake of participants’ convenience; however, some participants mentioned other qualities about the coffee shops where they asked to meet, including ambiance, support for small neighbourhood businesses, or availability of organic or fair trade beverages.

Deciding that participants in this study had little at risk even if they were exposed to staff in the stores, I did comply with the request and develop a permission form for store owners or managers. As the BREB also asked of me, I developed a consent form for participants to sign relating specifically to any digital photographs that I might take during accompanied shopping trips and focus groups. Following these additions and amendments, my application to the BREB was approved. (👁) I was interested in taking photographs of participants with particular objects that they were discussing, as both reminders to me and as visual aids for presentations and, later, for my dissertation. Still striving to maintain participants’ anonymity, I took care not to include participants’ faces or other easily recognizable features, such as tattoos, in my photographs.

I had initially envisioned the shopping trips as including window shopping and impromptu visits to stores; however, those possibilities were eliminated with the requirement of permission. During shopping trips, I did accompany participants as they looked at, considered

We greatly appreciate the support of stores that agree to allow in-store observations to be conducted. We also remind you about the importance of confidentiality in this type of research, and ask that you or any staff at the store who are aware of this study be discrete and respectful of participants' rights to confidentiality while this research is being conducted.

Permission:

On behalf of _____ (name of store), I confirm that I am authorized to provide permission for Ms Jubas to conduct in-store participant observations. By signing below, I permit Ms Jubas to conduct these observations in my store as outlined above.

If you would like limit your permission in any of the following ways, please check the applicable box(es):

I give permission for in-store participant observations to be conducted, but decline permission for in-store photographs to be taken.

I give permission for in-store participant observations to be conducted, but decline permission for my store to be identified as a research site in written or verbal reports.

Signature, Position

Date

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Figure 4.2b: Permission for In-store Observations (continued)

Consent to Use Photographs in Research Reports and/or Presentations

Title of Research Project: Trouble and promise, desire and critique: Discourses, practices and pedagogies of radical shoppers

Researchers: Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Studies, The University of British Columbia, PH: 604-822-3897; email: shauna.butterwick@ubc.ca

Ms. Kaela Jubas, PhD Candidate, Department of Educational Studies, The University of British Columbia; email: kaelaj@interchange.ubc.ca

Consent: By signing below, you indicate your consent for the researchers to use photographs taken of you during this study in research reports, articles and/or presentations.

Signature of Participant

Date

Version date: November 22, 2006

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Figure 4.3: Consent to Use Photographs

and bought items in stores where they regularly shopped, but not necessarily in the manner that they regularly shopped. “Naturalistic observation” seems a bit of a misnomer for this form of data collection. The shopping process during these trips was somewhat staged, because of my presence, notebook and camera in hand, alongside participants, as well as the restrictions on how and where we could go shopping. I have settled on the term “modified participant observation” or “accompanied shopping trip” to refer to this method.

Finally, I thought it only fair that, if I was asking stores for their permission to include their sites in my study, I should also ask for their permission to take photographs while I was on their premises. As well, I added a clause to the permission form dealing with the anonymity of the stores themselves. If the insistence of the BREB that the shopkeepers or their staff sign permission forms turned them into a kind of participant, then they too had rights to protection. Ironically, these clauses were not among the BREB’s directions for the letter of permission. As I did with the general consent for participation form, I offered participants and shopkeepers a duplicate copy of any of these forms that they signed. Dealing with the BREB’s standard and exceptional requirements and then thinking about additional ethical issues for this inquiry constituted the first step that I took in this research project.

Step 2: Participant Recruitment

Part of the process of receiving approval from the BREB was to outline my intended procedures for participant recruitment. Wanting a diverse set of participants, in terms of gender, race, class and neighbourhoods, I selected three neighbourhoods in the City of Vancouver to focus my recruitment efforts. These neighbourhoods have distinct qualities and reputations, which I thought would be helpful in finding sufficiently diverse participants. My usual modes of transportation are either public transit or walking. Especially given my interest in including participants across a range of socio-economic classes, I did not want to assume that potential participants owned or had access to a vehicle; the three community areas that I initially selected are all conveniently located along major public transit routes. Because of my own linguistic limitations, however, fluency in English was a requirement for all participants. The three neighbourhoods that I chose are Kitsilano, Commercial Drive (commonly known as “The Drive”) and Main Street/Mount Pleasant.

Within Canada, Vancouver's population is considered to be comprised of a relatively high proportion of visible minority groups (Merrill Cooper, 2006). The East Side of Vancouver is “Most of the neighbourhoods in the eastern part of Vancouver have a visible minority population



Certificate of Approval

<small>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</small> Butterwick, S.	<small>DEPARTMENT</small> Educational Studies	<small>NUMBER</small> B06-0927
<small>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT</small> UBC Campus ,		
<small>CO-INVESTIGATORS:</small> Jubas, Kaela, Educational Studies		
<small>SPONSORING AGENCIES</small> Unfunded Research		
<small>TITLE:</small> Trouble and Promise, Desire and Critique: Discourses, Practices and Pedagogies of Radical Shoppers		
<small>APPROVAL DATE</small> DEC 01 2006	<small>TERM (YEARS)</small> 1	<small>DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:</small> Nov. 22, 2006, Advertisement / Interview form / Cover letter / Consent forms / Oct. 19, 2006, Questionnaires
<small>CERTIFICATION:</small> The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects. <div style="text-align: center;"><hr/><i>Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</i> by one of the following: Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair, Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair</div> This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures		

Figure 4.4: Behavioural Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

that is greater than 50%, with some greater than 80% (City of Vancouver Social Planning, Community Services Group, 2003, p. 42). While the Kitsilano neighbourhood on Vancouver's West Side offers a variety of politically and socially aware shops and, likely, shoppers, it is not considered a low-income neighbourhood in Vancouver. Furthermore, the East Side neighbourhoods of The Drive and Main Street/Mount Pleasant have greater ethnic and racial diversity. Kitsilano While Main Street/Mount Pleasant and The Drive have both experienced recent gentrification, they continue to be home for a relatively high rate of low-income residents (City of Vancouver Social Planning, Community Services Group, 2003; Merrill Cooper, 2006).

Despite their differences, these communities are characterized by stores marketing themselves and their goods as socially and environmentally responsible. For example, each of these areas has at least one organic grocery store. During the 1960s, Kitsilano was home to Vancouver's hippies and, despite its location on what historically has been the up-scale West Side, it maintains a reputation as a socially progressive area. Its West 4th Avenue is lined with a combination of locally owned stores and trendy outlets of retail chains, which sell everything from clothing and jewellery to home furnishings and accessories, from books to outdoor and fitness gear. Main Street/Mount Pleasant is known for its locally owned stores, including fashion designer studio shops, hip second hand stores and antique shops. With the exception of a few coffee shops and the BC Liquor Store, shops on The Drive are locally owned and operated. Italian and Portuguese bakeries and cafés line the street along with small art galleries, book stores and clothing shops. Within a four-block stretch on The Drive, there are two organic grocery stores and the only co-operative grocery store in the city, several second hand stores (including one operated as a social venture), and a housewares store specializing in items such as organic linens. The southern part of Kitsilano and The Drive are also the locations of the Vancouver's Ten Thousand Villages® stores, a social venture operated by the Mennonite Central Committee across North America to educate consumers about fair trade and support groups of disadvantaged artisans worldwide. Aside from appealing to consumers committed to the fair trade movement, Ten Thousand Villages is also an example of stores selling what are commonly referred to as "ethnic" products. These qualities of the neighbourhoods and their commercial ventures were important given my interest in hearing from individuals who were connecting their shopping to their concerns about globalization. Although many of these stores appeal predominantly to middle class or wealthier shoppers, based on their prices and their speciality products, at least some of them might also attract lower-income and working class shoppers.



This study is central to Kaela Jubas' doctoral thesis, conducted under the supervision of Dr. Shauna Butterwick. Its purpose is to explore and document shopping as one example of how everyday activities can involve and invite a political form of learning. It investigates how "radical shoppers" deepen their understandings of the links between consumption, citizenship, globalization and resistance.

A study of the politics of shopping, globalization and adult learning

Trouble and Promise, Desire and Critique: Discourses, Practices and Pedagogies of Radical Shoppers

Contact: Kaela Jubas
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Department of Educational Studies
The University of British Columbia
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Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4

Are you concerned about globalization and consumption?
Does your shopping make a statement about your sense of who you are and what you stand for?
Do you routinely try to find information about what you buy or where you shop? Does that information change your shopping decisions?
Does shopping give you a sense of free choice or lack of choice?

If you are age 19 or older, have asked yourself or tried to answer these questions and are interested in talking to others about these topics, you are invited to participate in this study. Participation will involve attendance at a focus group (approximately 2 hours), as well as an interview or an accompanied shopping trip (1 hour-2 hours).

Interested? Please e-mail Kaela.

Version date:
December 7, 2006

Figure 4.5: Participant Recruitment Flyer

I developed a series of recruitment tools: a full-page flyer (☞), a postcard and a smaller double-sided leaflet. The flyer was also included with the other materials described above and forwarded to the BREB. All of these documents contained the same the same information, and I asked permission to leave them in the organic grocery stores, book stores and cafés, as well as the two Ten Thousand Villages® stores – stores where I thought prospective participants might shop. Most of these stores had spaces or bulletin boards where community information was displayed and made available to customers. None of the shopkeepers or managers whom I approached with my material declined to display it. To test the effectiveness of the recruitment tools, I started with two of the three neighbourhoods: Kitsilano and The Drive. I set out the materials and waited to hear from participants. Anticipating that people would shop in the same area where they saw my recruitment materials, I also requested permission to conduct accompanied shopping trips in stores that seemed large enough to do so without drawing an inordinate amount of attention to myself and participants.

I waited and I waited and I waited. I went back to the stores where I had left recruitment materials and, although I could see that the piles that I had left were shrinking, nobody was contacting me. One of the lessons that I have learned through the experience of this inquiry is that there is always a Plan B. In this case, after talking to my supervisor, I decided that Plan B was to approach managers of e-mail listservs whose members might be interested in participating in the study. I approached two organizations working on issues of local, sustainable food production (Farm Folk/City Folk and Your Local Farmers' Market Society) and a personal acquaintance who coordinates a local college's community development program. I also forwarded the flyer to the listserv operated by UBC's Department of Educational Studies, my own department, and encouraged people to either contact me or share the information with others who might be interested in participating in the study. I had flyers at a screening of a documentary film about fair trade and sustainability certification put on by the organization Necessary Voices. Later, I also posted a notice on Craig's List, an online compendium of classified advertisements.

Ultimately, it was the listservs and word of mouth which yielded the greatest number of participants. Of the 32 participants in the study (not including me), six were students or faculty in Educational Studies who responded to my appeal, six were members of the Farm Folk/City Folk and/or Your Local Farmers' Market Society listserv, and three were members of the community development program listserv. Two participants responded to my leaflets in shops or cafés, one person came forward after picking up my leaflet at the documentary screening, and one

Interview Schedule

Thank you for your participation in this part of the study. I'll quickly review some of the main points in the letter of consent that you've signed. Your participation is entirely voluntary and your identity will remain confidential in any papers or presentations that refer to you and your participation in this study. If at any time I ask you a question that you don't feel comfortable answering or if you would like to withdraw from the study, please let me know. Also, I'll remind you that, with your consent, I'd like to record this interview. I'll then transcribe it and, if you'd like, I will forward a copy of the transcript for your review before it's finalized.

I'm interested in exploring shopping as a site and process of learning about how consumption is linked to citizenship and globalization. During this interview, I ask you to think in particular about the politics of your shopping and consumption, and how shopping has helped you understand and respond to these politics. Do you have any questions before we get started?

.....

1. Can you tell me about what shopping means in your life? Can think of a couple of your shopping experiences or stories that might help illustrate what shopping means to you?
2. How did you learn about shopping and how to shop? Where do you think your ideas about shopping come from?
3. Do you think of yourself as a "good" shopper? What do you think are the most important qualities of a good shopper?
4. What kind of information do you need or want when you go shopping? How do you go about finding that information?
5. If you've ever encountered a barrier to getting the information that you feel you need, how have you dealt with the situation?
6. Do you regularly shop in particular areas of the city or in particular stores? If so, which ones, and why do you prefer those places?
7. What kinds of messages do you regularly encounter about shopping and where do you encounter them? How do you think they affect your shopping decisions?
8. What, if any, other kinds of issues or considerations affect your shopping and consumption?
9. Are there particular items that you try to buy or, conversely, items that you avoid buying? If so, what are they and what kinds of considerations go into your decisions?
10. Can you think of movements or organizations that seem connected to shopping and consumption? What kinds of statements do they make? Have you participated in any of them?
11. How, if at all, would you say that your shopping practices have changed in recent months? Can you think of a particular time when you made or noticed these changes? Are there any changes that you've been thinking about making in your shopping practices?
12. Today, shoppers can buy things produced all over the world. What do you think this means for you as a Canadian or as a citizen of another country living in Canada?
13. There's a saying that the personal is political. Do you think that your personal shopping practices can make a difference to local, national or global politics? If so, how? On the flip side, what are the limitations to the impact that shopping and consumption can have?
14. Do you have any final thoughts about these questions, this study or the topics of shopping and consumption, and their connection to globalization?

Version date: February 2, 2007

Page 1 of 1

Figure 4.6: Interview Schedule

participant responded to my posting on Craig's List. An additional 12 participants learned about the study by word of mouth, either from other participants or from me or my personal acquaintances. These recruitment tactics resemble the those described by Connelly and Prothero (2008) in their study of green consumers. The final participant saw a copy of my flyer, posted by somebody on one of the listservs mentioned, at her workplace. Because the tactic of leaving flyers and leaflets in shops was relatively unsuccessful and I had tended to approach shops in Kitsilano and The Drive where I had left recruitment materials, I never did approach stores in the Main Street/Mount Pleasant area. On the other hand, because I had publicized the study through various listservs, I did find that participants lived and worked in areas throughout the city. Further details about data collection and the participants are provided below.

Steps 3 and 4: Interviews and Accompanied Shopping Trips

Individuals who agreed to participate in the study chose between completing an interview and an accompanied shopping trip. I thought that asking them to set aside time to do both, in addition to the possibility of a focus group, was asking too much of them. In accordance with ethics protocol to maximize anonymity, participants were assigned pseudonyms. Many qualitative researchers choose pseudonyms for their participants, often selecting names which begin with the same letter as participants' real names and reflect their ethnic backgrounds. I was interested in finding ways to share as much control as possible within the inquiry. To this end, I offered participants the opportunity to name themselves. Seven participants chose their own pseudonyms; for the remaining participants, I use the convention of assigning pseudonyms starting with the same letter as their real names. All names used to refer to participants in this document are pseudonyms.

For participants who chose to be interviewed, I used a semi-structured format. Drafted questions were laid out in an interview schedule, which was included in my BREB submission and forwarded to participants by e-mail before their interviews. (☞) I tested the interview schedule on two, and made slight revisions to it both prior to beginning formal interviews and throughout the study as issues or points of confusion were raised in interviews. Eighteen participants chose to be interviewed. I met with participants in a variety of places to conduct the interviews, trying to make participation in the study as convenient as possible for them. Five interviews were conducted in my office in the Department of Educational Studies or elsewhere on the UBC campus, 12 interviews were conducted in cafés or small restaurants around the city,

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and one interview – with a participant who lived and worked outside the City of Vancouver but very much wanted to participate in the study – was conducted by telephone. Interviews generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes; the longest interview lasted around two hours and 45 minutes. As I explained in the letter of consent and the interview schedule, I wanted to record interviews with a digital recorder. Recordings would be transcribed to facilitate data analysis. All participants who completed interviews agreed to having their conversations recorded for this purpose. I also took notes during interviews in case the recorder failed, and to note points in the interview conversations that were of particular interest to me.

Following transcription, which I completed (at what seemed like a painfully slow pace!), I forwarded transcripts to participants by e-mail or in person for their review, unless they expressly indicated that they preferred not to receive a copy of their transcripts. In my e-mail messages accompanying the transcripts, I set a time frame – between 10 days to two weeks – for participants to complete their reviews and respond to me with any questions, concerns or clarifications. Most of the interview participants either did not respond or indicated that they approved of the transcript which had been forwarded; two of the participants requested that small sections of the transcript be removed because – whether or not they as individuals could be identified in my discussion of their interviews – they felt regretted or worried about comments that they had made about colleagues or friends. I complied with these requests, and consider that the removal of these sections has not made a substantive difference to the usefulness of these interviews. At the end of the transcript review period that I had set, whether or not participants had responded to me, I considered the transcripts finalized.

The accompanied shopping trips were meant to provide me with a fuller understanding of how participants approached, carried out and understood their shopping. Interview participants share what they are aware of in that moment; shopping trips helped participants (and me) be aware of particular and concrete things. For these shopping trips, participants and I arranged a meeting time and place after I forwarded a list of stores which had provided permission. Because some of the stores asked that their names not be divulged, I am unable to provide a full list of participating stores. With one exception, they are grocery stores, such as CapersTM in Kitsilano and the East End Food Co-op on The Drive. Given the BREB's constraint of permission, I focused on grocery stores because people typically shop on at least a weekly basis, and that seemed to increase the likelihood that prospective participants and I could schedule a shopping trip without too much delay. I also wanted to conduct shopping trips in stores that were big

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enough so that undue attention would not be drawn to my conversations with participants, and was concerned about the small size of some local boutique stores specializing in locally designed and produced clothing, fair trade items or other products that might be sought by “radical” shoppers. Consistent with my decision to concentrate on grocery stores, I note Connelly and Prothero's (2008) finding that food shopping and consumption is especially central to green consumers. The exception is HTnaturals™, near The Drive, a manufacturer’s owned and operated retail outlet for hemp clothing. Seven shopping trips were conducted on Vancouver’s West Side, three were conducted on the East Side, and one trip was conducted downtown.

The shopping trip at HTnaturals™ was exceptional for another reason: While the remaining shopping trips were conducted with individual participants, I met a group at that store. Linda, who had already completed an interview, was a member of an online network of mothers interested in natural parenting. A short time after her interview, she sent an e-mail informing me that the local network was planning what she called “a group shop” at HTnaturals™ they seemed as a social get-together, and asked if I might be interested in joining them. Although my preference and practice until then had been to conduct individual shopping trips, largely because more manageable than group trips, this sounded like an interesting, unique opportunity. Linda posted a message to the network asking other members if they would agree to my joining them, while I approached the store for permission, which was granted. The network members who responded to Linda’s message were in agreement, and I met the group at the store on the designated date. To ensure that only the participation of fully informed individuals was included in my analysis, I distributed consent forms to network members at the store and answered any questions that they had. A total of five members, in addition to Linda, signed consent forms. I exclude any input from individuals present at the time who did not sign consent forms.

Fifteen participants chose to do a shopping trip, and these trips were very conversational. Participants I asked questions and offered what we thought were noteworthy comments. I did not have a guide for questions, but I tried to find ways to insert content similar to that covered in the interviews without turning conversations into stilted interactions. Occasionally, other shoppers or store staff overheard our conversations and joined our conversations briefly. I brought a notepad and a small digital camera with me, although I frequently found it challenging to keep up with participants as I jotted notes and took pictures of items that we were discussing. As I noted in the consent forms for use of photographs, participants' faces were never included in pictures. Although participants could see and delete any pictures of themselves or their shopping trips that

Focus Group Outline

Thank you for your participation in this part of the study. I'll quickly review some of the main points in the letter of consent that you've signed. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If at any time I ask you a question that you don't feel comfortable answering or if you would like to withdraw from the study, please let me know.

To protect your confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym if I refer to you in any papers or presentations. I also remind you that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus groups, and ask that you respect the confidentiality of others who are participating in this group. Please be discrete in discussing the focus group with others, and take care not to identify other participants.

With everyone's consent, this session will be video recorded solely to aid in its transcription and/or analysis. Images from this recording will NOT be used in any presentations. I would also like to take photographs of participants with objects that they have brought with them. I will NOT include participants' faces in these photographs, and will use a digital camera so that participants can eliminate any photographs of themselves that they do not want included in the study's records. These images might be used in later presentations.

During the focus group, I'm especially interested in exploring how you connect your own shopping and consumption to issues of citizenship and globalization. In Canada today, everyone shops, but some shoppers relate what they're shopping for to broader issues of globalization. I'm interested in talking to you during this focus group about these sorts of connections, and how you learn about them. Does anyone have any questions before we get started?

.....
Introduction: Please introduce yourself. To get our conversation started, I'd like you to say a few words about something that you've brought with you today that you bought yourself. It can be an article of clothing, a piece of jewellery, an electronic device, a cup of coffee, a car....With your permission, I'd like to take a picture of you with this thing.

What criteria were most important in your decision to buy it? What did you want to know about it before you bought it, and how did you find this information? What sorts of things have you told people about this thing, and what have they said to you about it? Today, what do you like or dislike most about it, and what do you think it "says" about you?

.....
For the second part of our conversation, I'd like you to look through the materials that I've brought with me. (Please note that my inclusion of specific materials does not indicate or imply my endorsement of any products or services being advertised or promoted in those materials.) Choose a couple of examples that you find interesting. What do you think are the central messages of these examples? Who do you think is their intended audience and how do you respond to them?

.....
For the third part of our conversation, I'd like to talk about language. One of the phrases I've used in this study is "radical shopper." How do you understand this phrase? Do you consider yourself a radical shopper? What are you trying to accomplish through your radical – or critical or ethical – shopping and consumption? What do you think is possible to achieve, and what do you think is necessary beyond altering individual shopping practices to achieve that end?

Version date: May 3, 2007

Figure 4.7: Focus Group Outline

they did not want used, nobody made such a request. From the time participants and I met until we left the store, shopping trips varied in duration from 45 minutes to two and a half hours.

Step 5: Focus Groups

In addition to completing an interview or a shopping trip, most participants were also invited to a focus group. These proved more difficult to coordinate than I had anticipated and, although many participants expressed interest in attending a session, few people were able to do that. I organized three focus groups. Four participants attended the first session and three participants attended the second session. Both of these focus groups were held at the UBC campus on the West side of Vancouver. Although five participants had agreed to attend the third focus group in a central location on the East Side of Vancouver, only one participant, Julie, arrived. While she and I waited, hoping that others would arrive, we talked about the focus group exercises. I recorded my conversation with her, thinking that it might be useful in my analysis; however, I do not count it as a focus group session. Each of the two full-fledged focus groups lasted for approximately two hours.

As I indicated in the focus group guidelines (☞) as well as in the study's letter of consent, focus groups were video and audio recorded to aid in their analysis. The two focus groups that I report on were held at UBC campus. With participants' consent, I also took digital photographs of them with objects that they discussed during the first exercise in the focus groups; however, as I indicated previously, photographs never included participants' faces or clearly identifying features. Because I used a digital camera for these photographs, participants were able to view and delete any pictures of themselves that they did not want included in the study; again, no participants took advantage of this opportunity. I tested the focus group outline on a group of four acquaintances, and made minor revisions to clarify the exercises and my questions.

Although relatively few participants attended a focus group, the exercises and discussions in these sessions have methodological and conceptual value. Methodologically, focus groups balance the preference of some people for one-on-one conversations and of other people for group conversations, expanding participants' opportunity to generate and express ideas. The focus groups help bring contrast with and balance to the individual interviews and shopping trips (other than the group trip with the mothers' network), at the same time as they provided an opportunity for me to delve more deeply with participants into the study's guiding questions.

The focus groups included two exercises. During the first exercise, I asked participants to talk about an item that they had brought with them to the session. I asked them to bring

I bought a hamburger and took it to class. What better way to extraordinarily re-experience the ordinary? The burger is the nexus of so many daily realities. It's not only the kind of fast foods, the lunch/snack/dinner quickie meal, but it's also the source of wages for many students who work in the burger chains. In addition, the spread of fast food franchises is tied into the suburban dispersal of the American city....With the hamburger as the problem-theme of our inquiry, we developed in a number of directions. For the Reconstruction, one class wanted to act on our distinction between "junk food" and "health food." A class organizing committee emerged to cooperatize the college cafeteria, and have it offer a nutritious, fixed-price lunch. In other classes, we began evolving an extended conceptual paradigm to represent the total analysis of the burger. I had asked one class to recreate the entire production and distribution process which delivered a burger to a consumer. This recreation unveiled the largely invisible relations of commodity culture.

– Ira Shor (1980), *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, pp. 162-163



Semiology provides the analyst with a conceptual toolkit for approaching sign systems systematically in order to discover how they produce meaning....Semiology grew out of the discipline of structural linguistics that originated in the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The structural approach sees language as a system and attempts to discover 'all the rules that hold it together' (Hawkes, 1977:19).

– Gemma Penn (2000), "Semiotic Analysis of Still Images," p. 227

that they had bought themselves, and to say a few words about why they had purchased the item, what they knew about it, and what they thought it said about them. Items discussed ranged from a set of camping utensils to a compact disc of children's music to a vegetable scrubber to a leather purse. One participant, Karen, talked about an item that was too big to bring into the room: her bicycle. These were all ordinary objects that people might buy and use on any given day.

This first exercise is similar to a pedagogical experiment used by Ira Shor (1980) in his adult education classroom. Shor would ask students to go through a three-step process of rational analysis of something ordinary – a classroom chair or a hamburger, for instance. The process began with students' careful observation and description of the object, then moved to “diagnosis” through a contextual examination of its purpose, development and use, and then end with a “reconstruction of its problematic nature” through “creative imagination” (p. 157). (👁)

For the second focus group exercise, I asked participants to choose from among a series of newspaper articles, cartoons, advertisements and marketing materials. I asked participants to talk about what they saw in the pieces they chose: Who (or what) was represented and how were they portrayed? Who was the intended audience? What messages about shopping, consumption and consumerism, as well as social relations and citizenship, were conveyed? In the language of methodology, I asked participants to engage in an informal, small scale semiotic analysis. (👁) According to Gemma Penn (2000), conducting a semiotic analysis in a focus group setting helps overcome some of the limitations of semiology, notably the highly subjective nature of semiotic analysis, “by reinstating the lay reader” (p. 242) or viewer. Because the object of this exercise was to elicit conversation about shopping, consumption and the ideological messages encountered by consumer-citizens rather than to analyze specific visual images per se, I have not gone to the considerable, and likely futile, effort of seeking permission to reproduce the images here. When I discuss this exercise and the materials chosen by participants, I describe them in what I think is sufficient detail, although I remove any reference to corporate or brand names.

Focus groups were a helpful addition to my methods because they continued to uncover the complexities and nuances of shopping and shoppers. I hoped that meeting with participants twice over a period of several weeks would encourage them to consider and talk about their own experiences of shopping-as-learning, because learning often occurs or becomes apparent over time. Although even the most critical, conscientious shopping is not the same as the collective action that Foley (1999, 2001) discusses, it is a process which can straddle the division between

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the hegemonic and the resistant, as well as the solitary and the social. For the participants in this study, like many people who live in today's global cities, shopping is a solitary process at least some of the time; however, sometimes shopping can be an activity shared with a partner or a planned social activity. Often, solitary shopping becomes social, as shoppers come into contact with staff and other shoppers in the store, sometimes meeting people they know. Even when individuals shop alone, they often talk about their shopping experiences with others.

Step 6: Sampling Cultural Texts

Just as talking to individuals and writing about my conversations with them has been an integral part of my analytical process, so too has reading helped me uncover and make sense of multiple, often clashing, narratives and discourses about shopping and consumption. Both academic and popular scholarship have provided important conceptual, historical and sociological information. Equally important has been my reading of fiction.

Fiction is an interesting source of narrative data for several reasons. In the context of this inquiry, a careful reading of fiction helps uncover relevant ideology and ideologically based common sense (per Gramsci, 1971) in civil society. Including fiction alongside academic and popular scholarship and other forms of data in this inquiry helps me explicate the central concepts of this inquiry, and provides evidence that ideologies and ideologically based common sense are constantly present in culture and infuse civil society with politics.

Secondly, in its presentation of multiple characters, a novel is able to present a variety of ideological stances and material circumstances to its readers. Readers can encounter a wider range of life circumstances through fiction than they might encounter otherwise. When readers engage seriously with a serious work of fiction, they interpret characters and story lines in terms of their own circumstances in a self-conscious way, and they re-assess the taken-for-granted common sense of their lives.

Thirdly, readers always read a work of fiction in relation to other works of fiction and cultural images. The methodology of intertextual analysis interprets a text or image “in relation to the wider cultural and social panorama, consisting of other texts” (Saukko, 2003, p. 104). To the extent that engaged readers read one text against the backdrop of previously read texts and other cultural influences, at some level readers are conducting a perpetual intertextual analysis; thus, reading becomes a source of inquiry and incidental learning.

Other adult education scholars have explored the educational potential of popular culture. Typically, this research has concentrated on the consumption of media, including

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television or film (Armstrong, 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Tisdell, 2007; Wright, 2006, 2007) and magazines (Sandlin, 2005b). In the particular context of this inquiry about shopping and consumption as sites and processes of adult learning, the educational potential for the consumption of literature, especially fiction about shopping, has seemed relevant and interesting to me. Following Christine Jarvis (1998, 2000, 2003), I suggest that a critical, emotional reading of fiction – getting to know and empathize with different characters, their stories and their points of view – can build awareness of social issues and encourage reflexivity in readers’ daily lives. Increasingly influenced by neoliberal rhetoric of human capital development, educational studies commonly addresses reading in relation to literacy skills; however, as Jarvis (2003) notes,

reading is also a form of consumption, constructed by desire and aspiration. As such it is a space in which to practice ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984) as part of the construction of identity and identification. As Beckett and Morris (2001) demonstrated, lifelong learning is an ontological process; learners are engaged in becoming as much as in knowing. (p. 262)

My own reading of several contemporary popular English-language novels serves as the basis for the analysis which I discuss, along with related adult education research, in chapter five. I chose four contemporary, popular English-language novels for this analysis: *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (Kinsella, 2001), *Learning Curves* (Townley, 2006), *Generation X* (Coupland, 1991) and *My Year of Meats* (Ozeki, 1998). Among the fiction that I happened to find and read during this inquiry, these novels stood out for me because of their cultural resonance – sometimes globally (especially in the case of Kinsella's novel) and sometimes locally (especially in the case of Coupland's and Ozeki's novel's, both written in Vancouver). Read in juxtaposition to one another, and to data gathered through interviews, shopping trips and focus groups, these novels help me make sense of ideologically based discourses, practices and pedagogies of shopping.

Step 7: Incorporating Personal Reflection

Throughout this dissertation, I incorporate personal reflections about my own shopping and consumption experiences and understandings. Sometimes, these are included in the text of chapters; chapter one, for example, establishes the importance of my own background in my approach to this inquiry. At other times, as I explained in the Prologue, these reflections are contained in short inter-chapter bridges which I call Interludes (see Appendix A).

Recognizing my impact in the data gathered during conversations with participants, as I myself participated in and often steered conversations with them, I occasionally include my reflections in excerpts from interviews, shopping trips and focus groups cited in the analytical chapters. These personal reflections operate on different levels. They serve as self-conscious

Social identity	Gender; Race; Class; National/geographic region
What shopping means	Positive: Enjoy looking at/finding products; Quick rewards; Making a difference (Creates jobs for people in need); Being social (Being in community); Leisure activity; Choice as positive; Construct identity, express values, fulfil desires; Meeting needs, being responsible; Trying new things; Pleasant environment
	Negative: Chore (Time consuming, inconvenient; Frustrating); Price, unaffordability; Peer pressure; Inability to know, confusion; Choice as negative (Over-consumption); Guilt-inducing; Unpleasant environment; Finding clothes that fit and look good; Lack of (meaningful) choice; Manipulation, temptation; Price trumps ethics; Exploitation; Attempt to fill emptiness, express connection
	Neutral: Necessary chore, task, meeting needs; Quality/meaning of shopping changes
Sources of learning and messages	Family: Partner; Mother; Father; Siblings; Parents; Grandparents
	Online
	Documentaries
	Magazines
	Friends, colleagues
	Books
	Overseas experiences/travel
	Stores, staff
	Other life experiences: Raised/worked on a farm; Works in the food production/consumption chain; Encountered class clash; Having kids, being a caregiver; Moving out while young
	Movies
	Workshops, courses, forums, seminars; Others ways of hearing experts, activists
	Packaging, labels, corporate marketing material
	NGOs and “ethical” businesses
	Mainstream/commercial media: Newspapers; Radio; Magazines; Television
	Independent/community media
	Online
Society-at-large, culture: School	
Advertisements, mass marketing: Billboards; Bus/transit; Magazines; Television	
Stores/brands	
Information sought	
Types of messages	Choice
	Gotta have it, need, happiness
	Trustworthiness
	You can buy a new identity
	Buy!
	There's more to value(s) than price/profit: Be ethical/health, you don't have to compromise
	Lack of meaning
continued	

Table 4.1a: Code Book

reminders of my presence in the study and my impact on the generation of conversational data (see Fine, 1998; Naples, 2003; Richardson, 2000). The incorporation of such personal reflections into my inquiry, which is commonly referred to as researcher reflexivity, responds to Richardson's (2000) explanation that “our Self is always present” (p. 930) in our research and Fine's (1998) exhortation about “working the hyphens” between insider and outsider status in any research study. On the one hand, this study is not an ethnography, and I do not claim or aim to represent a distinct social group; on the other hand, inasmuch as I am interested in the connection between social characteristics and shopping, questions of insider/outsider status are relevant here. For example, chapter seven discusses in detail the complications which become apparent in talking to people about gender, race and class. As I outline in the following section, I use varied analytical procedures to deal with varied types of data, and my reflections additionally serve as part of the data and contribute to my analytical processes in this inquiry.

Step 8: Analysis

I have already explained that this inquiry involves a variety of data collection methods. I also use different analytical procedures to deal with these data. For data from interviews and shopping trips, I approached analysis in what is regarded as a fairly conventional way for social science research, using a process of coding individual transcripts to highlight trends and patterns. (👁) I used an open source qualitative data analysis software package called Weft QDA in this process (a choice which I explore in Interlude 3). Codes were generated in two ways. I began by setting a coding category for the main interview questions. Rather than creating a distinct coding category for each question in the interview schedule, I grouped together questions which aimed at eliciting information about a particular topic or issue. I began with the coding categories of Social identity; What shopping means; Sources of learning and messages; Information sought; Types of messages; Are you a “good” shopper?; Considerations; Practices; Analysis of democracy, consumption, choice and agency; Globalization and consumption; Conceptualizations of learning; and Being radical/making a difference.

From these initial codes, I developed a level of sub-codes, creating a nested code list. I began by coding interview transcripts by question and, as I continued with this process, I generated additional codes and sub-codes to capture themes and sub-themes which were repeatedly raised in participants' comments and offered important contributions in response to my guiding and framing questions. For example, a separate coding category for conceptualizations of learning was inserted because of the importance of these thoughts to my

Types of messages (cont.)	Money is power
	Be organized, in control
	Shopping is fun
	Frivolous, self-indulgent
	Shopping as a sign of the good citizen
	Multiculturalism at play
	Consume less
Am I a “good” shopper?	
Considerations	Ecological concern: Packaging; Food security; Climate change
	Ethics: Fairness in labour (Child labour); Animal welfare
	Community impact: Local/Canadian
	Convenience, efficiency
	Personal/family health
	Price, value for money
	Organic, natural
	Functionality
	Fashion, taste, trend
	Trustworthiness of retailer/manufacturer
	Quality/freshness
	Awareness of complications: Achieving a balanced approach, avoiding conflict
	Variety, selection
	Ability of retailer/manufacturer to act
	Cultural expectations/standards; Divergent habits among family members/friends
	Defining/meetings needs
	Comfort/fit
	Appropriateness of a gift
	Where the profits go: Women-owned
	Customer service
Shopping environment	
Practices	Buys local and/or co-op
	Grows/makes her own
	Avoids packaging, buys bulk, reuses bags
	Looks for sustainable/healthy products/ingredients: Buys organic, in season; Vegetarianism
	Creates a hierarchy
	Donates items
	Simplifies life, avoids shopping, rejects consumerism
	Volunteers
continued	

Table 4.1b: Code Book (continued)

framing questions of what people learn to do, who people learn to be and how people learn to make change. After I had coded several interview transcripts, I continued to use this coding list for data from shopping trips. Because I did not have a schedule of questions to ask participants who chose to do a shopping trip rather than an interview, shopping data did not cover every portion of the code book; however, the codes did seem to accommodate the topics raised in shopping trip conversations and my observations during those trips. My analyses of interview and shopping trip data are discussed in chapters six, seven and eight.

The other participant-based data came out of focus groups, which I also discuss in chapters six, seven and eight. Because of time constraints, I completed only partial transcriptions of the focus group conversations. I also did not use the Weft QDA software to code them. There were only two focus groups with relatively few participants in each and relatively little data to deal with, and I was comfortable listening to the focus group recordings and transcribing the sections that I thought were most useful, given the interview data which were already transcribed and coded. In their well known publication on focus group research, Jean Schensul and Margaret LeCompte (1999) advise that

A formal coding system should be developed and applied to the data if one or more of the following three circumstances prevail: if the number of interviews is large enough (more than 20 group interviews); if the interviews are long enough to warrant full-scale computerized coding (more than 15 pages); or if the research team decides that focused group interviews will continue, thus expanding the sample over time. In general, a database of more than 20 interviews, or more than 100 pages of text, warrants the creation of a coding system. (p. 107).

I was interested in listening carefully to the recordings and pulling from them both similarities to and differences from the coded interview data. This is consistent with the approach described by Anssi Peräkylä (2006):

In many cases, qualitative researchers who use written texts as their materials do not try to follow any predefined protocol in executing their analysis. By reading and rereading their empirical materials, they try to pin down their key themes and, thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen. (p. 870).

Practically, the relatively small amount of focus group data that I had to deal with made it possible for me to identify themes from the code book by reading through the focus group transcripts. I was interested in both patterns and similarities, and tensions and disagreements that arose in focus group conversations. I appreciate Saukko's (2003) point that divergence in perspectives can be apparent between two people and even, for that matter, within one individual's narrative; however, the nature of focus groups increases the likelihood that divergent, possibly clashing, experiences, opinions and feelings will be expressed.

Practices (cont.)	Goes elsewhere
	Avoids the worst of the worst: Avoids certain stores/brands; Boycotts
	Asks questions in-store
	Does research
	Takes certain kinds of paid work
	Combines trips, avoids driving
	Reads ingredients, labels carefully
	Makes a list
	Tries new things
	Delays purchase
	Uses things completely
	Seeks certain stores/settings/brands
	Goes along with others, compromises
	Reuses/recycles: Refurbishes/recycles objects; Second hand shopping; Swaps
	Buys fair trade
Shops online	
Analysis of democracy, consumption, choice and agency	
Globalization and consumption	
Conceptualizations of Learning	Learning as analysis/synthesis/understanding
	Learning as integration of information into life
	Learning as “reversible” as circumstances change
	Learning as an ongoing process
	Teaching/learning
	“Radar screen”
	Learning as intuitive, emotional
	Curiosity
Being radical/ making a difference	Faith/spirituality/hope: Having a “calling”
	Social and political engagement
	Getting to the root of the problem
	Extreme, undesirable: Certainty, orthodoxy
	Unpredictable
	Incremental
	Exciting, dangerous, admirable
	One person at a time, start with yourself: NOT one person at a time, mass movement
	Oxymoron, impossible (in the context of shopping)
	Radicalism is relative

Table 4.1c: Code Book (continued)

The focus group data have been useful to me in another, distinct way. For the second focus group exercise, I invited participants to engage with me in a quick exercise of semiotic analysis of texts and images. Penn (2000) offers the following synopsis of semiotic analysis, also known as semiology:

Semiology provides the analyst with a conceptual toolkit for approaching sign systems systematically in order to discover how they produce meaning....Semiology grew out of the discipline of structural linguistics that originated in the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The structural approach sees language as a system and attempts to discover 'all the rules that hold it together' (Hawkes, 1977:19). (p. 227)

In this exercise, participants chose from a collection of advertisements, cartoons, news articles and pamphlets. One-on-one interviews offer the advantage of exploring individual points of and experiences in depth; however, I wondered if interview “talk” might tend toward intellectual abstraction. The images that I presented in the focus groups seem designed to have emotional sway, and I hoped that analysis and discussion there would complement both the interviews and the shopping trips by prompting participants to engage in analysis and discussion on an emotional, as well as an intellectual, level. In this way, I aimed to suggest that learning and shopping, like research, are analytical processes, and that analysis, like all parts of learning, is more than an intellectual undertaking. The analyses which we – participants and I – jointly constructed during focus groups informs my discussion in chapters six, seven and eight.

In one chapter, chapter five, I use a different source of data and a different analytical approach. That chapter summarizes my attempt at an intertextual analysis of a type of cultural product discussed by scholars such as Jarvis (1998, 2000, 2003) and Paula Saukko (2003). In that chapter, I begin by using semiotic and narrative analysis in an attempt to uncover some of the ideologically based symbols and messages embedded in one of the novels. As I progress through the analysis, I set the analyzed texts against one another and against other cultural products – such as discourses of and approaches to consumer education for adults.

Depending on the data at hand, I have employed a range of analytical approaches and techniques, from a fairly conventional process of coding and analysis using a software package, to a jointly constructed semiotic analysis of cultural images and texts during focus groups, to a thematic analysis of fiction. Throughout my analyses, I maintain an intertextual approach, juxtaposing transcript texts, literature and images against one another. These analyses complement one another, and overall coherence is maintained through my continual return to my anchoring concepts. Finally, there are data which have been included in this inquiry to reiterate or illustrate conceptual and analytical points being made, even though they are not formally

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analyzed. These are the images and texts which appear on the even numbered pages. Some of these materials, namely graffiti and signs, were found as I went along, and seemed to reflect many of the messages in materials that I was compiling in a more purposeful way. They remind me that, in any inquiry, there are always more data collected than analyzed, and that no inquiry is ever entirely complete. They also function as reminders that there is always more to research than the data which undergo formal analysis, and more to knowledge construction than formal learning. As I go on to establish in my analytical chapters, participants in this study have engaged repeatedly in informal research and learning.

Step 9: Writing up/Writing as the Inquiry

I have already cited Richardson's (2000) thoughts on writing as a form of inquiry. The final step in this inquiry is the writing of this dissertation. This is not simply a matter of putting on paper the understanding that I have formulated in my head; it is a complex process of figuring out as I write. Richardson adopts a poststructural stance which emphasizes the importance writing as experimenting with language to build knowledge. She writes,

When we view writing as a *method*, we experience “language-in-use,” how we “word the world” into existence (Rose, 1992). And then we “reword” the world, erase the computer screen, check the thesaurus, move a paragraph, again and again. This “worded world” never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying. Writing as a method of inquiry honors and encourages the trying, recognizing it as emblematic of the significance of language. (Richardson, 2000, p. 35)

In producing this dissertation, the idea of writing as a method of inquiry has resonated with me. As I wrote this text, much of my analytical points became more apparent and clearer. Perhaps this is a standard part of bricolage, in which analysis, like the rest of the research process, unfolds and assumes a purpose in a somewhat unpredicted and unpredictable way. I have also discovered that there is much more than language at play here. My writing-as-inquiry involves images as well as worded texts, and it involves the aesthetics of the page as well as the words on the page. Richardson does not talk about these additional ways in which writing is not just a process of writing up an inquiry, but is an inquiry in itself. On the other hand, this inquiry remains more than an unfolding word game that, in my view, poststructuralism seems most intrigued by. I do not abandon the critical purpose of an inquiry anchored by Gramscian concepts and concerns. At the same time as I appreciate the importance of language and other cultural objects, I try never to lose sight of the materiality of circumstances and relations.

All of this seems related to shopping and consumption which are commonly recognized for their complex combination of material and symbolic functions. Layered on top of the topic of

Pseudonym	Heard about the study	Interview venue/location	Shopping trip site or area of the city	Focus group
Sharon	Educational Studies (EDST)	UBC		
Jocelyn	Necessary Voices	UBC		✓
Therèse	EDST		Grocery store/Kitsilano	✓
Carla	EDST	UBC		✓
Bonnie	EDST		Caper's Kitsilano	
Sandy	Word of mouth		Grocery store/Kitsilano	✓
Nicole	Flyer/leaflet	Café/Granville Island		✓
Alice	Flyer/leaflet	Café/Kitsilano		
Violet	Word of mouth	Café/Downtown		
Karen	Flyer/leaflet	Café/Granville Heights		✓
Amy	EDST	UBC		
James	Word of mouth	Café/Marpole		✓
Jody	Word of mouth		Caper's/Kitsilano	
Amitah	Farm Folks/City Folks (FFCF)	Telephone		
Sean	Word of mouth	Café/Cambie St.		
Mary	College listserv	Café/Oak St.		
Julie	College listserv	Café/Arbutus St.		(✓)
Tamara	College listserv	Café/Marpole		
Sarah	Word of mouth	Café/Main St.		
Claire	Your Local Farmers' Market (YLFM)		Caper's/Kitsilano	
Reesa	YLFM		East End Food Co-op	
Kerri	YLFM		Grocery store/Downtown	
Linda	YLFM	Café/W. Broadway	HT Naturals	
Vanessa	YLFM		East End Food Co-op	
Ellen	EDST	UBC		
Eddie	Craig's List	Café/The Drive		
Alexandra	Mothering network		HT Naturals	
Annette	Mothering network		HT Naturals	
Emily	Mothering network		HT Naturals	
Debbie	Mothering network		HT Naturals	
Jane	Mothering network		HT Naturals	
Paula	Word of mouth		Caper's/Kitsilano	
[Kaela]	[Researcher]			

Table 4.2: Summary of Participation

this inquiry – shopping as a process of informal learning – has been the recognition that my enactment of this inquiry, from its very beginnings to the production of this dissertation, has been a process of both consumption and informal learning. All along the way, I have made decisions as a shopper and a consumer. Such decisions are evident in my process of analysis itself. As an open source data analysis software package, Weft QDA was attractive because of its affordability; however, it is not a package used by anybody else in my department and, unlike commercially available software packages, there are no training sessions offered by UBC for researchers who want to use it. Ultimately, I chose it as a shopper, a consumer and a researcher: I thought that it could meet my analytical needs, at the same time as it reiterated my concern about the corporatization and commodification of culture, learning and everyday life.

Introduction to the Participants

I have already begun to describe how I found participants for this study and who they were. In this final section of the chapter, I provide further details about the process and outcome of my participant recruitment. As well, I offer a brief commentary on some of the limitations of both my recruitment methods and the composition of my body of participants.

As I have indicated, most of the 32 participants (not including me) heard about the study either by word of mouth or through an organizational listserv. Some of these participants were prior acquaintances of mine. Sharing my interest in shopping, consumption and globalization, they contacted me to volunteer when they saw my recruitment flyer or heard me speak about the study. Because I have not made claims about my own objectivity or neutrality, or about the generalizability of the study's results, I see my recruitment methods as limiting, without being unacceptable. Information about the participants, including the pseudonyms that I use to refer to them, and how they heard about the study is summarized in Table 4.2. (👁)

Of the participants in this study, I was acquainted with seven individuals before they volunteered for an interview or a shopping trip. These individuals tended to share certain values, experiences and characteristics with me and perhaps with one another, but there are also always differences among them and between them and me. For example, the participants who heard about the study from the Educational Studies listserv have, as I do, a high level of “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1984) which accompanies formal education; however, as the summary of demographic characteristics indicates, there were other types of differences among them and between them and me. Most notably, we ranged in age and, to a lesser extent, ethno-cultural identification, although most identified racially as white or Caucasian. Moreover, sometimes

Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	Socioeconomic Class	Occupation	Education	Race
Sharon	F	40-64	Middle	Faculty	University	Caucasian/ WASP?
Jocelyn	F	65+	“Privileged”	Retired (recreation therapist)	University	“Human”/ “Honky”
Therèse	F	30-39	“Middle class”	Student	University	“Caucasian”
Carla	F	30-39	“Born working class unsure now”	Research coordinator	University	“Canadian (½ Caucasian, ½ Filipino)”
Bonnie	F	30-39	“Lower-middle income”	NGO staff person	University	“White/ Caucasian”
Sandy	F	30-39	“Privileged lower class”	Student	University	“White”
Nicole	F	25-29	“Middle class”	Student/artist	University	“Caucasian”
Alice	F	30-39	“Middle”	HR/Professional Development officer	University	“Caucasian”
Violet	F	30-39	“Middle class”	Social services counsellor	University	“Japanese Canadian”
Karen	F	30-39	“Middle”	Faculty	University	“Mutt” European mix (British, Italian, Polish)
Amy	F	25-29	“Middle-upper”	Cinema/film officer/executive	University	“Chinese”
James	M	30-39		Unemployed/retail manager	University	“Caucasian”
Jody	F	30-39	“Middle class”	Cinema/film officer/executive	University	“½ Polish ¼ English ¼ Irish”
Amitah	F	25-29	“Grew up middle, dropped out”	Organic/fair trade food sales	Less than high school graduation	“East Indian and British – mixed race I guess”
Sean	M	40-64	“Middle”	“Investor/Computer programmer”	University	“Canadian”
Mary	F	40-64	“Lower middle”	Community contractor	University	“1/8 Metis + 7/8 white Canadian”
Julie	F	40-64	“Middle class”	Community contractor	College	“White, English-Scottish”
Tamara	F	30-39	“Middle class professional”	Organic/fair trade food sales	University	“Caucasian”
						Continued

Table 4.3a: Participants’ Social Characteristics

there were similarities among participants regardless of how they had heard about the study and whether or not we had known each other previously. For example, participants overall had a relatively high level of formal education. On the demographics form, 24 participants (not including me) indicated that they had at least some university-level education. Five participants indicated that they had college-level education, and only one person had not completed high school (two participants declined to provide those details). Participants who completed the demographics form also largely described their socio-economic status as middle class (or aspiring to middle class). Many participants who were unsure about their class identity either had grown up in a working class family and wondered about the impact of their post-secondary education on their social status, or saw their economic constraints as a temporary state while they were full-time students. My own class confusion, having grown up with one parent from an upper-middle class, highly educated family and one parent from a working class family, seemed rather unique.

These demographic similarities are one limitation to this study. Initially intent on finding participants with diverse gender, race and class identities, I was not especially surprised when most people who came forward identified as female and middle class. As I discussed in chapter two, shopping is constructed as a feminine task and past-time. Men shop too, but their reluctance to be seen as interested in shopping seemed a likely explanation for their disinterest in the study or reluctance to volunteer.

I also came to understand the largely middle class composition of my participant base. As Bourdieu (1984) recognizes, globalization's version of capitalism has created “new fractions of these [middle] classes, which are grey areas, ambiguously located in the social structure, inhabited by individuals whose trajectories are extremely scattered” (p. 112). In other words, unless one is extremely wealthy or extremely poor, one is likely to identify as middle class. Furthermore, individuals who are involved in activism framed as anti-consumerist are likely to be middle class, at least in the United States (Littler, 2005).

Although participants described themselves as having varied ethno-cultural identities, I was surprised and disappointed by the relative lack of racial diversity among them. Few came from racialized minority groups, or at least groups which are considered as such in contemporary Canadian society. My own linguistic limitation to English eliminated many people who might otherwise have been interested in participating in the study. I did make some attempts to recruit participants from a broader range of racial groups. To that end, I forwarded my recruitment flyer

Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	Socioeconomic class	Occupation	Education	Race
Sarah	F	19-24	“Upper middle class”	Occupational therapist	University	“Caucasian”
Claire	F	40-64	“Middle class”	Community contractor	University	“Chinese”
Reesa	F	40-64	“Working”	Unemployed/ receptionist	College	“Caucasian”
Kerri	F	30-39	“Middle class”	Social services counsellor	University	“Caucasian – European heritage”
Linda	F	30-39	“Middle”	Pharmacist	University	“White”
Vanessa	F	65+	“Low”	Retired	College	“Canadian – Scottish”
Ellen	F	25-29	“Upwardly mobile (I hope) Poor with safety net”	Student/instructor	University	“White/ Indian”
Eddie	M	30-39	“Poor”	Army reservist/ESL teacher	College	“Chinese”
Alexandra	F	30-39	“Middle class”	Photographer/mom	University	“European/ Caucasian”
Annette	F	30-39	“Working poor”	Midwife/mother/ volunteer	University	“Caucasian”
Emily	F	30-39	NA	NA	NA	NA
Debbie	F	25-29	“Middle class”	Customer service officer	College	“Caucasian”
Jane	F	40-64	NA	NA	NA	NA
Paula	F	40-64	“Poor student in debt and transitioning to upper middle class”	Student	University	“White – European”
[Kaela]	[F]	[40-64]	[“Middle class”]	[Student/instructor]	[University]	[“White/ Eastern European Jewish”]

Table 4.3b: Participants’ Social Characteristics (continued)

to two non-governmental organizations in Vancouver which are well known for their racially diverse membership and followed up with e-mails; however, nobody from those organizations responded to my call for participants. Demographic details about participants are summarized in Table 4.3. (☹), and I discuss the limitations of this inquiry in terms of gender, race and class in my concluding chapter nine.

Finally, I will say a few words about my own involvement in this study. I undoubtedly participated in the generation of conversational data from interviews, shopping trips and focus groups. Towards the end of interviews, when I asked participants if they had any questions for me, some people turned the tables and asked me about how *I* learned about shopping and consumption, and about how *I* came to understand and respond to the troubling aspects of globalization through my shopping. During shopping trips, participants often asked me about my opinion on various products or brands, or my speculation about what a label might mean, or my own shopping priorities and habits. Like me, the participants in this study are interested in shopping and curious about how it is connected to both globalization and learning. They and I had different purposes and objectives, but this was, in some way, their study too. Through our conversations, they were able to ask questions that they had and begin to work through some of their primary concerns. In an attempt to recognize both my participation in this study and my distinct role as researcher, I include myself (no pseudonym required) in tables summarizing information about participants and their participation.

Now that I have laid out the information about the concepts anchoring this inquiry, its ontological, epistemological and methodological frameworks, and its methods and participants, I turn in the following chapters to my discussion of the analyses that I have begun to describe here. As I indicated earlier in this chapter, my presentation of methods as a sequence of steps is useful, but somewhat arbitrary. Although I did not discuss my analysis of fiction until Step 6 in this chapter, I step out of sequence now, to begin the summary of my analyses with that process in the following chapter.

There's a very thin line that separates the strong, true, bright bird of the imagination from the synthetic, noisy bauble. Where is that line? How do you recognize it? How do you know you've crossed it? At the risk of sounding esoteric and arcane, I'm tempted to say that you just know. The fact is that nobody – no reader, no reviewer, agent, publisher, colleague, friend, or enemy – can tell for sure. A writer just has to ask herself that question and answer it as honestly as possible. The thing about this “line” is that once you learn to recognize it, once you see it, it's impossible to ignore. You have no choice but to live with it, to follow it through. You have to bear with all its complexities, contradictions, and demands. And that's not always easy. It doesn't always lead to compliments and standing ovations....The trouble is that once you've seen it, you can't unsee it. And once you've seen it, keeping quiet, saying nothing, becomes as political an act as speaking out. There's no innocence. Either way, you're accountable.

– Arundhati Roy (2001), *Power Politics*, pp. 6-7



I had become convinced in my own work that the most penetrating analysis would always be of forms, specifically literary forms, where changes of viewpoints, changes of known and knowable relationships, changes of possible and actual resolutions, could be directly demonstrated, as forms of literary organization, and then, just because they involved more than individual solutions, could be reasonably related to a real social history, itself considered analytically in terms of basic relationships and failures and limits of relationship.

– Raymond Williams (1980), *Culture and Materialism*, p. 26

CHAPTER FIVE

NOVEL CONSUMPTION: GOING SHOPPING AND LEARNING WITH FICTIONAL CHARACTERS⁶

In this chapter, I begin to respond to my framing questions about learning-through-shopping: What do people learn to do? Who do people learn to be? How do people learn to make change? I have chosen to place this chapter at the beginning of my analysis for several reasons, some of which I have already noted in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I explore the characters and stories of four contemporary popular novels. By preceding the chapters which discuss my analysis of data from interviews, shopping trips and focus groups, this chapter introduces evidence that culture is, as Gramsci (1971) argues, ideologically charged. It illustrates how individuals, including me and the participants who become the focus of my analysis in later chapters, encounter multiple understandings of and responses to hegemonic ideologies and, as consumer-citizens, negotiate our way through them in the context of our material circumstances.

My inclusion of fiction also confirms Gramsci's (1971) ideas on the role of intellectuals, such as novelists, in confirming or challenging ideologies and common sense, and in spurring informal, potentially radical, learning in the course of everyday activities. As novelist and essay-writer Arundhati Roy (2001) understands, novelists may or may not self-identify as artists with a higher calling than producing works of fiction, but they always function as intellectuals with political importance. (☉) Later scholars influenced by Gramsci, such as Williams (1980), argue similarly that the analysis of literature plays an important role in understanding a particular society. (☉) In part, I use reading fiction as an analogy for shopping, as both are processes of consumption and “part of the construction of identity and identification” (Jarvis, 2003, p. 262). Furthermore, as Jarvis (2003) notes, reading of popular fiction is, like shopping, seem as a distinctly feminine pasttime, “an indulgence, something women do...to escape the tedium of daily life” (p. 271).

In part, though, I also use the particular works of fiction discussed here as examples of how individuals learn about and through shopping. My assertion is that, for readers, getting to know and empathize with different characters, their stories and their points of view can build awareness of social issues and encourage reflexivity in readers' daily lives. This is also Jarvis' (1998, 2000, 2003) point. Her question of how a reflective reading of literary fiction can

⁶ This chapter is based on presentations delivered at two conferences in 2007: The joint Adult Education Research Conference (AERC)/Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education Annual Conference (CASAE), and the Standing Committee on University Teaching and Research in the Education of Adults (SCUTREA). I thank those who attended my presentations for their helpful questions, discussion and feedback.

Students did indeed develop technical expertise in practical criticism, but also analysed texts in terms of their social and political agendas. These aspects of analysis were not separable. Their analytical skills meant that they were increasingly conscious of point of view and audience which led them to ask what kinds of interests or perspectives a text represented. They had developed an awareness of texts as constructed knowledge as opposed to text as image of reality. Many reported that they now tended to analyse texts, including social texts, in terms of their representation of women and to ask questions about gendered points-of-view. I found it interesting, however, that this shift in attitude towards knowledge appeared to be transferable across contexts. This was not a media studies course, we had not discussed news and information media, yet students reported a more critical approach to the news and a stronger interest in current affairs when asked how they had changed as a result of their course.

– Christine Jarvis (2000), “Reading and Knowing,” p. 539

facilitate critical learning is rarely researched among adult educators; however, she and a few other adult educators have begun to explore the more popular question of how media can be used in critical learning (Armstrong, 2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Jarvis, 2005; Sandlin, 2005b, 2007; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007; Wright, 2006, 2007). As the reader of these four novels who is also the writer of this chapter, I am exploring my own learning. Like Jarvis (2000, 2003), I am interested in combining literature and the humanities into a study of social life. (☹) This is consistent with Gramsci's (1971) stress on the dialect of the social and the cultural, as well as with my explanation of case study bricolage methodology. From the outset of my analytical account, then, I have positioned myself as both a researcher and a participant in this inquiry.

Aside from me, though, there are other learners in this analysis. They are the characters in the novels. Talking about the character Murphy Brown, from the television show of the same name, Elizabeth Tisdell and Patricia Thompson (2007) explain, "Sometimes fictional characters take on national significance, and even become part of public debate on social issues, which indicates the incredible power of the media to both construct and contribute to discussion and commentary on social issues" (p. 653). Paul Armstrong (2000, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c) deals with the educational function of shows ranging from soap operas to the satirical *The Simpsons* and *The Office*. Robin Wright (2006, 2007) explores how Catherine Gale, a lead character in the version of the British show *The Avengers* which ran from 1962 to 1964, helped female viewers understand the British gender structures, and develop a critique of them and an alternative sense of self. Even Jarvis (2005) turns her attention away from novels to explore lessons about lifelong learning in the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Jarvis' analysis establishes that there is learning within the show which helps to develop the characters as the series progresses and helps them fulfil their roles within the show, as well as learning among viewers about the nature of learning, human development and the call to radical action. Moreover, Jarvis discusses the intellectual, emotional, intuitive and sensual dimensions of learning in everyday life, a view which is consistent with my own conceptualization of holistic incidental learning.

Fiction, rather than media, interests me for several reasons. Media is the focus of study for a few leading scholars in the field of education; however, as Tisdell and Thompson (2007) confirm, these studies often concern children and youth. I want my focus to remain squarely on adult learning, and literary fiction might be more useful than television or film in this study which is concerned centrally with incidental (Foley, 1999, 2001) adult learning. Even if a television show or a film makes a critical or radical point, its viewers are continually confronted

Knowledge and knowing are saturated with political purpose, intent, cultural and social values, and vested interests. And knowledge, as we have continued to create it in our discipline, has no greater claim to authenticity, to fidelity, to truth, to validity, or reliability than do the fictions we read, write, or tell ourselves daily in print or in conversations to get on with our lives. We tell ourselves stories in order to live, says Joan Didion. Well, we tell ourselves 'truths' and 'facts' for that reason as well.

My first point, then, is this: knowing and knowledge are fictions as much as fiction is knowing and knowledge.

– Lorri Neilsen (2002), “Learning from the Liminal: Fiction as Knowledge,” p. 208



Here I am concerned with methodological issues surrounding the textual treatment of women's experiences as data. What I mean is that sociological research itself entails the creation of texts – written field notes, interview transcripts, questionnaire data, and so on – which become the basis of knowledge claims. Not too long ago, sociologists would not be willing to admit that they “read” rather than simply “measure” the social world. Such an admission draws attention to the subjective rather than objective activities of the social scientist. Nor would sociologists until recently consider in their wildest dreams that they actually “write” the social; in other words, that sociologists create rather than discover what we have come to think of as “the social” (see Game 1991). For better or for worse, anti-humanist critiques have forced us to think about these matters. Certainly, I could not evade them in a sociological study of the cultural realm. For this reason, *Girl Talk* can also be read for what it tells us about our own practices as researchers.

– Dawn Currie (1999), *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*, p. 14

with commercial advertisements, challenging them to sustain a critical analysis of what they are consuming; fiction might be commercially produced and marketed, but it does not have the same direct attachment to advertising. Furthermore, the separation of the realm of literary fiction from the realm of advertising (i.e., the advertisement of products other than the novel itself) suggests that authors of novels are less constrained than their colleagues in television or film. Film makers and television producers face direct pressure to reiterate hegemonic ideology and common sense because of their need for sponsors or advertisers.

Reading a novel also takes time, much more time than it takes to watch a television show or a film. Thompson (2007) notes that media technologies now commonly available to consumers in the Global North enable them “not only to be entertained by television shows and films but to stop and start them and thus to dissect, analyze, and learn from them” (p. 84). Whether or not people actually consume media in this way remains an unanswered question, but most people do read novels in this way. (I certainly do.) Putting aside and returning to a novel, readers have an opportunity to think about what they have read and hold it up against their own daily experiences. This understanding of adult learning is consistent with a constructivist perspective. As Jarvis (2003) points out, “Narrative organization and point of view may lead readers to identify with characters whose values and actions are in opposition to their own. Reflection on this identification may challenge existing meaning perspectives at the personal or sociocultural level” (p. 265). Finally, in my holistic conceptualization of learning, I combine critical thinking and reflection with emotion; my serious reading of and learning from this fiction has encompassed intellectual and emotional responses.

My purpose is not to conduct a comprehensive analysis of contemporary literature; rather, my intertextual analysis of fiction provides one way of exposing and examining the range of ideologies and common sense relating to shopping and consumption and circulating in Canadian society. Fictional texts are evidence of cultural and social reality. (👁) Intertextual analysis, a prime methodological tool of cultural studies, asks researchers to read texts “in relation to the wider cultural and social panorama, consisting of other texts” (Saukko, 2003, p. 103). “Texts” is used loosely in this sense, and includes media, political and cultural writings as well as images and other forms of discursive representation. As Currie (1999) clarifies, texts can also include research transcripts (👁), and I occasionally intersperse my reading of novels with excerpts from transcripts of interviews, shopping trips or focus groups that I conducted with participants in this inquiry. These excerpts relate works of fiction to experiences of everyday life, and reiterate my

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point that discourses are constructed and confronted in a range of forms and settings. Their inclusion marks a recognition that people interested in working for societal change are constantly engaged in processes of research and analysis, and it elevates participants' comments from raw data to a contribution to the analysis undertaken in this inquiry.

Juxtaposing the words of fictional characters and living participants, I use Richardson's (2000) tool of crystallization in this inquiry to acknowledge the breadth of possible data gathering strategies and analytical frameworks. As Currie (1999) cautions, though, this does not mean that cultural texts *become* social reality. The cultural is not the same as the social, and cultural products cannot simply replace social encounters as a source of data (Currie, 1999); however, as Gramsci (1971) clarified, each helps the other make sense dialectically. Methodologically, my reference to participants' comments in this way acknowledges the often deep reflection and analysis within them. Some of the points made by participants are the same analytical points made by scholars; sometimes, participants articulated them with great clarity and, I think, their words have a legitimate place alongside the place where I often put scholars' words. Finally, I am also aware that this chapter is itself a text, which will be read in relation to the other chapters in this dissertation, just as this dissertation will be read in relation to other dissertation texts. My insertion of this chapter in this text and at this point in it is an affirmation of intertextuality, inviting readers to consider how they bring their own wealth of experiences to the reading of any text. As well, it is consistent with my methodology of case study bricolage, which emphasizes the fitting together of disparate pieces in response to a problem.

The books that I discuss here all contain characters who understand, practice and talk about shopping in particular ways. I begin with the novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, written by Madeleine Wickham under her pen name of Sophie Kinsella (2001), which reiterates the hegemonic consumerist discourse in contemporary Western cultures. I then explore what Williams (1980) might consider two different alternative responses, found in Gemma Townley's (2006) novel *Learning Curves* and Douglas Coupland's (1991) novel *Generation X*, and oppositional responses exemplified by Ruth Ozeki's (1998) novel *My Year of Meats*. Following Sandlin's (2005b) study of a lifestyle publication as a source of informal adult learning, the analysis in this chapter continues to use critical cultural studies, including Gramsci's (1971) anchoring concepts, to explore links between reading and popular culture, consumerist ideology and adult learning. Finally, I relate this analysis to more formal adult education purposes such as the critical consumer education discussed by Sandlin (2004, 2005a), as well as the contention of

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some adult educators that learning occurs throughout daily living and that a serious, engaged reading of fiction can spur critical exploration of social issues (Jarvis, 2000).

Narrative 1: Hegemonic Consumerism

Don't get me wrong. I like museums. I really do. And I'm really interested in Korean art. It's just that the floors are really hard, and I'm wearing quite tight boots, and it's hot so I've taken off my jacket and it's slithering around in my arms. And it's weird but I keep thinking I can hear the sound of a cash till. It must be in my imagination....

I peer vaguely at a piece of tapestry, then stride off down a corridor lined with exhibits of old Indian tiles. I'm just thinking that maybe we should get the Fired Earth catalogue, when I glimpse something through a metal grille and stop dead with shock.

Am I dreaming? Is it a mirage? I can see a cash register, and a queue of people, and a display cabinet with price tags...

Oh my God, I was right! It's a shop! There's a *shop*, right there in front of me! (Kinsella, 2001, p. 103)

Confessions of a Shopaholic (Kinsella, 2001) introduces Becky Bloomwood, a young, college-educated, white woman working in London for a small financial publication. As the novel's title suggests, Becky is "addicted" to shopping. The novel, part of a series about this character, follows Becky's daily experiences working in a boring job, shopping in fashionable neighbourhoods and stores. Living well beyond her means and unable to pay her credit card bills, Becky is overwhelmed by the inevitable pressure from her many creditors until she determines how to keep that pressure at bay:

As I'm about to leave, a pile of letters comes through the letterbox for me. Several of them look like bills, and one is yet another letter from Endwich Bank. But I have a clever solution to all these nasty letters: I just put them in my dressing table drawer and close it. It's the only way to stop getting stressed out about it. And it really does work. As I thrust the drawer shut and head out of the front door, I've already forgotten all about them. (Kinsella, 2001, p. 193)

In reading the novel, I followed Becky as she is first wooed by a wealthy and aristocratic (but unattractive and socially awkward) man, and then as she falls in love with Luke Brandon, a successful public relations professional (and a witty and handsome man). The story turns when Becky is drawn into the financial problems of her parents' neighbours who have been misled by an investment company and lost a substantial amount of their savings. To earn extra money, Becky writes a newspaper article about their predicament and, enjoying the resulting publicity, appears on a television show to talk about the problem of dishonesty among investment advisers. She brings the neighbours' case to the public eye and becomes, in the eye of her beloved Luke, a person of intelligence and integrity – as well as feminine beauty and style.

In many ways, this novel follows a conventional plot-line for romance novel. Women and men conform to traditional gender roles, and the heroes embody appropriately gendered, raced

Alice: I find from billboards more and more they are, or advertisers in magazines as well, are telling us that we don't have enough or that we deserve it or that you should buy, like really bombarding with this message that you need to buy this. This will make your life complete.

– interview excerpt, February 17, 2007

Julie: I think, um, there's kind of two sets. The main message I get about shopping is do more.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Julie: Um, and that it will in some way make me happy. So I think there's quite a cynical, um, message that almost feels to me as if it permeates the culture that says, if you are having any kind of problem, you can kind of buy your way out of it. And that, those messages I do think come primarily from the media. Magazines, tv, radio, even movies now. I mean you go to see a movie now and the first 15 or 20 minutes is ads for products. And the message within literature and movies and music that somehow having more things will make me happier, okay. The flip side of that is a message that I think really sort of denigrates women that is shopping is somehow frivolous. Women do it, women love it. Isn't that just typical of their gender?

– interview excerpt, March 14, 2007

and classed dispositions and habits. Becky corresponds to the Western hegemonic stereotype of the consumer-citizen as white and middle class. She represents the hegemonic stereotype of “woman” as an uncontrollable shopper who, ultimately, means no harm and balances “man’s” obsession with work (Bowlby, 2001; Rappaport, 2000). By the novel’s end, even she recognizes that shopping and acquisition are insufficient; she comes to realize that what she is missing is a romantic relationship. Luckily, she discovers that her attraction to Luke is mutual. Her story embraces hegemony in several ways: It presents consumerism as a path to social identity and status; it reflects idealized notions of gender, race and nationality; and its connection of consumption, gender, race, nationality and class reiterates hegemonic cultural values.

What distinguishes this book and the rest of Kinsella's series from other romances is Becky's (and Kinsella's) knowledge of high-fashion brands. Becky is not just a shopper; she is a *connoisseur* of designer labels and up-to-the-minute trends. Her consumption of fashion publications and other forms of popular media, as well as her shopping, enables her to invent the persona and, ultimately, the life of her dreams – dreams which mainstream media and advertising imply that are widely shared. (👁) Through shopping and consumption, she learns about who she is and, more importantly, who she can be. Shopping and consumption give her the confidence to socialize with wealthy men above her own middle-class position. At the same time, her shopping and consumption also remind me, the reader, of the common sense (per Gramsci, 1971) about the female consumer-citizen: She *must* shop! In response to this essentially female compulsion, Becky learns how to do several things: how to find and exploit credit well beyond her means, how to break her commitments to rein in her spending, and how to evade and lie to creditors. More than an intellectual process, Becky's learning involves an emotional investment in the construction of her identity as it is realized through shopping and consumption. This might not be the radical, incidental learning described by Foley (1999, 2001), hooks (2003) or Tisdell (1998), but it is an example of how emotion and sensuality are dimensions of learning (Dirkx, 2001; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998).

Juxtaposing stores and brands which cater to the middle class, such as Marks and Spencer^{PLC} or The Body ShopTM, with coveted designer boutiques and brands such as Agnès b.TM, Kinsella (2001) suggests that she, like Becky, has the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1984) necessary to sustain a desirable middle class life in London, and that middle class readers can develop this cultural capital and use it to help build their own status through their shopping decisions. Kinsella established herself as such an expert on fashion and shopping that, after

I also made up Denny and George scarves – which was a big mistake, as I then got loads of emails asking where can you buy one? So now I'm thinking I should go into scarf design on the side.

– Sophie Kinsella (n.d.), “Interview on *Shopaholic and Sister*”

inventing a brand of scarves in her novel, she was contacted by readers inquiring about where they could find this brand. (☹) Shopping in a fashionable city's fashionable stores gives Becky what really matters for a woman: an enviable sense of style and an appropriately self-deprecating manner. As the reader of this novel, I become a student of Kinsella's and Becky's teachings. Presumably, my recognition and admiration of the particular shops and brands mentioned throughout the novel extend the possibility for me to become a real-life Becky or Kinsella, a success as a woman living in a Western society. In this way, this novel functions as a curriculum for contemporary consumer-citizen for the ideal white, middle class Western, or at least British, woman.

What Sandlin (2005a) refers to as “traditional consumer education” (p. 174) is aimed at shoppers such as Becky – people who understand the emotional and cultural appeal of shopping, and just need to learn the art of self-restraint. Traditional consumer education” has focused on instrumental learning, “which pertains to controlling or manipulating the environment or other people. It involves predictions about observable events which can be proven correct, determining cause-effect relationships and task-oriented problems solving” (Mezirow, 1995, p. 49 in Sandlin, 2005a, p. 168). Such consumer education encourages learners to become informed so that they can make careful, well reasoned decisions in their shopping and consumption. The aim is to teach consumers how to choose wisely from among consumer options, rather than to upset consumerist ideology or the social and economic structures underpinned by that ideology. In doing so, it reiterates another part of hegemonic ideology, connected to learning rather than to shopping and consumption: learning is an intellectual, rational process in which emotions, sensuality and spirituality must be checked rather than followed. As for my final framing question – How do people learn to make change? – well, as far as Kinsella and Becky are concerned, why would anybody want to learn that?

Narrative 2: Reasonable Balance

She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror and recognized that perhaps she wasn't *that* fine. Passable, maybe, but she wasn't going to set the world on fire looking like this – an old baggy T-shirt and old jeans....

Jen hesitated, then, holding the suit several inches away from her as if it were a wet dog, she strode quickly into the cubicle. *I'm just going to try it on*, she told herself firmly. *There's nothing wrong with that.*

“Wow!” Angel said appreciatively five minutes later as they both came out to take a little look at themselves....“I've never seen you in a suit before. It looks great!”

Jen shook her head bashfully, but she knew she wasn't convincing anyone. She did look great. Much better than she looked in her jeans, which had become so comfortable that they no

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longer held any shape, draping over her legs as if hungover and unable to think what else to do. (Townley, 2006, pp. 168-171, emphasis in original)

Townley's (2006) novel *Learning Curves* might not share the commercial and popular success of Kinsella's *Shopaholic* series, but there is a sisterly relationship between both the novelists and their novels. Like *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and the other titles in that series, *Learning Curves* is in the romance genre and treats shopping and consumption as central, contemporary concerns. It is likewise based in London, and its main characters share much with Kinsella's (2001) characters. There is one additional point of interest which has heightened attention to this novel: Townley and Kinsella are, in real life, sisters. On the other hand, the differences between the two novels introduce some of the variations in discourses of shopping and consumption, and their relationship to both social identity and globalization.

In *Learning Curves*, I met the main character, Jen. Like Becky, Jen is a white, middle class, attractive, well educated Londoner; in contrast to Becky, however, she is torn between the mainstream and calls for change. This intellectual and emotional split is represented by her divorced parents: her wealthy businessman father, George, and her environmentalist-social activist mother, Harriet. Working in Harriet's consulting firm, Jen agrees to enrol as a student in the business education program operated by George's corporation. Harriet suspects that George is involved in a corporate scandal, and Jen is sent into his corporation via the business program to spy on him. In the excerpt that opens this section, Jen's increasing confusion about what is right and wrong, as well as her own identity, is illustrated as she tries on a fashionable business suit in a clothing store. On a shopping expedition with her best friend, Angel, Jen is shocked to see that this suit actually does suit her well. This outfit is the icon of everything which is contrary to her life's work and her sense of self. By putting it on, her understanding of the world around her and her place in it is called into question.

Jen's uncertainty continues to surface and build throughout the novel. In a later scene, she has the following exchange with the tutor in the business program in which she has enrolled:

Bill stroked his beard. "Okay, then let me ask you something. Let's take a drug company. What do they do?"

Jen sat up straight. "Easy. They develop drugs which they then sell at a huge profit and convince governments to stop other companies producing these drugs cheaper, even if they could save lives all around the world. They're hideous companies. Really awful."

Bill smiled. "Okay, so you think that once they've developed a drug they should give it out for free?"

"They should sell it at the price it costs to make it. Not charge people an arm and a leg."

"But wouldn't the price include the research and development costs, which can mean years of scientists conducting expensive experiments?"

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“Yes, but...”

“But?”

“But they still make huge profits.”

“Which makes people want to invest in them, which means they have more money for research....And if they didn't make a profit, do you think there would be the same level of investment?”

Jen frowned. “I guess not...” she started, then stopped.

“Business itself isn't bad,” Bill said gently. “You need rules, codes of conduct. But making money isn't in itself a bad thing....”

“What about corruption?” Jen demanded. “Businesses are rife with it.”

“Not as rife as a lot of governments.” (Townley, 2006, pp. 255-256)

This scene is interesting in the context of adult education research because Townley (2006) presents the character of Bill the tutor, who teaches both the character of Jen and the reader of the novel. Whether or not Townley (2005) appreciates the insertion of this type of exchange, it functions as a reminder of the educational purpose of intellectuals – from teachers to authors.

This novel stops short of the whole-hearted and light-hearted portrayal of shopping or consumerism. By the end of the book, Jen and Harriet learn that George has done no wrong and they actually reconcile and begin to work together in a new found, common purpose. Their reconciliation is more than the healing of an interpersonal rift; it suggests the possibility of reconciling the general status quo with a measured commitment to alternatives. Finally, like Kinsella's (2001) Becky, Jen is rewarded with the man of her dreams, Daniel: a successful, handsome man who shares her racial and socioeconomic status.

While Kinsella's (2001) novel never wavers from its embrace of consumerist ideology – replete with overtones of gender, race and class – and its central messages are consistent with the messages in mainstream advertising and popular culture, Townley's (2006) characters and plot are more tentative. Her regard for critics' caution around corporations and consumerism recognizes nuances that Kinsella's (2001) novel overlooks. Jen's “Mr. Right” is a highly placed publishing executive, rather than the so-called “spin doctor” of corporate communications who makes Becky swoon. Jen's parents and the array of other characters in the book portray two groups: those in power who attempt to build consent to social structures through the persuasive power of ideology and common sense, and other groups whose consent is sought. The challenge for Becky is to find a way to shop endlessly; the challenge for Jen is to negotiate a balanced position on consumerism and capitalism in a version that resembles Giddens' (1998, 1999b) caution about, but ultimate enthusiasm for an unstoppable globalization.

This novel might not be intellectually challenging or seriously critical; it does, however, raise some of the substantive concerns of contemporary Western, middle class consumers. In

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doing so, it exemplifies the second type of response discussed by Sandlin (2005a), which she characterizes as “individually questioning consumption” (p. 175). If Kinsella's (2001) novel reiterates hegemonic ideology and common sense in a simplistic way, Townley's (2006) novel suggests the possibility for other options even as it reiterates portions of hegemonic ideology and common sense. Williams (1980) expands on Gramsci's earlier thinking about hegemony by distinguishing between what he calls “alternative” and “oppositional” responses to hegemonic discourse: “There is a simple theoretical distinction between alternative and oppositional, that is to say between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light” (pp. 41-42).

I read the character of Jen and her story as an example of Williams' (1980) alternative response, and a candidate for Sandlin's (2005a) second reaction in consumer education. She and Harriet seem to be interested in working for widespread societal change, and are motivated by emotional and spiritual understandings of ecology and fairness; however, plot turns such as Harriet's reconciliation with George and Jen's acceptance of Bill's lesson about the fairness of multinational industries such as pharmaceuticals imply that what is called for is not wholesale social or economic change, but more balanced individual choices.

Capitalism and class might be at the centre of the encounter between Jen and Bill, but gender and race also surface in the novel in ways which reinforce, rather than challenge, the hegemonic order. Jen meets and falls in love with Bill, and together they embody Western images of the perfect couple. One of the few characters from a racialized minority group, Jen's best friend Angel both reiterates and rejects stereotypes of her Indian identity. Angel is outspoken and spunky, and adamantly rejects her parents' interest in an arranged marriage for her. When it comes to shopping, though, Angel reverts to stereotypes of gender and race. It is Angel who is with Jen when she tries on the fashionable suit and, later in their shopping trip, they go to stores specializing in Indian women's wear:

She [Angel] raised her eyebrow at the assistant who came wandering over to them. “I need to order five saris,” she said firmly, putting on her mother's strong Indian accent. “None of your rubbish fabrics, I want pure silk only. And I don't have much time. Okay? Well, go on then!”
As the assistant ran off obediently, Angel winked at Jen. “I'd make a great Indian matriarch, no?” (Townley, 2006, p. 166)

Kinsella (2001) relies on shopping and consumption – such as the time her white characters cook a curry meal – to acknowledge London's increasingly diverse composition; Townley (2006) goes a step further and introduces racially, ethnically and culturally diverse

Ellen: Well this is the biggest criticism of Canadian multiculturalism, is that cultures get reduced to their most popular identifiable obvious...salient component. Right? So Indian food gets reduced to samosas, Japanese food gets reduced to, um, sushi, Mexican food gets reduced to enchiladas. And, you know, like, we think of Japanese people as wearing kimonos. Well lemme tell you, you go to Japan, the vast majority of people ain't running around in a kimono. Right? Or, um, I mean, that's one of the things that's also really hard, is that cultures get marketed. Right? Like, bangra became really popular and like, you know, Britney Spears is sampling bangra in her music videos. I mean, you know, has she ever dated a brown man or an Indian man? Would she ever, you know? Like, did she learn anything about the culture? Does she know anything about the history of bangra? No, it's just a cool beat that she brings in. Like, are we really supposed to see that as like..., cultural infusion [chuckle]. And you know, I'm sorry, she just found, you know, some sampling and mixed it in. You know.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Ellen: Um, and that is, I mean that's, that's one of my central critiques of multiculturalism. It's exactly what you said. It's like, Oh yeah, I know about, you know, Eastern religions, I do yoga. No, you, like, go to the community centre and take yoga from a white woman. You know, you say, like, namaste at the start of every course [chuckle]. Like, that doesn't tell you anything about Eastern religions, you know. And there's no spiritual component to it. I mean, maybe there is for that individual but it's not intended to, so. That's a really good point.

– interview excerpt, April 24, 2007

characters. As Angel's words indicate, many people relate gender, class and race through shopping, albeit in the reductionist, superficial, stereotypical ways described by critical race scholars (Dhruvarajan, 2000; DuCille, 1999; Frankenberg, 1993; Knowles, 2003; Twine, 2000) – and by at least one of the participants in this inquiry (👁). In the excerpt cited above, the character of Angel recalls Mies' (1986) concept of “housewifization” as she asserts her appropriate, racialized and classed femininity the context of shopping. As in Kinsella's (2001) novel, I hear no call in this book for widespread societal change; unlike Kinsella's novel, there is a return to a predominantly intellectual process of learning about shopping, consumption, identity and globalization, as the narrative instructs that only better individual judgements and balance between the tradition and new opportunities. Articulating another contemporary Western ideology – neoliberalism – Bill the tutor offers one piece of advice to see Jen through the business education program and life in general: “You focus on your goals and align your life around them, and you'll get where you want to be” (Townley, 2006, pp. 38).

Narrative 3: Cynicism

We live small lives on the periphery; we are marginalized and there's a great deal in which we choose not to participate. We wanted silence and we have that silence now. We arrived here speckled in sores and zits, our colons so tied in knots that we never thought we'd have a bowel movement again. Our systems had stopped working, jammed with the odor of copy machines, Wite-Out, the smell of bond paper, and the endless stress of pointless jobs done grudgingly to little applause. We had compulsions that made us confuse shopping with creativity, to take downers and assume that merely renting a video on a Saturday night was enough. But now that we live here in the desert, things are much, *much* better. (Coupland, 1991, p. 11, emphasis in original)

Although this novel is the oldest of the books that I discuss in this chapter, its cultural impact goes well beyond its date of publication or even its own readers. This novel popularized a lexicon, including the term “generation X.” Reading this novel, I met narrator Andy, the other main characters, Dag and Claire, and an array of their friends, work acquaintances and family members. Andy, Dag and Claire have come from different places in North America but, as Andy explains, “where you're from feels sort of irrelevant these days ('Since everyone has the same stores in their mini-malls,' according to my younger brother, Tyler)” (Coupland, 1991, p. 4). Having left behind middle class families and jobs, in favour of a “McJob ('Low pay, low prestige, low benefits, low future')” (Coupland, 1991, p. 5), they live in the same housing complex in Palm Springs, California.

As the excerpts from the novel above suggest, these three characters recognize the superficiality of their consumer culture. As the novel's title suggests, they are stand-ins for

Amitah: ...I mean with the age of the internet we've almost all become global citizens. Um, people travelling, you know, businesses overseas and all these things. And it's much less, um, it's much less separate but a lot more separate. Do you know what I mean?
[chuckle]

Kaela: So there's that paradox.

Amitah: Yeah, there's definitely a paradox. And then of course we forget that here in Canada that we're actually living on stolen land...in the first place.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: Um, nobody talks about that one. Um, and the whole, this whole thing is really built on a lie.

Kaela: Right.

Amitah: The whole culture that we're all, you know, so proud of, this multicultural Canada, um, but how did we get here? Um, nobody wants to look at that because it would raise too many difficult questions.

– interview excerpt, February 21, 2007

middle-Americans (and, by extension, Canadians) of their age (and, by implication, their white race). Coupland (1991) is not always explicit about this, but he gives me clues that he, a white man, is writing about white characters for a white reader. For example, he fills the margins of the book with his original graphic art, from comic book-style portraits to graffiti to stylized definitions of the terms that he is constructing and using. Every portrait appears to be of a white person, making whiteness a parenthetical presumption, if not an overt mandate. Unlike Kinsella's (2001) novel, *Generation X* has a narrative which is critical of the aspiration towards middle class in a consumerist culture and of contemporary globalization more generally; however, critique, like resistance, can be partial (Sparks, 1997), and this narrative does not include a critical view of the social characteristics of gender and, especially, race. As critical race scholars – and one of the participants in this study (☹) – clarify, a Canadian discourse of multiculturalism and diversity (and Coupland is himself a Canadian author) serves to diminish the apparent urgency of discussing race and race relations (Dhruvarajan, 2000) and suggests how, through culture, whiteness is constructed without being named (Frankenberg, 1993).

When it comes to the relationship between class, consumption and globalization, *Generation X* has far more to say. Having reached adulthood in postmodern consumerist societies, Andy, Dag and Claire recognize the false promise of post-Second World War consumerism, and the environmental and social problems that it has created. They articulate an unwillingness to embrace it. On the other hand, for almost the entire novel they do little more than belittle continued acceptance and enactment of consumerism, poking fun at the people around them and the society from which they have purposefully marginalized themselves. Moreover, like the previous two novels, *Generation X* continues to feature a cast of characters recruited largely from the middle class. This similarity between the three novels recalls Nesbit's (2006) suggestion that contemporary Western cultures are focused on either disputing class as a category altogether, or insisting that “everyone is middle class” (p. 175). Finally, the characters in *Generation X* do not seem to share my concern that globalization is a project which is exacerbating class divisions. Having given up their middle class, consumption-driven lives, choosing instead to live in a low-cost housing project and work in low-income “McJobs” (Coupland, 1991, p. 5), Andy, Dag and Claire portray an understanding of class as an individually chosen characteristic rather than a matter of socially and materially structured relations. Just as whiteness is the default racial identity in these characters' social world, so too is middle-class the default class position. One can choose to work and consume in a way which is

Kaela: Do you think of yourself as middle class?

Amitah: Well, I feel that I grew up that way.... Yeah. Um, I think I've dropped out of the middle class..on purpose....[laughter]

Kaela: As a, as a sort of a statement of what you want to be in your life.

Amitah: Yeah, that's a good way to put it. I'll concur with that. [laughter]

– interview excerpt, February 21, 2007



The idea of a counterculture is ultimately based on a mistake. At best, countercultural rebellion is pseudo-rebellion: a set of dramatic gestures that are devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences and that detract from the urgent task of building a more just society. In other words, it is rebellion that provides entertainment for the rebels, and nothing much else. At worst, countercultural rebellion actively promotes unhappiness, by undermining or discrediting social norms and institutions that actually serve a valuable function.

– Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter (2004), *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture can't be Jammed*, p. 59

consistent with that position, or one can – as Andy, Dag and Claire have chosen to do – remove oneself from it in protest. (☹)

In the case of these characters, though, this is as far as the protest goes. The response taken up by Andy, Dag and Claire is, again, an example of what Williams (1980) refers to as an “alternative” response. These characters have no interest in educating or persuading others about their social analysis, and they issue no call to change society. They enact the cynicism about social institutions that Kenway and Bullen (2001) warn is developing among children and youth who are growing up within a “consumer-media culture.” This is what distinguishes the alternative from an oppositional response (Williams, 1980) made by characters in other stories – whether fictional or, as I explore in later chapters, real-life.

It makes sense that Sandlin (2005a) does not identify a type of consumer education program which corresponds to the cynicism of *Generation X*. Consumer education programs aim to help individuals shop and consume better, according to the particular meaning of “better” constructed by the educator and the learners. Cynics neither embrace consumerism, nor hold out the possibility to challenge it in meaningful ways. At points throughout his novel, Coupland (1991) adopts the tactics of culture jammers. He intersperses graffiti-like images and pieces of critical, colloquial jargon both in his texts and in his margins, resisting mainstream ideas about both consumerism and the cultural form of the novel. Contrary to the potential for culture jamming spelled out by Kenway and Bullen (2001) or Sandlin (2007), though, Coupland does not put his culture jamming to further transformational use. Ultimately, Coupland challenges elements of current North American hegemony and the its cultural mainstream, without realizing the culture jammer's function as an intellectual who leads “learners [or, in this case, readers] to a moment of *détournement* (a turning around), in which they are no longer who they used to be but are caught off guard with the possibility of becoming someone different” (Sandlin, 2007, p. 79).

Cynicism has been taken up by a few scholars, such as Canadians Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2004), but it tends to be directed *against* the idea of a counter-culture which can resist consumerism. (☹) Although they have an educational purpose, cynics' basic message that people should be left alone to spend their money is not one which translates easily into the basis of a consumer education program. There is no possibility for counter-hegemony in this ontology.

The sarcasm of Coupland (1991) and his characters is witty, clever and often insightful. As a reader, I frequently agreed with the characters about the senselessness of consumerism and the damage that over-consumption does to people's spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical

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well-being; however, the book's message that there are no preferable alternatives to the social status quo left me feeling anxious and frustrated. As the novel ends, Andy meets a group of “mentally retarded young teenagers” (Coupland, 1991, p. 177) during a roadside stop. Feeling their warmth and non-judgementalism, Andy has a form of spiritual awakening as he learns about a possibility for acceptance and connection that he has not been able to comprehend intellectually. Still, in this ending, I found only a momentary respite from the atomizing, alienating, wasteful consumerist society that Coupland presents.

Narrative 4: Committed Resistance

My American Wife!

Meat is the Message. Each weekly half-hour episode of *My American Wife!* must culminate in the celebration of a featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption. It's the meat (not the Mrs.) who's the star of our show! Of course, the “Wife of the Week” is important too. She must be attractive, appetizing, and all-American. She is the Meat Made Manifest: ample, robust, yet never tough. Through her, Japanese housewives will feel the hearty sense of warmth, of comfort, of hearth and home – the traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 8, emphasis in original)

At the centre of this novel is the character Jane Takagi-Little, a Japanese-American documentary film maker hired to produce *My American Wife!*, a television series promoting the American beef industry to Japanese consumers. The series uses “typical” American families in which women (who are also always wives and mothers) buy, cook and serve meat-based dinners to men (who are also always husbands and fathers) and their children. Jane struggles to identify suitable families, even as she understands the impossibility of this task. Single and child-free, and herself an example of the racial and cultural hybridity held up as a model of postmodernity and globalization, Jane personifies the gap between the ideal American woman and the reality of contemporary American demographics. The novel's complex stories and characters include Jane's Japanese colleagues and the families she meets in the course of the series' production; her lover Sloan, a white, “dominant male” (Ozeki, 1998, p. 91) who plays saxophone in a jazz band; and the Japanese advertising representative handling this project, Joichi Ueno (who gives himself the nickname “John Wayno”) and his unhappy wife, Akiko. Together, this ensemble and their stories both reflect and dispute hegemonic images of an America populated by white, middle class, nuclear, heterosexually-parented families who live according to clear gender roles.

In her travels across America, encounters with diverse families, correspondence with her supervisor in Japan and eventual meeting with Akiko, Jane clarifies the extent to which cultural images of gender, race, class, nationality and sexuality are socially constructed to meet certain

I wanted to make programs with documentary integrity, and at first I believed in a truth that existed – singular, empirical, absolute. But slowly, as my skills improved and I learned about editing and camera angles and the effect that music can have on meaning, I realized that truth was like race and could be measured only in ever-diminishing approximations. Still, as a documentarian, you must strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly.

– “Jane” in Ruth Ozeki (1998), *My Year of Meats*, p. 176

ends. *My Year of Meats*, the fictional television series, has as its end the capitalist goal of commercial success for the American beef industry in Asia. *My Year of Meats*, the real work of fiction, is critical of that aim and the associated aims of cultural and racial imperialism. It exposes the damaging health and ecological consequences of cattle farming, beef production and meat consumption, as well as the insidious penetration and acceptance of ideological constructions in individuals' lives and society in general. From the first couple in the series who are coping with the husband's extra-marital affair to the last couple, who operate and live on a feed lot, whose pre-pubescent daughter has started to develop breasts, even the “perfect” families expose the falseness of the ideal American woman/wife/mother and man/husband/father. Ideals of gender, race, class, sexuality and ability are also challenged, as Jane meets the parents whose beautiful, beloved teenage daughter is in a wheelchair, a poor black family for whom chicken is a luxury food item and meat is simply unaffordable, a white woman who has adopted children from several Asian countries, and a lesbian mixed-race couple with a bi-racial child. These assorted characters embody Martens' (2005) point that varied social characters and identities interact with the mass consumer-media culture which pervades society, and helps individuals use and respond to consumer pressures and media representations in diverse ways.

As the image of the wholesome “all-American,” “meat-and-potatoes” family is increasingly exposed as an ideologically based falsehood, Jane begins to sabotage the aim of the series so that she can showcase real people rather than imagined characters. As a documentary film maker, Jane has already come to accept that truth is in the eye, first, of the editor, and then of the beholder. (👁) This is the ontological and epistemological reality that researchers in the social sciences must also accept. As a reader of the novel, I took note of Jane's/Ozeki's reminder and the range of settings in which individuals confront, research and represent limits of the truth.

Accepting that there is no one truth does not mean dismissing the possibility of lies. Jane provides an example of how resistance and radicalism can still make sense for a documentary film maker, a community activist, a researcher, an adult educator or a novelist, even if the potential to achieve final, complete knowledge and emancipation is dismissed. Disturbed by what she is learning about the ecological and animal welfare issues in beef production, as well as the health and cultural implications of its consumption, Jane chooses to disrupt the television series. Among the weekly wives, she includes the bi-racial lesbian couple, even though they are also vegetarian, and she delves into the hidden health problems of the girl growing up on the feed lot. Jane is eventually fired from the project, but sends copies of her film footage to members of

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the families hurt by both the beef industry and how the television series presented them. The woman living on the feed lot explains what she wants Jane to do with the tape: “‘Spread the word,’ said Bunny. ‘Give ‘em your documentary. Nah, you ain’t got no money. Sell it to them. Whatever you want. The main thing is, people gotta know!’” (Ozeki, 1998, pp. 357-358). By “people,” Bunny is referring to shoppers who will buy and consume the meat which is not as wholesome and healthy as its image in beef marketing and, more generally, in culture.

Initially choosing an alternative response (Williams, 1980), Jane decides to stop buying and consuming meat. Eventually, though, she shifts to an oppositional response (Williams, 1980) and engages in a creative form of committed resistance which approaches Foley’s (1999, 2001) notion of incidental learning with its radical ambition and potential. Consistent with the conclusions of other scholars who write about informal learning, her learning is based as much in her emotional response to what she sees and experiences as it is to her intellect (Dirkx, 2001; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998), as well as her intellectual response to what she hears and reads. Twisting the original purpose of the footage, she edits it into a critical documentary which she sells to American and international media outlets. She creates a resource for the kind of holistic learning about the politics of consumption, as well as the politics of gender, race, class, sexuality and dis/ability that I have described. This is most like the third form of consumer education discussed by Sandlin (2005a), “collectively politicizing and fighting consumption” (p. 176), typically delivered informally through community activist organizations or networks.

As Sparks (1997) suggests, though, dissidence or what I call resistance is complicated by the various social relations and economic structure in which people are enmeshed. They dwarf the individual consumer-citizen in the Global North and entire countries in the Global South. Hegemonic discourse proclaims that the world is shrinking and individuals have never-before realized decision-making power; however, institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, which admittedly do not control every aspect of globalization but do direct its implementation, turn resistance against hegemony into a David-and-Goliath struggle. Jane recognizes the duplicity of consumer-citizens, even the would-be resistant ones, in this struggle:

Coming at us like this – in waves, massed and unbreachable – knowledge becomes symbolic of our disempowerment – becomes bad knowledge – so we deny it, riding its crest until it subsides from consciousness. I have heard myself protesting, “*I didn’t know!*” but this is not true. Of course I knew about toxicity in meat, the deforestation of the rain forests to make grazing land for hamburgers. Not a lot, perhaps, but I knew a little. I knew enough. But I needed a job. So when *My American Wife!* Was offered to me, I chose to ignore what I knew. “Ignorance.” In this root sense, ignorance is an act of will, a choice that one makes over and over again, especially when information overwhelms and knowledge has become synonymous with impotence.

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I would like to think of my “ignorance” less as a personal failing and more as a massive cultural trend, an example of doubling, that characterizes the end of the millennium....Fed on a media diet of really bad news, we live in a perpetual state of repressed panic. We are paralyzed by bad knowledge, from which the only escape is playing dumb. Ignorance becomes empowering because it enables people to live. Stupidity becomes proactive, a political statement. Our collective norm. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 334, emphasis in original)

Still, Jane does what she perceives she can do to adopt a radical stance against rampant consumerism, as well as American cultural imperialism, by producing and releasing her documentary. In seeking exceptions to the idealized American family to feature in the television show, and in her own bi-racial make-up, she contravenes the preferred image of the middle class, white, heterosexual, able-bodied American; however, by the novel's end, parts of her own story reiterate the image of the ideal man as strong and wilful, and the ideal woman as emotional and indecisive. Estranged from Sloan, Jane experiences a miscarriage. One night, she goes to see him at the bar where he and his band are performing, but it is not until she collapses on the ground in tears over the end of the (unplanned) pregnancy that he sweeps her up in his arms and agrees to reconcile. Although this novel does not otherwise fit into the romance genre, this plot twist, one of the final scenes in the novel, borrows just a bit from the traditions of that genre.

Summary

These novels offer four examples of the various narratives of and messages about consumerism, shopping and consumption in contemporary Western societies. In works of fiction, characters might adopt one or another of these messages. More complex narratives and characters make a simplistic response to hegemonic messages less likely. Of these three novels, the most simplistic is *Confessions of a Shopaholic* and the most complex is *My Year of Meats*. In the former, characters are recognizable but, at the same time, they are superficial and stereotypical. The lives of the lead characters, as well as the assorted peripheral characters whom I met in this book, are consistent with hegemonic ideologies and common sense.

Read against discourses of neoliberalism, consumerism, multiculturalism, tolerance and globalization, *Confessions of a Shopaholic* presents a society in which visible minority groups, regardless of the basis for their minority status, remain invisible, along with the problems that their existence poses to the social order. *Learning Curves* introduces a broader variety of characters and social relations, although it uses them to bolster, rather than challenge, hegemonic neoliberal visions of the individual and the corporation in society and in global affairs. This is most evident as the initially divergent cast of main characters move closer together intellectually, emotionally and physically, and develop a shared understanding that the status quo, with very

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limited, fixable exceptions, is just fine. *Learning Curves* might be more subtle and slightly more complicated than *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, but its female characters continue to construct their cultural and social identities largely in the context of shopping and, sometimes, in the shops. The main characters of *Generation X* understand that social structures, particularly class, exist, but are simply resigned to living on the outskirts of the social order which they reject.

It is in *My Year of Meats* that characters represent the greatest range of circumstances and points of view. Jane learns something from all of these characters, often unexpectedly, and her response to them conveys that learning does not necessarily involve adoption of one or another of the responses apparent in a narrative. What seems to interest Jane and what interests me is how individuals negotiate multiple narratives in their daily lives, and how resistance and, perhaps, even radicalism becomes evident in people's lives, often in unexpected, unplanned ways. In addition to the lesbian vegetarians who offer a political analysis of production and consumption, this novel features Bunny, whose blonde, buxom appearance and light-hearted manner reiterate racialized gender stereotypes, but who is moved to action after becoming aware of the consumption-related problems which touch her family. Her learning involves intellect, as well as emotions and senses. She hears and understands Jane's explanation of the damage done by hormones used in farming; she sees that hormones are altering the physical development of her own daughter; it is her love for her daughter which compels her to act as a consumer-citizen – even if that action jeopardizes the livelihood of her family. While Williams' (1980) distinction between hegemonic, alternative and oppositional responses might imply that individuals act consistently in one way or another, Sparks' (1997) elucidation of the complexity of dissidence clarifies how material circumstances and emotional needs combine with cultural ideals and personal histories to influence how people ultimately shop, consume and otherwise behave. Seen in this light, the potential for radicalism is always limited, but not eliminated.

In this chapter, I have presented examples of how a holistic form of incidental learning, which combines emotion, spirituality and intellect, might occur in daily activities such as reading or shopping. Sometimes this learning reinforces hegemonic ideology and common sense; at other times, there is the potential for learning which disrupts hegemony. Still, the potential for an apparently mundane, often belittled activity such as shopping or a typically solitary activity such as reading to prompt radical learning remains largely unexplored. Sometimes, the line between incidental and more intentional learning becomes blurred. Learning about a topic can begin accidentally, as it does for Jane about the beef industry, and become purposeful, as it does for her

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as she seeks information and even undertakes research. The realization that adult learning occurs beyond educational institutions, in the diverse, unpredictable lives of individuals as they read and shop, suggests that adult educators consider the potential for the products of popular culture and the activities of daily life to deepen understandings of social connections, adult learning and consumerism in the current era of globalization. After asserting the importance of fictional characters and their stories earlier in this chapter, I now acknowledge that fictional characters might be important, but they have the distinct disadvantage of not being able to respond to my guiding questions. In the following chapters, I turn to the conversations that I had with “real-life” participants during this inquiry to continue building an understanding of how, through shopping and consumption, people learn to do, learn to be, and learn how to make change.

[Insert Interlude 4 here.]

- How did you learn about shopping and where to shop?
- What kind of information do you need or want when you go shopping? How do you go about finding that information? If you've ever encountered a barrier to getting the information that you feel you need, how have you dealt with the situation?
- Do you regularly shop in particular areas of the city or in particular stores? If so, which ones, and why do you prefer those places?

– selected interview schedule questions



- What kinds of messages do you regularly encounter about shopping and where do you encounter them? How do you think they affect your shopping decisions?
- What, if any, other kinds of issues or considerations affect your shopping and consumption?
- Are there particular items that you try to buy or, conversely, items that you avoid buying? If so, what are they and what kinds of considerations go into your decisions?

– selected interview schedule questions

CHAPTER SIX

THE DISCIPLINES OF SHOPPING: WHAT PARTICIPANTS LEARN TO DO

In this chapter, I move from literary fiction to conversations with living people, and begin to explore how participants in this inquiry talked about their encounters with and production of discourses, practices and pedagogies of shopping. As my analysis illustrates, learning how to shop and what shopping means can happen incidentally as well as purposefully, and continually as well as sporadically. This learning is, moreover, a process which unfolds on multiple levels. As I outlined in chapter two, my conceptualization of learning combines critical adult education's emphasis on intellect (Brookfield, 1998, 2005; Foley, 1999, 2001), as well as an interest in emotion, sensuality and spirituality more typically found in feminist scholarship (Dirkx, 2001; English, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998, 2000). In my analysis here, I concentrate on one of my framing questions – What do people learn to do? – as I apply this conceptualization to conversations and observations from interviews, shopping trips and focus groups in order to extend the theorization of informal learning in the course of everyday life.

At least some of the learning involved in shopping can be regarded as “instrumental” (Mezirow, 1995 in Sandlin, 2005), and relates to the control of one's resources and environment. Several interview questions asked participants about the skills and knowledge that they developed through shopping. (☉) Budgeting, making shopping lists, organizing time, learning how to decipher labels and logos, and learning how to navigate store aisles and procedures are all examples of the technical learning involved in shopping.

The traditional approaches to consumer education discussed by Sandlin (2005a) might focus on a straightforward acquisition of information and decision-making skills, but the tensions of contemporary globalization, consumer-citizenship and social identity can make shopping a much more complex process. In this inquiry, I was interested in talking to shoppers who have self-identified as individuals concerned about globalization and the role of their own consumption in this phenomenon. The focus of our conversations was their understandings and experiences of this complexity. Some of my questions aimed to elicit participants' critical insights about shopping and consumption, and their links to globalization and consumer-citizenship. (☉) After reviewing and coding the data, I identified five thematic understandings of how participants develop skills and knowledge through and about shopping. These resemble some of the skills and knowledge typically required in formal educational settings. I begin by exploring the ways in which participants have learned to learn. Then, I outline their ability to

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find useful, reliable information in a society made noisy with conflicting information and messages; in other words, they learn to do research. These resemble areas of skill needed by all academics and students, regardless of their disciplines; however, participants' comments and practices also indicated that they were learning to do things which can be related to particular disciplines. They learned to identify and distinguish between value(-for-money) and other sorts of values, tasks which might be associated with the discipline of philosophy. They learned how to decipher text, symbols and messages; in other words, they developed a specialized shopping literacy. Finally, they learned to think about sites and spaces of shopping, and how local sites and spaces were linked to far-away places; in other words, they constructed a shopper's geography.

Learning to Learn

A central claim in this inquiry is that shopping itself is a site of critical learning about the politics of consumption and globalization, and can contribute to an agenda of societal change. Indeed, my conversations with participants confirm that they do learn through their shopping. More specifically, they learn to learn in a way which is compatible with a social constructivist paradigm, which assumes “that human beings do not ‘find’ knowledge, but rather construct it” (Tisdell & Thompson, 2007, p. 656) through their experiences in social contexts.

Participants described a variety of strategies and dispositional qualities which helped them learn through and about shopping. Most were aware of the growing attention in news and other media to shopping, consumption and consumerism. From the 100-Mile Diet and global climate change to safety-related questions about and recalls of products made in China, or from the loss of agricultural land and anxieties about food security to concerns about forced labour or unfair labour practices – most often in the Global South but sometimes here in Canada as well – various issues related to shopping crossed participants' “radar screens.” Some of the main sources of their information were media reports, magazines, books and documentaries.

Sarah: Um, like, I do a lot of, um, like I don't read, I don't usually read novels for fun. Like every once in a while I do. I more read about the world or about, um, sometimes it's new agey kind of stuff, like spiritual kind of stuff. And sometimes it's, like I'll, like I just pay attention to anything written, um, in the newspapers or like magazines or like, you know, like, um, what are those, the Canadian Geo–, the Canadian Geo–?

Kaela: Geographic?

Sarah: Yeah, like magazines like that or newspapers and stuff.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Linda: ...Um, and I try to buy organic produce because, not because I think it's good for my family but because I think it's important in terms of farming and the land that we have access to and not putting so many pollutants into the soil.

About Mother Jones

Mother Jones is an independent nonprofit whose roots lie in a commitment to social justice implemented through first rate investigative reporting.

– Retrieved August 17, 2008 from <http://www.motherjones.com/about/index.html>

New Internationalist (NI) workers' co-operative exists to report on issues of world poverty and inequality; to focus attention on the unjust relationship between the powerful and the powerless worldwide; to debate and campaign for the radical changes necessary to meet the basic needs of all; and to bring to life the people, the ideas and the action in the fight for global justice.

– Retrieved August 17, 2008 from <http://www.newint.org/>

Kaela: So those are ecological reasons.
Linda: Yeah, definitely, yeah.
Kaela: Are you hearing more about that now?
Linda: Yeah, it definitely seems to be a, a more mainstream topic. Um, I certainly don't feel like I'm a freak for being concerned about these things and I know that...[mainstream supermarkets], they're all coming out with more organic stuff. Um, some of it's a little bit frightening because I know Wal-Mart's coming out with it... but they're putting pressure on companies and stuff for price point reasons and that's, you know, that's not the point....And I recently learned about how they're not necessarily treating the farm employees any better and that kind of bugs me. Um, you know I, the article that I read about this was specifically talking about farmers in California. So now whenever something says that it comes from California I kind of go, Huhhhh, I don't know. But then at the same time I know we have migrant workers here too on our farms and so you don't, you never know. But nobody really wants to pay what food is really worth when it comes to the work it takes to produce it. Myself among them, sadly.
(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

We stepped away from the fridge, and Jody added, "I buy as much organic as possible and really I do that since I saw the documentary...*The Corporation*...." (shopping trip excerpt, Jody, February 12, 2007)

Karen: I'll often read like *Mother Jones*...or the *New Internationalist*, which I haven't picked up in a long time, but just learn a lot from things like that.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007) (☹)

Although the focus of many of these resources might not be shopping, learner-shoppers think about how they can extend the information and messages in these materials beyond their immediate focus and apply them in their shopping.

Another part of a constructivist understanding is that learners constantly adapt their existing knowledge as they encounter new situations and information. For critical learners, it is particularly important to open their existing knowledge up to challenge. Many participants in this study described early exposure to the "common sense" (Gramsci, 1971) image in Western cultures of the female shopper. This was an image that several participants came to reject in their adult lives, even if their mothers had exemplified it:

Alice: It's ironic because my mother's an avid shopper. She will spend hours shopping. I grew up with West Edmonton Mall being an essential part of life because we had activities going on there as well as shopping and family members would come in from out of town and we'd go there. So, yeah, I find it interesting that she really enjoys the experience and I just can see her bringing all these things home, trying to decide on them, having to spend the time to return them, having to look for what she needs, I think maybe that's what has influenced me to realize that it's not a pleasurable activity, for me. [laughter]
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

At the same time as they challenge and move beyond some early shopping lessons in adulthood, participants retain some of their early family-based learning in their shopping.

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Points which are valued and useful, even if they were not critical, are combined with the more politically charged learning that often comes later.

- Kaela: ...How did you learn about shopping and how to shop and where do you think your ideas about shopping come from?
- Eddie: My mom. Annd, and also just from hearing people, hearing activists talking about supporting this company and that company, buying Canadian, and that kind of thing. So I would have to say my, my mom as well as my, um, the overall community around me.
- Kaela: Um, what would you, would you consider your mom an activist?...In terms of her own shopping habits or interests?
- Eddie: Um, no, not at all.
- Kaela: So what did she teach you about shopping that's different from what activists taught you?
- Eddie: Uh, she taught me to buy at the lowest price, things like, uh, wait for a sale, uh, like walk to the store at the other end of the mall to see what's there.
- Kaela: So comparison shopping, value, those kinds of things.
- Eddie: Yeah. And being content instead of always buying the latest trend.
(interview excerpt, April 11, 2007)

- Amitah: Okay, well where I did I learn about shopping? From my parents.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Amitah: Um, usually from my mom....She was the one, we went out food shopping with her, clothes shopping. Um, and so my mom's sort of style was she's pretty picky about quality. Uh, when it came to food, um, she would always choose sort of fresh, uh, fruits and veggies. And she would cook a lot of things from scratch. We didn't buy, uh, packaged dinners. Um, so that impacted the way I looked at food.
(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

- Mary: I mean how did I learn how to shop? My mother taught me first, for sure, um, and um, my ideas about shopping don't come from, um, well some of them do, I mean the thing about frugality and not wasting, that's certainly from family of origin. So that remains. But, um, the rest of my ideas about shopping are very much, uh, embedded in political analysis that's supported by, um, the rest of my lifestyle. So, um, and the rest of my life experience.
(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

These excerpts illustrate the relational nature of learning in everyday life. In contrast to the historically masculinized arenas of formal education and employment, processes such as shopping and child rearing remain largely feminized. Unlike employment, which is conceptualized as the basis of collective identity and action, these processes have also been perceived as solitary undertakings which provide little opportunity for learning; however, participants' recollections of their childhood shopping experiences offer examples of the early and long lasting importance of relations and relational learning. Early lessons about how to recognize and evaluate quality and value-for-money remain important among participants' early learning even if, as I explore in the section below on Weighing Values, this learning confounds later learning and values.

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Another thing that these excerpts make apparent is the extent to which family life in Canada continues to be gendered. This is despite recent decades of both counter-hegemonic feminist discourse and a hegemonic response of rights-based policies in arenas such as employment, housing and access to public programs. Just like the multiculturalism policy, these policies signal a shift in hegemonic discourse and have made a difference in the lives of many individuals, without addressing the underlying structure of patriarchy. Patriarchy continues to exert an influence through cultural constructions of shopping as well as child-rearing as predominantly feminine activities. This helps explain why, regardless of their ages, participants spoke about the importance of their mothers as early teachers about shopping and, by extension, the gendered division of labour within and beyond the home.

As they have grown beyond their early family-based teachings about and experiences of shopping, participants have relied on expanding family and social networks in their learning about the politics of shopping. Partners and friends who share concerns about consumerist ideology and rampant consumption prove to be helpful teachers. According to Jocelyn,

Jocelyn: How I shop now has certainly been affected by my husband....[H]e's very socially aware....He opened my eyes to a lot of those things because of his family I think, and his upbringing was much more to the left whereas my family was way to the right.
(interview excerpt, January 22, 2007)

Likewise, Linda described her husband's love of non-fiction books on topical issues, and Claire talked about her husband who is “nuts about reading things on the internet” (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007). Both Linda and Claire tuned into the information that their husbands were able to find and incorporated it into their shopping and consumption. Most participants also talked about having friends, colleagues or social networks who encouraged critical, holistic learning about shopping and consumption. Sarah mentioned “a friend who has been to, like, the garbage dump and, I don't know, we'll all just really talk about something like that” (interview excerpt, Sarah, April 24, 2007). All of these examples continue to reiterate the relationality of shopping and learning processes which, at first glance, might appear solitary.

In contrast to Foley's (1999, 2001) concept of incidental learning which, although unplanned, occurs in the context of collective action, I build on participants' comments to suggest that incidental learning can be politically charged and appear solitary. Furthermore, the boundary between solitary and collective learning can become blurred, especially as learner-shoppers turn to globalization's information technologies such as the internet to engage with social movements. Along with an increasing number of popular books, documentaries and

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magazines, the internet affords new ways for participants and other learner-shoppers to learn about and become involved with critical or radical movements and organizations connected to shopping and consumption. Unlike the traditional social action settings explored in Foley's (1999, 2001) writing, the use of these resources creates a paradox of individualization and collectivity in learning and action.

What complicates the incorporation of experts' and activists' teachings into shopping is the inconsistencies among experts as well as between experts and participants' own knowledge and experiences. Part of participants' learning process is learning to trust their own judgements and feelings, even as they remain open to having their assumptions challenged and continuing to learn, and learning who else they can trust. As critical media literacy scholars explain, a critical learner knows the importance of not accepting information at face value, and carefully assesses the trustworthiness of an analysis and its conclusions (for examples see Jarvis, 2005; Sandlin, 2005b, 2007; Tisdell & Thompson, 2007).

During her shopping trip, Paula talked in depth about multiple sources of information and messages, and how she goes about determining what warrants her consideration:

We proceeded to the end of that aisle, rounded the corner and stopped in front of the soy beverages. She had been drinking them for health benefits but has more recently heard from one of her friends that you shouldn't drink too much of them....I asked about how she decides which source of information to trust when making her shopping and consumption decisions and she said, "I don't listen to the radio or the tv. I don't have cable." She said that some friends send e-mails about things that they have learned, but sometimes they are more radical than she is....She also talked about how people, including her, will "pay a premium" to shop for products and brands that claim trustworthiness; however, ingredients such as cane sugar are often present in these products and, even if they are organic, can make these claims debatable. Paula thinks that people can be naïve and overly trusting, at the same time as they are judgemental. In the end, she thinks that you have to trust yourself, "my taste buds, my own decisions. I don't like to follow people blindly." She will go back and forth with friends about opinions and resources for information. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Just as academics have rules to help them gauge trustworthiness of information, so too do participants have strategies to gauge the trustworthiness of products, producers and retailers. As Paula explained, trust is often earned, in large part through personal contacts and experience.

The issue of trust arose again during a focus group exercise in which I asked participants to talk about something that they had brought with them. I was interested in hearing what they knew about those objects, how they had learned about them, and what those objects said about them. Jocelyn talked about the bag of fair trade coffee that she had brought with her:

Jocelyn: ...But, you see it says FT?
Kaela: Fair trade.
Jocelyn: Yeah.

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Kaela: And, but they, um, write that on themselves, do they?
 Jocelyn: Well I believe them.
 Kaela: Right, because you know them.
 Jocelyn: Oh, I've gone there lots, for years.
 Kaela: Mm hmmm.
 Jocelyn: I mean partly because it's a local business that's owned by the two of them.
 Kaela: Mm hmmm.
 Jocelyn: Uh –
 Kaela: Well they just don't pre-print a lot of labels, I guess.
 Jocelyn: No! No, he wrote that on there. And I said, I'd like you write it just the way the sign is. But he told me something kind of interesting. They have a lot of trouble getting the fair traded [sic] coffee, um, because sometimes the people who could be selling to them sell directly to someone else because they get more money 'cause they've cut out the middle man so to speak, but you can't call it fair traded unless it comes through that system.
 Kaela: Right.
 Jocelyn: And the other thing he said was it's very dangerous, uh oh, I meant to find out where Sumatra was.
 Carla: Sumatra?
 Jocelyn: Do you know where it is?
 Carla: Indonesia.
 Jocelyn: Okay, well this isn't from Central [America], because we can't get the kind of coffee we want from Central America because, you know, it isn't FT, fair traded, because, um, well union organizers get murdered. That's what he said. Anyway.
 Carla: Hmmm.
 Jocelyn: So I was in there for about 20 minutes, there weren't any other customers...
 (focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

Jocelyn's comments reiterate the importance of personal relationships in learning, particularly in establishing trustworthiness. Jocelyn has concluded that she can learn from independent retailers who reliably provide the goods and services that she seeks, and take the time to talk to her and answer her questions. This does not mean that people and information judged trustworthy by participants was always correct, or that participants reached accurate understandings of their shopping options and choices. For example, some participants concluded that, by buying clothing produced or food grown in Canada, they were avoiding the problems of sweatshop labour and poor treatment of agricultural workers.

In contrast to sources of information and messages deemed trustworthy, advertising and popular culture, especially television, were considered suspect and were used judiciously. Five participants mentioned that they do not have a television set or that, if they have one, they use it to watch movies and do not subscribe to cable or satellite services. As the excerpts below illustrate, participants used a range of tactics to discriminate between valid, critical information or messages and invalid, hegemonic information or messages about shopping and consumerism:

Jocelyn: We don't have television, so...that's on purpose.
 Kaela: Okay.

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Jocelyn: Uh, it fell off the table when our two youngest children were three and four and we just thought, hey, let's just not pick that up again [laughter]. So we haven't had it since then. They're 40 and 41 now.
(interview excerpt, January 22, 2007)

Karen: Um, well you know, what's interesting, we don't have a television. Um, and when we go away on holiday and stay in a hotel and sit around and watch tv in the evening we're always shocked by the commercials and can't believe that somebody would, you know, get sucked in by this....Like does this stuff really work? It seems so alien to us 'cause we're so unused to watching commercials. And I, I mean, thinking about maybe in magazines, um, but generally the magazines I read don't have advertisements for like average consumer products.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Sean: Like I, I avoid, when I watch tv I keep the clicker going. The idea is to never see a commercial if I can avoid it.
Kaela: Okay, okay.
Sean: I try not to see them when I read media.
Kaela: Okay.
Sean: Like trying to avoid all advertising if at all possible....I turn away from commercials on tv as much as possible. So I try and avoid messages as much as I can.
(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

Kaela: So, if you, um, when the sales come, when you see ads about this great big huge sale, does that do anything to you, or -?
Sarah: No usually I say, Do I need that?
Kaela: Okay.
Sarah: And then, if I need it, then I'm like, Oh perfect! Maybe I should make a time to actually go look at it....But if I don't need it I'm like, Screw you, screw you, screw you [chuckle]. 'Cause I'm like, it's all like, propoganda to me, like, you know, I don't know, just, capitalism is about control, right. We have to consume in order for capital to go around. Like, and then I've been reading a lot lately about like, um, how, like [sigh] the only way to keep capitalism running is for everyone to be in debt, because then they have to work, you know. And then if they work then they consume and, I don't know, it's this big vicious cycle, right? So, to me all those sales and stuff are like, buy, buy, buy, buy, buy, buy more!!! Keep the capitalist system running!
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Despite participants' frequent disdain for advertising and popular culture, some of them did acknowledge that, from time to time, cultural products offer a critical view. Ellen mentioned having seen an independently produced feature film which helped her expand her analysis and knowledge base:

Ellen: Like I remember thinking after watching *Maria Full of Grace*, I could never buy flowers that are brought in from Latin America ever again. If they're not locally grown, and even if they're locally grown God knows what conditions they're grown under, but that's, that's the like ugly side of life that you won't normally, we wouldn't be interested in, we just want to see Dianne Keaton and Jack Nicholson fall in love. You know [chuckle]...like, really fluffy stuff when you go to the movies. And these are things that are actually like, whether it's a central theme in the movies or getting woven in as

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like a side story or a two-minute aside, you're seeing more of it and it's changing the way you go out into the world and shop and be and behave.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Likewise, corporate marketing materials, while suspect, can also provide new information:

Alice: There's a store in Edmonton called Earth General Store....It's a little store and does that guy ever put a lot of effort into researching the products that he sells and on his website! He will, he has this long diatribe about all these different products and why he carries these now and why he used to carry these and he doesn't carry them any more. He found that, um, for example, there was one, something,...and he said, There's just too much stuff in their, in their, um, advertising so I don't sell their stuff any more. You might find that interesting on his website....

Kaela: And did you just discover it on a trip back to Edmonton?

Alice: Yeah, yeah. He's really into community. He supports a lot of causes, environmental and otherwise. And he has things on his website.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

This excerpt is helpful because it indicates that, even within advertising and popular culture, there are multiple, often clashing, discourses that consumer-citizens can encounter.

On top of the critical information and resources which help them learn, participants also outlined some of the dispositional qualities which have helped them move toward critical learning through their shopping. These qualities include curiosity, caring, resourcefulness, intuition, scepticism and determination, and are qualities shared by academic researchers.

Linda: I think I do waste a certain amount of time finding out about all these different things, just because I'm so interested in different ideas people have, and I think I'm just obsessed with reading or addicted to it or something. I mean I'll read shampoo bottles if they're sitting there and I have nothing else to read but, um, it, there's a certain, I guess it's writing style. Some people are just really persuasive in the way the write. And I guess it's also kind of combining with other things I've read, like if I've read a book that was, you know, well referenced and, and had arguments really well laid out, and then, you know, finding other things, people's opinions and blogs and what-not that sort of dovetail into that and give you other further things to think about.

(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

While describing how she learns and makes decisions, she said that she doesn't need a long explanation "on why it's bad to have a whole stash of plastic bags; I know it's bad, but [my husband] would probably get all the facts and figures." She goes by "common sense" and described herself as "intuitive." Often, it's a matter of what comes across her radar screen.
(shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Ellen: I just do research. On the internet, I talk to people, I read whatever I can. Read labels. Talk to, you know, talk to people who are better informed than I am....

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Mary: How do you go about finding it? Well I'm a, I'm a voracious reader –

Kaela: Okay.

Mary: – of popular media, some popular not so much, but you know the daily newspaper. Um, but also a lot of independent media. And, um, um, and so I, um, I go about finding out

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the information by way of those things that come across my radar screen. My radar screen's pretty big.

(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Amitah: I think, um, then, um it was generally accepting that ads tell you what's new and exciting, a very simplistic view of advertisements...which, now I'm a little more cynical around advertising [chuckle] and I tend to, um, I would say rebel against them, but definitely I have boundaries, psychological boundaries around advertisements.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

These excerpts articulate the varied ways in which participants learn to learn through and about shopping. For the most part, they were discussing a form of learning which can be considered incidental, although in a slightly different way from Foley's (1999, 2001) discussions. While Foley focusses on the incidental learning which occurs in highly organized collective action, the participants in my study talked about incidental learning which can also occur in the course of more unorganized activities of daily life. Like Foley's notion, though, the discussion in this section continues to illustrate how incidental learning is informal and unintended. In the following section, I also outline how incidental learning might become more formalized and purposeful, as learner-shoppers become researcher-shoppers.

Conducting Research

James: Okay, um, if I'm looking at a particular item to buy, depending on the item, if it has a heftier price tag attached to it, I tend to do a little more research on, um, or a little more exploring, going from shop to shop.... You have to wade through a lot of information that may be out there or, even if it's conflicting reviews of the uh, the product, and then trying to assess a decision based on someone else's review, that's one set of difficulties.

(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

In the preceding section, I discussed how participants learn to learn through their shopping in an ongoing, often ad hoc way. Sometimes, though, questions might arise during the shopping process which cannot be answered immediately. When the question seems important enough, a more directed, purposeful approach to learning might be undertaken. Regardless of their disciplines or fields, all academics need to develop a contextually relevant and appropriate approach to conducting research. Academics learn how to do that in the formal setting of the university, and participants in this study described their learning in the informal setting of shopping. Having to wade through this volume of information certainly does prove to be “one set of difficulties,” as James suggested. All shoppers in contemporary Western shopping settings have to learn how to cope with “musak,” announcements, signs and other distractions; critically minded shoppers who are interested in the links between consumption and globalization

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additionally learn how to sift through a constant hum of facts, opinions, warnings and advice as they try to understand their shopping options and decisions. As they do this, they become a sort of researcher; indeed, they develop the skills of a bricoleur, who seeks information in new and novel places, and incorporates it into knowledge construction.

The participants in this study talked about diverse research topics and questions, as well as sources of information and messages which have been brought into their research and analyses. Just as they used a range of resources for their ongoing incidental learning, participants also noted the many sources of information in their more deliberate research, including mainstream news and alternative media, education and advocacy organizations or websites, documentaries, workshops or forums and books.

Carla: I don't usually ask the company for any information, I go looking for it myself.

Kaela: So how do you go--?

Carla: The internet.

Kaela: On the internet, okay....

Carla: Um, or I go to the library, um, and look up, there are, there are books out there. I had one, I can't remember, what was the name? I can't remember. That basically took, um, lots of organizations throughout Canada and rated them on, based on labour, based on, um, you know, the expectations from workers. Things like that.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

Amy: I think for me when I don't understand the label or anything I won't buy it. And then I'll go home and do my own research.

Kaela: Okay, so what kind of research? Online?

Amy: Yeah, mostly it's online because there's so much information on the web nowadays.

(interview excerpt, February 7, 2007)

Bonnie pointed to a bag of edamame and said, "I really like these edamame, but they'll all shipped from China." When I asked what the issue was with items from China, Bonnie explained that she had concerns about the levels of pollution there, especially for food items, as well as the environmental implications of shipping from so far away. She said that she had seen a documentary which showed Chinese agricultural workers putting little plastic bags over individual fruits to protect them from surrounding pollution. But she also noted that some food items that are certified organic are grown in China and she likes to think that she can "trust" the certification. "I need to do more research," she concluded. I asked her how she goes about doing such research, and she explained that she does a lot online, searching for non-governmental organizations, including Chinese NGOs that are pressuring the Chinese government on environmental issues. (shopping trip excerpt, Bonnie, February 5, 2007)

These excerpts suggest that participants can be motivated to research products and brands for various reasons. They might have had a long standing interest in and involvement with a certain issue, as Bonnie has had with organics and vegetarianism; they might also find new questions emerging while they are in a store, as Amy describes. On the other hand, their findings and conclusions are always partial and influenced by their own experiences and biases as well as

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the constraints of information. Bonnie noted the threat that pollution in China poses to food grown there and the precautions that agricultural workers take to protect the food, but she did not mention the threat that pollution poses to those workers or whether precautions are taken to protect them. Perhaps her focus during that portion of our conversation was on recounting an image that she had seen in a particular documentary film. Later in her shopping trip, I asked her about the issue of labour standards, and recorded the following exchange in my notes:

She also mentioned labour standards as a concern in factory farming. I asked her, “Are you concerned about labour standards as well?” “Oh yeah, that’s why I won’t buy non-organic bananas or chocolate or coffee,” she answered. (shopping trip excerpt, Bonnie, February 5, 2007)

Bonnie did have an awareness of some of the social justice issues related to agricultural workers, at least outside of Canada in the countries where bananas, chocolate and coffee are grown; however, whether this awareness carried over to agricultural production in Canada and whether these social justice issues were equal considerations to environmental degradation remains unclear from her comments.

Like those of any researcher, participants' conclusions are also always tentative. There is always more to research and learn, as new information becomes available and participants are exposed to new experiences and points of view. Using their skills as researcher-shoppers and learner-shoppers, participants respond to the multiple demands and pressures which become apparent in the arena of shopping. As I explore in the following sections, these generic skills help participants undertake learning which might be related to three particular disciplines or fields: philosophy, education and geography.

Weighing Value(s)

For the most part, participants described themselves as middle class. This class identification gives them a certain amount of choice in the arena of shopping, but they are aware of the constraints to this choice. Being able to assess value for the money that they are spending when they shop is a primary value for participants, one learned early in life and typically from mothers. Recalling one side of the Western stereotype of the female shopper as the caretaker of middle class family and home (Bowlby, 2001; Rappaport, 2000; Shor, 1980), participants' early shopping experiences were strongly gendered, as well as classed, from a young age.

Regardless of their class, age or background, participants agreed that globalization seems to bring more shopping options to them. They also agreed that, because of a combination of new technologies and critiques of consumerism, they are in the paradoxical situation of having access

Learning to shop is more demanding than figuring out what things to buy. The most important part of shopping is learning to steer your way between what you desire and what you know is right.

– Sharon Zukin (2005), *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture*, p. 35

to more information about individual products and consumption in general, even as information remains partial and suspect. On the one hand, media reports about diet and nutrition, as well as food labels with ingredients listings and nutritional information are helpful to many consumers. On the other hand, as participants noted, claims made on labels can be misleading, details can be confusing, and important information can remain obscured. This reality makes learning about shopping tricky and complicated, especially for shoppers who are concerned about globalization. Not all values respond directly to concerns about globalization; however, in the absence of reliable marketing and media reports, participants' personal values become important benchmarks for learning about and assessing the desirability, or value, of an item for sale.

Having a sense of the “going price” for items was helpful, and participants all described practices such as watching for sales or going to stores known for their competitive pricing. During her shopping trip, Kerri described herself as “a frugal shopper” (shopping trip excerpt, Kerri, April 29, 2007). The excerpts below, from both interviews and shopping trips, exemplify the role that value-for-money played in participants' shopping options and practices:

Alice: I don't shop all that much but when I do it's usually when all the sales are on.
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Paula returned to the issue of price as a factor in her shopping. “I look at flyers at home,” she said and, if [they are] for a regularly purchased item, tries to time her purchase for the “next time it's on sale.” For example, that's how she approaches buying something like toilet paper. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Claire raised the issue of price again, commenting that she'll look at prices and, if an item she wants is expensive and not on sale she'll come back on one of the customer appreciation days that Capers regularly has. (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Participants in this study confirmed Zukin's (2005) point that the immediate financial cost of an item is an important consideration, but it is only one sort of value that participants weigh in making their shopping decisions. (☹) Many participants talked about their early experiences of shopping with their parents, typically their mothers, who taught them about the importance of value-for-money and emphasized organization, restraint and quality:

Eddie: Uh, she taught me to buy at the lowest price, things like, uh, wait for a sale, uh, like walk to the store at the other end of the mall to see what's there.

Kaela: So comparison shopping, value, those kinds of things.

Eddie: Yeah. And being content instead of always buying the latest trend.
(interview excerpt, April 11, 2007)

Jocelyn: So what I learned from her, for instance, she'd give me a list and some money....And she would tell me how to pick out to be sure she gave us the best of the fresh vegetables....I mean maybe some of the things I learned from her were good after all.
(interview excerpt, January 22, 2007)

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Julie: And in that sense of not buying things on credit or buying what you can afford to buy, that I learned from my mother. Absolutely.
(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Quality itself can be indicated in different ways. For participants, freshness, taste and appearance, brand name and reputation, personal experience with products, manufacturers and retail chains, and friends' recommendations have helped measure quality:

Nicole: And to this day it still is somewhat, you know, if I see a two-for-one- sale I'm going to go for that. I'm not necessarily driven by, like, the name brand. Mind you, if I saw a no-name brand toothpaste I probably wouldn't buy it. So this is something that has probably been ingrained in me, is that if it's, if it's not flashy, if it doesn't have graphics, if it's not a, uh, a household name, a trustworthy name, I'm not going to go for it.
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Linda: Um, and occasionally if I wanna go to Old Navy I go to Metrotown.

Kaela: So Old Navy you'll go to for, sort of, for price?

Linda: For, yeah price is mostly it. T-shirts and pants because their pants do fit me. Although recently Reitman's has been the better choice for pants 'cause Old Navy pants always fall part.

Kaela: Okay, so quality's an issue.

Linda: Yeah. I mean, I, I hate hemming so I don't want something that the hem's gonna fall apart. There are shops that I don't shop at all because their hems fall apart within three weeks. [chuckle] Um, and I guess I like to shop at Army and Navy because they have really good deals on stuff and I can get to the one in New West on the Skytrain, um, I hate driving, [chuckle], so....

(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

Paula described having tried some of the packaged grain products, and finding them not as good as home made; so she doesn't buy these products. But she has used the organic broths and liked them. She finds them convenient because making broth is so time-consuming and very tasty, and will buy them when they are on sale. (shopping trip excerpt, August 14, 2007)

The considerations for Therèse are taste, price and family health. She pointed to the salad dressings that were opposite us, noting that she could get them for a much lower price elsewhere. We walked over to the bananas, priced at \$1.18 per pound, and Therèse commented that they were three and a half times as expensive as the conventional bananas for sale at the little neighbourhood Chinese grocer's down the street from her. "But I'll get some 'cause I need them," she said.... (shopping trip excerpt, Therèse, February 9, 2007)

As these excerpts indicate, indications of quality can be both concrete and subjective. Tastiness, healthfulness, fit and convenience might help participants evaluate quality and value-for-money.

Often, the search for quality and other values compete with finding good value-for-money and participants' own financial constraints. As Tamara asked,

Tamara: How do you judge, how do you judge value? Do I want to spend that much on this product? Is that important to me, that I get a good quality product?"
(interview excerpt, March 23, 2007).



Figure 6.1: James' anodized aluminum cutlery, focus group, May 10, 2007

This becomes especially apparent in participants' comments related to contemporary globalization. For example, almost all participants talked about balancing the need to spend money judiciously when shopping, with an awareness of the problems posed by production and shipping of items from different parts of the world. Products brought from the Global South to the Global North might carry relatively low financial costs, when compared to items produced in the Global North, but they are often perceived to carry greater ecological and human rights costs. Whether or not participants' understandings of these costs are accurate, the following excerpts exemplify how value-for-money and other types of values arise in and complicate the shopping processes of these shoppers:

She thinks that “community spirit” is now exploited, because of the insistence on cheap labour to keep prices down. When I asked her more pointedly, she agreed that this was part of globalization. Globalization, in her opinion, is having an adverse ecological effect: “The plants, the fields – it's all suffering....And money can't buy you out because the fields can only sustain so much.” She mentioned the destruction of the Amazon and suburban growth as examples of how globalization poses an ecological threat. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Sarah: I try and stay away from, from the more expensive stores anyway, the ones that where I know where there's all that, um, child labour crap going on.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Amitah: And in terms of being, um, one of the important qualities, now I would, where I am at in my life now, I would definitely say that considering, um, sustainability and global impacts in shopping choices is important too.
(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Nicole: ...So I do selective buying, and I try my best to buy locally, um, and educate myself on that.
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Similarly, James talked about an item that he had purchased recently during the focus group which he attended. For the introductory focus group exercise, when I asked participants to discuss something that they had brought with them, James shared the following anecdote:

James: I just bought this today and, not thinking at all about the focus group tonight. Um,...I wanted to get back into the habit of taking my lunch with me when I go [to work].... And...to try and get away from using disposable plastics. And also the the potential of, uh, plastics which leach whatever, uh, possible contaminant into food. Um, but mostly to get away from the disposable nature of the plastics....So...I headed down to Mountain Equipment Co-op, of course, and I was looking for, I had my thought originally set on a stainless steel set. And there was only one left and the little biner clip that was on it was not working properly, the spring on it was gone so it was hanging half open. And then I noticed these ones (👁️) and I thought, oh. Well, I looked at the weight, thinking, um, while the stainless steel set is nice there is this one. It is, these ones were twice the price, um, but being conscious that I would also want to use it for camping and backpacking and as we replaced items or acquired items for doing that activity, wanting light weight materials because I know what it's like carrying around too much weight.

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So just to shave off a little bit here and there. So twice the price, half the weight. Of course they had the plastic resin ones which I was concerned about, the polycarbonate plastic, um, like with Nalgene bottles leaching, um, bisphenol-A, I think it is, so the health matters, but also recognizing that they're a lot cheaper, um, and thinking, well, the plastics, they were made in Canada whereas these were made in China. The metal is mined so is that any better than having the plastic resin material which is being used? It, it just [chuckle], anyway, I, I settled on these more for the light weight aspect of them, uh, that they were reusable and that's pretty much it.

(focus group excerpt, May 10, 2007)

In this anecdote, James relayed the range of questions and considerations that can go into what initially seemed like a simple, straightforward shopping task. He also clarified some of the nuances of incidental learning. Its nature as partial and tentative can be frustrating when decisions have to be made; however, those elements also help shoppers with critical agendas develop the ability to continue asking questions and seeking solutions. This is, it seems to me, the meaning of lifelong learning which is so often shunted aside in the hegemonic neoliberal discourse of lifelong learning as a never-ending formal education project.

Another value that was mentioned by all participants is convenience. Convenience can be manifest by participants' decision to get into their cars and drive to a setting where a range of items can be found during a single shopping trip. During her interview, Alice noted,

Alice: I often do go to a mall, I will admit, um, because it's all in one, convenient, it's a good variety.

(interview excerpt, Alice, February 17, 2007)

Alternatively, convenience can be manifest in neighbourhood-level shopping. For her everyday shopping, Sharon dislikes the thought of “having to...travel long distances, especially driving a car just to...you know, shop. So I shop along Commercial Drive....So, um, I tend to go into a lot of small little stores in that area” (interview excerpt, Sharon, December 19, 2006).

So far in this section, I have outlined value-based learning which stems largely from intellectual reflection about personal experience and material circumstance. Some adult educators have begun to explore the links between spirituality and learning (English, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 2000), and I incorporate spirituality, as well as emotion and sensuality, into my conceptualization of holistic learning. Although I did not ask questions about spirituality, several participants raised this topic when discussing the values that figured in their shopping and their attempts to become “good” shoppers. Most overtly among participants, Eddie spoke about how he connected shopping to spirituality and religious convictions:

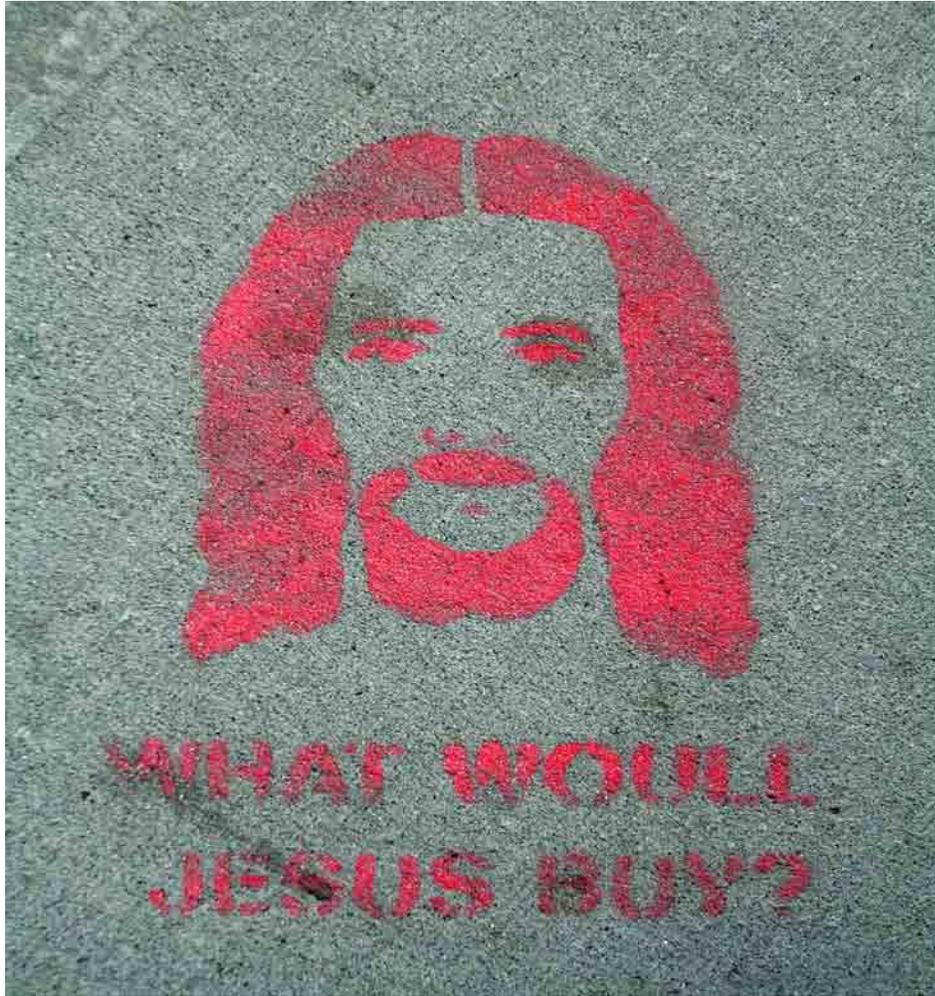


Figure 6.2: "What would Jesus buy?" Graffiti on Fort Street, Victoria, March 16, 2008

Eddie: And so then, like I wouldn't go and buy just any Bible. It has to be the right Bible. But yet, um, you know, so I wouldn't want to support a certain Christian organization by buying certain Bibles....
(interview excerpt, April 11, 2007)

While Eddie attached shopping to spirituality in a particular, formalized way, for other participants, spirituality helped them develop a broad critical analysis of hegemonic consumerism, and motivated a broader form of resistance to it and corporate globalization (☹):

Carla: I know there are some [critical consumption organizations] and um,...and actually I e-mailed one to some friends of mine who are Catholic, um, because...I thought, I mean, as someone who is Catholic, it's problematic to me that, um, often it doesn't seem to come up in discussion. And I found this one group that did, and I thought, oh, I have Catholic friends who are also interested in this sort of thing so I e-mailed it off to them.
(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

Amitah: Um, probably in my teenage years, um, went through the whole rebellion phase. I am an Aquarian [laughter], so I don't know if that has anything to do with it. But, um, I don't know. It just kind of, I can't say that there was one defining moment. The first sort of, uh, introduction to anything around that was, um, making the switch to eating organic food.

Kaela: And when did that happen?

Amitah: That happened probably in, um, when I was about 19. I got married fairly young and, um, just interested in spirituality, interested in health, um, sort of exploring meditation and, um, healing and, um, food and nutrition.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Paula then shifted to a broader level again. "Why am I here?" is a central question for her. She answered her own question, saying that it's "a spiritual thing." She is "constantly on a search," and described a kind of learning as a never-ending process. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Kaela: Okay, okay. And how did you, how do you think you arrived at those criteria [for making shopping decisions]?...

Mary: Um, two primary things. One is, is the political analysis and, um, uh, and economic analysis that I've had for 30 years, a little more than that. And the, uh, so that's the one side, that's always been there. Um, and the layering of uh the exceptions would be probably through, uh, my understanding of, uh, certain Buddhist and Hindu precepts.

Kaela: So it's a mix of political and economic analysis and spirituality.

Mary: Yeah.

(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Whether or not individuals manifest their spiritual affiliation within an organized religion, spirituality fosters an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991), which I explore in the next chapter. For now, I will say that spirituality can bring certain values into the mix for critical shoppers, and can help them respond to the often conflicting demands of different values.

There were still other types of personal experiences and feelings that helped some participants understand shopping differently. Paula described looking for natural cleaning

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products “because I’ve seen...[pollution] in the streams” (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007) while on camping trips. Amitah thought that moving away from her native Britain to Canada and marrying while still fairly young encouraged her to distance herself from her family's mainstream attitude toward shopping and consumption, and adopt a more emotionally and spiritually based perspective. Linda explained the importance of “having children and knowing that, um, you know, what I leave behind is up to them to deal with” (interview excerpt, Linda, April 29, 2007). Alice recalled having her own business helping clients clean out their clutter:

- Alice: And that was also a really good lesson for me in seeing how buying and buying and buying would not bring you happiness. I worked with some very wealthy people who were absolutely miserable.
- Kaela: Uh huh.
- Alice: Not all my clients, but, and they had all this stuff around them. And I, you know, I would go in and think of all these people, I'd just recently returned from Guatemala and I just thought of all these things that could have been used by people in developing countries that are just sitting there collecting dust. So what I started to do was offer to take those things to charity....That, that really helped me and it helped them.
- Kaela: It helped them as well?
- Alice: Yeah, they didn't feel guilty.
- Kaela: So that, you brought that into your business.
- Alice: Mm hmmm. But I noticed that those clients had so many magazines in their homes and it was fuelling their, I feel it was helping them fuel this desire for more and more and more. And they had home décor magazines and beauty magazines and you name it.
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Julie shared a poignant anecdote about an episode which followed her mother's death, and helped put consumerism and consumption into a new perspective for her:

- Julie: Well, um, there's this little story. Um, when my mother died, my sister and I went to help my father get organized. And we said, Do you want us to deal with mom's personal stuff? And he said yes. And I, my mother was 77 years old, I took everything she owned that was a personal items in two Safeway grocery bags. And my mother would tell you she never did without. And I went home, and I looked in my closet and I thought, This is obscene! But, you know, there were more things in my closet that I could wear probably in a month. And it was, it was almost, it was, what's the word, it was an epiphany or something, you know.
(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Julie's excerpt is especially helpful in clarifying that, not only can learning be incidental and holistic, it might become evident in an instant realization, just as it might over a protracted period of research and investigation.

One participant, Karen, spoke about *creating* value through consumption, rather than *finding* value through shopping. For her, value was connected to the amount of time that

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purchased items lasted and, in the case of clothing in particular, the amount of wear that they could withstand:

- Karen: I guess since I don't like shopping if I find something I like I tend to wear it until I absolutely, it's falling apart and my husband says, you really can't be in public in that any more. [laughter] Um –
- Kaela: So you really do sort of consume the things that you buy.
- Karen: Well I try to, yeah definitely. Um, I think because I try to spend a lot of time you know figuring out what it is that I need, um, and what is, what I feel most comfortable buying, that once I spend all that time buying it I don't want to get rid of it very quickly.
- (interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

As Karen clarifies here, value is not just a quality apparent on a price tag or a label; rather, it involves a process of projection of her future use of an item and an ongoing decision to consume it fully before discarding it.

Sometimes, values are not just multiple, they are competing and seem to defy a happy compromise. During his interview, James outlined some of these competing values:

- James: ...Uh, there's the economic factor, the, trying to be aware of, uh, where a product is produced or a food is produced, um, and comparing that against personal values of, um, having, knowing that the workers are being paid justly or that it's produced, um, locally or as near to local as possible. Um, sometimes they conflict....So there's something I think I saw last week. The, the organic food item which is coming all the way from California versus the locally produced but non-organic, uh, item. Which is better for you? Ultimately. Or which, I guess because it's comparing, it's, it's trying to compare values.
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- James: Personal health –
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- James: – versus environmental impact.
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- James: And ultimately then personal health.
- (interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

Fair conditions for workers who produce items, the environmental costs of shipping, the personal health risks and benefits of consuming food products – these were all matters of concern to most of the participants, and complicate shopping decisions as learning about them deepens.

For most participants, values lead them to particular shopping places as well as items. Sixteen participants related how shopping at thrift stores, buying second hand or participating in “swaps” helps them weigh and balance value-for-money with other sorts of values, including environmentalism. Participants used these tactics to acquire items from clothing to sporting equipment to cars:

- Amitah: I like to go to thrift stores for clothes.
- Kaela: Okay.

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Amitah: Um, partly because, I don't know why. [pause] I think part of it is, um [long pause], because, hmm, I don't know why I like to go to thrift stores. [chuckle] I think it's not, I don't have a lot of disposable income.

Kaela: Okay.

Amitah: That's part of it. The second part of it is, is I kind of feel like it's recycling.
(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Ellen: If I need a pair of jeans or a sweater or I'd rather buy it used than off the rack or through a clothing exchange or something.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Kaela: Do you go to Craig's List for, what do you go to Craig's List for?

Eddie: Free stuff, so that we don't have to put stuff in the, in the landfill.
(interview excerpt, Eddie, April 11, 2007)

Karen: And for a long time I would only...shop at second hand shops because I felt at least that had lower impact and I was giving...to a charity that was maybe working locally.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Sarah: So I think that, and I also bought a used car which is like a '91 [chuckle], right. Um, I don't think I'll ever buy, um, an expensive, like a new car.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Nicole: Well, my room-mates and I and my friends realized that why would you go to Ikea when you're just, even though the prices are low you're still buying a new product, you're still bringing that, whereas there's tons of things that are still out there. You can buy a shelf at Value Village, and it will act with the same function.
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Although several participants appreciated finding ways to spend responsibly and efficiently, the mostly middle-class participants in this study were aware that they have many material and social privileges because of their class position. Still, they find that some options are foreclosed to them. The excerpts below provide some examples of how participants have encountered and learned to respond to this reality in the course of their shopping:

Opposite us was a stand with toilet paper. She pointed to the packages of...toilet paper made from recycled paper, priced at four rolls for \$5.49. "That would last like a day in our house," she explained, as an example of why it would be too expensive to shop at [this store] all the time.
(shopping trip excerpt, Therèse, February 9, 2007)

At the sale boxes, I chatted with Annette... We talked about food – buying organics especially... She would like to buy more organics, but finds the cost prohibitive. Considering her options, she suggested that she could buy and eat less so that she could choose organics more often, but that's not a trade-off that she's prepared to make. When it comes to clothes, size and finding things that are affordable and fit are other issues. Sometimes she will buy used or second hand items. She explained, "If I want to buy cheap stuff, you have to go to SuperStore and Wal-Mart. And what does that say?" (shopping trip excerpt, mothers' network, May 19, 2007)

A few participants approached this dilemma by arranging their values into a hierarchy. Carla and Mary summarized how this helped them weigh values and options and make decisions:

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Carla: So it's all sort of give and take and weighing these, balancing these...There's no easy choices, and so if you can't, if you can't afford these organic foods look closely at the label anyway, maybe you shouldn't be supporting that form of organic. If it's local and it's organic then you know, go, and if you can afford it, you know, power to you. But there's definitely a hierarchy, um, for me when it comes to buying things. Like, for food, if it's organic and local it's first, if it's local but not organic it's next, and so on down the line. I do try to follow some rules that way.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

Mary: So I guess what that means is that what shopping means to me is it becomes more and more a, um, a process of acting out my ethics. Uh, and you know, there are exceptions to that, un, one of which would be the buying of gifts for others. Okay, so my sister and niece, I went to visit not long ago, before Christmas, and went into a mall and quite happily bought them each a nice coat. You know, so the ethics of that in terms of consumption are not there. The ethics are around, uh, love and support of family, you know, supersede the political. Um, but that doesn't happen very often.

Kaela: Okay, but, so there's something about, um, ethics, but also sometimes conflicting ethics, conflicting ethical, um, priorities.

Mary: No they don't conflict.

Kaela: Okay.

Mary: It's just that one is a higher, one is a higher order.

Kaela: Okay.

Mary: Love of family and need to support family is a higher order ethic than an ethic of not consuming.

(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Likewise, Vanessa recalled having heard advice to construct a hierarchy to guide food shopping. If a choice had to be made between local and organic produce, the preference, according to the expert whose name she could not recall, was to buy locally rather than organically; however, Vanessa had had cancer, and felt strongly about the important personal health benefits of organic produce. These processes illustrate “a kind of juggling, conceding on one aspect and holding fast on other issues” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008, p. 126) which surfaces as participants, like the green consumers who participated in Connelly and Prothero's study, ask, “what practical concessions have to be made to one’s cherished ideals, and how does all this play out” (p. 126).

In some instances, a happy resolution might be possible, but it can demand an inordinate commitment of time. As Jocelyn explained, values enter into shopping decisions; “[t]hey enter in, they don't always win” (interview excerpt, Jocelyn, January 22, 2007). Recalling a time when he and his partner were seeking a sustainable, healthy alternative to synthetic mattress covers, James had the following exchange with me during his interview:

James: So when we would go to other events, uh, such as the, uh, Fibre Arts Festival on the Sunshine Coast, we happened to come across a vendor that sells all kinds of wool products, uh, including mattress covers. Um, so we were keeping it in mind, knowing the price –

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

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James: – thinking, you know, you suffer a bit from sticker shock, um, but once you think about it and think about what goes into it, then you can kind of see how the value plays out.
Kaela: Okay.
James: But then there's concern about, okay, are these, we had also heard that some sheep on farms are, the way that they keep, um, infections or, uh, pests under control is to actually expose the sheep itself to some, some other, um, um, insect or pest repellent.
Kaela: Okay...
James: Um, and so, because I don't know enough about it –
Kaela: Mm hmmm.
James: – um, and trying to find out some information but then there's also the matter of time.
Kaela: Yeah.
James: The amount of time it takes to investigate.
(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

Contemporary globalization, in which production and consumption are so heavily mediated by multinational corporations as well as local conditions and personal circumstances, might be heightening awareness of some values and exacerbating the clash between different values. One important lesson that participants have learned about weighing values, then, is that the scale is rigged to favour certain values, especially those connected to time and money, over others.

Developing Literacy

As the analysis above established, people bring a multitude of values to their shopping; however, shopping decisions are made on the basis of information as well as values. Shoppers are confronted with information throughout the shopping process. As shoppers increasingly attend to a range of issues and concerns, they seek and deal with additional types of information which they garner through various research and education strategies. In confronting information in their shopping practices, shoppers develop a form of literacy as part of their learning-through-shopping. For the participants in this study, this literacy is both technical and critical.

All shoppers encounter labels and ingredients lists. During their interviews and shopping trips, participants talked about reading these materials to help them weigh the values outlined above. For example, Violet talked about wanting to buy “cruelty free” and safe cosmetics:

Violet: Um, brand names, um, if, um, cosmetics and beauty products, um, it they test on animals, and I'll also look for organic ingredients in, um, beauty products as well.
(interview excerpt, April 4, 2007).

For Karen, organics and fair trade are important considerations, and she has learned to look for information about these things on labels and packages:

Karen: Right. It, definitely, like fair trade, I like to, you know, look for that symbol because...it's not just marketing, it is reliable, yeah, from what I've seen.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007).

Maltodextrin is a polysaccharide that is used as a food additive. It is produced from starch and is usually found as a creamy-white hygroscopic powder. Maltodextrin is easily digestible, being absorbed as rapidly as glucose. The CAS registry number of maltodextrin is **9050-36-6**.

Maltodextrin can be derived from any starch. In the US, this starch is usually rice, corn or potato; elsewhere, such as in Europe, it is commonly wheat. This is important for coeliacs, since the wheat-derived maltodextrin can contain traces of gluten. There have been recent reports of coeliac reaction to maltodextrin in the United States. This might be a consequence of the shift of corn to ethanol production and its replacement with wheat in the formulation....

Foods containing maltodextrin may contain traces of amino acids, including glutamic acid as a manufacturing by-product. The amino acids traces would be too small to have any dietary significance.

– “Dextrin,” retrieved May 12, 2008 from *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dextrin>

Shoppers who take the time to read labels and lists encounter unique language and symbols. One example of these is the “best before” date stamp on food items:

She then turned to the shelf of pies behind us, and chose a boxed slice of pie. She checked the dates on it, and explained that she always does this. Whatever she buys has to be fresh, because it “has to be able to keep for a few days.” (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

When shopping for prepared or processed food items, there is even a possibility of encountering words which are unfamiliar. During several shopping trips, participants and I took note of labels and ingredients, and wondered about what some of them really meant:

We walked around the corner and stopped just after we entered the next aisle. Sandy looked at some packages of taco mixes. She looked first at a package..., and noted that the first ingredient listed was maltodextrin. “What’s maltodextrin?” I asked. “I don’t know,” she answered. Then she picked up another brand’s package, this time labelled organic, and said, “Here’s a package I can recognize the ingredients on but it’s like five bucks! For five bucks I’ll leave it.” (shopping trip excerpt, Sandy, February 5, 2007) (👁)

This incident illustrates how shoppers might regularly encounter words that they have not learned in school. Nor do they see or hear them in everyday conversations, media accounts or popular culture. Understanding a simple ingredients list can require an elementary technical literacy from fields such as chemistry or dietary science. Beyond ingredients, labels can contain other new information. Sometimes this information continues to test and expand shoppers’ technical literacy, as it did during Kerri’s shopping trip:

Kerri stopped near the beginning to look at vinegar. She looked at a bottle of organic vinegar, and read the explanation on the label about how non-organic vinegar can be sourced from wood chips. She and I commented that we had never heard this before and, in fact, had never really thought about what vinegar comes from. (shopping trip excerpt, Kerri, April 29, 2007)

In addition to technical literacy skills, critical literacy skills are developed, especially by shoppers who question the hegemonic status quo that advertising and other consumerist materials reiterate. Product packaging and other marketing materials that proclaim the benefits to consumers who buy that product are scrutinized. This relates to Linda’s qualified admiration for Ikea’s® and its self-promotion as a responsible corporation which uses sustainably sourced wood, even as it continues to sell products with questionable environmental and personal health effects. Shopping trips were especially useful in providing examples of how participants both extract information about a product from labels, packaging and price tags, and treat such corporate communications as suspect:

We then turned around and walked a few steps to the yoghurt section in the long dairy fridge. Bonnie reached for one single-serving berry yoghurt...and put it in her basket. When I asked her about that choice, she pointed out that, as a vegan, she had only three choices from all the products in that large fridge. One she found “tastes like chalk,” and she preferred the one that she

Palm oil is used in a wide variety of foods including margarine, cooking oil, crisps, cakes, biscuits and pastry. Vegetable oil production worldwide totals 95 million tonnes per year and palm oil is the world's second largest after soyoil. Although being entirely GM free and having the highest yield per hectare of any oil or oilseed crop, it is recognized that there are environmental pressures on its expansion to eco-sensitive areas, particularly as oil palm can only be cultivated in tropical areas of Asia, Africa and America. Palm oil sales are set to rise dramatically particularly in the growing economies of China and India. Sales in Europe have also grown recently due to palm oil being an effective substitute for partially hydrogenated soft oils such as soyoil, rapeseed and sunflower thereby eliminating trans-fatty acids from many products.

– Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (2004), “New Global Initiative to Promote Sustainable Palm Oil,” ¶2

got because it's locally produced. The third option is produced in Ontario. (shopping trip excerpt, Bonnie, February 5, 2007)

She first picked up a box of...toothpaste, read the packaging and put it back on the shelf. "I have to deal with my price comparison issues," she said, and picked up a box of [another brand of]... toothpaste which was on sale for \$3.99 and was less expensive....She read the box, noting that its ingredients list include blue green algae. We wondered about the benefits of that, and I asked her if she thought that such things might be gimmicky. She acknowledged that marketing can be used that way in natural products, as it is in conventional products. She looked at the box again, and read the information about the advantages of blue green algae, which according to the information on the box, has antiseptic qualities. She chose the...toothpaste [which was on sale]. (shopping trip excerpt, Kerri, April 29, 2007)

We had rounded the corner and were standing in the next aisle, looking at bread. Vanessa reiterated that you can't assume that an item labelled "multi-grain" is entirely whole grain as she looked at one loaf of bread. "People get sucked in by that," she added. I had noticed that she spent a fair amount of time reviewing the information on labels and asked, "Do you normally read a lot of labels?" "Yes!" she answered. (shopping trip excerpt, Vanessa, May 4, 2007)

In terms of her learning, she talked about reading labels carefully and the importance of understanding them. Often, though, it takes her time to learn about something. For example, she used to think that palm oil was an ingredient to avoid because of how people talked about it, but then she learned that "it's not really bad." (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Claire's learning about palm oil is instructive of how both technical and critical literacy must be developed by critical shoppers who hear conflicting messages. For several years, consumers have been advised that certain dietary fats are healthier than others. Palm oil was not considered a healthy option, although more recent thinking has re-focused consumers' attention onto hydrogenated oils and advised that, as Claire suggested, palm oil is "not really bad" after all. On the other hand, as I have learned, ecologists are concerned that renewed acceptance of palm oil is now wreaking havoc itself, as palm tree planting and harvesting heightens threats to already vulnerable environments and communities in the Global South. (👁) Like any literacy, the literacy of shopping is socially contextualized, so that information's meaning and importance are constantly renegotiated. New information, as well as shifting considerations of health and well-being, mean that participants are developing their literacy skills continually. What is important, as Tamara pointed out, is questioning information and messages. Speaking about the disparity between multinational corporations' messages and practices, she made the following comments:

Tamara: Um, they have a good message, like Gap was the first one to give, first sort of retailer to give, um, uh, um, benefits to same sex marriages.

Kaela: Okay.

Tamara: To recognize them. You know, um, Starbucks is you know all the...they do all this community stuff. And I mean they have shit loads of money, of course they can. Um, but, they treat the farmers like crap. Um, and the same thing with Shell. Gets awards for environmentalism, uh, they you know, they have positive employment things



Figure 6.3: Certified transitional grapes, shopping trip, April 29, 2007

in their, in their stores. And, and we'll employ people with, with disabilities and barriers and so. Um, but, uh, you know, go to Nigeria, um, and see how they treat Nigerians and people that live around their wells. Um, Starbucks, I mean watch Black Gold. It's fricken' amazing to see, you know they say we spend \$2.00 a pound on our coffee. Well, who's getting paid that? Not the farmer, man. Because, like poverty, phenomenal poverty. Yet, you know, they have such a lovely message on our end. And that's what I don't like.

(interview excerpt, March 23, 2007)

One of the realizations that surfaced for some participants is that, even with a well developed shopping literacy, they have a limited capacity to build their knowledge about products and brands. In part, this limitation results from corporate desires to withhold certain information, and the development and use of confusing jargon to promote products. During Kerri's shopping trip, for example, we encountered rice labelled “nutra-farmed” as opposed to organic, and grapes labelled “certified transitional” (shopping trip, April 29, 2007). (☹) We chatted about the possible meanings of these phrases which were outside our familiar lexicon. Increasingly, this limitation to knowing and learning is also linked to the growing complexity of chains of production which make it difficult even for producers to know the minutiae of how the objects which ultimately bear their corporate monikers are actually made. A few participants, including Linda, noted this shopping dilemma:

- Linda: Um, I guess at this point mostly I'm looking at the information that's already provided, usually with the packaging. So when I go to a store to, for clothing I'll look at washing instructions and, um, sometimes I look at provenance if it says made in wherever, although usually it's made in sweat shop central, so I've, it's just kind of, and you never know if it was made in a sweat shop or if it was made in a decent place. Um –
- Kaela: So that's a, so labels sometimes give you information and sometimes don't give you real information.
- Linda: Yeah, not, I mean they give you...they give you the basics, but you don't really know how much further into that you need to go.

(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

For shoppers concerned about the links between their own consumption and globalization, being literate demands that they attend to and deal with technical claims and information critically, always anticipating answers to an existing question as well as the next set of questions.

Constructing a Shopper's Geography

In the preceding sections, I have outlined participants' generic learning and research processes. Participants also discussed their more particular learning about the role of competing values around material well-being, social status, cultural norms and personal ethics, as well as jargon and logos which carry meanings related to status, ethics, product quality and price. In addition to this already complicated learning, shoppers also build a particular approach to and

human geography Geography is generally defined as the science which describes the earth's surface, its form and physical features, its natural and political divisions, climates, and productions. This broad-ranging discipline has numerous points of contact with the natural and the social sciences. In the case of the latter the sub-discipline of social or human geography is particularly pertinent.

Human geography was pioneered by the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache (*Human Geography*, 1918). A broadly similar development of social geography occurred in Germany, influenced by Friedrich Ratzel. Unlike physical geography, which is concerned principally with the description and analysis of the land, human geography focuses on the interaction between human populations and the territories in which they live....

– John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2005), *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, p. 280

knowledge of geography. (☉) Consistent with the phenomenon of globalization, this knowledge relates to both local and global geography. On a local level, participants learn to map the city in terms of areas and stores where they like to shop, and areas and stores that they try to avoid:

Claire mentioned that she has gone back to eating meat, but only poultry or lamb. She recalled that she always had liked turkey at Christmas. She still avoids conventionally farmed poultry though, and thinks that lamb is safer. She said, “I love places like Aphrodite's – you don't even have to worry” about what to order there because it's all organic/free range. (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Preferences for neighbourhoods or stores related to various considerations, including convenience of location, availability of products at attractive prices or experiences of a shopping environment as pleasant. During her shopping trip, Claire noted that, if she is unable or unwilling to spend the money to buy specific items at natural products stores, she checks more mainstream drug or grocery chains to see if they are available at lower prices. A small number of participants mentioned Ikea® as a retail chain which helps them balance these values, or retail co-operatives, such as Mountain Equipment Co-op® (MEC) which specializes in outdoor gear and clothing:

Carla: Um, another thing about MEC though, is, uh, they actually have organic products um that are reasonably priced. So if I want an organic tee-shirt, chances are I will find it there. Um, if I want hemp pants, I got a really great pair of hemp pants there. I find clothes shopping at MEC not as painful as other places. Um, so MEC and so I guess also Ikea sort of for the same reasons.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

Linda: We were going to buy a bed too...and so my husband went and bought us the cheapest bed at Ikea. So now we have a bed. But, yeah that's one place where I wish I didn't shop but I know they are at least are making an effort at stewardship and so on, um.

Kaela: How do you know that about them?

Linda: Um, it's on their website and some of their advertising and catalogue. And in their store, like they'll sort of highlight different issues, um, but I know that most of it is not very good.

Kaela: In terms of quality you mean or their –?

Linda: Oh quality and provenance and um things like that.

Kaela: Okay.

Linda: But I know that they are making an effort.

Kaela: Okay, so you say they're making an effort.

Linda: But not on all their products.

Kaela: Oh okay.

Linda: So, you know, a lot of their inex–, their less expensive stuff is particle board and stuff. So, you know, the fact that they're doing forest stewardship stuff is kind of irrelevant when you're buying particle board, um, but it's certainly, you know, better than some other places that are just, you know, putting together pine crap and, I don't know. It seems to be slightly better.

Kaela: So then why do you wish that you didn't buy there?

Linda: Um, because I, well partly I wish I had money to go elsewhere.

(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

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Julie: So I have learned over the last couple of years by deciding to shop, where I can, through co-ops that are locally owned and locally controlled and have a whole set of principles that underlie them. Um, and related to that, trying to support women-owned businesses and locally owned businesses and environmentally friendly businesses. So just being kind of mindful about not just how much something costs in a financial sense or an economic sense but how much of a contribution is that method of selling making to the rest of my life.
(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Many participants talked about avoiding large mainstream stores when doing grocery or clothes shopping. The following excerpts explain some of the participants' reasons for preferring or avoiding different places, and how they have established a sense of local shopping geography:

Sharon: ...I like to go to the local shops in my area, and if I've got time to do that I quite enjoy it. I take my little cart, you know, and I have my favourite little veggie store and I have my, you know, bakery and I have my other kind of places that I go to. And it's a bit of a, sort of, outing and I, 'cause I like to do that rather than going to the big stores.
(interview excerpt, December 19, 2006)

Sarah: So I, like if I lived over on Commercial Drive I would never probably go to Capers or Choices, right. So, so a lot of it is convenience because these places are close to my house. If I do shop at a regular grocery store, for example I would go to IGA, though I don't like Safeway, I just don't like the lay-out of their food and I don't like the selection, I think it's really poor for the stuff that I'm looking for. Um, and I like to go to markets too and I will, like, drive to a market. Like I...bike or whatever, like I'll walk down to Granville Island....Um, and for clothes and stuff, like I, I would just go to specific stores. Like I'll go to like the hemp stores or the second hand stores.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Kaela: Do you regularly shop in particular areas of the city or in particular stores and if so which ones and why do you prefer those places?

Alice: I often do go to a mall, I will admit, um, because it's all in one, convenient, it's a good variety. But for a change I do like to support these local Chinese grocery stores.

Kaela: So the, so some sense of the importance of community-based businesses.

Alice: Yeah.

Kaela: Small, local, locally owned, locally controlled.

Alice: Yeah. However what I've found though is when there was a period of my life where I really wanted to support those and just shun any kind of big business. And I found that there was a huge price difference and I just could not afford [it]....Those are tough decisions where you know you can get it at Wal-Mart or Staples but, in the big picture, how am I, what kind of a legacy am I leaving? And I do, I do shop at Wal-Mart but seldom. I really cut down on shopping there because of all the stuff that I hear. But there are some things that I need from there that I know I can get and I need them quickly. I go there once maybe every, um, three or four months, if that.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

As these excerpts indicate, convenience becomes a factor in a shopper's geography in complex ways, depending on neighbourhood, the items sought during a shopping trip, and the availability of resources such as time and money. A shopper's local geography takes into account multiple values, including one's material need to balance value-for-money with other needs and wants.

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Beyond a very local geographic knowledge, many, although not all, participants also articulated an understanding of and concern about global geo-politics and human geography:

Alice: There are a lot of things to consider when you're buying things. Uh, is this environmentally, is this gonna have a negative environmental impact? Who has made this? That's the first thing that comes to my mind. When I see made in China I'm just, I, my heart kind of goes out. Should I really be buying this? I have to admit I don't look at everything that I'm buying to see where it's made but if I happen to see that it's made in China I, uh, I wonder what kind of conditions they were working under, how much they were being paid. If I see something and I figure, oh this probably costs about a dollar and it's fifty cents, I think, ahhh, what did this person who made this, what did they make? And so when somebody tells me, oh I got this great deal on something, I really, that's the first thing I think of – that person, could they feed their family that night?
(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Sarah: I try and stay away from, from the more expensive stores anyway, the ones that where I know where there's all that, um, child labour crap going on. So I, like I don't mind, like Lululemon is expensive but it's a Canadian made clothing, right. So I don't mind paying extra money for something that's Canadian made 'cause I know it's, it's not the sweatshop stuff, right?
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

These excerpts suggest the extent to which awareness and concern relates to campaigns which have been garnering attention in media and popular culture. Notable among these is the discourse of Canada and other countries in the Global North as places where reasonable regulations and statutes foreclose the possibility of exploitive work conditions, such as sweatshops. Another discourse is that of fair trade which often brings the conditions of production in the Global South to the attention of consumers in the Global North, and combines a commitment to human rights and sustainability. One participant, Tamara, worked for an international development non-government organization with a particular interest in labour rights and the coffee industry. Violet was familiar with the Ten Thousand Villages® shops which support fair trade and small-scale artisan projects in the Global South, and made a point of shopping there; Alice volunteered there.

On the other hand, even the most conscientious shoppers are not fully informed. Just as participants' literacy is limited, so too is the knowledge of the geography that they develop. Sarah implied that buying “Made in Canada” products avoids the encouragement of continued use of so-called sweatshop labour; however, there are certainly sweatshops here in Canada and other countries in the Global North, as well as in across the Global South. As Jocelyn explained,

Jocelyn: You know, I don't understand totally what it means to buy something from Chile, for instance....I, I know about some places but I don't know about every place. Um, I have much better, I mean that'd be food. If I were buying clothing, time and again I'll look at these tags and they'll say, made in Sri Lanka, made in Turkey. And you wonder who did that. Now, as a Canadian, I can only say that when I see things and it says, made in Canada, I'm pleased. Now whether this makes any sense or not, I don't know....

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Kaela: Well do you think that, how easy do you think it is to know?

Jocelyn: I think it's not easy, or I would know! I mean, I'm not a totally uninterested and stupid person. But it seems to me that it's not easy to know. Or else I've blocked it out for some reason, there's that possibility. Um, when you go shopping to buy clothes, for instance, you, I usually decide first whether I like it before I look and see where it was made.

Kaela: Okay.

Jocelyn: And then, if it's made in India, I don't know if I have a hesitation because I think about, you know, there's so many arguments on both sides. They say those people would be on the street starving if they weren't making these bedspreads or whatever it is. So I don't know.

(interview excerpt, January 22, 2007)

Part of a knowledge of global geography for shoppers, then, has to do with the early stages in the chain of production and consumption – where items are produced. The considerations for participants as they develop this sense of geography are both personal and political. While Jocelyn spoke about human rights concerns in the excerpt above, there was also talk about the link between geography, shopping and personal health:

Nicole: So I question where it's come from. That's one of my most important, where it's come from. Uh, I'm also interested in the ingredients. Uh, I feel organic on specific things such as GMOs [that is, genetically modified organisms], so corn, um, I'm not necessarily, wheat I know is not GMO, uh, as of now in Canada so I'm not as wary about that. Uh, and if it's fruit and vegetables I'll take local over organic because in some sense, like...anything that's grown in Vancouver, I feel it's lower in price but I know that it's also coming from the local, so.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

On top of buying organics, she also mentioned her preference for buying locally grown/produced food, because she thinks it's better for the consumer, the people growing it and the environment. (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Turning to the left and standing in front of a refrigerated section, Jody picked up a cucumber and looked at the label, which indicated that it was grown in Mexico. “I was in Mexico,” she said, “and you couldn't find one of these things to save your life.” I asked her what she thought that was all about, and she said that they must be exporting their produce for more money. She added that she had found a similar thing with tomatoes – she could buy them in Mexico, but they looked to be of poor quality. She moved over a few steps and picked up a package of snap peas which were marked as having been imported from China. “This makes me crazy! They don't have clean irrigating water!” (shopping trip excerpt, Jody, February 12, 2007)

The excerpt from Jody's shopping trip establishes how shopping, globalization and geography are re-mapping the world so that both the benefits and the problems of production and consumption are being redistributed across local, national and regional borders. While the problems – from food shortages to sanitation and safety – remain concentrated in the Global South, the consumers in the Global North reap the benefits of new types and seemingly unlimited amounts of food and other items. This recalls Beck's (1992) conceptualization of the “risk

The distribution of socially produced wealth and related conflicts occupy the foreground so long as obvious material need, the “dictatorship of scarcity”, rules the thought and action of people (as today in large parts of the so-called Third World). Under these conditions of “scarcity society”, the modernization process takes place with the claim of opening the gates to hidden sources of social wealth with the keys of techno-scientific development. These promises of emancipation from undeserved poverty and dependence underlie action, thought and research in the categories of social inequality, from the class through the stratified to the individualized society.

In the welfare states of the West a double process is taking place now. On the one hand, the struggle for one's “daily bread” has lost its urgency as a cardinal problem overshadowing everything else, compared to material subsistence in the first half of this century and to a Third World menaced by hunger....Parallel to that, the knowledge is spreading that the sources of wealth are “polluted” by growing “hazardous side effects”. This is not at all new, but it has remained unnoticed for a long time in the efforts to overcome poverty. This dark side is also gaining importance through the over-development of productive forces. In the modernization process, more and more destructive forces are also being unleashed, forces before which the human imagination stands in awe. Both sources feed a growing critique of modernization, which loudly and contentiously determines public discussions.

In systematic terms, sooner or later in the continuity of modernization the social positions and conflicts of a “wealth-distributing” society begin to be joined by those of a “risk-distributing” society.

– Ulrich Beck (1992), *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p. 20

society” which has developed in the Global North and demands that consumer-citizens self-reflexively deliberate the risks attendant to globalization. (👁)

Still another part of this knowledge relates to later stages in the chain – where items are made available locally to the consumer. One distinct point about developing a shopper's geography was raised during Amy's interview. Born and raised in Singapore, Amy reflected on possible reasons for the lack of attention to provenance in this unique Asian country:

- Amy: I don't think they, no-one really thinks much about what you buy. Oh, okay, we do think about it when we buy it, but we have never thought about what's behind it.
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- Amy: We just assume it appears on the shelf already packaged and ready to go....I mean, I never thought about who is making it and for what reason and who takes the money....
- Kaela: But as you say, that's a, I mean, there's much more of a presence of things like organics and fair trade in, in Canada, or in Vancouver, let's say, than in Singapore.
- Amy: ...I don't know, I think it's because we don't actually produce anything anyway.
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- Amy: So it's like production doesn't really affect us. We're very used to being consumers and not producers....
- (interview excerpt, February 7, 2007)

Having lived most of her life in an extreme example of a consumerist society, Amy learned about the importance that geography had in her practice of shopping and consumption.

Other participants who had spent most of their lives in North America recognized that globalization's multinational corporations are posing both opportunities and challenges for shoppers as they develop a sense of the local geography, and its ties to global phenomena. The current interest in buying locally grown and produced food and other items can be contrasted with the ability to transport desirable goods across great distances efficiently or the increasing preponderance of multi-national retail chains. As Barndt's (1999, 2002) Tomasita project also illustrates, understanding where and how things originate, why and how they arrive in local stores, and where retail profits go is all part of the geography lesson for critical shoppers. Karen summarized this point in her comments:

- Kaela: You...talked a lot about production. Um, what about retail? So what about local stores, who owns the stores you shop in, stuff like that? Does that enter into your decisions?
- Karen: Yeah, for sure. Um, definitely, I mean that's one thing that does bother me about going to Capers. I mean they're an American company, but then there are other things that sort of, yeah, it's one of those trade-offs.
- (interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Even as globalization and multinational corporations make desirable products more accessible to shoppers, they violate some of participants' central values and priorities.

While I would have loved to take Marissa to Mexico to meet some of the women at the other end of the tomato chain, that was not possible. But I was able to invite her along for a visit with Mexican migrant workers picking Ontario tomatoes two hours west of Toronto....A few days after this visit, I received a nine-page letter from Marissa, filled with rich observations and analyses of what she had seen and felt: “The highlight for me was sharing this life experience with my 'sisters' from Mexico....They all looked older than I had anticipated....I was very interested in the relationship between the workers, government and 'patrons.' Such a powerful word relegated to a farmer who hires you as a picker.”

– Deborah Barndt (2002), *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization*, p. 238

Two types of experiences seem especially important for fostering participants' learning in this regard: having travelled, worked or lived abroad, and having grown up on or around a farm.

Mary: So, for example, I've spent a fair bit of time in India where, unless you're very very wealthy, and even then, um, people do not, consumption is not the drug that it is here. (interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Alice: Hmmmm, what's the difference? I think I've lived in, I spent time in a developing country and that set me on a different course, helping me appreciate what we have here. (interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Karen: ...When I graduated university, I worked, uh, I don't know if you've heard of Frontier College?

Kaela: Yup.

Karen: I was a labourer-teacher. And...I've always thought about Frontier College and how it impacted my teaching practice and so many other aspects of my life. I don't think I ever thought about how it impacted how I feel about...shopping....But definitely, working on a farm, I became more aware of, you know, issues around food production, um, and how definitely our cheap produce is possible because there are these impoverished people from Mexico who are willing to come and spend eight months a year doing totally back-breaking work....And then also looking at, um, and also just being with the other people who were labourer-teachers with me. There were like eight of us together in that, in a house, tended to have more unconventional ideas about things like that. I did learn a lot from them and from, uh, I guess just working with these guys from Mexico as well, you know, people who had so little. And I went to Mexico afterwards and travelled around and, uh, went to visit the guys that we had worked with. And one of them, uh, borrowed his friend's truck and took us on a tour of some things he thought would be interesting. And one of them was, um, a t-shirt making factory. It wasn't really a factory, it was just like somebody's house. And they'd constructed this really ramshackle kind of area in the back and there were these women who just, you know, sewing t-shirts....And again that's something that I, you know, never had exposure to before. And it really made me think about, you know, the process of where it comes from. The people who are involved. (interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Violet: Um, well a couple of years ago I was an intern...for an...umbrella organization for, um, all the agencies and NGOs working to, to fight child labour. And it's something that I really didn't take very seriously until I spent time with them and I did research for them. (interview excerpt, April 4, 2007)

In these excerpts, participants described how experiencing life in other societies changed their perspectives on life in Canada. In particular, spending time in a society in the Global South provided helped participants question a Western hegemonic ideology such as consumerism and all of the common sense which accompanies it in Canadian society. This recalls Barndt's (2002) anecdote about a Canadian participant in her study who was able to spend some time with Mexican migrant workers on an Ontario farm. Even though she had not travelled to the Global South, her direct experience with citizens from Mexico who are living temporarily in Canada, deepened her understanding of the politics of consumer-citizenship and globalization. (👁)

Historically, BC has drawn on specific groups from poorer, non-white countries as a source of cheap labour, for dangerous occupations, with inferior employment and citizenship rights in Canada. As part of this history, early in the 20th century, BC farmers successfully petitioned the federal government to admit South Asians and Japanese to work in agriculture.

Canadian immigration policy continues this racialized practice by permitting specific groups from the global South to enter Canada to fill jobs with poor pay and working conditions that other populations are unwilling to fill. Their racialized and highly vulnerable status allows employers to justify substandard working, housing and health/safety conditions.

BC farmers in the Fraser Valley rely largely on immigrants from the Punjab to replenish their labour force. Today, about 90 per cent of these farmworkers are Indo-Canadian; the majority are women, many in their 50s and 60s. Most immigrated to Canada as parents or grandparents under the federal family reunification program, sponsored by their Canadian children or grandchildren.

These farmworkers are vulnerable for several reasons. Many are older and are not fluent in English. Thus, few employment options other than farmwork are likely to be available to them, particularly as women. If they are sponsored, farmworkers often feel compelled to repay their families for their economic sacrifices in bringing them to Canada and maintaining their welfare. Income security programs for Canada's older population, such as Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), are generally off limits to sponsored immigrants for 10 years, and are prorated after that....

While most BC farmworkers in the Fraser Valley are Indo-Canadian, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) began in 2004 to curtail this traditional source of labour by restricting the admission of parents and grandparents in its family reunification program. This policy shift contributed to the labour shortage that had been emerging in BC agriculture. Accustomed to paying seasonal harvest workers no more than the minimum wage (and sometimes less) and providing substandard working conditions, BC farm owners faced a labour shortage in the early 2000s. The provincial government did not raise minimum wages and standards in agriculture to attract workers to meet these shortages. Nor did the federal government seek to maintain or increase the number of immigrants that traditionally serviced this sector. Mechanization of farmwork proceeded slowly. Instead, the horticultural industry lobbied the federal and provincial governments to gain the right to hire temporary migrant workers. In 2004, BC joined the Seasonal Agriculture Workers Program (SAWP) by agreement with Canada and Mexico to give Mexican workers temporary employment visas in agriculture, with wages slightly above the provincial minimum.

– David Hairey, Christina Hanson, Glen MacInnes, Arlene Tiger McLaren, Gerardo Otero, Kerry Preibisch and Mark Thompson (2008), *Cultivating Farmworker Rights*, pp. 13 & 14

Participants who had spent time on a farm also related that experience to their approach to shopping and consumption. Karen's experience enabled her to consider the ties between production and consumption, the Global South and the Global North, and structures and cultures of globalization and consumption. That experience became the basis for her continued learning when she travelled in the Global South, and illustrates how learning occurs through and builds on lived experience. A couple of other participants talked about how having grown up around a farm became tied to their own consumption, and helped them appreciate issues such as food security.

She then talked about going to the farmers' market and enjoying that experience of shopping. "I like to buy in-season as well, that's important to me as well," she explained. She added that buying locally grown produce is important too, and that "I like to support farmers as well....My dad's parents had a farm" where they grew produce and farmed animals. "I had that growing up," she explained. She helped her grandmother sell the produce and, she added, "I know how hard they work." To her, buying directly from agricultural producers is a way of "giving back to people that I don't even know because I appreciate them...." She then talked about having gone recently to a blueberry farm to buy berries. She had observed, "They have all these East Indian women working....I see them, I know they work hard." By buying directly from the farms, she feels that she is supporting them. She also thinks that "It's more humane to be integrated with your food," and that seeing and engaging with producers helps her achieve that. She also spoke about other influences on her shopping and consumption, including travelling and a constant analysis that she undergoes in daily life and that gives her "an understanding of where people are coming from." (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

When I asked about what first prompted her to pay attention to shopping and consumption in this way, she explained that her mother had grown up on a farm. Vanessa could see that the family farm was "becoming non-existent" and that encouraged her attention to local provenance and control. (shopping trip excerpt, Vanessa, May 4, 2007)

Although Vanessa and Paula had spent a lot of time in their youth on family farms, they developed different analyses of shopping and consumption, as well as globalization in general. Paula did not distinguish between her grandparents' family farm and the farms near Vancouver. Her statement that shopping at farms helps her understand "where people are coming from" seems like an ironic use of a colloquial expression rather than a literal recognition that most of these workers have come here from the Global South as immigrants or temporary migrants. (☹) In contrast, Vanessa acknowledged that corporate agribusiness was replacing "the family farm." Like Karen, Vanessa attached her personal experiences to social movements and organizations concerned with fair, sustainable production which does not compromise the health of producers or consumers. These two participants discussed buying shares in a co-operatively owned and operated farm, and Vanessa had served on the board of directors of another co-operative.

In this section, it is apparent that all participants approached shopping with concerns and questions which connect their shopping to globalization. Some illustrated a more critical

Simply having experiences does not mean that they are reflected on, understood or analysed critically. Neither are experiences inherently enriching. Experience can be construed in a way that confirms habits of bigotry, stereotyping and disregard for significant but inconvenient information. It can also be narrowing and constraining, causing us to evolve and transmit ideologies that skew irrevocably how we interpret the world. So a learner's experience can represent a barrier to, rather than an enhancement of, learning.

– Stephen Brookfield (1998), “Against Naïve Romanticism,” p. 128

tendency to challenge the structures underpinning both Canadian society and globalization. Considerations of convenience, affordability and consumers' health compete with human rights, community cohesion and ecology as participants construct a knowledge of geography which encompasses the local and global landscapes, and the producers and consumers who inhabit them

Summary

In this chapter, I have traced an analysis of what participants learn to do through their shopping processes. This analysis both consolidates and extends the concepts related to informal adult learning that have been central in this inquiry. In presenting how participants have learned to learn, to conduct research, to weigh values, to develop literacy and to construct a geography, I have established that shopping is always a site of technical or “instrumental” learning (Mezirow, 1995 in Sandlin, 2005) and is indeed also a site of incidental, politically charged learning for some people. Through my analysis, I have also illustrated why the activities of everyday life and the incidental learning which accompanies them deserve the serious attention of adult educators.

As well, I have demonstrated that such learning has multiple dimensions. Incidental learning is, as critical adult educators such as Foley (1999, 2001) and Brookfield (1998, 2005) imply, an intellectual process; however, as others argue, it is also an emotional, sensual and spiritual process (Dirkx, 2001; English, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1995, 1998, 2000). Furthermore, it is a relational process which is both solitary and social, involving a wide range of “intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971). Finally, learning-through-shopping is multidisciplinary, as critical shoppers attend to research, philosophy, language and geography. Participants have learned about learning and the processes of research; they have learned about the tensions between material constraints and a wide range of values; they have learned how to read and use language and symbols; and they have learned about place and space.

This incidental, holistic learning about what to do in shopping is complex and limited. A comprehensive conceptualization of learning appreciates experiential knowledge, but Brookfield (1998) notes that it is naïve to think that personal experience always leads to more critical understanding. (☹) This concern re-surfaces in chapter eight, when I concentrate my analysis on learning about change. Although I have touched on issues of identity and making change in this chapter, I have yet to fully address the questions of who participants learn to be and how they learn to make change. It is to these questions that I turn my attention in the next two chapters, building on my analysis here and introducing new theoretical facets in my remaining analyses.

[Insert Interlude 5 here.]

- How do individuals living in Canada society, in which a postmodern sensibility and the phenomenon of globalization converge, understand and articulate the implications of their “location” (within cultural milieus, social structures and geographic places) for their shopping options, constraints and preferences?
- How do they relate this learning and their consumption to citizenship in the nation-state and to “global” citizenship?
- What do participants learn to do and who do they learn to be as social beings in through shopping?
- How do they learn to make change to their social identities and, more broadly, to structures of social relations?

– selected guiding questions

CHAPTER SEVEN
GROWING UP WITH, GROWING INTO, GROWING OUT OF:
WHO PARTICIPANTS LEARN TO BE

- Kaela: How did you learn about shopping and how to shop and where do you think your ideas about shopping come from?
- Sarah: Probably a lot from my mother [chuckle], to be honest. Um, probably a lot to do with when I, I moved out when I was really young, when I was 17, and I had to learn really early how to manage my money at a low paying job before I went back to school. Right? So I think a lot of it had to do with my money management as well. Uh, can I afford to buy clothing and pay for rent and buy my groceries and still be healthy and happy, right? And so, and also my mother also taught me a lot about food and being healthy and I think that's probably why I don't feel bad about spending money on food.
- Kaela: So was that, um, some people talk about, um, growing up in households where they learned, where the real value around shopping was getting, getting good value. Getting a good deal. Um, and other people talk about value in terms of quality.
- Sarah: I think quality, yeah. Quality, not, not price. My parents spent a lot of money on food and it was never a bad thing. It was always a good thing 'cause we knew it was healthy good food for us. They did shop at markets a lot for fresh food, but I mean that's still part of healthy food, right....
- Kaela: Okay. Um, and what about your, um, the way that, that you talked about being interested in the environment, for example? And, and the issue of over-consumption. Was that something that you grew up with or –?
- Sarah: Um, I think I grew into that. 'Cause my parents are definitely over-consumers. Um, you know, when there was five of us at home we all had cars. When one car died we bought another one [chuckle].
- (interview excerpt, April 25, 2007)

The analysis in this chapter carries on from the previous chapter, moving to the guiding questions related to who participants learn to be through their shopping. (☞) As the conversation between Sarah and me cited above hints, participants began learning what kind of shopper they ought to be at an early age. As children, they watched and listened to their parents and other adults, and they grew up with images of shoppers. As they matured, they grew into their own ideas of who they wanted to be as shoppers and grew out of some of their early shopping lessons in favour of new concerns, priorities and commitments.

My analysis continues to draw on data from interviews, shopping trips and focus groups. Concepts outlined in chapter two remain central here. These include ideology, common sense and the role of intellectuals in everyday learning (Gramsci, 1971); consumer-citizenship and identity; holistic learning which is incidental (Foley, 1999, 2001), emotional (Dirkx, 2001; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 2003, Tisdell, 1998) and, for some, spiritual (English, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 2000); an understanding of globalization as an era and a project marked by global tensions and local particularities (Barndt, 1999, 2002; Evans, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Huws, 2004; Katz, 2001; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2001); and the complications of resistance or dissidence

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(Sparks, 1997). Additionally, I introduce a new theoretical facet through which I view these data as I attend to questions of who participants learn to be as shoppers: Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of "imagined community."

By "imagined community," Anderson (1991) refers specifically to the nation-state as an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (p. 6, emphasis in the original).

Anderson concentrates on nation-building and discusses media as central to that project. If consumption, like citizenship, is a marker of national identity and part of nation-building, then applying Anderson's (1991) concept to shopping is consistent with his original intention. National cultures are constructed around a constellation of values and identities which bind populations together. These cultural values and identities are in turn expressed through discourses and practices of shopping and consumption. Tamara and James suggested these links between shopping and consumption and values and identities during their interviews:

Tamara: ...I think there's tradition there, there's culture. I think that has to be respected. You know, as cheesy and as stupid as it is, you know, it has a sentimental value. And, and we need that. I, I mean we need those kinds of things. Um, that's what creates society.
(interview excerpt, March 23, 2007)

James: Um [long pause], I mean I suppose that would have to, that would have to, that would go back to, uh, a personal feeling of, um, the kinds of, of values or the way one likes to be envisioned or seen by others. Um [pause], I suppose for the most part, people want to feel, or I don't know, I'll just try and talk about myself.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

James: I like to feel that I am part of a community.

Kaela: Okay.

James: Um, because of the, the sense of belonging, the sense of having historical roots. Um, at the same time [pause], I also do like the sense of, well, I like learning, I like discovery, I'm open to discussing, I recognize that there are issues with, uh, the community in terms of social, economic characteristics of it. The way that, the various degrees of our, various members of our society, um, are living, the effect of being, them being in the community, and what that does.

(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

As well, emerging discourses associated with globalization, notably around global citizenship and cosmopolitanism, suggest that, while the nation-state retains central importance, it is only one of several possible scales of imagined community. Regardless of its divergent effects, globalization is loosening the weave of the social fabric of nation-states. New information and communication technologies are enabling individuals to connect with one another across borders. Whether they are hegemonic or counter-hegemonic, civil society

“Good” has been drained of much of its meaning, in these circles, by the exclusion of its ethical content and emphasis on a purely technical standard; to do a good job is better than to be a do-gooder. But do we need reminding that any crook can, in his own terms, do a good job? The smooth reassurance of technical efficiency is no substitute for the whole positive human reference. Yet men [sic.] who once made this reference, men who were or wanted to be writers or scholars, are now, with every appearance of satisfaction, advertising men, publicity boys, names in the strip newspapers. These men were given skills, given attachments, which are now in the service of the most brazen money-grabbing exploitation of the inexperience of ordinary people. And it is these men – this new, dangerous class – who have invented and disseminated the argot, in an attempt to influence ordinary people – who because they do real work have real standards in the fields they know – against real standards in the fields these men knew and have abandoned. The old cheapjack is still there in the market, with the country boys' half-crowns on his reputed packets of gold rings or watches. He thinks of his victims as a slow, ignorant crowd, but they live, and farm, while he coughs behind his portable stall. The new cheapjack is in offices with contemporary decor, using scraps of linguistics, psychology and sociology to influence what he thinks of as the mass-mind. He too, however, will have to pick up and move on, and meanwhile we are not to be influenced by his argot; we can simply refuse to learn it. Culture is ordinary. An interest in learning or the arts is simple, pleasant and natural. A desire to know what is best, and to do what is good, is the whole positive nature of man. We are not to be scared from these things by noises.

– Raymond Williams (1993), “Culture is Ordinary,” p. 92

organizations and social movements challenge Anderson's (1991) understanding of the centrality of the nation-state in structuring imagined community. For that matter, older examples of social organization, including religious institutions, can be seen as the basis of imagined community. As I discuss in my analysis here, spirituality, along with other bases of values and cultural practices, do indeed help structure the imagined communities apparent in the arena of shopping.

A Community of “Good” Shoppers

Thinking about colloquial phrases which are commonly used to characterize shoppers, I built on the varied meanings of the phrase “good shopper.” I asked interview participants if they considered themselves good shoppers, and how they would define that phrase. This question, while not always asked verbatim during shopping trips, frequently arose and data from those encounters are also included in this analysis. Does “good” measure skill and talent? Is it an ethical quality? Is it a sign of conformity? I am not alone in wondering about what the word “good” means in a phrase like “good shoppers.” Participants in this study, as well as cultural studies scholars, also ponder this question. (☞) The simultaneous availability of increasing consumer options and awareness of possible problems with those options gives rise to new questions for participants, even as they make it more difficult to answer questions. During their interviews, some participants, such as James, spoke about the frustration of living with this conundrum and trying to be a good shopper:

- James: Okay, um, good shopper most of the time. Um, and if it's just in the sense of getting good value then I would say yes. Or at least I do my best at it. The, I think some of the difficulties in evaluating that arise from the, your standards for judging it.
- Kaela: Okay.
- James: So in terms of getting the best value for money, uh, as soon as issues of things like globalization and, uh, social justice, um, and environmental damage, as soon as those enter the equation it becomes much more difficult.
- Kaela: Okay. So there's value, sort of financial, value for money...
- James: Financial value. You have a limited number of, limited amount of funds and so you want to make it go the farthest....And there's always something on the wish list....
- Kaela: Are there other factors that go through your mind or that, that you think go through the mind of a good shopper?
- James: Um, probably how the products will affect personal health.
- Kaela: Is that something that you –?
- James: Yeah, it's, for the most part of I've been, it was a few years ago, some close friends who are a little further along in terms of their commitment to buying pesticide and organically grown, pesticide-free and organically grown food. Um, which I've been slowly progressing toward but there's always the economic aspect of that as well, which makes it somewhat difficult to commit to.

(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

“Demanding consumption” or politisk konsumtion is the use of consumer choice for political purposes. This term is recent and Danish in origin. Politisk forbrug was coined by the Danish Institute for Future Studies to analyse the intensive involvement of Danes in the boycott of the Shell Oil Company in the mid-1990s for its decision to decommission the Brent Spar oil platform by dumping it into the North Sea. Although the British government granted Shell Oil permission to decommission the platform in this fashion, Shell Oil was the sole target of the boycott. Formally defined, political consumerism is choice among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. These choices are informed by attitudes and values regarding issues of justice, fairness, or non-economic issues that concern personal and family well-being and ethical or political assessment of favorable and unfavorable business and government practice. Political consumers engage individually or collectively in such choice situations. Their market choices reflect an understanding of material products as embedded in a complex social and normative context.

– Michele Micheletti (2003), “Shopping as Political Activity,” ¶6



Increasingly, we witness reports of consumers who actively seek a voice through their purchase “votes” in a similar way to which citizens register their voice through votes in political elections (e.g. Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Dickinson and Hollander, 1991; Shaw et al., forthcoming). Consumers voting through practices such as boycotting and buycotting are not new but have been increasingly reported over recent decades and can occur with daily regularity (e.g. Friedman, 1996, 1999).

– Deirdre Shaw (2007), “Consumer Voters in Imagined Communities,” p. 135

As I discussed in the previous chapter, participants have learned to weigh diverse values through shopping. Not surprisingly, participants mentioned various qualities summarized by the word good. From “moral” or “ethical” to “sensible” or “reasonable,” participants noted the qualities that they found most important in shopping. This variety in qualities corresponds to the variety of phrases used by scholars who write about social movements related to shopping and consumption. These include “demanding consumers” and “political consumers” (Micheletti, 2003) (☉), “consumer voters” (☉) and “ethical consumers” (Shaw, 2007), “green consumers” (Connelly & Prothero, 2008) or “critical consumers” (Sassatelli, 2006). The following excerpts illustrate the breadth of understandings and concerns that participants shared in their conversations with me about what it means to be a good shopper:

Karen: I was gonna say, do I think of myself as a good shopper? I don't know, what is a *good* shopper? Um, to my mother being a good shopper would be, you know, knowing what the bargains are and going for those things. Um, and she's constantly giving me clothes that she has bought but then she got home and realized that they didn't quite fit her right or she didn't really like but they were on sale so she had to get them. Um, and if, in some ways I think I'm a good shopper. I tend to, uh, I mean I think very carefully about what I'm going to buy. Um, my husband and I, my husband more than me, he like, he does a lot of research on things. Um, we both needed new shoes and he spent a long time researching which companies were the, none of them were great but, you know, which one had the best...

Kaela: Like running shoes or –?

Karen: Hikers, yeah, yeah. Which ones had the best, sort of, uh, reputation as far as sweatshop labour goes. Which ones had, had leather-free. We were, we're vegetarian and tried to, you know...

Kaela: Oh, okay, you tried to find vegan shoes.

Karen: Yeah, as much as possible.

Kaela: Yeah, yeah.

Karen: Yeah, and not always easy, but as much as possible we try to do that.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Ellen: I feel really good about a purchase when, you know, when it was made in a responsible way or made locally I should say. Or, I mean, I'm always looking for a good deal because I don't have tons of extra money but what...[my mom] considers, quote, good shopping, is just a good deal. For me, there's far more, there's many more, uh, uh, like factors that play into what I consider to be a good purchase or purchase that I feel good about.

(interview transcript, April 24, 2007)

Eddie: Uh, morally I think I'm a good shopper because I try to think about where it's coming from, uh, or at least who it benefits. I am not the good shopper in that I don't always find the good bargains. But I do try to support transit friendly locations and what have you and I try to make sure I get, um, that it benefits the community as well instead of just my own uh, my own well-being. So, yes.

(interview excerpt, April 11, 2007)

Sean: ...Um, I'm a, I'm a, I wouldn't say I'm a good shopper for food, I'd say I'm a *fantastic* shopper for food. So food I really delve into, I really think about where it comes from.

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Other stuff I'm probably a lousy shopper. Just 'cause I hate it so much I don't put the work into it.

Kaela: Okay. So being a good shopper means putting work into it?

Sean: Well, really coming to an understanding of what you're buying, what the consequences of.....Yeah, here's, let me try and define what a good shopper is.

Kaela: Okay.

Sean: It's someone who knows all the inputs that went into the extraction of the resources,...the transportation of the resources, the manufacturing of whatever it is, the transport of the manufactured product, all the waste products that are produced, the packaging, and then the disposal. So to me that's a good shopper, is someone of the, of everything that goes into getting that product into my hand and what's going to happen afterwards.

(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

These excerpts indicate how participants attempt to become good shoppers who make the “right” shopping choices. Like the excerpts cited in the previous chapter's section, *Weighing Values*, they clarify that choices involve multiple values and priorities around which participants develop a sense of imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Participants whose spirituality inspired them to shop in a certain way, for example, see themselves connected to other people who share their values and cultural practices, in shopping and in other arenas. If their expression of spirituality includes organized worship, the community of affiliation can be both real and imagined. Likewise, participants involved in secular civic organizations or social movements might think about the values and practices which bond them in common struggles, practices and convictions to both their actual acquaintances and others whom they have never met.

At first glance, Anderson's (1991) notion of imagined community might not seem to resonate with shopping. While Anderson emphasizes the political authority inherent in the imagined community of the nation-state, hegemonic consumerism, especially when twinned with neoliberalism, treats shoppers as discrete, autonomous agents. This seems incongruent with the links which necessary for a sense of community. Ironically, this incongruence can heighten when language around democracy and citizenship are appended to shopping. In her analysis of “ethical consumers,” for example, Shaw (2007) invokes the metaphor of “shopping-as-voting.” The counter-argument to her analysis, which Shaw herself lays out, is made that

while voting in an election is a private action it is a public phenomenon and is publicly organised. Shopping...lacks this public dimension. As such the authors view political consumerism as an individualized act, highlighting that it is not restricted to any formalized design but rather exists as independent of time, space and choice because they are inherently individualistic. (Shaw, 2007, p. 136)

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Shopping, according to this second point of view, remains an essentially private process. Inherently manipulative and encouraged in the service of hegemony, it is seen as silencing, rather than promoting, the development of a public sphere.

In contrast to that depiction, some emerging discourses convey an image of shoppers who are united by shared concerns and values. Shaw (2007) discusses ethical shopping as one such discourse and accompanying movement which, she asserts, fosters a sense of shared identity among adherents. As Shaw (2007) further points out, rhetoric of consumer power – “the customer is always right” – constructs shoppers and consumers as sovereign. To the extent that shopping can be constructed as an exercise of sovereignty, Shaw argues, social movements formed around shopping and consumption are also examples of imagined communities. As my analysis in the previous chapter clarified, it is true that even critical shoppers are manipulated, if for no other reason than the unavailability of and, sometimes, deliberate withholding of information. It is, I think, also true that consumerism can serve the existing hegemony by distracting and dissuading consumer-citizens from engagement in formal politics. On the other hand, these shoppers are not merely duped into buying and consuming. They use a mix of learning sources and strategies to deepen their understandings of their own consumption and systems which draw them into global relations and processes. Nation-states might be constrained by the forces and structures of globalization, but they retain important powers; so too are critical shoppers constrained by social structures and material circumstances, even as they look for ways to exert their power. Ultimately, it is shopping's ability to function as both a conservative and a progressive force which makes it an ideal case for exploring the dialectical tensions and the resulting learning brought to the fore for today's consumer-citizens.

In the following sections, I continue to use Anderson's notion of imagined community and explore how participants have learned about who they are in the particular context of Canadian consumer-citizenship. In this analysis, I return to the concept of the consumer-citizen as a political and social construction. This both reinstates Anderson's (1991) interest in the nation-state as an organizing force for imagined community, and ultimately complicates the notion of a singularly ideal, “good” Canadian consumer-citizen.

From Good Shopper to Good Canadian Shopper: The Consumer as Citizen

Returning to the original context of Anderson's (1991) imagined community, I found that parts of some interview, shopping trip and focus group conversations related more directly to living in Canada among Canadian consumer-citizens. This was not a topic readily pursued by

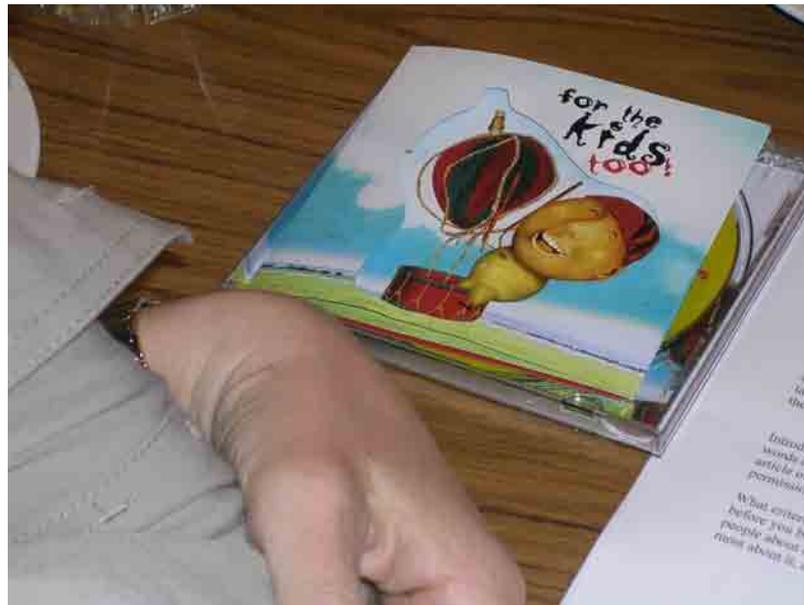


Figure 7.1: Therèse's compact disc, focus group, May 10, 2007

most participants, even though I asked a question connecting shopping to citizenship in the interviews; however, a few participants were eager to discuss the association between shopping and citizenship, and how hegemonic discourse portrays the good shopper as a good citizen.

Violet: Yeah, designed in Canada, made in Canada, there's just a sense that you're supporting I guess the national, national economy, so it's better to provide something that's made in Canada as opposed to made in China, or something like that, 'cause you are then supporting I guess local, I guess you could say local, um, labourers and companies. But then again you never know where they're being processed and manufactured, right? So –

Kaela: Mm hmmm, mm hmmm... But that somehow, I mean to me that sort of links up with the idea of, that's an example of how consumption starts to link up with citizenship.

Violet: National, like nationalism?

Kaela: Yeah, the idea that somehow you're a good Canadian –

Violet: Yeah.

Kaela: – if you buy Lululemon.

Violet: Yeah yeah yeah. Yeah yeah yeah yeah, it's true. Yeah, it's true, that idea totally exists. Although there are, there's not many things made in Canada [chuckle].

(interview excerpt, April 4, 2007)

During one focus group, there was a conversation which similarly recognized how the good shopper is characterized as consumer-citizen. As they were going through the first exercise talking about an object that they had brought, what they knew about it and what it “said” about them, Therèse made these comments about a compact disc that she had brought (👁):

Therèse: Um, this is a children's CD...[A]nd I bought it because we have three kids and somebody I know is on one of the tracks. And it is made by...a Canadian company although they are in the United States as well. And, uh, what was interesting is that it's children's songs but by Canadian artists who are very popular with adults also. And, for example, Sarah Harmer sings, Ron Sexsmith, Matthew Sweet, that kind of thing...Um, and a portion of the proceeds when you purchase this go to, uh, a non-profit agency here in Canada...Um, and I guess you can separate what is, what is the content, which is culture. I mean, you know, what is, where is it being made? Well, Canadian artists creating Canadian art or recycled art. Then you can start thinking about, well, what was involved in paying certain copyright licences to recreate old songs. But the packaging and the plastic and the actual, I don't even know what CDs are made out of, you know, where was that made? Where does that come from?...So I would, I would think that the content and production is Canadian. They're home grown and you can trace that, but all the other stuff, like the paper and the ink and who knows.

Kaela: So the material things.

Therèse: Those kind of things, who knows? I mean, it's kind of an endless tracking of things.

(focus group excerpt, May 10, 2007)

The Canadian-ness of this project is evident in the attachment of its performers and producers to this country, as well as to the sense of Canada as a country which cares about the less fortunate. Layers of Canadian culture are evident on this disc although, as Therèse indicates, the materiality which is behind that culture remains more obscured. Both Violet and Therèse articulated how

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buying Canadian-made or designed products is portrayed as an expression of national loyalty of Canadian consumer-citizens to an imagined community of fellow Canadians.

On an even more local level, some participants talked about shopping at farmers' markets, and the sense of trust and well-being that they engendered:

Kerri was talking about the confusion in shopping, even for natural products. The exception for her is the Farmer's Market – “I feel really safe there,” she said. (shopping trip excerpt, Kerri, April 29, 2007)

Sean: Like I love, one of the reasons, I don't mind paying more to the farmer at the farmers' market.

Kaela: Okay.

Sean: 'Cause when I give him that 50 dollars, or her that 50 dollars...they get, they get all of it.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Sean: Whereas if I bought the 50 dollars worth of stuff at the store, you know, they're getting, whatever, five dollars.

(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

Mary: ...I'm kind of on the periphery of a bunch of the sustainable circles, okay, and that includes food. Uh, so yeah, most of my grocery money goes to Choices, um, and farmers' markets.

(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Participants who enjoyed farmers' markets were insinuating a particular pleasure and comfort in that community setting. Kerri described a feeling of safety there. Mary talked about being on the periphery of “circles” of like-minded people who presumably shared her preference for a farmers' market. Several participants who did not shop regularly at a farmers' market, often because of distance, work schedules or other logistical issues, had joined listservs promoting farmers' markets. Even though they did not shop at these markets, the internet gave them a way to join an imagined community of like-minded shoppers.

Born and raised in the United States, Ellen raised another way in which imagined community is evoked, this time in the hegemonic discourse of consumer-citizenship:

Ellen: No, I will say that, um, my mom grew up in tight times, economically. And so this is also the woman who will not throw away food, she washes plastic bags and, you know, aluminum foil, and I mean it's, it's about saving money, it's about never having clothes as a kid, it's about being able to dress nicely and feeling really good about herself and doing it on a budget....And I think that there is a sense from my parents who have both worked full-time for probably 40, 45 years. I mean they have worked so hard, to be able to go out and spend money for them is a real sense of accomplishment. Look, like, I'm not my parents. Right? I, I made it. I am the American dream [chuckle]. I have spending power. [chuckle] I have consumer [power], you know, I can consume [chuckle].

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Ellen's comment returns to Anderson's (1991) emphasis on the role of imagined community in nation-building. In a society underpinned by consumerist ideology, one test of how well people

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are seen to enact citizenship is how willing and able they are to shop, buy and consume. It is no over-statement to claim that, to the extent that consumer-citizens learn to enact a hegemonic version of shopping, they are participating in the hegemonic construction of the nation-state.

Several participants were Canadian raised, but had lived abroad. Nicole and Karen spoke about how shopping and citizenship came together unexpectedly during these periods:

Kaela: Um, in Canada today, shoppers can buy things from all over the world. What do you think this means for you...as a Canadian?

Karen: Um, well I mean it's sad to see local, um, producers of things maybe not be able to compete as well. Um, I know that I was visiting my family...'cause I was back for a visit and they were sitting around talking about how they thought it was really sad, um, that Wal-Mart in their little town had killed all these businesses. That...little shop was so nice! And I found it really frustrating listening to them because I knew that all of them probably shop there weekly. Uh, I had kind of the opposite experience. My husband and I were in Taiwan for a while and we were wandering around an open air street market and picking up, uh, we saw some apples that were grown in BC so it was kind of... [nice] that –

Kaela: So you can sort of have a taste of home.

Karen: Yeah, yeah.

(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Nicole: Well I had an interesting experience. Um, when I was eight I moved to Indonesia with my family for two years. We lived in Jakarta. And that, I think in itself, was a, um, an eye-opener and huge, different culture from Canadian culture. But uh, in regards to shopping, I remember as a kid, uh, one of the first things I associated with living in Indonesia was that it was completely different from, from Western culture. And I felt that it was wrong. There was, I mean this was from an eight-year-old perspective where you, your day is routine and structure and, like,...you know what you like in food and, and it's weird because here I am, like, I wanna eat organically, I'm very aware of what ingredients go into food, all this stuff, and yet as an eight-year-old kid I would want Kraft Dinner, hot dogs [laughter], you know, cheddar cheese that's orange, a very, I would assume, Canadian diet. Like, apples, uh, ketchup, you know, all these really bright coloured foods that are not necessarily food but that, you know, have been associated with my childhood so that it would be, you know, everyone else would be eating it. So when you move to Indonesia, all this stuff doesn't exist unless you go shopping in the, uh, the Westernized food markets which are pretty much developed for the ex-pats.

Kaela: The ex-pats, yeah.

Nicole: And, and, my parents would do a little bit of shopping there 'cause, you know, they have four kids and they're, they just can't change your life, this is a culture shock to begin with, just when you come to a new country, so they took us to these places but they would never buy what we wanted. I mean, the one thing I remember was the fruits and vegetables. Here in Indonesia, a tropical country, they grow amazing fruits and vegetables [my laughter] and here I want, is like, a McIntosh apple and an orange orange from Florida, you know, where, Indonesian oranges are small and green....Which is real but because they're not orange, you want an orange and I, like, I wouldn't be able to eat those things.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

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For both Nicole and Karen, certain food meant a “taste of home.” Nicole's comments are particularly interesting because they suggest how shopping for and consumption of food become not only nationalized but also racialized. As a child, she saw goodness and rightness in a certain way of growing, preparing and eating food, which was seen as distinctly Canadian. Juxtaposed with Indonesian culture and society, this Canadian way and Canadian society as a whole was also racialized as white. Nicole is in her mid twenties and, although the prepared foods, hot dogs and orange cheddar cheese that she recalled might be the culinary mainstays that many North Americans have grown up with, they do not reflect the diversity of consumption preferences and choices of Canadian consumer-citizens. In chapter five, I discussed the all-white, middle class leading characters in Coupland's (1991) novel *Generation X* and their experiences as stand-ins for an imagined middle America (and Canada) which functions as the norm against which living people are measured. In much the same way, Nicole's favoured childhood foods reflect and contribute to the presumption of the all-Canadian consumer-citizen as white and middle class. Again, shopping and consumption are seen as active in the construction of the imagined national community comprised of good consumer-citizens.

At the same time as such idealizations help retain the importance of the nation-state in one's identity as a consumer-citizen, there is another discourse emerging in contemporary globalization which extends the concept of citizenship beyond the nation-state. “Global citizenship” is invoked as the ties between people who share not only a given society, but this entire planet. Often, this term is invoked to talk about the responsibility of countries in the Global North to come to the aid of governments and citizens in the Global South. What remains unarticulated in this developing discourse, though, is who sets the ground rules for citizenship on a global, let alone national, basis. A couple of participants commented, somewhat quizzically, about the prospect of global citizenship and its link to shopping and consumption:

- Sarah: ...Um, so global, like I guess, I guess it sounds, it sounds kinda nice, in a way you know, like, we're all equal, we're all just citizens of the world, but I don't really know how realistic that is. 'Cause people have their pride, their pride and they're attached to the things that are theirs, right.
- Kaela: Oka y.
- Sarah: I don't know, especially when you have a culture that's attached, you know, as well, and then you get the family and friends involved, 'cause they're part of the same culture and then it's just all, I don't know, I, I think it would be hard to, to say that we're all citizens of the world and not citizens of our country.
- (interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Here, Sarah seems to be evoking some of what Anderson (1991) attempts to convey in his concept of imagined community. The shared identity and patriotism that nation-states are able to

Being a “savvy” consumer is not about continually finding the best bargains, although that is a useful skill. Being a savvy consumer is to be aware of the contradictions between the marketing and advertising imposed on us, but still consuming items in intended and unintended ways in order to articulate something else – a sense of self-identity, of difference, or to express a social identity, that sense of belonging to a group based on shared tastes and values.

– Mark Paterson (2006), *Consumption and Everyday Life*, p. 152

foster among consumer-citizens through media and other institutions and processes can be seen as a call to a national culture. Even as the authority of the nation-state is disputed by proponents of globalization such as Giddens (1998, 1999a), it seems to have retained a central place in identity formation.

Finally, in the second focus group, there was a critical conversation about constructions of the good consumer-citizen. During the second exercise when participants chose from a selection of media materials, Jocelyn chose a magazine advertisement for a popular automobile, and the following discussion ensued:

Jocelyn: ...Mini Cooper, okay....Okay, this one is really awful. It's got, it tries to diffuse any idea, here is, well what are these two symbols? What's the elephant?

Carla: Republicans and Democrats.

Jocelyn: Yeah.

Carla: The donkey's the Democratic –

Jocelyn: Is it donkey?

Carla: Yeah, and the Republicans are the elephants. Yeah.

Jocelyn: ...Let's always be open, it says. Let's be law-abiding liberals on the gas pedal and ultra-conservatives at the pump. What it's doing is ridiculing both sides of this discussion, I felt....So what it's doing is ridiculing both sides of an issue, of a political feel, as well as the process....I mean I just think this oughta be against the law. Let's skip all the mud slinging and stick to the road ahead. Let's motor. I just thought that was awful....

Kaela: Yeah, that's quite blatant. Just go buy the car and skip the politics.

Jocelyn: Yeah, that's what it says!...

Kaela: ...There's a lot of talk about, um, apathy, citizen apathy, um and declining voting rates and things like that. And I wonder if –

Jocelyn: So this is playing right into it.

Kaela: Well is it, um, playing on people's awareness of how that issue has been portrayed in media?

Jocelyn: Oh!

Kaela: I mean this, um, like, well I guess that's a question that I have. Does this ad, um, assume that people sort of have an awareness of, of these issues around cynicism and apathy and those kinds of things that are, especially around election time we see stories in the newspaper about how it's important to come out and vote and there's been a trend towards, you know...just this trend towards, um, declining voter rates and that kind of thing. And I just wonder if that ad plays on,um, people's awareness.

Karen: Because it's a Mini ad, I would say absolutely 'cause all of their ads seem so, um, meant to play with like subtle double meanings and things like that, that I, I totally see them playing on awareness.

Kaela: So then is part of the message there not only that there is this cynicism and apathy, but that savvy people know that and savvy people actually know, savvy people have moved beyond the political? And they're just buying the right car.

Carla: Yeah. Buy your way out of these issues....

(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

Paterson (2006) talks about the “savvy” consumer (👁) and, in this conversation, participants articulated an awareness of the layers of savvy that are required of a critical shopper. The advertisement under discussion pokes fun at formal politics, and implies that driving a

Voter turnout in British and European elections, which was in steady decline for decades, has fallen rapidly for years, precipitating an atmosphere of crisis surrounding the structures of political representation. For Zygmunt Bauman, “Britain's exit from politics”, manifested as apathy, a profound distrust of politicians and alienation from public institutions, has been fostered by successive governments that have encouraged the electorate to “buy oneself out of politics”. According to Bauman, politics is now seen only as a nuisance, a barrier to real life, which lies elsewhere, in the world of personal freedoms, the market, human relationship and so on.

– Frank Mort (2006), “Competing Domains,” pp. 225-226

particular automotive brand and model is more important – personally and socially – than engaging in political debates. The participants' responses indicate that critical consumer-citizens must also be able to see through such manipulative attempts to define their identities as citizens who, are first and foremost, consumers.

In advising readers that freedom is found through shopping and consumption, the advertisement exemplifies the conflation between democracy and consumption, and citizens' withdrawal from the arena of formal politics. (☹) This American advertisement seemed to reflect a Gramscian notion of common sense to the Canadian participants, as well as to Jocelyn who was from the United States. The advertisers are conveying the message that Kinsella (2001) conveys through her character Becky in *Confessions of a Shopaholic*: They are advising their readers that buying particular items signifies “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1984) and helps them build not only freedom, but also social status. Even though participants rejected this hegemonic portrayal of the good shopper as the good citizen, they recognized the link between citizenship and consumption; however, the portrayal of the good shopper consistent with neoliberal, consumerist ideology offers a vision of neither the consumer nor the citizen they want to be.

An especially cogent rejection of the substitution of consumerism for liberal democracy and of the shopping as voting metaphor (see Shaw, 2007) was articulated by Tamara during her interview.

- Kaela: ...Because consumerism and, and democracy are, or consumption and democracy are conflated.
- Tamara: Yeah. And then, um, and then that whole idea, it might be a bit off-topic, but that whole idea of vote with your dollars – it's such bullshit.
- Kaela: But that's the citizenship. Everything is voting now.
- Tamara: But it's bullshit....But I think my idea of like vote with your dollar is that there've been so many decisions...made for you before it's even put in front of you. That's not democracy.
- Kaela: No.
- Tamara: You don't know anything about it. You have no education about what you're buying.
- Kaela: Yeah.
- Tamara: Yeah, and then you think you're making your, your, you know, doing your democratic thing by buying.
- Kaela: Yeah.
- Tamara: That's bullshit. It's really bullshit.
- Kaela: Yeah, yeah.
- Tamara: I mean, education. You have to have a well educated society to have a good democracy and we don't have a well educated society. We have, you know, what you know about the product you buy is probably an ad you've seen somewhere that promotes a lifestyle,...but it's so much a reflection of who you are....And people get made, uh, you know, when things become mainstreamed, right? Like, no, because like I'm alternative and I go against status quo and when, you know, sustainability is mainstreamed and you

The tendency is towards the emergence of individualized forms and conditions of existence, which compel people – for the sake of their own material survival – to make themselves the center of their own planning and conduct of life. Increasingly, everyone has to choose between different options, including as to which group or subculture one wants to be identified with. In fact, one has to choose and change one's social identity as well and take the risks in doing so. In this sense, individualization means the variation and differentiation of lifestyles and forms of life, opposing the thinking behind the traditional categories of large-group societies – which is to say, classes, estates, and social stratification.

– Ulrich Beck (1992), *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, p. 88

see flashy stores that sell sustainable products, well then you get cynical. Well!
[laughter]
(interview excerpt, March 23, 2007)

Tamara's analysis continues to illustrate the conflation of citizenship and consumption. For her, the metaphor of shopping as voting props up consumerist ideology and practices. Her comments also suggest how the hegemonic discourse of shopping and consumption facilitate the portrayal of Canada as a country whose citizens unite as one imagined community through consumption. Ironically, I wonder whether this conflation might also illuminate the degree to which political voting is, for many Canadian citizens, like the process of shopping for the candidate with the most attractive “brand” image, rather than the most fair policy platform. This flip side of the association between formal politics and shopping was not discussed in our conversation, although it might have yielded some interesting ideas. In thinking about everyday shopping sites and processes as a politicized arena, I return to the understanding of consumer-citizenship as contested territory whose divisions are social as well as material (Cohen, 2003; Hearn & Roseneil, 1999; Hilton & Daunton, 2001; Jacobs, 2003; Micheletti, 2003; Paterson, 2006).

The Shopper as a Social Character

The hegemonic ideologies of neoliberalism and consumerism construct the consumer-citizen as a freely choosing subject, unconstrained by social structures and relations. Postmodernism's emphasis on partial, fluid identity or, more likely, identities, fits into these ideological refrains, creating a common sense notion of shopping and consumption as a series of choices which eliminate the meaning of social groups. One's affiliations and the trajectory of one's life are explained as choices made in a society which proclaims equality and personal responsibility. This is articulated, for example, in Beck's (1992) notion of individualization. (👁) Indeed, several participants made comments which reiterated this hegemonic common sense:

Ellen: Like, you know, you can actually, if you have the money you can adopt an image, you can buy the clothes and the accessories and get the haircut and get the shoes and you can, you can reinvent yourself every six months, every six years, however much you want to. That is a, if you want to consider it this way, a luxury that most people don't have. I mean, the vast majority of the world wears what they can wear.

(interview excerpt, Ellen, April 24, 2007)

Kaela: Well I just think, I just think that, . . . um, that fashion, . . . well all consumption but particularly something like fashion, . . . part of what we're trying to do is convey something about ourselves.

Violet: Mm hmmm.

Kaela: And so . . . the idea of unlimited choice is I think a little, I don't think that our choices are unlimited because, um, well because we're trying to construct identities in a, you know, in a particular contextual way.

Consumer-media culture does have a “menu of meaning” but some have more choice to dine à la carte than others. Further, many “choices” are forced in the processes of production and consumption.

– Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen (2001), *Consuming Children*, p. 153

Violet: Mm hmmm. But I think that anybody can claim any sort of identity just through clothes. I think that's a choice.

Kaela: That anybody can claim any identity through clothes.

Violet: Mm hmmm.

Kaela: Okay.

Violet: Yeah, yeah.

Kaela: Okay.

Violet: ...I think anyone can go into any store and, and decide that they want to look like a golfer one day and, or, like an athletic person, you know what I mean, because...there's a choice there.

Kaela: Do you think a black person would have that choice?...

Violet: I do, yeah.

Kaela: Do you think a First Nations person would have that choice?

Violet: Are you talking about money? Are you talking about financial constraints?

Kaela: Um, no, no.

Violet: No? If the money was unlimited, yeah. I think that absolutely they can claim any identity that they want.

(interview excerpt, April 4, 2007)

Interestingly, Violet and Ellen were the participants who most clearly reiterated a postmodern, neoliberal view, and they were also the two participants with the most concentrated academic work in feminist and critical race studies. Both women seemed to recognize that material wealth, part of socioeconomic class, is a factor determining how much choice people actually have in their shopping; however, as the excerpts cited above indicate, they initially suggested that gender and race are much more malleable, controllable characteristics. Later in their interviews, both women offered quite different comments, and I will outline some of those comments in the following discussion. I believe that such shifts in analytical perspective indicate the extent to which hegemonic ideologies and common sense are absorbed even by critical consumer-citizens, and come to exist alongside their more critical ideas. For critical consumer-citizens, a steady, concerted effort to counter these ideas is required.

Despite these hegemonic ideologies and their resulting common sense, my analysis of conversations with participants recalls the conclusion of Kenway and Bullen (2001) that, especially in the Global North, consumer-citizens exercise choice creatively, but always within the context and constraints of the social structures which remain evident. Consumer-citizens have multiple identities and social affiliations, and often make choices which surprise and even contravene marketing pressures. At the same time, they cannot remove themselves from the relational categories which structure society, including gender, race and class. (👁)

One piece of long standing hegemonic “common sense” (Gramsci, 1971) apports the primary responsibility for shopping to women. Feminist scholarship on the history of shopping in Western societies establishes how, since the construction of the leisure shopper drawn to

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Victoria-era malls and department stores, shopping has been seen as both a leisure activity and a task for women (Bowly, 2000; Rappaport, 2001). Although shops for men also developed at that time (Breward, 1999), the idealized shopper was a woman and, more particularly, white and middle or upper class. This ideal shopper embodied contradictory qualities: She was responsible and caring as well as emotional, selfish and easily persuaded. In fact, most of the participants in this study – 29 of 32 people – were women. Most also described themselves as middle class or higher (18 of 32), or thought of themselves as temporarily inhabiting a lower class position while they were full-time students or recent graduates. Whether or not they actually enjoy shopping, participants suggested a lasting association between being a middle class woman and being (seen as) interested and engaged in shopping.

In response to my question about how they learned about shopping and how to shop, participants recalled childhood shopping trips with their parents, and especially with their mothers. When Jocelyn, the oldest participant in the study, and I were talking about recruiting other participants, she mused that it might be difficult for me to find older individuals. I added that I anticipated a challenge in finding male participants, regardless of their age. I started to add that shopping continues to be feminized but, before I could finish my sentence, Jocelyn characterized shopping as “mother’s work” (interview excerpt, Jocelyn, January 22, 2007). Mothers were generally seen as especially important influences in participants’ early shopping experiences, often teaching their children about the importance of quality and good value in shopping, as well as the gendered construction of shopping.

During her interview, Julie moved from shopping-as-work to shopping-as-leisure. Although she acknowledged that many women, including herself, are not avid shoppers, she recognized the cultural image of women for whom shopping is both a task and a hobby. As she said,

Julie: ...I still know many, many women who would quite happily spend a Saturday afternoon shopping. Who view it as a social activity, who would even describe it as a mental health activity. Um, I know no men, at all, who, who...would just shop for pleasure. (interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

A few participants described having grown up with mothers and even grandmothers whose love of shopping also reiterated the image of women as impulsive, compulsive shoppers. Their recollections suggest a mixture of confusion and resentment:

[M]y mother's an avid shopper. She will spend hours shopping. I grew up with West Edmonton Mall being an essential part of life because we had activities going on there as well as shopping and family members would come in from out of town and we'd go there. So, yeah, I find it interesting that she really enjoys the experience and I just can see her bringing all these things

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home, trying to decide on them, having to spend the time to return them, having to look for what she needs, I think maybe that's what has influenced me to realize that it's not a pleasurable activity, for me [laughter]. (shopping trip excerpt, Alice, February 17, 2007)

Ellen: [chuckle] Well, as the daughter of a compulsive spender who also has this real, like, I'm a good shopper, I'm a smart shopper, everything my mother buys she comes home and says, This originally at the department store was \$85. I got it...for \$13. That's 75% off! You know, so, for my mom, particularly, it's always about finding the bargain. It doesn't matter if she's never going to wear it, if it's a white elephant, if it is cheap enough, if it's discounted enough [chuckle], she'll buy it. And when I say, I mean my mom in many ways sort of is a compulsive shopper, compulsive spender, she doesn't have a ton of money so she's always going for these bargains. But she loves shopping. She always refers to, like, I need some retail therapy. And so she would pick us up from school, she'd get off work at like five and come pick us up...and literally take us to these, like, discount retailers [laughter]. And I think that's one of the reasons why I hate shopping so much, because, as a child, you want to go outside and play. You know, you want to go and be in the world, you don't want to be at...some bargain basement store, you know, sifting through department store rejects [chuckle] trying to find the best deal you can. So very vivid memories of my mom shopping for dresses and my sister and I would crawl around on the floor of the department store picking up all the buttons and sequins that had fallen off. And we would have these boxes of buttons and sequins at home, then when we were doing art projects we would use to decorate [chuckle], probably sequins off some like Ralph Lauren evening dress [chuckle].

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Karen: And I know that my mother and my grandmother, you know, they go through the flyers together and,...my grandmother doesn't, uh, she's not as mobile as she used to be so that's her big excursion of the week, is going through the flyers and going to find, you know, the cheapest things. My mom comes to visit, she asks if I get the flyers and if I know what's on sale and where. And I'm not interested in where I'm gonna get it cheapest. I'm interested in where I'm gonna get something that I feel comfortable buying.

(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

Not surprisingly, given my appeal to individuals who were concerned about consumerism and globalization, these participants rejected the exuberance for shopping that they had seen in their mothers. Regardless of the critiques and alternative shopping practices they had developed and regardless of their ages, all participants acknowledged that their mothers had had a pivotal role in their early experiences with and learning about shopping. These individuals ranged in age from their early twenties to their early seventies, and were raised in different communities across Canada or the United States. They grew up in cities, large and small, as well as towns. A few of them were raised in other countries: Amy came from Singapore, Paula came from Germany, and Amitah came from Britain. Regardless of their ethno-cultural affiliations and, for the female participants in particular, the distance that they had established between themselves and stereotypical portrayals of the female shopper, most participants identified the women in their early lives – mothers and, possibly, grandmothers – as their first teachers about shopping.

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The specific lessons that participants learned from their mothers varied somewhat, depending on their ages and family circumstances. Nonetheless, some points remained central: the importance of value-for-money, for example. The meaning of gender has changed across time in any given place, and continues to vary across places; however, in many cultures, shopping remains part of the portfolio of tasks related to coordinating home and family life, which itself remains assigned to women in their idealized form.

In part, then, participants' early association of shopping with their mothers seems to reflect mothers' ongoing primary responsibility for caregiving. It also reflects the reality that many shopping settings, especially in the Global North, have adapted so that children can join in adults' shopping. Shopping carts in which a parent can seat a toddler, child-sized shopping carts which can be pushed by children following their parents, play areas in some large suburban stores – these all illustrate how contemporary gender relations are enacted in family and broader social contexts.

As Rappaport (2000) and Bowlby (2001) explain, shopping has been associated with women's work and leisure since the Victorian era's development of shopping urban areas and malls and the evolution of department stores, but children's learning about shopping in those times would have been largely second-hand. More so than any other time, it is over the last 50 years or so that children have participated in shopping and have come to learn about it through their own experiences. An additional outcome of children's engagement in their parents', especially their mothers', shopping is that, as scholars note, children have been identified by marketers as a distinct and important group of consumers (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Martens, 2005; Spring, 2003; Zukin, 2005). I see these outcomes in my own family, among my nieces and nephews. My oldest niece loves to go to the mall with her (girl)friends. My nephews love to go to that same place, but they talk about it differently: They go to the video games store. This builds on my analytical conclusion from chapter six that girls and women might accept or reject the association of shopping with their own aspirations for feminine identity, but they recognize that shopping is generally perceived as a feminine activity. The exception is shopping for masculine gadgets and gizmos. Gender relations undergo constant shifts in Canadian society, as they do elsewhere, but for the most part shopping remains an arena in which those relations remain evident.

In addition to gender, race is also a kind of social relation which is apparent in shopping. In Canada, neoliberalism works in concert with the political policy frameworks of equality

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between the sexes and of multiculturalism, which celebrates ethnic and cultural diversity without addressing structural barriers to the full inclusion of racial minority groups into Canadian society (Dhruvarajan, 2000). Although some participants, such as Jody, celebrated Canada's multiculturalism, others, such as Amitah, spoke in more critical terms about it:

Jody chatted some more about living in Kensington Market. She had grown up in a suburban area, and moved to the Market area when she could. She felt too sheltered in the suburbs, and welcomed the diversity that the Market area offered. She described growing up, asking herself, "Who am I? The only difference between the boys and the girls was the colour of our shirts." (shopping trip excerpt, Jody, February 12, 2007)

Amitah: ...And then of course we forget that here in Canada that we're actually living on stolen land –
Kaela: Uh huh.
Amitah: – in the first place.
Kaela: Uh huh.
Amitah: Um, nobody talks about that one. Um, and the whole, this whole thing is really built on a lie.
Kaela: Right.
Amitah: The whole culture that we're all, you know, so proud of, this multicultural Canada, um, but how did we get here? Um, nobody wants to look at that because it would raise too many difficult questions.
(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Jody's memories memories about place and culture recall my earlier discussion of how shoppers construct a geography as part of their learning. From an entirely different perspective, Amitah's comments clarify how, despite rhetoric of a free market and consumer sovereignty, the ultimate lesson for consumer-citizens to learn from Canadian history and the history of other colonized territories has more to do with force and theft rather than freedom and fairness.

While completing his demographic form just before beginning his interview, Sean retorted, "Race is a social construct and I refuse to participate in it!" Here, Sean reduces the social to matters of individual choice, rather than structures with material and cultural pressures, constraints and outcomes. The reality that one cannot simply choose to withdraw from social structures such as race is contradicted by Sean's determination to remove himself from an objectionable construct, even as he, like all consumer-citizens, does continue to participate in it in the course of his everyday life in Canadian society.

Policy frameworks of equality and multiculturalism instruct consumer-citizens that to talk about race, with its obvious historical attachment to colonization, slavery and total social exclusion, is impolite, negative and out-dated. Sarah's comments, which equate talk about race with racism, reiterate Sean's view of race as an individualized choice and the hesitation that he and most of the other participants felt in talking about race:

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- Sarah: Um, racism? I think that, um, now it's hard for me 'cause I, I don't really like to talk about racism a lot considering that I am white.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Sarah: Um, but I have a lot of friends that are from different races, I don't really like to think of that, but I mean, you know, Chinese or black or —
- Kaela: Mm hmmm.
- Sarah: — you know, whatever. Um, and I, I don't actually notice when I first meet someone what they are and...like, where they've come from in terms of like...what country their parents came from, I don't really care, but I think that there is still racism that exists, I think there's still prejudice that exists...Um, and also, I don't know [muttered], people are scared. And it's pride too, it's like pride being in the way. I think it's people's pride and people's fear getting in the way...Um, however, I think that we've also come a long way with racism. Especially like in, Vancouver's a really good example. Like I think, from what I see, I know that I hear some stories here and there about racism. Like my friend works,...a good girl friend of mine is a teacher and she works in a private school, so she gets, she teaches kids from you know Russia, from Japan, from all over the world. And she says that every once in a while there'll still be racial acts in her classroom and so I guess I think that it still exists. But I think that we've also progressed a lot as well.
- (interview excerpt, April 25, 2007)

Sarah's and Sean's comments echo Frankenberg's (1993) and Knowles' (2003) conclusion that race, including whiteness, has been constructed in the context and service of racism, and that white people — especially those who consider themselves socially progressive — are reluctant to consider their own whiteness as part of a racial structure. For these participants, rhetoric of race is a reminder of the bad behaviour of white people from previous generations. Race and racism are psychological attributes of those who are fearful and proud, rather than social qualities of us all. Whiteness is eliminated from conversation so as not to (re-)offend.

This rhetorical elimination of whiteness and race in general does not mean that race itself is eliminated as part of the social structure in Canada. Sometimes participants did speak about how relations of race and racial identity become apparent through shopping. Reesa is a white woman married to a man of Chinese descent. When she and I met for her shopping trip, she had already started shopping and was looking at packaged Asian-style soups. I recorded the following passage in my notes:

You found me looking at something I wouldn't normally buy," she said, and explained that her husband likes them. He is of Chinese descent, she explained, "and sometimes he tells me he's tired of Caucasian food. (shopping trip excerpt, Reesa, May 2, 2007)

Linda, another white woman married to a man of Chinese descent, similarly shared her husband's racial identity with me while we talked about shopping and consumption:

Linda: Um, my husband shops at Metrotown a lot, partly because there's a train that he can take my kid on. [chuckle] The little one likes the train. And, I don't think he actually does any shopping while he's there.

Most often, the homogenization argument subspecies into either an argument about Americanization, or an argument about “commoditization”, and very often the two arguments are closely linked. What these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one or other way....But it is worthy noting that for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization may be for Sri Lankans, Veitnamization for the Cambodians, Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic Republics. Such a list of alternative fears to Americanization could be greatly expanded, but it is not a shapeless inventory: for polities of smaller scale, there is always a fear of cultural absorption by polities of larger scale, especially those that are near by. One man's imagined community (Anderson 1983) is another man's political prison.

– Arjun Appadurai (2000), “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” p. 230

Kaela: Oh, so it's an outing.
 Linda: Exactly. Maybe a little bit of grocery shopping at T&T supermarket....
 Kaela: And why T&T?
 Linda: Um, partly because it's right by where the train is and partly because it's an Asian speciality store so they have a lot of different things that you can't get at like Safeway. Um –
 Kaela: And is your husband Asian?
 Linda: Yeah, yes.
 Kaela: Oh.
 Linda: So, although he, he doesn't think of himself as Asian. He was raised very Western. His mom didn't even raise him in Chinese. He grew up speaking English.
 (interview excerpt, May 30, 2007)

A second anecdote that Linda shared with me during her interview presented an example of how racism can be encountered in a shopping setting. In this case, it was a matter of another shopper whose behaviour was objectionable and even offensive to Linda:

Kaela: So do you think that racism has existed as a, as an issue?
 Linda: Oh no. It's still here. I mean, maybe not in the same way. To a certain extent, where I am, I'm, in my life and the way I've arranged my life I don't see racism. But occasionally it rears its head in surprising ways. Like a had a, somebody who came to my pharmacy and phoned me back and said, I wanna transfer all my prescriptions there because you don't have any of those damned Chinese people. And I was just like, Um, my married name is [Chinese]...I, do you get this? I'm really not liking this and I'm not going to transfer your prescriptions here for that reason. I kind of was so shocked.
 (interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

This excerpt provides a marked contrast to Linda's earlier insinuation and the generally postmodern insistence that shoppers can simply buy an identity, as well as Sean's insistence that he can exit the social relations of race and Sarah's impression that race and racism have diminished from the Canadian social landscape. It illustrates that although Linda and her husband tried to think of him as “Western” rather than Chinese, they received constant and unpleasant reminders that they do not control where they are located in relation to other Canadians.

Another participant, Amy, discussed race and nationality in the particular context of her home country of Singapore. Her comments recall the writing of Arjun Appadurai (2000) which disputes that globalization can be characterized by a singular, uniform threat of Americanization. (☞) Racialized as Chinese, she spoke about the importance of avoiding items with a distinct association to traditional and Mainland Chinese culture:

Amy: I would say it's strange but I try not to buy things that encourage a cookie cutter image.
 Kaela: Okay.
 Amy: Like, um, you know,...I don't know, um, when you talk about Chinese, you tend to think of all the Chinese silks and, you know, all the really Chinese things with the silk... patterns...or something like that. I try not to buy that when I'm in Singapore because it's,

The dialectic of downclassing and upclassing which underlies a whole set of social processes presupposes and entails that all the groups concerned run in the same direction, toward the same objectives, the same properties, those which are designated by the leading group and which, by definition, are unavailable to the groups following, since, whatever these properties may be intrinsically, they are modified and qualified by their distinctive rarity and will no longer be what they are once they are multiplied and made available to groups lower down. Thus, by an apparent paradox, the maintenance of order, that is, of the whole set of gaps, differences, “differentials”, ranks, precedences, priorities, exclusions, distinctions, ordinal properties, and thus of the relations of order which give a social formation its structure, is provided by an unceasing change in substantial (i.e., non-relational) properties. This implies that the social order, an “order of successions”,...each group having as its past the group immediately below and for its future the group immediately above (one sees the attraction of evolutionist models). The competing groups are separated by differences which are essentially located in the order of time.

– Pierre Bourdieu (1984), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p. 163

I mean, the thing about it is, like I said, it's identity and, okay, we can't really establish who we are for now for Singaporeans anyway. I mean we are Chinese but we don't want to be identified or associated with Mainland Chinese....And so we try not to buy things that they buy.

(interview excerpt, February 7, 2007)

I understand Amy's comments as a distinct attempt to tie shopping and consumption to the nation-building project. Amy was talking about her and her fellow Singaporeans' attempt to resist the regional imposition of an ancient Chinese culture on the relatively new nation-state of Singapore. To that end, she described a new notion of Chinese-ness.

When it came to discussing or referring to class, participants seemed to struggle with their self-identification and understanding in some distinct ways. As they were completing their demographics forms, some participants told me that they were unsure about how to define their class. Some participants described a sense of having been born into a working class but, with education and professional opportunities, began to identify with a middle or professional class. A few participants described the opposite experience: having been born into a middle class family but thinking of themselves as temporary consigned to a lower class while they were full-time students or recent graduates. Descriptions on the demographic forms such as “Born working class unsure now” (Carla) or “Upwardly mobile (I hope), poor with safety net” (Ellen) indicate participants’ uncertainty about their class locations as their circumstances – both material and social – changed. As I noted during my shopping trip with Paula,

She commented that she didn’t know what socioeconomic status meant on the demographics form and we discussed it. She said that it was difficult to locate herself, because she came from a lower middle class or working class family, but was now in university and, she hoped, headed upwards in terms of her own class. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Eventually, Paula described her class this way: “Poor student in debt and transitioning to upper middle class.”

Bourdieu's (1984) ideas about class, which incorporates cultural capital and social status as well as economic capital, and his notion of “upclassing” are helpful here. By upclassing, Bourdieu refers to the illusion that, by mimicking the behaviours and practices of the elite class evident at one time, members of other, lower classes can raise their own class positions. (👁) Some people actually might achieve such a shift in their class positions; in Bourdieu's opinion, however, most are likely to experience confusion and frustration in their attempts.

Another participant, Ellen, had parents who had grown up poor but gained post-secondary credentials and done well for themselves professionally. Their class position shifted from lower class to professional/middle class; Ellen's comments, which I previously cited, are

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relevant here as they indicate how she continued to see remnants of her mother's lower-class identification:

Ellen: No, I will say that, um, my mom grew up in tight times, economically. And so this is also the woman who will not throw away food, she washes plastic bags and, you know, aluminum foil, and I mean it's, it's about saving money, it's about never having clothes as a kid, it's about being able to dress nicely and feeling really good about herself and doing it on a budget. I mean she always talks about the one cashmere sweater that her dad gave her when she graduated from high school and how it was like her prized possession because she grew up without, just without, right?

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

This stubborn, embodied memory of class refutes the postmodern portrayal of identity as continually, and often wilfully, reconstructed. Contrary to the postmodern vision of shoppers and consumers who change their identities, this anecdote clarifies that identity is never completely shed; rather, traces of a prior class position are retained in one's memories and cultural habits.

Amitah was alone in her “choice” to shift her position from middle class to a lower class. On her demographics form, she provided this overview of her transition: “Grew up middle, dropped out,” although she managed to avoid the cynicism evident in Coupland's (1991) lead characters who describe themselves similarly. Other participants had also rejected the rampant consumerism that they grew up with in the context of their middle class families; what set Amitah apart is her drastic separation from her family, their lifestyle and their material circumstances. Having moved from England to Canada and married at a young age, she made consumption and employment decisions which shifted her class position downward rather than upward. The shift in her class position was evident in more than her relatively low-income job. Among the participants in this study, Amitah had an extraordinarily sophisticated, comprehensive analysis; however, the fact that she did not complete high school distinguished her from other participants and the middle class in general. Despite the change in her material position, though, she continued to relate on some level to the middle class:

Kaela: Would you still describe yourself as middle class?

Amitah: Um, no. I don't think so. I don't know actually. Would I? I don't think I'm in the income bracket for middle class anymore [chuckle].

Kaela: Do you think of yourself as middle class?

Amitah: Well I feel that I grew up that way.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Again, a remnant of a former class position remained in Amitah's understanding of herself and class relations.

Although few participants attended a focus group, these groups do provide an interesting additional source of data. They encouraged reflection about the inter-relatedness of gender, race

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and class. Two conversations which occurred during the second exercise in each group seem especially helpful in this analysis. During this exercise, participants chose from among a series of media images that I had brought with me and discussed how these materials portray gender, race and class, and how they connect social characteristics to shopping and consumption. While conversations during interviews and shopping trips tended to cover the social categories of gender, race and class separately, the materials discussed during the focus groups encouraged participants to think about how these categories intersect so that social relations become complicated. This again recalls Barndt's (2002) "interlocking analysis of power" (p. 62). I will review two conversations which assumed this view of power.

The first image is an advertisement for a laptop computer taken from a Canadian business publication. The full-page, full-colour glossy advertisement features two men, one black and the other white, in a locker room. They both appear naked, except for the towels wrapped around their waists. The white man is sitting on a bench with the laptop open on his lap, facing the black man; the black man is staring down at the white man's lap(top), with an expression of amazement on his face. The following excerpts from the focus group conversation outline the understandings that participants and I had of this image:

- Kaela: So one of the things that jumped out at me when, the first time that I saw that ad was, um, the race of the men.
- Nicole: I agree. That's the first thing that jumped out at me.
- Kaela: Okay, so can you, so what jumped out at you about that?
- Nicole: Well just I, like I mean I saw it from afar but there was uh, two naked men, one black, one white. And, yeah, I mean I, I mean sexuality too in what was being presented....
- Kaela: Okay. Anything else about -?...
- James: Um, yeah, there's a tension playing in there. Well, the stereotype of the black man being more physically endowed than the white man and here in his head sort of it's the white man getting one up over, uh, over the black man. But, yeah the whole, part of it's I think also the competing gadgets, I mean that stereotype of men as well....Sort of like, who has the best gadget? Because somehow that's, um, an indication of your, your intelligence, your style, um, as well as what' you've got in your pocketbook....
- Kaela: So then the ad is playing with ironic possibilities in a few ways. It's playing with the, I mean, everybody knows that black men have what to look at in the locker room. And, you know, but actually, no, now it's the white guy's [laptop].
- Nicole: Right.
- Kaela: So they're playing with that kind of racial stereotype.
- Nicole: Right.
- Kaela: And they're, um, and they're playing with the, they're reversing the, the locker room stereotype about what gets noticed, which is the biggest, with the smallest gadget.
- James: Mm hmmm.
- Nicole: Mm hmmm.

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.

– bell hooks (2001), “Eating the Other,” p. 425

- Kaela: So technology makes the smallest more desirable. Okay, okay....
- Sandy: Well it's just interesting. I didn't pick up on the whole, um, like there are a lot of different interpretations of why they used a white man and a black man....I just did not see any of that whatsoever. But I see it now as a lot of tv and ads do, uh, try to have a diversity of cultures, whereas 10 or 20 years ago it was all...white people, mostly white males that you would see on tv or ads or stuff. So I think, I see it more as, as uh, media making more of an effort to have a diversity in their...material.
- (focus group excerpt, May 10, 2007)

Nicole, James and I conveyed an understanding of this advertisement as a play on several stereotypes connected to gender, race and class. Sharing the same locker room, the two men presumably also share a class position. This overturns the stereotypical link between blackness and poverty. The image of the black man staring down at his friend's lap overturns a second stereotype which helps explain why this advertisement is placed in a locker room: that is, black men, not white men, have certain enviable assets. Moreover, the object of attention in this advertisement is noticeably compact, in contrast to the stereotypical male locker room contests over size. The three of us saw this advertisement as an attempt at humour which relies on an awareness of these stereotypes which it overturns, but does not dismiss.

In contrast to that analysis, Sandy adopted a stance consistent with the contemporary Canadian discourse of multiculturalism. In her view, this advertisement is an affirmation that race is being reconstructed so that racism is eliminated. The new locker room accommodates people of all races; therefore, they must all be equal. As this conversation between me and several participants indicates, not everybody attracted to this study shared a social analysis, even if they shared a conviction that shopping and consuming in a more ecologically sensitive way was a necessary part of societal transformation.

The second image, chosen in the other focus group, is from an American women's fashion magazine. It features a bowl made by a well known crystal ware company. During our discussion about it, hooks' (2001) concerns about the commodification of racialized cultural practices were echoed (👁):

- Carla: So in this case it's a wooden bowl surrounded by, what is there,...crystal, right?...I think they're making some sort of comment about art and that the...bowl is like art. You know, it, it's put in this room full of beautiful *objets d'arts*, you know, these beautiful objects....
- Kaela: The colours and –
- Carla: Yeah, the bright colours, the fact that it's, um, I mean...and this woman [in the painting pictured above the bowl] is clearly African, but it's the...sort of idea of, you know, the –
- Kaela: The exotic.
- Carla: The exotic, the, the noble savage if you will. You know, here she is all, absolutely gorgeous in her sarong, pouring out the water. Um, and I'm assuming it's supposed to go into the bowl. Um, so it, it's basically, the key audience is people who have, um,

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expendable cash....Um, yeah, I was making a joke about colonist envy, people who wish they, you know, who wish they lived in different times and could be colonists, you know.

Kaela: Colonizers?

Jocelyn: Colonizers.

Carla: Yeah. Colonizers, imperialistic, because it is, you know, the African woman. Um, and like I said I really don't understand the message aside from...trying to relate [this brand] ...with really beautiful art....

Kaela: But it is, I mean you make an interesting point about, um, the colonist envy.

Carla: Yeah [chuckle]

Kaela: And you pointed out that she's,...it looks as if she's meant to portray an African woman.

Carla: Yeah.

Kaela: Um, and so is part of the, I mean is that actually part of the sort of unspoken message in that ad? That, that if you buy [this brand]...in some ways you are, you know, you do take on a kind of colonial status. Not power, not necessarily power, but part of that does become the ability to possess –

Carla: Hmm.

Kaela: – not just art, but I mean,...that's not an abstract, it's not a still life. It's a very, you know, they've inserted something in a very purposeful way into that ad. And they've inserted the image of a black woman...But, um, so the idea that wealth and things like [this brand]...are actually even more than a sign of good taste....

Jocelyn: You can buy yourself a black woman, basically.

Carla: Yeah, it's a sign of status, yeah.

Kaela: And that status gets racialized.

Carla: Yeah, yeah, that uh, you know. So, I mean I don't know what the bowl is made of. Perhaps it's some sort of African wood and that's supposed to be the, the connection.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Carla: But, um, certainly it does seem, I mean everything else in this room too, like the, the walls, it all looks, it all looks like something that an English imperialist would have in his or her room you know in Nairobi or wherever.

Kaela: And, and that's also interesting in terms of globalization....As much as we often hear that globalization is such a new kind of period and phenomenon that this ad sort of pulls us back into an earlier time.

Jocelyn: [sigh] Righhht.

Carla: Hmm, which was totally about globalization, yeah I mean....And I think what's interesting too is how, again how she is portrayed kind of as a, as this beautiful but sort of, but she's still, uh, primitive you know?...

Jocelyn: She doesn't have running water.

Carla: She doesn't have running water, she has to carry it on her shoulder. And now she's pouring it into the beautiful bowl. Um, yeah, so it's highly exotic and you know....

(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

By the end of the discussion, Jocelyn was convinced that this advertisement uses race in a way that is decidedly racist. Her statement that the image suggested that “[y]ou can buy a black woman, basically” indicates that she is troubled by its invocation of race. This image also attaches gender to race, presenting an exotic woman who entrances and serves, and is available for possession. It also recalls Skeggs' (2004) point that qualities and dispositions are racialized so that, when they are embodied and enacted by different people, they assume different meanings.

The interest here lies in how some forms of culture are condensed and inscribed onto social groups and bodies that then mark them and restrict their movement in social space, whilst others are not but are able to become mobile and flexible.

– Beverley Skeggs (2004), *Class, Self, Culture*, pp. 1-2

To turn the intellectual gaze into a form of knowledge and competence for one's own enhancement is precisely how cosmopolitanism as a disposition is generated. This must involve access to the cultures of others, turning them into objects of distanced contemplation for oneself. The intellectual cosmopolitans learn to know themselves through travelling through the cultures of others. This then is the aesthetic/prosthetic self, shopping, sizing-up the value of what is available, participating in the art-culture system of otherness, where others become a resource – in the propertizing of the self. The property of this possessive individual is premised on access to valued cultural resources; on accruing cultural value through drawing to oneself the culture of others.

– Beverley Skeggs (2004), *Class, Self, Culture*, p. 158

(☞) In the case of this advertisement, the painting of the black woman, although not the item offered for sale, suggests that purchase and ownership of the bowl attaches to an exotic aesthetic as well as a social organization which confines black women. This advertisement conveys a rather literal illustration of how some social groups and bodies are marked and restricted in social space, while other social groups and bodies retain a social and physical mobility.

This analysis adds a nuance to Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined community. Although the idea of a singular hegemonic discourse might suggest an idealized version of the Canadian consumer-citizen, the complexity of both citizenship and consumption which emerges from social and material divisions renders that version an unrealizable abstraction. Ultimately, there are multiple hegemonic discourses and images of the good Canadian consumer-citizens, all of which might emphasize the same qualities, but in different ways. For example, good working class or poor consumer-citizens might be extolled as people who exercise responsibility by not over-extending their credit; good middle class and wealthy consumer-citizens might be extolled as people who demonstrate their sense of responsibility by spending lavishly in support of the national economy. These differences exemplify how shoppers are marked as members of different imagined communities within Canadian society. Because people embody locations in more than one type of social relation at any given time, shoppers are also always marked as members of multiple imagined communities.

Summary

In this chapter, my analysis has focused on how shopping helps participants learn about and manifest who they are and who they want to be. Participants discussed various qualities that they strove to embody. These qualities helped guide them in their shopping deliberations. Participants talked about their notions of a “good” shopper and, although they shared many concerns, conclusions and priorities, they did not necessarily imagine themselves in the same community. For some participants, spirituality and organized religion helped inform the approach to shopping of a few participants. For others, the ethics of community well-being, fair trade, environmentalism or animal welfare had secular humanist roots, and some participants were involved in organizations connected to these movements. For example, Bonnie was involved in a vegetarian/environmental organization, and Alice volunteered at Ten Thousand Villages®.

Even participants who were not regularly engaged in organizations related to shopping and anti-consumerism found ways to connect with certain types of messages and shoppers. They read publications which aim to educate and engage readers in societal change, belonged to

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local retail co-operatives, surfed activist websites and, on rare occasion, even participated in formal political activities. To the extent that imagined communities of like-minded consumer-citizens are constructed through organizational, media, cultural and even marketing discourses and rhetoric, shopping becomes an arena in which individuals can translate imagined ties and the values that they bring forth into a concrete sense of themselves.

As I also explored in this chapter, part of who participants learn to be is shoppers within contemporary Canadian society. In chapter two, I conceptualized consumer-citizenship in terms of the social relations which comprise notions of gender, race and class. Participants' comments help establish how these relations are evident within the arena of shopping, even as efforts at their discursive erasure are made.

Finally, the analysis in this chapter suggests that a range of imagined communities are resisting some of the disturbing elements of globalization. These imagined communities exist within Canadian society and, thanks especially to new information and communication technologies, well beyond Canada's borders. Even if participants produce critical understandings of shopping, consumption and consumerism, and affiliate with social movements which attempt to develop their own imagined communities, they remain constituents in the imagined community which is Canada. Images of the “good” Canadian consumer-citizen might celebrate diversity, equality and choice, but they are silent on the topics of gender, race and class. The extent to which participants backed away from these topics or talked around rather than about them, especially race and class and regardless of their own racial identifications, illustrates the talent of hegemony in absorbing initially counter-hegemonic points of view. This has implications for the capacity of shopping to serve as a site not only of critical learning but also of attempts to spur societal change. In the following chapter, I attend more closely to the movements and organizations which help frame these imagined communities and guide their members' efforts to change the direction of Canadian society in the early 21st century and globalization more broadly.

[Insert Interlude 6 here.]

I shall go on to argue that these very distinct perspectives have in combination prevented us from recognizing the potential power of consumerism – and here I am talking about power in a quite orthodox pre-Foucauldian sense – a power which has been brought into focus latterly by the acceleration of Green activism, by South African boycotts and other instances of consumer sanction and support. Finally, I shall propose that consumer politics is able to mobilize and enfranchise a very broad spectrum of constituents, and moreover that it is productive of a kind of utopian collectivism lacking from other contemporary politics.

– Mica Nava (1999), “Consumerism Reconsidered,” p. 46

CHAPTER EIGHT

AT THE ROOT OF IT ALL: HOW PARTICIPANTS LEARN TO MAKE CHANGE

Demanding consumers need ways to assess political consumerism. We need to understand the importance of political consumerism as a force in global politics and evaluate its democratic potential. Scholarship on political consumerism has much to teach us. I use this research to compare the differences between political consumerism past and present and to evaluate boycotts and buycotts as political tools. (Micheletti, 2003, ¶17)

The analysis in this chapter carries on from previous chapter, moving to my third framing question of how participants learn to make change through their shopping. I continue to draw on the Gramscian concepts that I have already outlined as well as my conceptualizations of holistic learning, socially embedded consumer-citizenship, and the complications of resistance. In this analysis, I also return to the notion of radicalism, and explore the meanings of radical and the potential for radicalism in the arena of shopping. Although, as Sparks (1997) establishes, all dissidence involves tension between creating change and maintaining the status quo, shopping-related resistance occupies an especially paradoxical place among social movements. Shopping fulfils the consumerist ideology, but critical shopping introduces protest into hegemonic discourse and practice. Shopping-based resistance is ironic, because it uses a tool of globalization to oppose globalization. (☞) In this way, such resistance is able to highlight some of the central dialectical tensions which infuse learning about the politics of globalization, consumption, citizenship and societal transformation.

In framing much of my analysis in this chapter, I turn to an article by Jo Littler (2005) in which she introduces the concept of “relational reflexivity.” Her theorizing suggests how different social movements and discourses encourage particular types of reflexivity and have differing potential to contribute to societal change. Within the arena of shopping, different forms of reflexivity help shoppers learn how to understand and enact critical shopping and consumption, and how to carry their shopping-based analysis and resistance other arenas.

Forms of Reflexivity

Littler (2005) develops her analysis “from a neo-Gramscian, post-Marxist premise in which wide-ranging coalitions, connected through commonalities, chains of equivalence and articulation are more politically fruitful than isolated avant-garde gestures” (Littler, 2005, p. 229). Consistent with Beck (1992) and Connelly and Prothero (2008), Littler contends that anti-consumerist activism generally encourages reflexivity among consumers; however, she notes, reflexivity is often romanticized. She distinguishes between two forms of reflexivity which are

About Blackspot Campaign

Blackspot campaign was born almost three years ago when we decided to stop merely criticizing the status quo and actually do something about it. It was born on the back of Nike, capturing the attention of the global media as a lively attack on the brand idolatry and sweatshop production methods of that multinational. Encouragingly, over 25,000 people are now wearing Blackspot shoes. Earth-friendly, anti-sweatshop, and cruelty-free, Blackspots are the only shoes designed to give Big Business what it needs the most: a swift kick in the brand.

– Retrieved June 17, 2008 from <http://www.adbusters.org/campaigns/blackspot/about.html>



The text's implication is that readers have to find their own way to activism. Yet, for those outside activist circles, or uninvolved in the kind of educational spheres where such activism is examined, the act of reading *No Logo* is itself probably one of the most significant investments in “the movement-of-movements” that many people will make. This brings us to one of the most important, overlooked and problematic points about *No Logo*: the great issue – unspoken of in the text... – of the role for books like *No Logo* in putting such debates on the agenda and turning them into ideas that will seem to be popular and feasible. In short, the issues of mainstreaming, coalition building and creating broad-based counter-hegemonies. In effect, to discuss this is to discuss the role of the commodity of the book itself as a form of activism.

– Jo Littler, “Beyond the Boycott: Anti-consumerism, Cultural Change and the Limits of Reflexivity,” p. 233

apparent in the different approaches to anti-consumerism and encourage different political and consumer responses among shoppers:

I am interested in the possibility that two different types of reflexivity might be identified at work in anti-consumerist discourse, as well as in cultural theory: first, a relatively narcissistic form of reflexivity that acts to shore up a romantic anti-consumerist activist self, and second, an understanding of reflexivity as a more relational and dispersed process. (Littler, 2005, p. 229)

Relational reflexivity is both affective and intellectual, and focuses “on the nature of the alliances through which the individual is constituted and situated” (Littler, 2005, p. 246), while narcissistic reflexivity maintains a neoliberal, individualistic focus which discourages collective action.

These distinctions are not dissimilar from what Williams (1980) is trying to get at in his distinction between “alternative” and “oppositional” responses. Within the sphere of shopping and consumption, relational reflexivity extends to considerations of the ties between consumers and producers as well as the differences among consumers, and the structures in which they live.

In making her argument and developing these concepts, Littler (2005) analyzes Anita Roddick's book, *Take it Personally*, Naomi Klein's hallmark book, *No Logo*, Bill Talen's persona of “Reverend Billy” and his Church of Stop Shopping, and Kalle Lasn's magazine *AdBusters* as well as his Buy Nothing Day and Blackspot Sneakers projects (👁). Roddick's approach is interpreted as the most narcissistic in its reflexivity. It encourages people to examine their own lives and make changes on an individual basis. Her book “predominantly interpellates the reader as a ‘rational choice’ consumer who, once equipped with enough information, will be able to challenge globalization from a personal perspective (Roddick 2001, pp. 42-43)” (Littler, 2005, p. 236).

In contrast, Klein's book “interpellates its audience of youthful Generation X and Y consumers by gesturing emotively towards a shared habitus. It enacts a politics in which change is ultimately conceived of as happening through global laws, brought about through the movement-of-movements, and displays a somewhat contradictory attitude towards its own role as activist-text” (Littler, 2005, p. 242). Littler notes further that, despite Klein's critique of identity politics, which she thinks excludes material issues related to uneven distribution of wealth, she relies on her own analysis of identity politics and her (predominantly Western) readers' familiarity with those politics. In Littler's analysis, not only does *No Logo* itself become an object for consumption, its consumption can become the chief form of anti-consumerist activism for many readers. (👁) Littler complicates the function of *No Logo* which both uses relational reflexivity in generating an analysis of consumerism and a resistant response to it, and

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lacks reflexivity in considering who the book's audience is, how Klein relates to them, and her own position of authority in writing this book.

To Littler, Talen and Lasn use a combination of irony, performance and culture jamming, and work “less to advocate attempts to withdraw from corporate consumption as a continuous year-round general strategy and more as a promotional tactic to create discursive space for rethinking the relations of consumption” (Littler, 2005, p. 239). Talen, who appears in character as Southern Baptist-style Reverend Billy with his choir at well known retail outlets and preaches the ills of consumerism, exemplifies “the politics of 'boycott culture' mixed prominently with a flamboyant advocacy of consumer abstinence” (Littler, 2005, p. 239). Lasn, largely through *AdBusters*, “energetically argues for large-scale social change by forming new principles of economic and environmental sustainability, and...imagines such change has the best chance of being brought about through ideological and discursive shifts” (Littler, 2005, p. 242). Seen as the best exemplar of relational reflexivity among these four, even Talen's Reverend Billy leaves his audience with “questions about not only what other types of change are imagined across the spectrum of contemporary anti-consumerist discourse as happening 'after the boycott' but also how these changes are imagined as emerging” (Littler, 2005, pp. 239-240).

Applying these ideas about reflexivity to the novels discussed in chapter five, I surmise that Kinsella's (2001) shopaholic Becky generally lacks reflexivity altogether. Townley's (2006) figure of Jen, and Coupland's (1991) ensemble of main characters generally exemplify narcissistic reflexivity, although they engage in this process to different ends. Several of Ozeki's (1998) characters, and especially Jane, engage much more in relational reflexivity.

In her article, Littler (2005) clarifies that there is more nuance to reflexivity than I have suggested by this quick review of the four novels. She notes the limits of even the most relationally reflexive example of Talen's Reverend Billy, and ascribes some degree of relational reflexivity to both Klein's book *No Logo* and Lasn's projects. It is only Roddick's book, *Take it Personally*, which, as its title suggests, remains essentially an example of narcissistic reflexivity. In the analysis summarized in the remainder of this chapter, I continue to employ Littler's (2005) ideas on reflexivity to explore how the comments and shopping practices of participants in this study relate to learning about making change and participating in a transformational or radical agenda. First, though, I take some time to discuss the concept of radicalism itself, and the variety of views articulated by participants about this topic.

rad·i·cal

adj.

1. Arising from or going to a root or source; basic: proposed a radical solution to the problem.
2. Departing markedly from the usual or customary; extreme: radical opinions on education.
3. Favoring or effecting fundamental or revolutionary changes in current practices, conditions, or institutions: radical political views.
4. Linguistics Of or being a root: a radical form.
5. Botany Arising from the root or its crown: radical leaves.
6. Slang Excellent; wonderful.

n.

1. One who advocates fundamental or revolutionary changes in current practices, conditions, or institutions: radicals seeking to overthrow the social order.
2. Mathematics The root of a quantity as indicated by the radical sign.
3. Symbol R An atom or a group of atoms with at least one unpaired electron.
4. Linguistics See root 1.

[Middle English, of a root, from Late Latin *rdclis*, having roots, from Latin *rdx*, *rdc-*, root; see *wrd-* in Indo-European roots.]

– “radical” in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed.)



Radical has been used as an adjective in English from C14, and as a noun from C17, from...*rw radix*, L – root. Its early uses were mostly physical, to express an inherent and fundamental quality, and this was extended to more general descriptions from C16. The important extension to political matters, always latent in this general use, belongs specifically to IC18, especially in the phrase **Radical Reform**. **Radical** as a noun to describe a proponent of **radical reform** was common from eC19...**Radical**, especially with a capital letter, was by the second half of C19 almost as respectable as *liberal*, and **Radicalism** generally followed. But **radical** was still available, in some uses, in the sharper eC19 sense. Where in 1952 we find “incipient radicalism, chartist tendencies, or socialist symptoms” there was by IC19 a clear distinction between Radicals and Socialists, and in the course of time most Radical parties, in other countries, were found considerably to the right of the political spectrum.

C20 use has been complicated. **Radical**, with or without the capital, has continued to be used of the more vigorous elements of LIBERALISM (q.v.) and more generally to indicate relatively vigorous and far-reaching reforms. As such it has often been contrasted with “dogmatic” *socialism* or *revolutionary* programmes. It has also been widely used in its older general sense, as in “radical re-examination”. Two further uses have complicated it. There is now common use in the phrase **Radical Right**, either to indicate extreme right-wing politics or more strictly to indicate active policies of change of a right-wing kind, as distinct from a more conventional CONSERVATISM (q.v.). On the other hand, **radical** was readopted, especially in the United States from the late 1950s, in a sense very close to the eC19 use; as such it is often virtually equivalent to socialist or revolutionary, and has gathered the same range of responses as in that earlier period...**Radical** seemed to offer a way of avoiding dogmatic and factional associations while reasserting the need for vigorous and fundamental change...It is interesting that the old phrase **radical reform** (q.v.) has been split into the contrasted **radical** and *reformist*, within the radical movement, while elsewhere radical (with *militant*) does service as a contrast with *moderate* (which in practice is often a euphemistic term for everyone, however insistent and committed, who is not a **radical**).

– Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, pp. 251-252 (emphasis in original)

Radical: What's in a Name?

Throughout this inquiry, I have applied the word radical to both learning and shopping. As I explained in chapter two, my initial use of this word was meant to recall its meaning in critical adult education and denoted teaching, learning and action directed toward socially just transformation; however, as I clarify in this chapter, radical does not mean the same thing to all people and, even if a common meaning is assumed, the complications of social life complicate radicalism. After conducting only a few interviews, I began to ask participants how they understood the word radical and whether they considered themselves to be radical shoppers. I heard diverse opinions about radicalism as well as both the potential and the desirability of radicalism in the arena of shopping.

Etymologically, the word “radical” derives from the Latin word for root. Further to its original English meaning of fundamental or inherent, it has taken on additional meanings as extreme or drastic. Colloquially, it is also used to mean wonderful, in much the same way as words such as “cool” or “sweet” are used. (☹) In addition to these technical and colloquial meanings, the word radical has also been attached to certain bodies of scholarship. In its sense of extreme or drastic, it has been applied to extreme or revolutionary movements, either Marxism on the left of the political spectrum or conservatism on the right. (☹) Within the field of adult education, radical is often used by scholars and practitioners interested in critical pedagogy, which has grown out of Marxist as well as more recent epistemological and theoretical perspectives such as feminism or critical race studies. It can describe movements, individuals or ideas. Foley (2001) cites the original meaning of the word, and focuses on adult learning which attempts to address the root of a social problem. He and other adult educators alternate the use of the word radical with other relevant words, including “emancipatory” (Foley, 1999), “revolutionary” (Coben, 1998), “dissident” (Chomsky in hooks, 2003) or the widely used “critical.”

So, it seems that the word radical is loaded with assumed meanings and biases. It also seems that the word radical has different meanings. Somewhere along the line in this inquiry, I realized that the use of the word radical and the phrase radical shopper assumed a clear meaning on my part and a shared understanding among participants. I knew that I was using the word radical as a nod to the critical adult education scholarship of Foley (1999, 2001) and others, in the sense that I've already outlined: an attempt to identify, learn about and respond to the root of a problem. I was not sure, though, that participants understood the word in the same way; so, I

Can the Social-Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social-Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.

It is in Eduard Bernstein's theory...that we find, for the first time, the opposition of the two factors of the labour movement. His theory tends to counsel us to renounce the social transformation, the final goal of Social-Democracy and, inversely, to make of social reforms, the means of the class struggle, its aim. Bernstein himself has very clearly and characteristically formulated this viewpoint when he wrote: "The Final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything."

– Rosa Luxemburg (2008), *Reform or Revolution*, p. 41

What does the active participation of trade unions in fixing the scale and cost of production amount to? It amounts to a cartel of the workers and entrepreneurs in a common stand against the consumer and especially against rival entrepreneurs. In no way is the effect of this any different from that of ordinary employers' associations. In no way is the effect of this any different from that of ordinary employers' associations. Basically we no longer have here a struggle between labor and capital, but the solidarity of capital and labour against the total consumers. Considered for its social worth, it is seen to be a reactionary move that cannot be a stage in the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat because it connotes the very opposite of the class struggle....So that the scope of trade unions is limited essentially to a struggle for an increase of wages and the reduction of labor time, that is to say, to say, to efforts at regulating capitalist exploitation as they are made necessary by the momentary situation of the world market. But labor unions can in no way influence the process of production itself.

– Rosa Luxemburg (2008), *Reform or Revolution*, p. 57



For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support.

– Audrey Lorde (2002), "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House," p. 108

began to ask participants if they considered themselves radical shoppers and what the word radical meant to them. Participants' responses to these questions suggested that some adjustments were in order, including an amended sub-title for this dissertation; however, the idea of radicalism cannot be removed completely from this project. It appropriately returns to my analytical discussion in this chapter, in which I respond to the question of how participants learn to make change through their shopping. Now, it is important to spend some time thinking about how participants and I talked about the challenges of coming to understand the meaning of, potential for and desirability of radicalism during contemporary globalization, and how the arena of shopping might be helpful in or, on the contrary, a distraction from learning about radicalism and becoming radical.

In response to the assortment of meanings for the word radical, some critical scholars and activists attempt to distinguish between radicalism and other sorts of changes which serve to reiterate and reinforce, rather than refute, the social status quo. A century ago, Marxist Rosa Luxemburg (2008) warned against confusing revolutionary and reformist strategies in class struggles. (☹) A tactic such as unionization was seen as helpful in leveraging workers' limited power within capitalist structures. Although that could help improve the lives of workers, Luxemburg regarded such a tactic as strategically insufficient for ending capitalist relations and achieving true socioeconomic transformation. More recently, Audrey Lorde issued a similar caution about the limitations of using hegemonic tools to overturn that social order. (☹) Referring to inclusion of racialized minority women in the feminist movement, Lorde's (2002) well known remarks about the impossibility of using the “master's tools” to “dismantle the master's house” (p. 108) urge white feminists not to abandon a radical purpose by settling for a greater share of the privilege available to white men. In short, both Luxemburg and Lorde argue that efforts to reform hegemonic structures might improve the situation for oppressed groups but does not eliminate the fact of oppression. Reforms which tinker rather than overhaul existing structures, in the way that Canada's multiculturalism responds to racism, mollify many critics, distract attention away from ongoing critical analysis and marginalize radical positions.

Strongly based on Sparks' (1997) concept of dissidence, my conceptualization of resistance approaches the sense of radicalism offered by Luxemburg and Lorde, with the proviso that resisters, dissidents or radicals avoid violent tactics. For Luxemburg, like Gramsci (1971), the solution involves a political party which can articulate a radical vision and work to implement a radical agenda; however, this was not a direction pursued by participants in our

Is there such a thing as “ethical consumerism”, or is this a oxymoron, like “huge dwarf” or “brave coward”?

– Mark Paterson (2006), *Consumption and Everyday Life*, p. 225

conversations. Although shopping is one arena in which consumer-citizens can develop and begin to implement resistance in concrete terms, its potential for true radicalism is uncertain. With his educational background in critical sociology, Sean actually thought of the phrase “radical shopper” as a *non sequitur*, because all shoppers participate in fundamentally oppressive capitalist relations.

- Sean: ...Um, so, radical, it's a bit of a [pause], in a sense it's radical but in a sense shopping makes the very, it's a bit of an oxymoron. A bit, not completely.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Sean: But a bit of an oxymoron.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Sean: 'Cause if you're shopping how can you be radical?...Because shopping is such an endemic part of the way that North American society is constructed. So if you [shopping] are you're part, you can't help but partake in those structures.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Sean: Radical, if you think of radical as overthrowing that, that's where I more think of radical as overthrowing the whole structure.
- Kaela: Okay, um –
- Sean: But I come back, I go back to the sixties when radical was overthrowing society and, and uh, you know, and institute the dictatorship of the proletariat. That to me, that's what radical is.
- Kaela: Okay.
- Sean: And so in a sense, I mean it's a cute phrase and I kind of like it 'cause it, it does encapsulate some ideas but it isn't really radical. I don't think the act of shopping can be radical.
- (interview excerpt, March 24, 2007) (☞)

In the remainder of this section, I discuss how some participants discussed radicalism as not only a possibility within the arena of shopping, but also an aspiration. I also discuss how, alternatively, some participants expressed discomfort with the moniker of radical and articulated their hopes in other terms. Finally, I explore the suggestion raised by several participants that radicalism, like other elements of identity, might be understood as a contextual, shifting concept rather than in a definitive way.

Radical Aspirations

Participants in this study held a range of views on what type and extent of change was important and worthy of their commitments. When I asked them to define their understanding of radical and whether they considered themselves to be radicals, participants articulated a similar range of meanings as those found in a dictionary. Although he drifted from the arena of shopping in his response, Eddie articulated an understanding of radical and, among all of the participants, most clearly characterized himself as someone with a generally radical purpose:

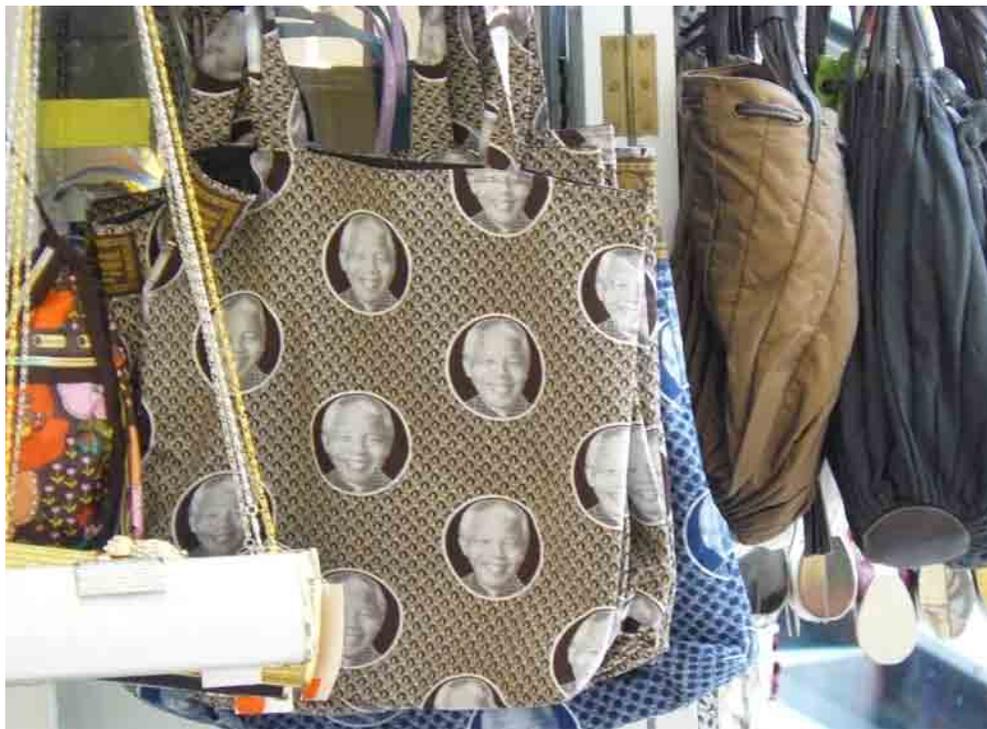


Figure 7.2: Hand bag with image of Nelson Mandela, on display in Cape Town, December 2007

Kaela: Okay. Uh, so what does the word radical mean to you?
Eddie: Um, an extreme definition would be, uh, or, an extreme definition is of, um, someone who absolutely is focused on making a specific outcome, a specific, uh, change and insists on roping everyone into the cause, sometimes nicely, sometimes not nicely. And just trying to get a certain goal done, really goal focused. And, but for me I would say, uh, on a scale of one to 10, being, um, and one and 10 both being absolute extremes possible, that are possible for people, I would say I'm a, I'm an eight out of a 10. So I'm like extremely, I'm eight. Like 10 being radical and I'm an eight. I'm just guessing though.
(interview excerpt, April 11, 2007)

Ironically, although my call for participants had reached out to people who identified as radical shoppers, Eddie was a notable exception; others were generally reluctant to associate themselves or their shopping to radicalism. Ellen, who comes from the United States, shared Eddie's enthusiasm for the idea of the radical shopper, although she aligned herself with a more recognizable image of the radical figure and purpose. Her comments were somewhat unique in another way, as they evoked a romanticized vision of the radical hero:

Ellen: Right. [pause] Well..., when [my husband] and I talk about our shopping practices and how we live in the world, we never say, we don't explicitly use the term radical, but we always say, We're gonna Che it [giggle]. Like Che Guevara.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Although this might be construed as an attempt to bring some levity to the stress of choosing to think and act outside the social norm, the commodification of Che Guevara and other well known radical figures, evident especially in the mass produced items bearing their images, gives people a way of expressing radicalism as “cool” and fashionable. (👁) This seems to create bonds of “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991) between individual consumer-citizens and famous figures who stand for something; however, it does not demand that individuals contemplate the kind of analysis, action and sacrifice undertaken by those radical figures.

A couple of participants, Sean and Karen, had educational backgrounds which helped them understand the word radical in its original sense. During his interview, in response to my questions about radical shopping, Sean made this comment:

Sean: Well of course the root of the word radical is root. No, there's my academic side coming out....
(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

Although, as I noted above, Sean was sceptical about the potential to find and manifest radicalism in the arena of shopping, both he and Karen were generally supportive of radical ideals and commitments, given that understanding of the word radical.

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Other participants shifted away from the idea of radicalism as learning about and responding to the very root of a problem. For them, radical shopping involved bucking convention. The idea of radical shopping was an intriguing, creative possibility, but one which requires great commitment and sacrifice. Violet, who was very fashion conscious, made this comment during her interview:

Violet: Someone who's a radical shopper is someone who, um, can think outside the box and think alternatively and not be affected by, um, trends in society or not worry about the way that they look, etc. etc. So, that's my idea of a radical shopper. And I am not one. (interview excerpt, Violet, April 4, 2007)

Violet was clear in her opinion that she was not a radical shopper, but some other participants described an admiration for and aspiration to radicalism. Julie and Linda offered similar explanations of the radical shopper, but were more interested in adopting the radical shopper's practices:

Kaela: And so I'm interested in how you, if you would describe yourself as a radical shopper and how you understand the word radical.

Julie: Um, I understand the word to mean...at odds with convention. Swimming upstream. Um [pause], would I describe myself as a radical shopper? I would describe myself as someone who tries to be a radical shopper. (interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Linda: Yeah, I think that radical means, you know, choosing really different choices than what's commonly available in the mainstream. And I know people who are radical shoppers and I'd like to say that I'm one of them but I'm not. I still shop at Safeway and I still shop at Metrotown and I still buy Reitman's clothes. But I know people who, they make a point of only buying organic clothing and only, you know, they just go so much farther than I have the time or energy to do. Um, and I think they're like beta testers, people who buy the first edition of every piece of software that comes out....But they pave the way. They provide a smaller market for companies to try things out. Um, and I think that's important. I'm not one of them. I'd like to be. [chuckle] I'm sort of the second wave. Um, but there's definitely, those people are out there and I, and you, you see them. They walk down the street and they just look different.

Kaela: Okay.

Linda: And I wish I was one of them, whereas other people go, Oh! Crazy long-haired hippie! [chuckle] (interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

For Amitah, the idea of being a radical shopper was exciting if also puzzling:

Amitah: [laughter] Am I a radical shopper? I don't know. Radical, hmmm. It's kind of exciting, the word. [laughter] I want to be radical. [laughter] It's a bit dangerous, you know, you, know, sounds dangerous. Um, I would almost want to say yes but I don't want to say yes because I don't want those choices to be the radical choice.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: I want it to be the normal choice. (interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

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These comments indicate a level of uncertainty about what it means to adopt not only radical convictions and actions, but also the identity of a radical. The participants cited above were generally accepting of the importance of real radicals, even if they were unsure about their own roles in radicalism. Many participants, though, were disinclined to consider the social function and importance of radicalism, in shopping as in other arenas of life. Often, they emphasized radicalism as extremism. Their comments resonate with Beck's (1992) writings on the “risk society,” as they spoke about the dangers which radicalism posed to radicals themselves and, by implication, to others in society.

Radical Risks and Alternatives

Julie's, Linda's and Amitah's comments recall Sparks' (1997) assertion that the quality of courage is essential to dissidence. Certainly, these three were not talking about the kind of courage demonstrated by Sparks' example of Rosa Parks or other well known civil rights activists, but they were willing to take a certain amount of social risk inherent in stepping outside the middle-class mainstream. Social movement learning scholars recognize that people join or avoid organizations for a range of reasons beyond their commitment to a cause. Some people join social movements or activist organizations because of their existing social networks rather than their own deeply held convictions, although they are unlikely to become engaged deeply or for a long period (Kilgore, 1999). As Deborah Kilgore (1999) also notes, there are costs involved in participating in any social movement which agitates for societal change. These always include time and emotional commitment, but can also include financial costs and threats to physical safety or social status. Assessing the risks involved in affiliating with any social movement, including those to social status or material wealth, is part of the decision about whether to get involved. In contrast to the individuals who engage with a social movement for reasons other than shared values, analysis and identity, there are also always other individuals who *do* share members' values, analysis and identity, but remain absent because of the perceived costs of joining the movement. That is why courage is so important to dissidence. For her part, Amitah described attempts to “walk her talk,” as the colloquialism goes:

Kaela: Do you think of yourself as middle class?

Amitah: Well, I feel that I grew up that way.... Yeah. Um, I think I've dropped out of the middle class..on purpose....[laughter]

Kaela: As a, as a sort of a statement of what you want to be in your life.

Amitah: Yeah, that's a good way to put it. I'll concur with that. [laughter]

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

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One of the interesting details about Amitah's understanding of radicalism in the arena of shopping is the implication that desirable but radical behaviour remains marginalized. Thinking of herself as radical meant realizing how much work was still to be done in helping others learn to change their “common sense” (Gramsci, 1971) and associated practices. Perhaps she too was hinting at the social costs of being radical but, given her other comments and her willingness to step outside of the social norm, it seems more likely that she found it disconcerting that important changes remain a long way away.

A few participants reversed Amitah's concern about labelling critical shopping as a radical activity. They argued that critical shopping cannot be considered radical precisely because it has become so accepted within the mainstream:

Karen: Um, yeah, I'd have to agree with you about not totally liking the word radical. Um, because it seems like more and more it's starting, it's becoming in some ways more mainstream...But, I mean, if you look at radical meaning, like, root, there's a totally different meaning for it. But if you look at that word meaning root and you think about, that when I'm shopping I'm trying to uncover all kinds of things, get down to the root of things,...it does make sense, if you look at a different meaning of the word radical. Um, so yeah, I'd say I probably try to be ethical..., more than anything.
(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

We left the produce section and, in the next aisle, I asked Claire about how she understood the word radical which I had used in my flyer. She defined it as “extreme” or “crazy.” When I asked if she thought of herself as a radical shopper, she said no, that she was not extreme – “We're here on 4th Avenue! It's not extreme, especially on the West Coast.” (shopping trip excerpt, Claire, March 22, 2007)

Still, the shopping and consumption practices of both Karen and Claire seem outside the ordinary, even for vegetarian-friendly Vancouver. Although she had resumed eating meat in limited amounts, Claire maintained a vegan diet for several years and remained strict about buying and consuming only organic or free range meat. Karen continued to maintain a vegetarian diet, had routinely shopped for vegan shoes and at second hand stores, and chose to live in Vancouver's West End where it is easier to avoid having a car. When we met for her interview, she happily displayed the jacket that she had recently bought because it was stylish, made in Canada, and made with organically produced wool.

For the most part, remaining participants who expressed an opinion on radicalism in shopping or in other arenas offered a more negative view. Often, the word radical was associated with undesirable extremism which, as I have already indicated, was seen as a threat to people's social standing and relations.

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Kaela: ...So I'll ask you how you understand the word radical and if you would describe yourself as a radical shopper.
Sarah: I think a radical shopper would be an extreme shopper and, no, I don't think I am.
Kaela: Okay, so radical, if you hear the word radical that's what it –
Sarah: To me it's like an extreme shopper.
Kaela: Okay. And that's negative?
Sarah: Yeah.
(interview excerpt, April 27, 2007)

She was quite involved in [an environmental organization] for a few years, in 1990/1991, but was “turned off” by one active person who was very “intense.” She thinks that sometimes “people who have an agenda and are very dominating” are looking for answers and drawn into an [an activist] organization...and a more radical lifestyle. She described their fervour as akin to being “born again.” She said, “When I first learned these things I wanted to share,” but she came to see that she had to be conscious of what she was saying to whom. (shopping trip excerpt, Reesa, May 2, 2007)

These participants embraced ethical or critical shopping as part of the demonstration of their values and concerns, but radicalism was rejected as a term to express those values and concerns.

Even some participants who were more supportive of people whom they characterized as radicals sometimes mentioned some unpleasant qualities and risks that they associated with radicalism. Linda described the tendency for radicals to come across as “holier than thou” (interview excerpt, Linda, April 29, 2007). In her mind, not only did such people risk social isolation, they also risked having their analyses dismissed by others:

Linda: And I, occasionally I find myself feeling that way but then I go, No, you know what? Once upon a time I was like that too.
Kaela: Mm hmmm.
Linda: And I didn't know any better. And if I'm gonna act like that nobody's gonna follow my example.
(interview excerpt, April 29, 2007)

If radical was not an optimal word for most participants to describe their shopping-related ambitions, what were some of the more preferable alternatives, and how did participants connect them to change? Participants for whom radicalism had negative connotations of being extreme, authoritarian and socially alienating were likely to seek more positive-sounding, palatable language and practices, as Reesa did during her shopping trip:

She also talked about being motivated more by a desire to “support” rather than “protest” and said that she thinks that she teaches by example. (shopping trip excerpt, Reesa, May 2, 2007)

Reesa's sentiments raise a question in relation to critical shopping as a type of social movement learning. Scholars such as Connelly and Prothero (2008) assert that green or other types of critical shopping bring people together in social movements, in which they learn to understand particular issues, the meaning and impact of their shopping and consumption, and

In both social movement and consensus movement dynamics, actors share solidarity and an interpretation of the world, enabling them to link specific acts and events in a longer time perspective. However, in the latter, sustained collective action does not take a conflictual element. Collective goods are often produced through cooperative efforts that neither imply nor require the identification of specific adversaries, trying to reduce the assets and opportunities of one's group or preventing chances to expand them. Prospected solutions do not imply redistribution of power nor alterations in social structure, but focus instead on service delivery, self-help, personal and community empowerment. Likewise, the practice and promotion of alternative lifestyles does not require the presence of opponents defined in social and political terms. Collective actors may fight ethereal adversaries, ranging from bad or conventional taste, in the case of artistic and style-oriented movements, to "the inner enemy" in the case of some religious movements, without necessarily blaming any social actors for the state of things they intend to modify.

– Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, pp. 22-23

their identities. On the other hand, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (2006) express the generally accepted understanding that conflict and an oppositional stance are elements of a social movement. Many critical shopping movements, though, stress the possibility of resistance and change without overt protests against an identified enemy or opposition. For della Porta and Diani (2006), movements which concentrate on solidarity and collectively generated and enacted solutions are more properly referred to as “consensus movements” (p. 22). (☹) This seems closer to the approach that Reesa described in her comments. Perhaps most of the participants in this study were better aligned with the politics of consensus, rather than the oppositional politics which comprise a central element of social movements. At least some participants had seemingly embraced “personal and community empowerment” (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 23) rather than a radical transformation in social relations.

Still, several participants seemed comfortable apportioning blame, even if they were unwilling to adopt an overtly conflictual stance. Many seemed interested in belonging to a movement which found a way to voice opposition and exercise resistance, without feeling as if they were in a constant state of conflict. The possibility that individuals and perhaps even an entire movement might alternate between a conflictual and a consensual stance, depending on the immediate circumstances and perceived urgency, is suggested by some participants' experiences and comments. Critical shoppers might, for example, alternate between tactics of boycotts and buycotts, depending on what they have learned and what their material and cultural options are. Moreover, boycotts can be expressed as buycotts: I do not boycott large multinational corporations, I just make a point of shopping at small, locally owned stores and for locally produced items. The tension between what della Porta and Diani distinguish as social movements and consensus movements bears further exploration among social movement learning scholars.

Putting aside the question of whether or not critical shopping can constitute a form of social movement, I return to the concerns raised by participants about assuming an identity as a radical. During the second focus group, the following discussion about the merits of and concerns about the word radical and the reasons for distancing oneself from radicalism ensued:

Jocelyn: ...I prefer the word ethical to radical. For some reason, the word radical makes it seem far away....Radical, somehow it's too easy to knock it down.

Kaela: Oka y.

Jocelyn: My understanding of the word...[is] that when you buy anything, remember a certain number of values. One is, how does the production of this thing affect the earth? And that's, you know, you can think of that in lots of, there's lots of subsets to that one. What are the conditions of the workers that produced it or farmed it or what all?...Um, what are, what does the profit support? For instance, does it go either to military or

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pharmaceutical companies, two people that I'm particularly hoping that I wouldn't have to buy something [in support of]? Um, local is another one....

Carla: Um, I don't know. I mean, I'm trying to think about what radical meant, and if I think about how it's used in education then radical usually refers to somebody like Freire and how Freire approached education. That concept of radical, if we're using that concept of radical to describe a radical shopper then I guess that's what I am, because I do try to find out more about what, what's happening in the world around me and to understand what the implications of each thing [are], which is sort of how I think Freire would, would go about, um, so in that sense, yes, I, I guess I would call myself that, if used in that context. But radical's such a, radical's a really, um, whew, one of those words that have a lot of meanings associated with it.

Kaela: It's loaded.

Carla: It's very, yeah, loaded. It's very loaded....So I would probably go for critical or ethical or, I would try to think of, conscientious actually is one that I would, I try to be a conscientious shopper....Um, but uh, there's, there's two reasons. Because I, I mean there's altruistic reasons, which is the guilt thing. Um, and also, the whole concept of someone, somewhere in the world getting paid a dime or less to make a pair of shoes that I'm gonna buy later on and pay over 100 dollars pisses me off, right? [laughter]... Um, so there's, there's another, I mean it's altruism because I, I don't think someone should be working in poor conditions. They should, you know, they should get bathroom breaks, they shouldn't be locked into the factory....But also it's, there's a level of selfishness too. I get really angry that I have to pay this much when, when the company who, you know, made the product pays their employees so little. It just makes me really mad! But, and there's another sort of selfish reason. Um, so for example, if I'm buying, um, house cleaning products, shampoo or whatever, I try to get something that won't harm me, um, that doesn't, my own little environment. It's not just, I mean it's also the big environment. I don't want, I try to avoid pesticides because overall it's bad for the environment, it's bad for the birds, it's bad for the fish or whatever. Um, but my own micro-environment, I don't want it to be polluted either. So there's some selfishness there.

Um, so what's possible to achieve?...I mean, I'm hoping for a fair, fairer global society and a cleaner environment but, um, obviously shopping's not going to be the only way you do that. So for example, when I talk about the person who's getting the dime paid for every pair of shoes he or she makes, um, it's gonna take more than just me not buying the products. If anything it's me not buying the product might be more damaging so I have to think of other ways to, you know, to get on the company's back, to get on the government's back to try and, to, um, and to, and to get other people around me to know what's going on so that way they too, hopefully, will feel the real power in, in the sort of...the real power of trying to change something....

Karen: Um, yeah, I'd have to agree with you about not totally liking the word radical. Um, because it seems like more and more it's starting, it's becoming in some ways more mainstream....But, I mean, if you look at radical meaning, like, root, there's a totally different meaning for it. But if you look at that word meaning root and you think about, that when I'm shopping I'm trying to uncover all kinds of things, get down to the root of things,...it does make sense, if you look at a different meaning of the word radical. Um, so yeah, I'd say I probably try to be ethical..., more than anything.

(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

In this conversation, Karen, Carla and Jocelyn reiterated many of the reasons that participants were reluctant to assume an identity as a radical. They were concerned about being perceived as negative, and having their analyses and responses marginalized, misunderstood and dismissed.

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Carla's comments sharpen some points which have arisen or been implied in this analysis. Critical shopping is important, but is limited in its potential to help effect change. Her view of radical shopping is not the outright *non sequitur* that Sean had proposed, but is instead a recognition of the need to engage in multiple tactics as part of a critical, or radical, commitment. Secondly, Carla's comments clarify that reflexivity is more than an intellectual process of thinking through an issue, as it is commonly understood to be. Her comments illustrate that other dimensions contribute to reflexivity. She talked about how, at times, she felt “really angry” and “really mad” about certain parts of shopping. These emotions gave her intellectual analysis a greater urgency, and pressed her toward a more relationally reflexive understanding.

Thirdly, whether or not it was considered radical, much of the impetus for participants' critical shopping emerged from relational reflexivity – thinking and caring about one's role in the global scale of social relations and the environment; however, some of it emerged from a narcissistic reflexivity which is consistent with neoliberal ideology and its individualistic orientation. On some occasions, participants' comments clarify Littler's (2005) distinction between narcissistic and relational reflexivity even further: Reflexivity involves consideration of the scope of a problem and the nature of a response. The narcissistic reflexivity in Roddick's book might lack a structural analysis and lead to individualized actions, but it calls for an appreciation of concern about and obligation for others. It is not an entirely self-involved reflexivity, in the way that some proponents of organics or local buying can be. For Carla, concerns about costs to personal health, safety and finances remained present in Carla's mind, even though she conceded that, in some sense, she might be radical in her shopping after all.

What's Radical is Relative

Poststructural and postmodern scholars assert that knowledge is always contextually constructed (Hekman, 1997; Richardson, 2000) and that “[r]esistance is effected by employing other discursive formations to oppose that script, not by appealing to universal subjectivity or absolute principles” (Hekman, 1997, p. 357). Another difficulty in ascertaining what and who is radical, according to participants, arises from their general understanding that radicalism, like gender, race, class and even knowledge, is contextually determined. What is radical was defined in relation to what is happening within one's social and material world.

Alice: I wouldn't classify myself, I remember seeing that and thinking, I don't know if I really fit that description compared to some of my friends who are, I would classify as radical....I think compared to a lot of people I know I would be considered radical because there are conversations that come up where people will say, well why don't we go to such and such a place, uh, why don't we go to Wal-Mart or Starbucks or

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whatever? And I found that just to avoid conflict I say okay, let's go. Because in the past when I've said, you know they're doing this or they're doing that, oh well, you know, what can I do? Who cares? It's cheap, let's go. So when I have my own personal choice I, I tend not to go.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Ellen: I mean I,...I think coming out of the States which is so conservative, to me, like just not going to McDonald's would constitute radical shopping [chuckle] in the States because radical is always going to be on a sliding scale, right. I mean it's radical in comparison to what?

Kaela: So it's relative.

Ellen: Right, right, it's relative. It's, so I mean, honestly, I think radical means something very different in Canada where, you know,...there aren't guns on every street corner and same sex marriage has been allowed, you know, in many areas.

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Nicole: It's very hard to step out, because you're just placing yourself in a Western idealism [or, ideology] kind of, how you've been brought up.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Nicole: So I mean you're not necessarily taking yourself out of that box.

Kaela: Mm hmmm.

Nicole: You may be questioning the box but there's no way that you can pull yourself out, completely.

Kaela: So what does it mean to be radical? And is that, is that possible?

Nicole: I guess challenging, challenging that idea, I guess actually,...questioning your surrounding, questioning, uh,...[pause], yeah, um, I mean being, going against what is implemented I guess. But it doesn't necessarily have to be, I mean I don't see, I mean radical I think implies being extreme.

Kaela: Okay, so it has that kind of colloquial association.

Nicole: Yeah.

Kaela: Which actually isn't how I meant it.

Nicole: Okay,...I think it's just more about [pause], hmmm, yeah, it didn't necessarily mean extreme for me. I just think it means, it's just stepping out of context.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Searching for an example to help me clarify the difficulties in determining who and what is truly radical, I think about Fidel Castro. On the one hand, he radically transformed social and economic relations in Cuba, dismantling capitalism and racism in that country. On the other hand, patriarchy, as well as homophobia, is alive and well in there, and Castro himself has not hidden his homophobic views. Mariela Castro's work to alleviate sexism and homophobia in Cuban politics and culture surely makes her a new "organic intellectual" (Gramsci, 1971), but, just as surely, it does not erase the radicalism of her uncle Fidel. Here, then, participants in this inquiry and this analysis contribute to the conceptualization of radicalism, seeing it as contextual, shifting and, sometimes, unpredictable, rather than universal and static.

Having gone through these data, I am undecided about whether any of the participants were radicals, even if they engaged in relational reflexivity, and whether it makes sense to think

- Can you think of movements or organizations that seem connected to shopping and consumption? What kinds of statements do they make? Have you participated in any of them?
- How, if at all, would you say that your shopping practices have changed in recent months? Can you think of a particular time when you made or noticed these changes? Are there any changes that you've been thinking about making in your shopping practices?
- There's a saying that the personal is political. Do you think that your personal shopping practices can make a difference to local, national or global politics? If so, how? On the flip side, what are the limitations to the impact that shopping and consumption can have?

– selected interview questions

about shopping as potentially radical. This inconclusive conclusion helps explain my decision to shift from the concept and language of radicalism in my analysis. There is, though, more to the question of how critical shopping is tied to change than whether or not it can be seen as radical. In the following discussion, I turn my attention to other ways of addressing this question.

Learning to Change Shopping, Shopping to Make Change

As I concluded in the previous section, one reason that participants might eschew an identity as a radical is that they are worried about possible social repercussions. Even people who are disturbed about the status quo might worry about not fitting into it. Facing the reality of materially and culturally defined constraints, needs and desires, people might find overt shows of radicalism both admirable in others and unacceptable for themselves. Generally reluctant to identify as radicals for varied reasons, most participants nonetheless approached shopping with some form of reflexivity and desire to help bring about change. In this section, I explore how participants learned to understand the potential to make changes in their shopping practices and to ensure that their shopping contributes to an agenda of change.

During interviews, I invited participants to talk about movements and organizations that might have contributed to their learning about the politics of shopping, about changes in their shopping practices that they had made or were contemplating, and about how shopping is connected to formal politics. (☹) These questions helped me capture participants' thoughts and feelings about the links between their shopping and their interest in contributing to some sort of change. Amitah offered the following response to some of these questions:

Kaela: There's a saying that the personal is political. Do you think that your personal shopping practices can make a difference to local, national or global politics and if so how? And on the flip side, what are the limitations that shopping and consumption can have?

Amitah: Um, so to the first question, yes, I think, uh, they can make a difference. Um, how? Because of the almighty dollar.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: And on the flip side what are the limitations to that? Um, well you're still playing in the same field. Um, even if I'm making a sustainable choice I'm still consuming.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: Um, things that I don't necessarily need.

Kaela: Okay.

Amitah: So it's, you're still kind of in the same paradigm although you're trying to take a, a higher road in a way. But somehow the basic foundation of that is still skewed.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Returning to Shaw's (2007) use of the shopping-as-voting metaphor, I have suggested some of the limits to the potential political impact of one's shopping practices. As I have already noted and as Amitah reiterated, critical shopping and the use of shopping to resist hegemony

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and participate in change is replete with the dialectic which characterizes all resistance, at least as I have conceptualized resistance in this inquiry. Even radicalism, for that matter, likely reiterates a portion of hegemony as it attempts to overturn other parts; it is difficult, if at all possible, to agitate for the overthrow of every structure which serves the hegemonic social order. As critical scholars now readily acknowledge and I have previously explained, individuals have complex identities and affiliations. Even social movements favouring some sort of radical change choose from among possible aims and priorities, and movement members might not share a common stance on issues beyond their established purpose. In the remainder of this section, I explore how this reality helps shape participants' understanding of the political potential and limitations of their shopping to an agenda of change, whether or not that change is considered radical.

It All Adds Up, But...

One of the common refrains that I heard while talking to participants is that what is important is that everybody undertakes some sort of critical analysis and response, through their shopping as well as through other processes and activities. Participants also concurred that, although people might not be willing or able to do *everything*, that does not mean that they should and can do *nothing*. Faced with the prospects of Kinsella's (2001) shopaholic Becky or the cynicism of Coupland's (1991) characters, participants did not necessarily endorse the conclusions reached by Luxemburg or Lorde; they thought that it was preferable to take some sort of action, and that such action, including critical shopping practices, contributed to change in a meaningful way. Even apparently small actions and changes might make a difference.

Alice: I think it's been a gradual process starting with simplifying my life to being, having friends who are...talking about not supporting Starbucks, then living in Guatemala. A lot of different pieces to the puzzle coming together to making me realize that I can make a difference through my shopping.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

Amitah: But I think change takes time and the movement's there.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Nicole: Yeah, as a, one person alone, there's limitations I suppose because you have to rely on a, um, you have to rely on others, I suppose.

Kaela: Okay.

Nicole: But I think that changing your own way, you can make a difference.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

After returning to Canada from Australia, concerned about animal welfare and ecology, "I went into Greenpeace and said 'What can I do?'" The person told her that "how you live every day" really matters and can make a difference. (shopping trip excerpt, Reesa, May 2, 2007)

Social-movement learning includes both learning by people who participate in social movements and learning by people outside of social movements through the impact they make (Hall and Clover, 2005). Learning through a movement can occur informally through participation or through intentional educational interventions.

– Shirley Walters (2005), “Social Movements, Class, and Adult Education,” p. 55

Carla: I think part of the problem, people think that, that to achieve this you all have to do the same thing. And that's not true. To achieve what you need to achieve you do different things. You do what you can in the space and in the time and the place that you're in. So, um, and I, and I understood that when I went to see, um, I went to a few years ago, when *The Corporation* was, uh, was the book for the Library, the one book chosen, and um, Joel Bakan came out to talk and someone asked, someone quite cynically asked, Well what can I do? And, and he said, Well, I don't know. It's gonna be different for different people. For me it was the book and this movie. But for you it might be, it might be getting together with the parents, the parent council of your school and getting the Coke machines out of the school. And it was so funny because there was this collective, Ohhhhhh. [laughter] Like it struck everyone at once, like we don't all have to do the same thing. We don't all have to write a book. You know, we don't all have to make a movie. We all have to do something different with what we're given. And even a small thing like getting the Coke machines out of the school is, is enough. Well, it's a start anyway. It's a, a way to begin.
(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

The last excerpt, from the second focus group, reiterates a point made by Gramsci (1971) and also expressed by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1991) that, although all people have the capacity to be intellectuals, not everybody functions as an intellectual in either maintaining or challenging hegemonic relations. In the previous chapter, I noted Walters' (2005) related point that social movements are sites and sources of learning for both individuals who are integrally involved in them and individuals who are not actively engaged in them but are affected by their discourses, campaigns and actions. (☞) For that reason, the learning spurred by social movements is unpredictable.

There are, of course, different opinions about what it means to make a difference. Small actions might add up, but to what? In answering this question I can return to my previous discussions about radicalism and forms of reflexivity. From all of my conversations with participants, there is one particularly clear example of narcissistic reflexivity and an understanding of change as reform, and it occurred during my shopping trip with Jody.

At the check-out, the cashier asked, "Would you like paper or plastic?" "Paper, please," Jody replied. We chatted, and the cashier joined in, about packaging and how good the new recyclable, compostable packaging...is. Jody said, "Every little thing we can do, might seem little but it can change the world. Don't you think?" "Do you?" I asked. "I do!" she answered. (shopping trip excerpt, Jody, February 12, 2007)

This excerpt from Jody's shopping trip is particularly interesting as an illustration of a learning and perspective which can emerge from narcissistic reflexivity (Littler, 2005). Her opinion that choosing a paper bag over a plastic bag is not only a good habit but also a way to "help change the world" entirely overlooks the need to examine structures. It maintains that people can help change the world without making any real changes in their lives. Jody might

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have approached her food shopping carefully and inquisitively, but her questions focused on personal health and safety rather than social relations and politics. Her understanding that solutions to problems begin and end with better shopping options and choices recalls the narcissistic reflexivity that Littler (2005) sees in Anita Roddick's book. Her perspective is entirely consistent with neoliberal, consumerist ideologies which portray change as an individualized endeavour. It does not correspond to my conceptualization of resistance or Sparks' (1997) conceptualization of dissidence; it certainly is not radical.

There were, however, some participants who were somewhat doubtful about concluding that every small action necessarily contributes to meaningful change. One currently popular focus of resistance which plays out in the arena of shopping is environmentalism. Among participants, Bonnie had an especially long and strong affiliation with the environmental movement. Not only did she maintain a strict vegan diet and wear non-leather shoes, she was involved with an activist organization educating and advocating on the combined topics of animal welfare and the environment. She herself raised and connected several issues in a sophisticated way during her shopping trip, including the following point about the problem with the shopping-based resistance which often addresses animals rights and environmental concerns:

She also talked...about the difference between anti-racist or class-based activism and environmental activism. Because it's become easier for people to shop – especially for food – in an environmentally sensitive and animal-friendly way, replacing conventional products with vegetarian, organic and fair trade products, the message is that you don't really need to make changes in your life. But activists focused on other issues “would never talk about race or class that way,” Bonnie explained. (shopping trip excerpt, Bonnie, February 5, 2007)

In her comments, Bonnie was recognizing the shortcomings of critical shopping as a strategy of resistance, because it leaves inherently problematic structures in place in people's lives, in national policies and in global affairs. The central message in such resistance is that consumer-citizens can help effect societal change without making any great personal change. In contrast to Jody, who thought that choosing paper bags at the check-out counter helped change the world, Bonnie understood that the environmental movement in which she had situated herself often seems satisfied with responses which emerge from more narcissistic and limited reflexivity.

Like Bonnie, Karen and Carla raised some reservations about the full acceptance that small actions necessarily contribute to societal change. They discussed a trade show which offered a range of fair trade and environmentally friendly products for sale.

Karen: My husband and I went and it was interesting and it was, you know, we found some, some cool stuff....But the whole time I was very conflicted about this whole idea of

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buying yourself out of the guilt. There's, here's these things you can do to buy your way out of feeling guilty for –

Carla: Did you see the ad in the bus for it?

Karen: No.

Carla: The catch phrase was, “Buy yourself a better future.”

Karen: Oh yeah.

Carla: [laughter]

Karen: Oh yeah, I saw that. And that, that really drove me crazy.

(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

Again, these participants might have recognized the importance of doing even little things in the name of change, but they were not under the illusion that all little things add up to the same big change when they are combined. Carla suggested a move to a more relational form of reflexivity during her interview, when she noted the importance of always asking what more can be done and being willing to do more:

Carla: Do they make a difference? I think, me as an individual, no, I don't think they make a difference. I think, um, however, as a group of, me as an individual in one day, no. Me as an individual over my lifetime, yes. Me as an individual among all of my friends who have similar, you know, thinking, similar ways of thinking, yes. I think it's one of those things that, um, but again only to a point. And I'm thinking of *The Corporation* –

Kaela: Okay.

Carla: – and where Joel Bakan has said there's a point where, you know, this, this, this is effective but it's not, you need to go one step further. You need to, you need to write to your government and tell them to be accountable and tell these organizations to be accountable.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

I do not dismiss Luxemburg's (2008) and Gramsci's (1971) cautions against reformism and pragmatism, and the importance of connecting resistance in the cultural and material arenas to formal politics; however, I conclude that the incremental learning and changes discussed by participants are consistent with Gramsci's (1971) understanding of revolution as a slow process based in ideological transformation which mobilizes support for structural transformation. This is also reminiscent of marino's (1997) invitation to look for “cracks in consent” to begin a process of critical learning and transformation. It is precisely the unpredictability of learning and change which makes any sort of resistance worth paying attention to. Participants, like Anita Roddick, might stop at narcissistic reflexivity, individualized actions and reform but, then again, they might move on to more relational reflexivity, collective actions and radical responses.

Each One Teach One

Originating in the field of literacy education, the slogan “each one teach one” expresses a widely held conviction in critical adult education that people share in their learning and, in turn,

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teaching others. Related to participants' general understanding that individual, small actions had a cumulative impact over time, there was a similar agreement among most – albeit not all – participants about the importance of sharing what one learned about shopping, consumption and globalization with friends and family. They also knew that they had gained important information from others, both acquaintances and experts. This kind of very informal teaching and learning is one way that individuals on the periphery of a social movement can learn its message and tactics (see Walters, 2005), and suggests why it can be difficult to gauge how many people are actually aligned with a social movement.

A methodological extension of this latter claim contributes to my rationale for avoiding particular organizations in this study. As social movement learning scholars recognize, organizations are among the constituents of a movement, but they do not represent all of a movement's supporters (della Porta & Diani, 2006; Eyerman & Jamison, 1991; Walters, 2005). A movement's constituency grows and shrinks, often in ways that are not immediately observed or managed.

The excerpts below illustrate the different ways in which participants could have a hand in furthering anti-consumerist resistance by sharing their learning with others:

Ellen: And so I, I personally don't think that I alone will bring Wal-Mart down. But what if my friend...is really affected by what I said? And...she's an economics professor. And really starts thinking about these issues. And then what if she brings it up with her students, and what if her students then bring it up with their parents? I mean, I don't mean to be this like, I am the pebble on the lake, I mean that's just too cheesy for words....But I think that you can effectively engage in smear campaigns and protests and activities and I don't think, I think at some point, we always want measurable outcomes. What was the outcome of this protest? What was the outcome of this letter-writing campaign? What was the outcome of not shopping there? And I think there's a danger in doing that because we need to stop thinking of grand social movements and measurable outcomes and just say, you know, We really are human beings 24 hours a day and you educate yourself and you help educate other people and you open yourself up to being educated by others and you sort of live the best you can with what you've got, you know, and with what you can do. And, do I think that in the long run that'll really change? I actually think it will. I think if enough people, um, if we raise the consciousness of enough people, you know, myself included, I certainly don't know even a millionth of what I should know, um, I think eventually it will change.

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

She does not see herself as a front line activist, but she supports such efforts by signing petitions for animal rights and organic foods....And she doesn't just sign petitions; after signing them, she also tells her friends about them and the campaigns that they are associated with. (shopping trip excerpt, Paula, August 14, 2007)

Alice: I read an article in a magazine about what to do in South Africa and one of them was shop at these stores, and these social upliftment stores. So I started doing research and thought I would love to expose people, expose travellers to this.

[Former Malian consul general in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, Adboulaye] Macko tells me he eventually learned that the [cocoa] farmers had deals with an elaborate network of traffickers, and he began to understand that the real villains in the story were not the farmers but the crime rings who brought the children to the farms. The boys may have left their family farms voluntarily and even joined up with the smuggler of their own volition. "They were just kids who needed money for their families," says Macko. They didn't bargain for the kind of exploitation they experienced. He believes many of the cocoa farmers were also caught in an unbearable squeeze. Though some of the farmers were surely taking advantage of the desperation of the poor, most of those who were buying the children had been driven to do so by their dire economic straits. Preying on the hopelessness and needs of both groups, the middlemen were the ones making the profits.

– Carol Off (2006), *Bitter Chocolate*, pp. 129-130

Kaela: So is this something you do in your spare time, write?
 Alice: Yeah.
 Kaela: Do you have a journalism education or –?
 Alice: No, no. I'm not a journalist [laughter], I don't have any stellar writing qualities but my, I just have this desire to get the word out about where people can be shopping.
 Kaela: Okay.
 Alice: So I was in the Caribbean recently and I did, found a place where people who are, uh, disabled, where they're making items and tourists can go and buy things there.
 Kaela: So getting the word out, there's something about getting the word out.
 Alice: Yeah.
 Kaela: And that kind of education that you think is part of what you contribute –
 Alice: Yeah.
 Kaela: – to this whole sort of shopping and consumption message. I mean you're sort of putting another message out there.
 Alice: Well, there are options.
 Kaela: Okay. There are options and it's important to think about the options.
 Alice: Yeah. Mostly places, they're doing good but they don't have the money to market themselves.
 (interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

At the cash register, Sandy used a canvas bag that she had brought with her and took a paper carry bag. She noted, “I did convince my husband to use reusable bags – I'm so happy.”
 (shopping trip excerpt, Sandy, February 5, 2007)

Although some participants were wary about how they shared information and concerned about being construed as self-righteous, on the whole participants were convinced that helping others learn about the politics of shopping and consumption could amplify the success of their resistance. Their teaching could range from small details such as persuading a partner to stop using disposable shopping bags, to information about larger, more complex issues such as how the simple act of buying name brand chocolate makes one complicit in the use of child slave labour (see Off, 2006). (👁)

For several participants, one central site of mutual teaching and learning was social enterprises or co-operatives. Karen and Vanessa had purchased shares in and volunteered at a co-operatively owned organic farm. Vanessa had also served on the board of directors of retail food co-operative which adds public education about food security, the corporate agri-business, globalization and the value of the co-operative movement in general to its retail function. Alice volunteered at one of the Ten Thousand Villages® shops, and Tamara worked for a social venture marketing fair trade products. A few of the other participants were also involved actively in non-government activist and education organizations, where they both learned and shared information and analyses. Again, the perceived value of these volunteer activities in furthering societal transformation is in contrast to the thinking of both Luxemburg (2008) and Gramsci (1971), who cautioned against “volunteerism” and pragmatism in a radical agenda. Still, by

- There's a saying that the personal is political. Do you think that your personal shopping practices can make a difference to local, national or global politics? If so, how? On the flip side, what are the limitations to the impact that shopping and consumption can have?

– selected interview questions

sharing their knowledge, participants believed that they were expanding awareness about issues and the potential for resistance and societal change.

Further to Foley's (1999, 2001) important conceptualization of incidental learning which emerges through collective action and engagement in social movements, my analysis here suggests that it is also important to consider the learning which occurs among individuals who might appear to be disconnected from social movements or from one another in their learning, decision-making and practices. This learning might imply relational reflexivity or narcissistic reflexivity, but either way it encourages people to think about how they can change their shopping and, through their shopping, contribute to change.

Getting the Political Message to the Politicians

Participants were aware of clichés about the politics of shopping, including the shopping-as-voting metaphor taken up by Shaw (2007) and others. Even the participants who rejected consumer choice as democratic choice agreed that, by shopping selectively and purposefully, they were sending a politically charged message to manufacturers and retailers, as well as other shoppers. Whether that message reached politicians in Canada and in other countries and, moreover, whether it is something that rightly concerns politicians were other matters. I tried to raise these issues in some of the questions that I've already noted, namely those asking about the political impacts and limitations of critical shopping. (☹)

Gramsci (1971) concurs with the Marxist argument that engagement in the arena of formal politics is necessary for societal transformation (see also Luxemburg, 2008), even though the necessary ideological challenge and reconstitution first occurs culturally in civil society. In their conversations with me, very few participants spoke about being active in an existing political party or about the prospect of any new parties being formed. Some of them, though, did say that it was important to become engaged in the process of formal politics and to convey what they had learned through and around shopping to politicians.

Alice: I'm thinking that with shopping practices what would need to happen is also sending out the word to government because just by shopping at Caper's won't send a message to them. So coupling that with some sort of awareness programs or encouragement of contacting them to say that, that our importers should be going through more stringent, there should be more stringent laws of what we accept and what kind of conditions those products were made under, and certified. Again very idealistic, but, yeah, more pressure.

Kaela: Okay, more pressure and more regulation. I mean you're talking about a kind of regulatory pressure.

Alice: Yeah, yeah.

(interview excerpt, February 17, 2007)

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Kaela: Can you think of movements or organizations that seem connected to shopping and consumption? What statements do they make and have you ever participated in any of them?

Sarah: Yeah, there's this one thing, I don't know if you've heard of it, um, the Church of Pointless Consumerism.

Kaela: No.

Sarah: The Church of Pointless Consumerism. It's um, I think, it's a yearly kind of event. And it's actually put on, the Work Less Party puts on tons of events regarding this kind of stuff, and so the Work Less Party put on an event regarding this and they do it. And they pretty much make fun of consumption.

Kaela: Okay.

Sarah: And money money money money money! And they just go on about it. They do a play, and it's the most like obnoxious [chuckle] like, um, farce on, on consumption that I've ever seen. Um, and so I'll participate in stuff like that. And like, the Work Less Party is always talking about consumerism and I, I just really agree with them. So I'll go to events and stuff like that.

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Carla: So, um, yeah, I think, I think if I wanted to do something more...I would find groups that, um, have campaigns about those sorts of things, or else write more letters.

Kaela: So who would you write letters to?

Carla: Uh, I'd probably write to the government, um, get their act together, and this whole Mr. Harper thing we all know is just a splash of paint and as soon as he takes a shower it'll be gone [laughter], he'll be blue all over again. Um...

Kaela: So you think there is still this continued connection between formal politics and, and consumption or, or sort of the corporate world?....

Carla: I think, I still think there is. Um, I realize that people can, that organizations can move from country to country. I'm trying to think of an example. Well, okay, how 'bout we take the European Union and the whole issue with uh, with uh genetically modified organisms. Um, the EU does not accept them. This is a formal governing body made up of democratically elected, um, members and, uh, the people in the countries made it really clear that they didn't want this stuff on their soil. So, um, I think there is a process and I think that, um, to assume there is no process is to open yourself up to despair. Because then what are you supposed to do? Like, become an anarchist? [laughter] I don't, I don't know what the answer would be. Um, I think the problem is, is that people think that citizenship just means voting. Um, but it's much more involved than that. And, um, corporations are huge and they move around, they do what they like, but at the same time we as a society who have elected officials have to make it clear, this is what we want, this is what we want for our country....So the world is all about, human life is all about finding solutions. It's not about assuming horrible things will happen just because you don't let the corporations do what they want, you know? [laughter]

Kaela: Is shopping a kind of, um, voting?

Carla: I don't know if I would go as far as that. Um, if it spurs you to be more politically active, then yes. 'Cause I do think it can be a political act but...[politics] can't just be that.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

Hegemonic neoliberal political discourse argues against regulations and in favour of the free market; however, participants understood the continued importance of environmental and employment regulations which could help protect them, as consumer-citizens, as well as ensure that workers in Canada and in other countries had decent, safe work conditions.

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When participants did mention political parties that they supported, they typically mentioned the New Democratic Party (NDP) or the Green Party, which are already aligned with social movements and, in the case of the NDP, a social group; Sarah was alone in mentioning the Work Less Party, which is affiliated with other emerging social movements such as voluntary simplicity. In general, though, participants seemed to reflect the ennui, if not cynicism, around formal politics, most apparent – as many of them noted – in declining voting rates. This suggests that, on the whole, participants might have still been in what Gramsci (1971) would consider an early phase in the process of change in Canadian society, when ideological critique and education are of greatest importance. Aside from Amitah's view that she had “dropped out” of her middle class origin participants did not talk about what it would mean for them, as middle class consumer-citizens, to dismantle Canada's capitalism, even if they did think it was unfair. Many of them thought that great strides had already been made in dismantling racism and patriarchy, through a combination of formal politics (i.e., human rights legislation) and culture. Here, then, are examples of the seduction of reformist strategies and the power of hegemony to absorb critiques and neutralize them.

Answering Questions, Questioning Answers

During his interview, Sean offered a concise definition of the good shopper. His version of that person is somebody who knows the full environmental impact of every product bought and used. Unearthing that information is no small challenge. To add concerns about who made a product, what the working and living conditions of those individuals are, and how consumer options are connected with economic, gendered and raced structures operating within and between nation-states deepens the challenges. Although, as I discussed in the previous chapter, some participants were very adept, innovative, persistent researchers in their shopping processes, most of them surmised that basic questions can seem unanswerable. In their interviews, some participants described this reality:

Jocelyn: ...And they're, and they're much harder questions than the cut of this blouse or the colour or the fabric or in terms of the food the flavour. These other questions are much harder to understand.

Kaela: Why would you say they're harder?

Jocelyn: Because you don't, there's so many other factors.

Kaela: Okay, so they're harder to answer. They're complicated questions.

Jocelyn: Yeah, they're too complicated.

(interview excerpt, January 22, 2007)

Ellen: And I actually believe that most of us can't shop the way we want to shop because, well for starters, we can't, we can't know.

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Kaela: We can't access the information, we can't –
Ellen: We just can't know what it is we're really buying.
(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Sean: ...But to go back to your original question. Can you figure that stuff out?
Kaela: Yeah.
Sean: It's really hard....But if you work at it...you can get a really good sense of it, I think. And you can use it to guide as much, you can get enough information to usefully guide you choices. I mean the fact is, I just bought a laptop....And it's almost impossible to know where parts and pieces came from.
Kaela: Mm hmmm.
Sean: And...[a computer manufacturer] is not going to tell me 'cause it's gonna be a secret for, you know, for commercial reasons and stuff like that.
Kaela: Mm hmmm.
Sean: So with a lot of stuff it is impossible. And so my goal there is to just consume as little as possible.
(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

Kaela: Do you think that those questions are, um, well I mean you said that there's a practicality in terms of time when it comes to answering those questions, but do you think that, um, those questions are always even answerable? Even if you had unlimited time.
James: Um, if I had unlimited time? I'm not convinced that they're all answerable.
(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

Violet: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, getting the information. And it's not that cut and dry, either. You can't, um, you can't completely avoid or boycott products made by child labour because now I know that what happens is those things move underground now....So it's, it's really tricky.
Kaela: Yeah. I also think it's tricky because there are so many stops in the chain of production.
Violet: That's right.
Kaela: And so things are so easy to hide.
Violet: Exactly.
(interview excerpt, April 4, 2007)

I began this chapter with a discussion of the word radical, which implies definitiveness; however, as the excerpts above indicate, the complexity of contemporary consumer-citizenship in a Western society such as Canada interferes with people's ability to discern the very root of a problem, let alone its resolution. The excerpts echo Connelly and Prothero's (2008) point that “individuals are left with a sense that *I should and can do something, but I don't know which is the right thing to do*” (p. 133, emphasis in original). They are also reminiscent of the reflections of Jane, in Ozeki's (1998) novel, about learning to be ignorant as a coping strategy in a world where messages and structures seem to overwhelm personal capacity to understand and make choices. On the whole, I had the impression that participants were trying to wade through a dizzying array of information, options, discourses, needs, desires, worries and fears.

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Most participants had not abandoned their commitment to societal change, even if they felt frustrated and ambivalent about the contributions that they could make through shopping as well as other types of activities. In this task, many participants found it important to retain a sense of hope and optimism and a positive outlook, whether or not these were linked to spiritual convictions. Some of the excerpts already discussed above, in which participants talked about preferring what they thought were more positive-sounding words, such as ethical or critical, to the word radical, reiterate this point. During his interview, Sean was explicit about the role that the emotion of hope assumed when intellectual conclusions pointed to defeat:

Sean: ...Can I make a difference? I'll turn to Antonio Gramsci.

Kaela: My hero!

Sean: Yeah, me too. Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.

Kaela: Yeah.

Sean: I'm gonna act as if they do, even if they don't....'Cause that's what it takes for me to get through, from day to day. But I think, you know, they [that is, my decisions,] can in some sense but who knows? It's impossible for me to measure. So I'm going with Gramsci.

(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

In a similar vein, Karen spoke about maintaining a sense of stubborn determination, if not hope:

Karen: ...My husband and I were kind of discussing why is it that in some ways we're very nihilistic? Like we really don't think that there is that much hope so why do we bother? And we were sort of trying to weigh it out. Like, why are we vegetarians and don't own a car when really, we're going to hell in a hand basket and what can we, what can we do about it? And I think it kind of made it clear, I was, it was actually before Kurt Vonnegut died but I remember reading something about him and how he had that, that same sort of, like, you know, there is no hope. We're all screwed. While we're here, be nice. And, and that was sort of the same thing [my husband] and I thought. That, um, I don't think that what I'm doing is gonna make much difference, but if it makes any difference then why not? Um, yeah, that's about it.

(focus group excerpt, May 17, 2007)

If Gramsci (1971) is right and revolution occurs through a slow process of learning, alliance-building and construction of new ideologies, then what might be most important is to encourage critical questioning and holistic learning, rather than to dismiss efforts at resistance as partial.

In discussing their learning about how to make change, participants were unanimous in their willingness to ask questions, even if answers were not easily forthcoming. A few participants added another point, about learning to respond to ambiguity with a sense of hope or sheer determination. Tying together the notion of asking questions with the belief that it was important to bring these issues to the attention of politicians, Karen explained why it is important to support non-profit organizations which lobby for progressive regulatory and policy changes:

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Karen: Um, it just seems that it is so hard to have any kind of political impact. Certainly, um, well voter apathy is probably a good example of [how] most people don't look at the impact. It is, is does feel like an opportunity to, again, to say vote for that organization, however small a donation it is. That, you know, we do want to see that there's somebody questioning.
(interview excerpt, February 2, 2007)

All of this said, I appreciate Luxemburg's (2008) and Lorde's (2002) cautions against being lulled into a sense of success because some sort of change has occurred. Societal change, whether or not it is radical, is constant. This realization is integral to Gramsci's (1971) conceptualization of hegemony, even if most changes function to reiterate, rather than fundamentally alter, oppressive structures. Resistance enacted through shopping, as in other arenas, can be co-opted and absorbed into current hegemony. This, again, is a reminder of Sparks' (1997) conclusion about dissidence, which both complies with and resists the status quo. The shift towards a “green” agenda by the current Premier of British Columbia follows years of activism by radical movements; however, the feminist consensus-based decision-making processes outlined by Walter (2007) are certainly not part of the Premier's agenda. In terms of Littler's (2005) analytical framework, the maintenance of hegemony seems to encourage the absorption of radical discourses and to neutralize them by replacing their initial relational reflexivity with an increasingly narcissistic reflexivity. Even shoppers who want to make change have to contend with the reality that, under consumerism and neoliberalism, “the personal is political” often is reinterpreted so that the personal becomes the full extent of the political. For the most critical shoppers, asking questions and questioning answers is a never-ending, cyclical process which accompanies, precedes and guides continual change and learning.

If You Can't Join 'em, Beat 'em

A familiar cliché advises people to join forces with opposition that cannot be eliminated. In a reversal of that advice, most participants talked about their general discomfort with hegemonic consumerism. Some participants went further, rejecting a central premise of the contemporary iteration of Western consumerism: that shopping and consumption manifest the democratic values of choice and freedom. Drawing on his education in sociology and his admiration of Marxist analysis, Sean offered an especially cogent summary of the problems with consumerism:

Kaela: ...Um, there's a saying that the personal is political. Do you think that your personal shopping practices can make a difference to local, national or global politics and if so how? And on the flip side, what do you see as the limitations to, um, the impact that your own shopping and consumption can have?

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Sean: I'm gonna start with the flip side.
Kaela: Okay.
Sean: Which is, the biggest limitation is, is all the structures.
Kaela: Okay.
Sean: The institutional structures that control the little quote-unquote...choices that I have.
Kaela: Okay, okay.
Sean: Like what, what arrives in the places that I can shop....
Kaela: Okay, so a lot of choices have been made for you before you enter the store.
Sean: Yeah, yeah, exactly. Or, or that I even have to go into the store to get it.
(interview excerpt, March 24, 2007)

At the same time as Sean identified a reality of shopping – that many decisions are made even for critical shoppers before they enter the store – some people are seeking ways around these apparent limitations and finding ways to express their agency and choice. This might be through a rejection of consumerist ideology, which I have already discussed somewhat in the preceding chapters, especially in sections in chapter seven on Learning to Learn and Weighing Values. As many excerpts that I have already cited suggest, most participants were uncomfortable with the idea of hegemonic consumerism and excessive consumption. Many did not enjoy shopping, or at least shopping for certain types of items, such as clothing, or feeling that they had to resort to shopping in certain types of settings, such as relatively affordable “big box” stores.

Some participants went further in their comments about consumerism and consumption. I did not ask participants questions about the voluntary simplicity movement in particular, and the phrase voluntary simplicity was not one invoked by participants in their conversations with me; however, a few participants articulated a perspective which resonated especially well with the central tenets of the voluntary simplicity movement. They described their commitments to slowing down their lives and their consumption, and learning to choose less rather than more.

Amitah: It's always more, more, more. Um, there's always something new. And you've gotta have it, you know?
Kaela: Yeah.
Amitah: It's like you gotta keep up with, yeah, it's distraction and it just seems to be everywhere.
Kaela: Okay.
Amitah: You know, where do encounter it? Not just on the television but on the radio and out, you know, when you're out and about, um, storefront windows, you know, wherever you are. Or if you're over at a friend's place and they've got this newest thing, you know. Um, and what that does for me is that it makes me want to go more the other way.
Kaela: Uh huh.
Amitah: And that's probably why I've dropped out of the middle class [chuckle]....
Amitah: 'Cause I just don't believe in it.
Kaela: Uh huh.

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Amitah: It doesn't, you know, I'm, you know, I'll go to Value Village on a Saturday or something. Even though it's owned by Jimmy Pattison? Somebody told me that. And somebody else said, no it's not. But it's almost a big box store now, isn't it?

Kaela: Yes, yes.

Amitah: I'll go there and I'll spend three hours and spend, you know, \$30 or \$40 on four different sweaters and come back, but I'll still feel empty.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: You know. [soft laughter] And I go, well that was kind of fun, it wasted some time. Um, but at the same time it doesn't really fulfil anything. Um, there seems to be a general lack of fulfilment and we're trying to fill that hole with things like shopping.

(interview excerpt, February 21, 2007)

Julie: Um, I buy fewer, like significantly fewer clothes. Probably 20 percent of the clothes I might have bought 10 years ago. Not 20 percent less, 80 percent less.

Kaela: Oh okay.

Julie: Eighty percent, yeah.

Kaela: Okay.

Julie: Um [pause], I buy much less processed food....So, we have a rule where...every time something new comes into the house, something existing has to go out. Well, it changes how badly you want something.

(interview excerpt, March 14, 2007)

Sarah: Yeah. Um, I don't like buying...all this technology drives me crazy. I think there's a place for it but I also think that we're just wasting a lot.

Kaela: So the gizmos –

Sarah: Drive me crazy.

Kaela: Okay.

Sarah: I mean, I have a cell phone but I don't have any other phone and it's just easier for people to get a hold of me and I've kinda fallen into that, it's just kind of the way it works right now, right. But, I mean I never have the latest anything and I have the, the free phone that came with my plan. You know, and if I need something electronic I'll just go with the basic standard. Just let me just, you know, I don't even care! If it works and gets me by that's all that matters. Um, and I think that we keep, we keep changing these annually so that everyone's throwing all their stuff out and using more stuff and it drives me crazy.

(interview excerpt, April 24, 2007)

Another way that some participants talked about reducing their shopping as a way of resisting consumerism was to take up do-it-yourself practices. These include growing and preserving food, making clothing or gifts, and, in a couple of cases, joining an agricultural co-operative. In the following excerpts, participants discussed their use these tactics:

“And I have my own garden and I grow stuff. I canned tomatoes and made jam,” she also noted, as ways that she can control what she buys and consumes. (shopping trip excerpt, Bonnie, February 5, 2007)

Carla: Um, and, I make a lot of stuff for Christmas. I bake. Um, 'cause I don't like the idea of giving people things that they just collect. So often times I give them things that they can consume. And I made a lot of gifts too like, uh, my neighbours, my parents, the

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neighbours to my parents, he's an old English gentleman, he loves, um, the BBC, so I made a whole bunch of CDs for him on CBC plays.

(interview excerpt, February 13, 2007)

James: We've also taken to making our own preserves when the fruit is in season. Which also works well on the pocketbook because they turn into lots of Christmas gifts. So that's been, that's been one of the benefits of staying locally and in season.

Kaela: Okay.

James: Because that gift-giving can really add up.

(interview excerpt, March 28, 2007)

She went to bring him back into the store, and returned to the sale boxes. She picked up a t-shirt in size XL and said, "Maybe I could reconstruct this into something." I asked her about what she might do with it, and she explained that she had seen a book on things to do with old t-shirts.

(shopping trip excerpt, mothers' network, May 19, 2007)

"I'm involved in an organic farm...", she explained. This is a co-operative farm, and she owns a share in it. (shopping trip excerpt, Vanessa, May 4, 2007)

Certainly, there was more to participants' do-it-themselves than a commitment to anti-consumerist resistance. As James noted, shopping for prepared foods and ready-made goods becomes expensive, and for consumer-citizens with material constraints an interest and skill in cooking or crafts can be enviable for various reasons. Sometimes, these activities were also pleasurable hobbies and interesting challenges; sometimes, they offered a way for participants to express their heartfelt caring for recipients of gifts; and sometimes, they gave participants an alternative to going into a store and buying items that others had decided they wanted or needed. Like all shopping and consumption, learning about do-it-yourself and voluntary simplicity has multiple dimensions: intellectual, as well as psychological, emotional and even spiritual.

These types of anti-consumerist resistance might help critical shoppers act on critical analyses of hegemonic consumerism and unrestrained consumption, as they engage consumer-citizens more directly in the process of production. Movements such as fair trade and local buying aim to narrow the gap between consumers and producers, but a movement such as do-it-yourself implies that this gap can be eliminated; however, the definition of consumption offered by Roseneil and Hearn (1999) that I have employed in this inquiry clarifies that consumption is always productive. On the flip side, I also note that production always involves consumption of energy and raw ingredients. In contemporary Western societies, moreover, production likely also involves shopping. From amateur "do-it-yourselfers" who grow their own food and people who farm for a living, producers of the most basic consumable items shop for seeds and soil, tools and equipment. Feminist scholars have argued that production and formal employment have been distinguished from consumption and home-based work largely for social purposes, namely the

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privileging of masculinized spheres over feminized spheres. Even the historical academic focus on production has helped maintain a patriarchal social order. In blurring the sharp division between production and consumption, I contribute to the disruption of that social order and the ideological “common sense” (Gramsci, 1971) which underlies it.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Patterns of Learning

One of the basic faults that poststructural or postmodern scholars find with critical scholarship is its tendency to speak about social development as a linear advance towards emancipation. Within the field of critical adult education, it is tempting to see learning as the process which enables people to participate in such an advance; however, changes in individuals' financial, health or other personal circumstances contribute to learning and action. For a variety of reasons, some participants realized that they tended “to not mix with the crowd any more” (interview excerpt, Eddie, April 11, 2007) or were “not...joiner[s] in that stuff these days” (interview excerpt, Sean, March 24, 2007). For two participants, the change had to do with returning to Canada after doing volunteer work in the Global South:

Violet: Um, well a couple of years ago I was an intern...in Bangkok, Thailand. And I worked for an...umbrella organization for, um, all the agencies and NGOs working to, to fight child labour. And it's something that I really didn't take very seriously until I spent time with them and I did research for them. Um, yet I'm not really sure, I don't know, I'm just trying to reconcile that because I know that I could make choices around child labour, like [pause] that it's made by child labour, but I don't really know exactly which companies are doing it.
(interview excerpt, April 4, 2007)

Therèse clarified that she has come to understand – partly through her experience in Bangladesh – the layers of production and the impossibility of really knowing where something comes from. (shopping trip excerpt, Therèse, February 9, 2007)

She also pointed out that her life has changed since she...[returned to Canada]. She is married and has children; she is in Canada, not Bangladesh. (shopping trip excerpt, Therèse, February 9, 2007)

These stories illustrate how the constant construction of knowledge, priorities, options and practices occurs as one's social circumstances and personal experiences mesh. Unlike Therèse and Violet, Karen, Nicole and Alice seemed to retain the lessons from their time abroad in their lives back in Canada. Perhaps there were differences in how dramatically their circumstances had changed since their return, or perhaps they were part of a social network or community – real or imagined – which helped them transfer a politics formed elsewhere to Canada. Why some people are able to hang onto certain pieces of radical learning or how they

It hardly seems worth analyzing the Black Spot campaign as it seems such an impoverished example of social critique that is neither especially socially minded nor particularly critical. But I would contend that this campaign, far from being discontinuous with *AdBusters'* prior and broader politics, represents only the latest crystallization of what I will call *AdBusters'* politics of [gestural] resistance, symptomatic of a broader tendency in many ostensibly resistant social texts. And this politics, which seems to be becoming remarkably fashionable in a variety of circles, must be critiqued as not only inadequate for confronting the contemporary global political and cultural hegemony of neoliberalism, but in many ways rehearsing key tenets of neoliberalism so as to make *AdBusters* a highly problematic political text, one made even more worrisome in that it smugly wears the mantle of radical resistance.

– Max Haiven, “Privatized Resistance: *AdBusters* and the Culture of Neoliberalism,”
p. 86

are able to transfer such learning into new contexts are important questions and, although I am unable to answer them here, I note them because they are worth exploring in future research.

Buying in or Selling Out: Concluding Thoughts

In contrast to the conclusions of Luxemburg (2008) and Lorde (2002), participants in this study did not summarily dismiss all hegemonic tools. Shopping is, after all, a primary tool of the consumerist ideology which underpins contemporary globalization, at least in Canada and throughout the Global North. According to the logic of Luxemburg and Lorde, shopping-based resistance likely distracts citizens from the aim of real structural change and reiterates, rather than transforms, societal structures. The question of whether and how shopping can move from a process which reiterates hegemonic ideology and common sense (Gramsci, 1971) to part of a transformative, rather than a conservative, social movement has no simple answer.

I began this chapter by outlining Littler's (2005) analysis of four examples of anti-consumerist activism. Her analysis points to the contributions made through anti-consumerist resistance such as the culture jamming of Kalle Lasn, even as she notes some of its limitations and complications. Undoubtedly, Lasn's critique of consumerism has helped build awareness of the problems with consumption and its driving ideology; however, this does not mean that his strategy and some of his tactics have gone without criticism. His critics argue that, by developing and marketing his brand of Blackspot Sneakers, he has become complicit with the neoliberal, consumerist ideology that he claims to oppose (Haiven, 2007; Heath & Potter, 2004). Moreover, what is seen by some as *AdBusters'* lack of attention to structures of gender and race diminishes Lasn's credibility as a proponent of social justice. (☹) As Max Haiven (2007) writes,

However, *AdBusters'* many myopias, notably its near total disregard for class (both as a “historic” and sociological category), its persistently simplistic, libertarian, and tacitly sexist approach to gender, its near complete indifference towards race, and its confusing (yet aggressive) ambivalence between revolutionary and reformist politics, all conspire to make the magazine an infuriatingly difficult text to approach. (p. 87)

Such critiques, as well as the limitations which Littler (2005) spells out for the examples in her article, establish the complications of reflexivity and change. Although some discourses and responses, such as fully hegemonic books like Kinsella's (2001) novel *Confessions of a Shopaholic* or Roddick's book *Take it Personally* might not involve any reflexivity or might employ a narcissistic form of reflexivity, other projects, such as those initiated by Klein, Lasn or Talen, or Ozeki's (1998) novel *My Year of Meats*, can combine narcissistic and relational reflexivity. For their part, participants in this study often engaged in a complex of reflexive

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processes. Moreover, as Littler (2005) recognizes, relational reflexivity is not sufficient to persuade individuals to take radical action together with others in their communities – real or imagined (Anderson, 1991). People's emotional and material needs and priorities must also be recognized and accommodated within organizational and movement discourses. Littler (2005) herself offers these words:

“Anti-consumerism”, then, and what it wishes for, is not a monolith. If an awareness of the role of popular discourse in shaping the citizen-consumer can be found, so to can romanticizations of activist enclaves that shore up its boundaries; if there are spaces where consumers are shaped as dupes, there are also sophisticated understandings of the affective investments and complex psychologies of consumer identities. Similarly, the type of consumer and anti-consumer being imagined, the role of activism to cultural and social change, and the scenarios imagined as happening after the boycott can all vary substantially. (p. 242)

Who shoppers learn to be and how they learn to make change through and around their shopping varies in part, as Littler notes, by the type and level of their reflexivity. Building on Giddens' and Beck's ideas about the culture of reflexivity which is accompanying globalization in Western societies, scholars such as Connelly and Prothero (2008) use green shopping to exemplify how reflexivity has become a part of daily living. This understanding of reflexivity, considered an important aspect of learning, supports the assertion made throughout this thesis that learning occurs during the activities of daily life. What Littler clarifies is that reflexivity has nuances which help distinguish learning which is part of a societal change agenda from learning which is essentially reiterative of the societal status quo. Social and material differences between consumer-citizens increase the range of understandings about and practices in shopping, even if they all identify in some way as good or critical shoppers.

As Barndt (2002) further notes, over the past century or so, much highly organized, collective resistance has been carried out through labour unions in the arena of formal employment. Limiting the conceptualization of social action to such formalized strategies tends to masculinize resistance, and overlooks much of women's historical and ongoing resistances which can appear solitary and private. Sparks (1997) makes a similar point when she argues that dissidence is more likely considered a response for male citizens because it requires the quality of courage which, according to hegemonic common sense, describes men, not women. Differences between individuals, and between the communities that critical consumer-citizens imagine and are imagined in blur the difference between societal revolution and reform, between buying in and selling out.

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CHAPTER NINE SOMEWHERE AROUND THE MIDDLE

As I start to draft this chapter, it is the middle of the Jewish holiday Passover. In my introductory chapter, I talked about growing up in a kosher household, but Passover makes the everyday rules of *kashrut* seem like a minimalist approach to dietary restrictions. In my family, we had special sets of dishes, cookware and cutlery just for Passover. As children, my sisters and I would help my mother clean the house in the days before the week-long holiday. We would buy special foods – matzo and other items made with no leavening. Although we could have ordinary fruits and vegetables, many everyday staples such as rice, corn, beans and lentils were off-limits. Prepared foods had to be designated “kosher for Passover” because of the frequent use of additives which might violate the rules. For the most part, this special food was expensive, tasteless and highly refined. One of the few food treats, for me, was chocolate (which I maintain should be accorded the status of a food group on its own). Chocolate was not a staple in our household, except for this one week when our cupboards were well stocked with kosher for Passover chocolate bars.

Again, I fast forward a few decades to 2006, when this doctoral research project was well under way. One morning, while listening to the radio show *The Current*, I heard an interview with journalist Carol Off who had just had her book, *Bitter Chocolate* (Off, 2006), released. In that book, Off traces the development of chocolate as a favourite food item in Western culture for children and adults alike. She also traces the long standing role of imperialism and slavery in cocoa production, and the legacy of both in today's cocoa growing and harvesting areas, including the country of Côte d'Ivoire. As I shop for some traditional Passover foods in 2008, I wonder why none of the kosher for Passover chocolate available in Vancouver is not also certified fair trade. The irony of buying and consuming a treat which originates with the enslavement of children during a holiday which celebrates freedom from another long-ago enslavement is one example of the multiple, often clashing, discourses, practices and pedagogies about shopping and consumption that I, like other shoppers, encounter and construct in everyday life. What I have learned about chocolate, globalization and my own identity exemplifies the promise and desire as well as the trouble and critique of shopping.

Still later in the process of drafting this chapter, I find myself listening to accounts of the Democratic leadership race as it unfolds in the United States. Just as shopping and consumption can be seen as politically charged processes, formal politics in Western societies can also be seen

Angered by what they consider sexist news coverage of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, many women and erstwhile Clinton supporters are proposing boycotts of the cable networks, putting up videos on a "Media Hall of Shame," starting a national conversation about sexism and pushing Mrs. Clinton's rival, Senator Barack Obama, to address the matter.

– Katharine Seelye and Julie Bosman, "Media Charged With Sexism in Clinton Coverage," ¶1

as connected to the arenas of shopping and consumption. The hallmarks of consumer culture – market research, branding, advertising – have been extended to political parties and political candidates. Governing by policy is replaced by governing by polls, and positions are replaced by images. Just as shoppers can be said to vote with their dollars, so too can voters be said to shop for politicians. And, just as relations of gender, race and class are evident in shopping and consumption, so too are they in the campaigns, operation and media accounts of formal politics.

In this Democratic campaign, people insist that the campaign has nothing to do with social characteristics such as gender, race and class. Barack Obama, the son of a white woman and a black man, who has lived in Hawaii and Asia, portrays himself as, alternately, an American and a citizen of the world. He appeals to a youthful generation of American citizens eager to put racism behind them. As Sarah suggested during her interview with me, racism and race are being discursively elided, so that the reluctance, particularly by individuals who consider themselves socially progressive, to be associated with racism becomes reluctance to speak about race. This point is in full agreement with the conclusions of critical race scholars such as Knowles (2003) and Frankenberg (1993).

Thinking back to conversations with other participants, I remember Ellen's frustration with the view that Obama and his steadfast supporter, Oprah Winfrey, are held up as fulfilments of the American Dream and the ability of all American citizens to shed the constraints of a racialized body. As the recent Democratic leadership contest confirmed, though, race remains very much alive in American society. Critical scholars conclude that Canada's discourse of multiculturalism serves to deflect critical attention away from ongoing racism (Dhruvarajan, 2000) and that social characteristics such as gender continue to function through a consumerist culture among other spheres of social life (Currie, 1999).

Likewise, gender relations are evoked during this political campaign, predominantly through the candidacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton. I also recalled another comment that Sarah made during her interview as she suggested that women have achieved equality with men, at least in Canadian society. This seems inconsistent with both the disproportionately high number of Clinton's female supporters, and the way in which mainstream American media continually takes aim at and lampoons Clinton and the idea of a female president. (👁)

Class is also active in this Democratic campaign. Clinton is perceived as the front runner among working class voters, at least for members of the white working class. The dilemma for Democratic citizens with multiple social affiliations does not escape the attention of journalists.

- How do individuals understand and manifest the idea of “learning” and the potential to learn in the course of daily life?
- How do they learn to find and respond to complicated, obscured consumer information? How is this learning, and how are shopping and consumption practices more generally, integrated into other parts of their lives, including the possibility of social action in response to consumerist globalization?
- How do individuals living in Canadian society, in which a postmodern sensibility and the phenomenon of globalization converge, understand and articulate the implications of their “location” (within cultural milieus, social structures and geographic places) for their shopping options, constraints and preferences? Further to studies of the relationships between consumption and citizenship in earlier eras, how do individuals today relate this learning and their consumption to citizenship in the nation-state and “global” citizenship?
- How can “radical” be understood and acted out in the context of complicated identities and social relations, and a complicated phenomenon such as globalization?
- What new meaning might arise for case study methodology, which typically contains a study within a community setting or a specific site, in light of a phenomenon which claims to unbind social relations within and across nation-states? In an era which emphasizes multiple levels of experience – the individual, the local, the national, the regional and the global – and gives rise to terms such as “glocalization” or “global citizenship,” where and how is evidence to be found? How can critical research respond to postmodernism’s dismantling of groups and categories?

– guiding questions

One news article discusses the struggle between “loyalties” (Seelye, 2007) for female African American Democrats. The participants in my study might have found it difficult to talk about their class positions, and Beck (2002 in Crompton, 2006) might describe class as a “zombie category”; however, the Democratic campaign exemplifies the ongoing operation of class, as well as gender and race, in Western societies. These three social categories have unique histories in the social relations of different countries, but, as the critical scholars cited throughout this thesis and my analyses establish, they continue to shape material and cultural relations across the Global North, including in Canada. Despite ideologies of neoliberalism and consumerism, consumer-citizens cannot simply elect to extricate themselves from these relations, through either voting or shopping. Globalization is altering the discourses, meanings and experiences of gender, race and class but, within Canada as in other societies, these categories continue to structure social relations among consumer-citizens.

If that conclusion is accepted, how might this exploration of shopping expand understandings of adults' informal learning about globalization, identity and the politics of consumer-citizenship? Furthermore, what does this inquiry contribute to the pursuit of research about globalization in this time of globalization? In chapter one, I posed a series of questions which have guided the development and completion of this inquiry. (☹) In the remainder of this chapter, I return to these questions. Using the analyses discussed in the preceding chapters, I offer some final reflections in response to these questions, outline some of the limitations of my analyses and this study in general, and suggest some remaining questions and the potential for further research on these topics.

Conceptualizing Learning: Holistic Learning in Everyday Life

In chapter two, I conceptualized a type of learning which is incidental, as well as holistic. Drawing on the writing of feminist and other critical adult education scholars, I outlined a notion of learning which can be based in emotion, sensuality and spirituality (Dirkx, 2000; English, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; hooks, 2003; Tisdell, 1998, 2000), as well as the intellect emphasized by Foley (1999, 2001) and other critical adult educators (see, for example, Brookfield, 2005). In the chapters which detailed my approaches to and outcomes of data analysis, I applied this conceptualization to illustrate how, indeed, everyday life is replete with sites and sources of such learning. Shopping, understood as the search for, learning about, comparison between and acquisition of goods and services – typically through purchase, but also through swaps or “freecycling” – can become one of these sites. In my analytical pursuit of

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this argument, I used empirical data from interviews, focus groups and shopping trips with real-life participants, as well as stories of made-up characters from four popular novels which present discourses, understandings and experiences of shopping, consumption and consumerism in the Global North during contemporary globalization. That use of fiction not only provided data for analysis; it also suggests that the reading of fiction and the consumption of other forms of culture can be seen as additional sites of incidental learning apparent in everyday life.

Although I have talked about incidental, holistic learning throughout this text, I recognize that the line between incidental and more intentional learning can become blurred, just like the line between production and consumption. One of the findings that strikes me as noteworthy is that the appearance of a topic on a person's intellectual, emotional or spiritual “radar screen,” in combination with a curious disposition, might encourage a more deliberate learning process. In Ozeki's (1998) novel *My Year of Meats*, Jane's initially incidental learning becomes more purposeful as she begins to seek information and conduct research into topics such as the use of growth hormones in cattle. Participants in my study provided several examples of how learning which begins as incidental can become more formalized when they recognize the importance and implications of what they have learned. These participants were aware of such learning, even if they were also becoming aware of its limitations.

Helen Colley, Phil Hodgkinson and Janice Malcolm (2002) suggest the possibility of thinking about elements of formality in informal learning and informality in formal learning; indeed, they argue that it might be more productive “to step outside the frames of this contest between formal and informal...learning, in which each set of protagonists exaggerates the weaknesses of the opposite case” (p. 9). Academic developments such as community service learning move teaching and learning outside the confines of the classroom and beyond the authority of the teacher, increasing the informality of learning in formal settings.

In this era of contemporary globalization, a hegemonic discourse of lifelong learning has developed. It seems to conflate learning with education, and to constrict the recognition of learning by imposing the logic of formality and credentialism on the learning which is most valued. As a site of learning, shopping is located outside the traditional, formal purview of the academy; however, there is a formality imparted into such a site by the social and economic structures and discourses which help shape people's lives and their learning. Still, I have not dispensed with rhetoric of informal learning. It is crucial that discussions of adult education respond to, without simply being guided by, a hegemonic script. If the way to talk about and

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bring recognition to the breadth and depth of learning which is not accompanied by a credential is to refer to it as informal, then for strategic reasons I am prepared to continue distinguishing between formal and informal learning, even as I note the limitations of that distinction.

My final note on adult learning theory relates to Foley's (1999, 2001) conceptualization of incidental learning which has been so important to this inquiry. Although Foley emphasizes the incidental learning which emerges through organized, collective action, I have investigated an arena in which individuals seem to learn and act on a more solitary, unorganized basis. As I have uncovered the depth and breadth of learning which occurs in critical shopping, I have extended Foley's conceptualization. Through the use of Anderson's (1991) concept of imagined community, I have also extended the conceptualization of shopping. Shoppers might appear to learn and act in solitude, but they carry a multitude of contacts and affiliations with them into and out of the store. I am not suggesting that there is no distinction between the individual and the collective, only that the division between them – like the division between formal and informal learning, the global and the local, or production and consumption – can be blurred and that such blurring contributes to an enriched understanding of learning, globalization and change.

Educating Critical Consumer-citizens

On a general level, my conceptualization of holistic adult learning asserts that there are multiple dimensions of learning. Although I have focused in this inquiry on incidental learning, these dimensions are present in the classroom as well and I think that this inquiry can contribute to critical adult learning in a formal arena of the classroom. Some of the thoughts that I raise in this section do not arise directly from my data; however, I think that they are important considerations in transferring the findings of this study of informal learning into more formal settings.

Formal education emphasizes the intellectual dimension of learning, but emotional, spiritual, sensual and experiential ways of knowing do not disappear when learners – and teachers – move from everyday experience into the classroom. In fact, the classroom is itself a setting of everyday experience. Community service learning and other forms of practica, options for creative assignments, and encouraging reflexivity among students and in their own pedagogical practices might be helpful to adult educators seeking a more critical and holistic approach in their classrooms. The work of Marino (1997) and Barndt (1999, 2002), both of whom incorporate visual art into their classroom-based and community-based education, offers interesting ideas and exercises.

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Littler's (2005) concepts of narcissistic and relational reflexivity are useful to instructors in any course which encourages reflexivity among students. Although reflexivity is often regarded by adult educators as important and beneficial in a blanket way, Littler's concepts and my use of them help clarify that reflexivity can be taken up and put to work in different ways with very different purposes and ends. For feminist and other critical adult educators, it is important to teach about the distinctions between these two forms of reflexivity and encourage relational reflexivity in particular among their students.

The focus of many critical scholars interested in societal transformation is often on oppressed groups living in the margins of society. Fraser's (1992) concept of subaltern counterpublics emphasizes the role of oppressed groups in generating counter-hegemonic critiques and discourses, and Sparks' (1997) concept of dissidence is similarly focused on oppressed groups; however, resistance can emerge from the social middle ground too. Many of the participants in this study, including me, described themselves as middle class and racially identified as white. On the whole, participants also had relatively high levels of education and career aspirations. In an inquiry into informal learning about the politics of consumption, citizenship and globalization, these participants and I undoubtedly live with great social privilege. This lack of socio-economic diversity and, to a lesser extent, the lack of racial and gender diversity, points to a major limitation of this study. The best that I can hope to have yielded here is a partial understanding of part of a contemporary phenomenon which helps characterize social life in Canadian society.

Still, in this limitation there is also an opportunity. Chapter two, in which I conceptualize consumer-citizenship, relates to both critical citizenship and consumer education. My discussion of resistance in that chapter, based on Fraser's (1992) notion of subaltern counterpublics and Sparks' (1997) notion of dissidence, and my application of it in the later analytical chapters might offer some interesting content for courses dealing with either of these topics, as well as the broader topic of globalization. Likewise, the analyses summarized in chapters six, seven and eight might contain relevant and useful points for courses exploring the workings of resistance, social movements, identity and learning.

In general, I avoid introducing new concepts or literature in this concluding chapter. The work of Ann Curry-Stevens is the singular exception. My focus in this inquiry has been on informal adult learning, rather than on education, either formal or informal; however, I think that connecting my study to Curry-Stevens' work helps illustrate its implications for critical adult

Further support for the role of the privileged in social movements comes from a review of the leaders of revolutionary social and political movements: Fidel Castro with his roots as a student leader and lawyer; Che Guevara as a physician; Paulo Freire, educated in law and later a senior government official in education and culture; Martin Luther King Jr., an ordained minister who also had earned a PhD; and Mahatma Gandhi, who was born into wealth, studied in Britain, and became a lawyer. The French revolution is understood to have been led by privileged students and the women's suffrage movement by many class-privileged women.

– Ann Curry-Stevens (2007), “New Forms of Transformative Education,” pp. 35-36



Participants in the study added complexity to this binary framework as they recognized that one's identity as privileged or oppressed fluctuates with the context in which one is situated. These educators advocate for a modified binary framework, where one's multiple identities serve to either moderate or exacerbate an experience of privilege, on one hand, and oppression, on the other. When trying to explain the patriarchal experience for a poor, White man, for example, it is helpful to describe his experience of patriarchy being moderated by being White and exacerbated by being poor. In this sense, supplemental identities that are privileged serve as protective devices that typically protect or buffer the individual from bearing the full brunt of that oppression. Similarly, bearing multiple oppressed identities serves to exacerbate or deepen one's experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and powerlessness. Understanding this construction of plural identities can be very helpful to the learner beginning to grapple with these issues.

– Ann Curry-Stevens (2007), “New Forms of Transformative Education,” p. 37

education. Like Gramsci (1971), Curry-Stevens understands that in a democracy with multiple “classes” – expanded to mean social groups – radical change is possible only when the oppressed and their privileged allies come together. Emerging from her empirical research with adult educators engaged in critical or transformative education with privileged learners, Curry-Stevens (2007) proposes a six-stage model “that intentionally seeks to engage privileged learners in workshops and classrooms and to assist in their transformation as allies in the struggle for social justice” (p. 33). First echoing the Gramscian understanding about the importance of building alliances, she goes on to provide examples of noteworthy radicals who had enjoyed social privilege, from Mahatma Gandhi to Fidel Castro to Che Guevara to Paulo Freire. (☹)

Curry-Stevens develops the notion of “pedagogy of the privileged,” in contrast to a Freirian pedagogy of the oppressed. She outlines the complications in determining who, exactly, is oppressed and who is privileged, given the reality of multiple identities for any individual. (☹) She carefully adopts a “universal construction’ of privilege” (Curry-Stevens, 2007, p. 37), which conveys an understanding that both privilege and oppression are present in most people's lives.

On the other hand, this does not mean that everybody lives with privilege in equal measure and outcome. Nor is it sufficient to explore the particular oppression experienced by learners who live with relative privilege. In Curry-Stevens' (2007), “Pedagogical applications of the universal construction of privilege will necessitate sufficient focus on each form of domination and, in so doing, decrease learners’ tendencies to avoid the gaze that interrogates privilege” (p. 38). Using this approach, critical adult educators can avoid a simplistic “good guys/bad guys” binary and begin to draw even learners with a relatively high degree of privilege into a critical examination of how privilege and oppression are structured, talked about and lived.

Curry-Stevens develops a preliminary pedagogical model for critical adult educators working with privileged learners. Her model involves a sequence of what she calls “confidence-shaking” and “confidence-building” (Curry-Stevens, 2007) among learners. As I have done in this inquiry, she recognizes the intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of learning. Using different language, she also agrees with Littler's (2005) conclusion that a shift from narcissistic to relational reflexivity, and individualism to collectivity, is necessary for meaningful change. Shifts on all of these dimensions, as well as in identity construction and behaviour, are all part of her educational project. Curry-Stevens' pedagogical model might help critical adult educators interested in consumption and citizenship develop courses and teaching strategies to work with learners, especially in the most privileged learning setting of the university classroom.

I write this paper as a contribution to a tradition which is in danger of being forgotten, at a time where it is sorely needed. A further question: How do we talk about radical adult education in these times, which seem to work only against it?

– Griff Foley, “Radical Adult Education and Learning,” p. 71

The application of Curry-Stevens' model in an action research study set in a course exploring consumerism, citizenship and/or globalization is an intriguing possibility to me.

Finally, I recall Foley's (2001) concern that critical pedagogy itself is being undermined, particularly in formal settings. (☹) Adult education has a long history of engagement in critical analysis and social justice, but this tradition is being increasingly marginalized within the educational sector as hegemonic neoliberalism encourages a human capital understanding of education. That view stresses education for credentialed rather than critical citizens, and rewards profitable rather than critical education programs. In response to this shift, evident especially in universities, I call on the leaders of adult education programs and the leaders of educational institutions across Canada to strengthen their resistance to the increasing privatization, corporatization and commodification of education and learning, and to reinstate critical studies across disciplines and departments to their previous and rightful place in public education at all levels. This can only be achieved by pressing governments at the provincial and federal levels to restore adequate funding for programs which might not be commercially lucrative, but create knowledge of profound value for a society of learner-citizens as well as consumer-citizens.

Walter (2007) describes the coming together of feminism and environmentalism in Clayoquot Sound during the early 1990s; however, many environmental organizations seem to have been absorbed into the mainstream and have lost sight of the reality that social relations are within, not outside of, ecology. For example, Vancouver-based David Suzuki has become an iconographic Canadian spokesperson for the environment. His background has also included civil rights activism, which grew out of his family's internment during the Second World War; however, these concerns are absent in the work of the foundation which bears his name and much of what is recognized as Canada's environmental movement. The impacts of poverty and wealth are as great an environmental issue as pollution, global climate change and food security; in fact, these issues are inextricably linked. Several participants spoke fervently about the need for environmentally sensitive policies and practices, but articulated no understanding of how environmental issues are also social issues. Even organizations and actions which still might be regarded as being outside the mainstream, such as Kalle Lasn's *AdBusters* and culture jamming, face criticism for neglecting important issues in their own analyses and critiques.

In his writing, Gramsci (1971) advocates alliance-building between the urban working class and the rural peasantry within the Italian society of his time. The potential for alliance-building has implications for the intellectuals who lead today's movements and organizations

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which aim to contribute to societal change, as well as the activists who enliven them. Neoliberal ideology discourages such alliances, as it does any kind of group identification and collective action. In my conversations with some participants, the emphasis was on narcissistic reflexivity (Littler, 2005). In conversations with other participants, there were indications of relational reflexivity (Littler, 2005), but these were accompanied by expressions of frustration with finding ways to put together disparate concerns and agendas, and to respond to dialectical tensions – between preferences and material constraints, between personal practices or circumstances and global conditions, between making change and reiterating the status quo. The presence of these types of reflexivity and frustrations implies that neoliberalism is affecting learning about change, confirming Gramsci's (1971) theory of the educational function of ideology and culture. Additional research investigating how particular organizations and movements encourage reflexive learning in the name of change would continue to build knowledge in this area.

Understanding and Enacting Change

Of all the themes explored in this inquiry, the issue of how to understand and enact radicalism and change remains the least conclusive. Conceptually, it is not difficult to distinguish between radicalism and reform, as Luxemburg (2008) does, but this distinction can seem more difficult to see in practice. There were examples of reformist, individualistic narcissistic reflexivity (Littler, 2005) evident in participants' comments, but these were outnumbered by comments with greater nuance and possibility. The most obvious example of narcissistic reflexivity is Jody's opinion that choosing paper bags rather than plastic bags is a little thing that can “help change the world.” Among other things, Gramsci (1971) warns about the adoption of a strategy of pragmatism. Reformism elevates pragmatism to the level of strategy; what matters is seen as whatever seems doable and workable. The problems with this approach, in relation to a discussion of meaningful societal change, seem obvious, but the question of how to actually achieve and validate change is tricky to answer. Sparks' (1997) conceptualization of dissidence helps illustrate the tension between reformism and radicalism, status quo and change.

In her own terms, Lorde (2002) argues that the “tools” of the privileged cannot be used by the oppressed to upset power relations. Bricolage, the methodology employed in this inquiry, takes as its premise that tools do not have set applications. The bricoleur's view that nobody can claim ownership of “tools” has conceptual, as well as methodological, implications. My conversations with participants yielded no firm directives for change. Some participants seemed satisfied with narcissistic reflexivity and reformist ambitions, while others seemed interested in

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engaging in relational form of reflexivity and pursuing more substantive change. Faced with a combination of multiple ideological discourses and a sense that information is being obscured, participants live with the constant tension between knowing and not being able to know, in a society which also constantly pushes them to learn. As bricoleurs of sorts, participants and other critical shoppers look for ways to learn about the politics of their shopping and consumption, and how to enact some form of resistance as they build knowledge and understanding. They understand the limitations of their knowledge, even if they find those limitations frustrating, and they make use of tools for knowledge construction in creative, often unanticipated ways.

The feminist critical scholarship by Barndt and Marino extend Gramsci's ideas. Marino's (1997) urge to look for "cracks in consent" and Barndt's (2002) ideas on the ordinariness of resistance acknowledges that apparently small actions might reflect great reflexivity and risk, and relate to change in unpredictable ways. As Barndt (2002) further clarifies, the tendency to conceptualize resistance in terms of organized, collective action favours the masculinized arena of formal employment and overlooks less organized, more feminized forms of resistance.

Although most participants appreciated that their shopping and consumption had political importance, few spoke at length about the arena of formal politics. Gramsci (1971), Luxemburg (2008) and Holst (2007) explain that a party dedicated to radical purposes is necessary for societal transformation. Several participants spoke about the decline in voting rates and political engagement, although they themselves did not know how to remedy that problem. Critical, holistic adult learning which incorporates critiques of hegemonic ideologies and their associated common sense is, as Gramsci (1971) realizes, a crucial first step in political participation and creation of a party dedicated to transforming society and its unjust social structures.

Protecting Consumer-citizens

There are, as well, immediate and practical implications of this inquiry for consumer-citizens. In chapter six, I discussed the need for consumer literacy, and the confounding nature of information which is provided to shoppers. Labels can contain highly technical information and be difficult to read or understand. In the absence of evenly applied regulations across and beyond Canada, claims of organic production, fair trade and provenance have multiple meanings. Even shoppers who prefer to make certain decisions feel confused and ill informed. Recently proposed changes to regulations governing "Made in Canada" labelling are consistent with the clarity that several participants in this study are seeking and are, in my opinion, a welcome addition to consumer information and protection policies. Further clarification of organic and fair trade

Kaela: Right, okay. Today, shoppers can buy things produced all over the world. What do you think this means for you as a Canadian or as a citizen of another country living in Canada?

Amitah: Hmm, well, free trade isn't it? We're in the age of free trade? Um...

Kaela: Is it free?

Amitah: Is it free, that's a good question. [chuckle] It's not free, is it? It's um, well the world seems to be run by corporations these days. And we're told it's good for us but is it really good for us? We don't see the impact. Um, I think again we end up being disconnected from, um, from the things that we use or consume. Um, we don't see the impact on people or on the planet, again. Um, what does it mean for me here? Well, being in a wealthier country, I think it's our responsibility to use our, I mean the values of this society really are money. It's a money culture and so that is, sort of, where the power lies. Um, you know, talking about of course climate change and global warming and there's a lot people saying, you know, we need a carbon, um, rationing system and we need to, um, make people sort of pay for the carbon units that they use otherwise people will never, never change. Like, but if you have to pay for it...oh, you have to start having to make choices because it's impacting you directly.

Kaela: Right.

Amitah: And it's measurable. Um, so I think that all the cheap goods that are available, um, to us, 99 per cent of which are, is just stuff, we don't need it, it's just stuff to fill up our houses with and then throw out, what [goes into] the landfill...later, um, we need to, we need to really have more, we should be more educated, we should know better. Um, where am I going with this? What does it mean for me. I think we need to be more responsible, um, and change the way that we look at those things. Um, and countries seem to be forced into this free trade global economy, um, and I think that in terms of the global economy it ends up making them dependent on us and it's not a sustainable economy for other countries, um, you know, countries that are exporting so much food that they can't feed themselves.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: But they have to keep exporting.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: To make money, you know.

Kaela: Uh huh.

Amitah: Um, it seems all backwards. So I think there needs to be that awareness, um, 'cause we're the ones that are buying it.

– interview excerpt, February 21, 2007

claims would similarly support consumer-citizens in their decision-making, and should be driven by combined efforts of government and certifying bodies, as well as by organizations concerned with these issues and consumer rights more broadly. Similarly, concerns raised in this inquiry as well as recent stories in mainstream and alternative media about threats to personal health and safety posed by products ranging from plastics to paints, or from cosmetics to genetically modified food demand greater research, regulation (at the federal level in particular) and clarity.

Although they are appropriate and called for, the addition of such policies as well as improvements in consumer information would have a limited impact on the options available to consumer-citizens. As participants confirmed, affordability is still a major concern. Participants' largely middle class status and urban residence might expand their shopping options, but they recognized their own financial constraints and the constraints on people with even fewer economic resources. Some participants attached these constraints to a broader analysis of globalization. They articulated an awareness of how policy directions such as “free trade” do not expand freedom for consumer-citizens, within and beyond Canada. (☞) Some participants talked about the insidiousness of a discourse of freedom at the World Trade Organization or the World Bank, which aids in the conflation between democracy and capitalism. No policy can protect consumer-citizens against this, but critical learning can provide a degree of inoculation.

Exploring Globalization

There are inter-related methodological and conceptual lessons emerging from this inquiry. Methodologically, this study confirms that bricolage is an intuitive, creative, cumulative and practical process. Despite Kincheloe's (2001, 2005) cautions about using bricolage, this inquiry illustrates how case study bricolage and strategies of crystallization (Richardson, 2000) can contribute to the study of complex phenomena such as globalization and learning. Such an approach to research recognizes, works with and disputes traditional boundaries around what constitute data, and between insiderness and outsiderness of a study's researcher, participants, evidence and disciplinary practice. The theory behind this methodological direction seems especially important to a phenomenon such as globalization in a period such as postmodernism, both of which are associated with a breakdown in borders, identities and traditions.

Although I welcome many of Kincheloe's (2001, 2005) thoughts about bricolage, I am unconvinced that chaos and complexity theories can replace structural theories. For researchers concerned with social and environmental justice, conceptualizations developed from critical, feminist or other structuralist traditions remain helpful. A central challenge is to incorporate

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poststructural and postmodern ideas about the fuzziness of boundaries and partiality of identity and truth, without feeding into neoliberal discourse by obviating structures. As critical race theorists such as Twine (2000) argue, race is constructed as people relate to one another in a society, but that does not mean that race is not structured in all societies. As Curry-Stevens (2007) further establishes, in the Global North it is possible to see both privilege and oppression in people's lives, but this does not mean that privilege and oppression no longer have any impact on them. Structures can be fluid and discursively constructed *and* be real and materially present.

Thinking through these ideas has helped me understand what it means to conduct bricolage with rigour. Rigour requires that I begin with ontological, epistemological and methodological clarity, and I proceed with a commitment to the purpose and questions of the research project. I do not have to pursue a carefully planned and deliberately executed method, and can be open to incorporating varied methods, sources of data and analytical approaches which become apparent as I move through the inquiry. It also means that I am reflective, transparent and consistent about my ontological, epistemological and methodological stance.

I have already noted the limitation to this inquiry evident in participants' largely middle class, white identity, and related it to critical consumer and citizenship education. This can also be discussed as a methodological limitation. My framing of this study as centrally concerned with shopping seemed to appeal to participants with middle class identity or aspirations. This makes sense to me, given the hegemonic construction of shopping as a middle and upper class leisure activity. Although at least one of the Vancouver neighbourhoods where I tried to recruit participants – The Drive – is considered ethno-racially diverse, I did not achieve the diversity that I had hoped for. As I noted in chapter four, most participants came to the study through listservs or word of mouth, rather than by seeing in-store flyers. Other than the listserv from my department, I have no idea of the composition of the listservs which promoted my study. I am thankful for that promotional assistance, but I wonder if the members of these listservs are, in the main, white, middle class and well educated. A second limitation of this study is my decision to focus on shopping for goods. There is an expanding service sector in Western societies, and understandings and experiences of shopping for services – including adult education itself – might yield interesting and important additions to scholarship in this area.

These methodological limitation points to an associated conceptual limitation. In studies of globalization, the tendency to construct binaries leads to the rhetorical division of the Global North and the Global South. Each side is then associated with other sets of binaries: wealth and

Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact.

– Raymond Williams (1993), “Culture is Ordinary, p. 90

poverty, privilege and oppression, developed and undeveloped. Participants' identification as middle class or aspiring-to-middle class reiterates a problematic refrain of wealthy consumers in the Global North and poor producers in the Global South. It obscures the degree to which there are material and social divides within the Global North. A few participants, notably Amitah and Ellen, articulated an awareness of this fact, but it remained on the periphery of conversations. This fact also tended to remain unacknowledged in the novels that I analyzed, with the exception of Ozeki's (1998) *My Year of Meats*. It is something which needs to be intentionally inserted into conceptualization and teaching about globalization, as well as consumption and citizenship.

Closing Thoughts

Over the past few decades, the academic field known as cultural studies has developed. Although Raymond Williams, a pioneers in this field, identified as an adult educator, cultural studies has drifted away from adult education. Strongly influenced by Gramsci's writing, Williams (1993) stresses the ordinariness of culture and its importance as a site of learning. (☹) Although shopping and consumption have become popular topics for cultural studies scholars, the resulting scholarship often overlooks the role of the social in determining and understanding the cultural. This is the problem about which Currie (1999) cautions, and one that I have tried to avoid. In recalling a Gramscian understanding of the dialectical relationship between culture and social life, and the importance of that relationship for both adult learning and societal change, this inquiry represents a sort of reclamation of intellectual territory by adult education.

I titled my introductory chapter *In the Beginning* because it marked the start of this text and outlined the emergence of my interest in this project. Although this chapter marks the end of my thesis, I prefer to think of it as a mid rather than an end point. As much as I have learned, my questions remain only partially answered. Participants' tendency to identify as middle class, white and female, as well as my focus on in-store shopping are two important limitations of this study. How can adult learning be more fully conceptualized and researched? How might other dimensions of learning, such as intuition which I mention but do not focus on, contribute to such work? How can critical adult education about the dialectics of globalization, citizenship and consumption be developed and put to use, from the classroom to the advocacy organization? What does change entail, and what is the potential for radicalism in everyday life? What methodological challenges and opportunities emerge in researching learning about and during globalization? This academic project might be done, but my exploration of the ties between adult learning, shopping, citizenship and globalization is still very much in process.

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APPENDIX A: INTERLUDES

Interlude 1: Images of Promise and Desire



Figure A1: Toilet paper with a message, shopping trip, April 2007

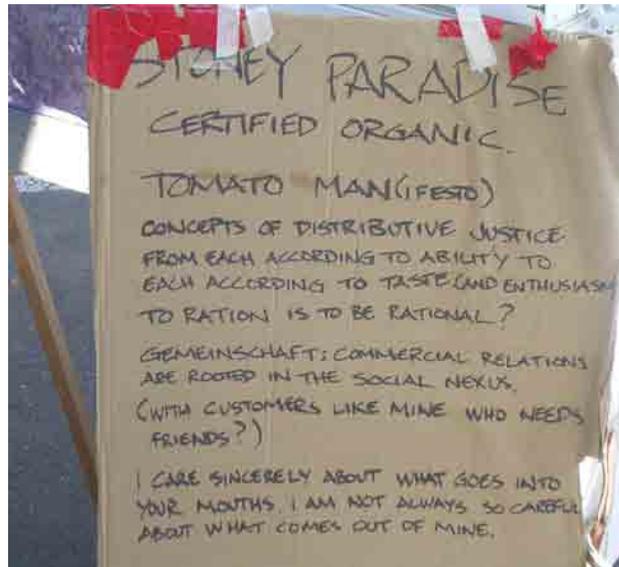


Figure A2: Tomato Man(ifesto), Trout Lake Farmers' Market, Vancouver, Canada, October 2006



Figure A3: Syn Bar & Grill, Victoria BC, Canada, March 2006 (now closed)



Figure A4: A vinegar for all occasions, shopping trip, April 2007

Interlude 2: Images of Trouble and Critique

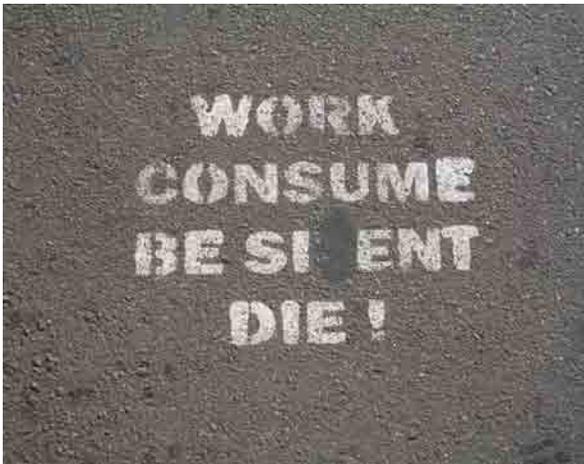


Figure A5: Graffiti outside Central Train Station, Sydney, Australia, December 2006



Figure A6: Sign at the community market, Airlie Beach, Australia, December 2006



Figure A7: Church sign, Dublin, Ireland, June 2007

Interlude 3: Shopping for a Dissertation

In the talking to others about a doctoral program in my department, I heard the process outlined like this: First you take some courses, then you write the comprehensive examination, then you produce your research proposal and apply for ethics approval, then you conduct your research, analyze your data and summarize it all in your dissertation. The dissertation is the purchase, both the product and the leverage, of the program.

I have come to understand the process a bit differently. Laurel Richardson (2000) outlines that writing is not just a way to share knowledge already developed; rather, it is also a process of inquiry and knowledge construction. The production of this text has been an extension of my research methods and learnings, not just a process of talking about them. All along the way, shopping and consumption, learning and globalization inserted themselves into the process, as I bought everything from a computer and printer to paper to dozens of books on consumption and anti-consumerism. (The irony that, in three years I spent more of my disposable income on anti-consumerist books than anything else has not escaped me!)

As I approached the analysis of my interview, shopping trip and focus group data, I was advised to use qualitative data analysis software. I considered two commercial packages, and attended educational sessions for those products. Thinking about my data and the context of my study, I got curious and conducted an online search for “open source qualitative analysis software.” Open source software is, after all, an attempt by programmers to resist the corporatization of technology, which is so important to the globalization project, and democratize its use and development. I found a program called Weft QDA and, after reading some reviews of it written by other researchers, decided that it was the best choice for me. It was affordable (i.e., free of charge!), straightforward to learn, and helpful in highlighting and organizing patterns in my data. On the other hand, unlike the commercial products, it was unknown in my department and I was on my own to figure it all out. Also, it soon became apparent that Weft QDA is more limited than the commercial programs; then again, I didn’t think that I needed their bells and whistles. It’s true that Weft QDA couldn’t produce diagrams, but I found another open source package (BlockNote) to generate a conceptual mind map. More than anything, using Weft QDA became a reminder of the constancy of consumption and learning, and the reality that even the most radical research is embedded in whatever project it tries to resist.

Interlude 4: A PhD Student, her Books, and her Search for a Bookcase

Doctoral students read a lot of books and journal articles and conference proceedings. Although I relied on online articles and the library as much as possible, I had acquired dozens of books to add to my five still-unpacked boxes of books and papers – in addition to what was unpacked and shelved. My progress, and the sanity of my partner, Karen, and me depended on our getting new bookcases. Except for my grandfather's towering bookcase, most of our bookcases used a simple modular system of pine planks. They were functional, but gave our home the look of a student residence – temporary and inexpensive. We didn't want to extend that look any further.

Nor did we want to buy more bookcases like the one that we had bought a couple of years earlier. It looked fine in its spot in the hallway and was holding up well, but it didn't match the furnishings in the other rooms. Besides, since we had bought it, I had heard more about sustainable wood sourcing and was no longer comfortable buying furniture made from Asian wood, unless it came with a certification that I could trust.

Ikea, with its decent prices, aesthetics, functionality and decent reputation for its sourcing of wood, had lots of bookcases; however, most of them were made of pressboard or fiberboard, both of which off-gas formaldehyde. Ikea had a couple of bookcases that matched our furniture, but they were either too small or too tall. Feeling like the fairy tale Goldilocks without the benefit of Mama Bear's furnishings, I spent two years scouring local stores whose prices we could afford. I liked the idea of buying quality used furniture, and we turned to the many antique and collectible. China and curio cabinets abounded but, except for the relatively small (and pricey) lawyer's bookcase with glass doors, bookcases were not to found.

With my book collection growing in size and diminishing in organization, I gave up on second hand bookstores and turned to the few local stores we hadn't yet checked. How surprised we were to find bookcases made in the Lower Mainland from BC wood, available in different sizes and stains to hold our books and fit in our rooms, in the locally owned furniture store a 15-minute walk from home! We had avoided it because of its notoriously tacky television commercials; I had assumed that its inventory would match its marketing. The bookcases were reasonably priced and attractive, and we decided to put one in each of two rooms, chose stains and placed our order. My search for a bookcase was over.

Interlude 5: My Dinner at Moyo's

In December 2007, I attended in a conference in Stellenbosch, South Africa. One night, delegates had dinner at Moyo's. Moyo's promotes itself as an African dining experience. The main dining tent also covers a stage at the centre and a stage at one end, and a couple of treetop dining platforms accommodate more intimate suppers. A pathway guides diners through the gift shop and into the dining area, and the buffet tables piled high with "African" dishes ran alongside the length of the tent. The food was tasty (and I appreciated the variety of non-meat options), the service was pleasant, the entertainment – "African" drumming, dancing and singing on the centre stage and Reggae music on the far stage – was lively, and the other delegates at my table were wonderful company. Still, I felt uncomfortable and confused throughout the evening.

Shortly after we were seated, we were greeted by a young woman who offered to paint diners' faces with geometric designs. I felt increasingly drawn into more than a dinner out; this was fast becoming a spectacle of consumption, and I didn't understand that spectacle or my role in it. Who were the musicians, dancers and face painter, and which, if any, racial, ethnic or cultural heritage were they representing? What was their role in this evening? How was I implicated in a commercial appropriation of culture, ethnicity and race? What was "African" about all this? I declined the face-painter's offer.

During this inquiry, and especially since my dinner at Moyo's, I have thought often about what race, ethnicity and culture mean for me. As a Jew, I understand myself as white/non-white/never black. At some points in history, Jews have been engaged actively in Western cultural life and have been regarded as part of the social mainstream. At other points in history, efforts have been made to distinguish Jewish minorities. Nazism is the most notorious example, but the ghettos in European cities preceded Nazism by centuries. Back here in Canada, only two generations ago, universities had quotas restricting the number of Jewish students. My father grew up in Toronto, where signs in the Beach community advised "No Jews or dogs allowed." Today, in Canada as elsewhere in the Global North, Jews of European descent are racialized as white, and I live with the advantages afforded by whiteness. Still, the Medieval image of Shylock, the greedy Jew, continues to resonate culturally, and from time to time I've listened to other people relate with a measure of satisfaction how they managed to "Jew down" a contractor at home or a vendor at a vacation-spot marketplace.

Interlude 6: Radical Accidents

When I was a child, my father, Donny, loved to tell stories about his childhood. A favourite was about the time he and his friend, a black boy named Harry, went ice skating. The story is retold by Harry's father in his manuscript, *A Black Man's Toronto*:

There was one racial incident at that time-around 1945....This was on a Saturday. [My son] Harry went to school with two Jewish boys, Danny [sic.] and Sonny Jubas. Their father was a barber and the mother was a hairdresser. They came to my house, and Harry went to their house. One day I was ready to go out on a run to Ottawa. "Daddy," Harry said, "have you got any money?" "Yes sir, I have. How much you want?" And he says, "Just a dollar. Danny and I, we're going to the Icelandia to skate." That was a private skating rink. But I had read in the paper that they discriminated against Jews and Blacks at the Icelandia, and I says, "If they discriminate against Jews, you haven't got a chance, my boy." He says, "Daddy, Danny and I, we goes every place and we know how to behave ourselves." I said, "Be careful."

Now I didn't get back until Sunday night, and the wife had a nice supper for me. After she figured that my supper was digested, she sprung this on me: that Harry was refused admission to the Icelandia. He had paid his money, but when he entered the arena proper, the fellow stopped him at the door and said, "You can't go in." Harry said, "Why?" He says, "You're coloured." Well, Danny was already in, so Danny came back out and got his money refunded, which was very fine of Danny, and the boys came home. (Gairey, 1984, ¶15 & 16)

Despite the rink's discriminatory policy against Jews, my father's ability to pass as white afforded him privileges and opportunities that were denied to his friend Harry. Several years later, my mother Gilda accompanied her white Christian friend to the same ice rink. That time, my mother was recognized as a Jew and denied entry into the facility.

These stories clarify that race is socially constructed, and suggest how intention and coincidence can combine in radicalism. What happened to my father was taken up as by activists because it was recorded by Harry's father, a civil rights activist and union organizer. What happened to my mother was also recorded – in an article in the Toronto daily where her friend's father happened to work; however, that article remained a one-off protest, unattached to social activists and their movements. Like Rosa Parks' famous incident on the bus, these incidents can be understood as matters related to consumer, as well as citizen, rights: Everybody who pays an entrance fee has the same right to partake in a service. The mythologized account of Rosa Park often ignores her engagement with the NAACP and Highlander Education and Research Center. Again, it is in the meeting of the individual and the collective, of formal and informal, of experience and reflexivity which translates radical teaching, writing and thought into learning and action.

Interlude 7: Rumours and Queues

In 2005, Karen and I purchased a condominium in Victoria. A few weeks after we got the apartment, we were there for the weekend and out for a walk on Saturday morning. On our way to nowhere-in-particular, we noticed a short queue of people outside one of The Brick stores – a Canadian chain which sells home furnishings and electronics. Curious, we approached the queue and learned that this outlet was closing and its inventory was deeply discounted. I persuaded Karen to join the queue and see what awaited us inside the store.

As we and the other shoppers-in-waiting stood patiently, the manager exited the store every so often to share some tantalizing news. One time, he announced that DVD players were on sale for \$29! After he re-entered the store, I listened to the response of the woman in front of us. Turning to face her companion, she didn't seem excited by the manager's latest news. She seemed, rather, exasperated. "We have to stop buying these things for \$29," she said. "\$29. Who made these things for \$29?"

Karen and I smiled at each other, struck once again, as we frequently were, by the tensions in shopping. What would bring someone into a queue outside a store if not the promise of low-low prices? And how could those low-low prices retain their appeal once someone recognized the cost behind the price tag?

Then we heard a woman behind us say something to a man in front of her. "Do you know if there's any truth to the rumour I heard that Thrifty's is coming in here," she asked him. He hadn't heard that rumour, although he didn't disagree with her as she shared her hope that, if a grocery store was coming into this location, it not be Safeway. With passion evident in her voice, she explained that a grocery store would be a wonderful addition to the neighbourhood retailers, but the last thing needed was another American supermarket.

Not long after that exchange, the doors to the store opened and we were allowed to enter. I watched the others who rushed through the store and left empty-handed, as well as those who lingered and looked at everything slowly and carefully, and those who seemed determined to find something, anything. As we passed by the \$29 DVD players, I heard the woman's words again, but only quietly against the constant announcements blaring through the overhead system and the din of shoppers eager to grab one of those bargains.

**APPENDIX B: UBC BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services and Administration
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Butterwick, S.		DEPARTMENT Educational Studies	NUMBER B06-0927
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT UBC Campus ,			
CO-INVESTIGATORS. Jubas, Kaela, Educational Studies			
SPONSORING AGENCIES Unfunded Research			
TITLE Trouble and Promise, Desire and Critique: Discourses, Practices and Pedagogies of Radical Shoppers			
APPROVAL DATE DEC 01 2006	TERM (YEARS) 1	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL: Nov. 22, 2006, Advertisement / Interview form / Cover letter / Consent forms / Oct. 19, 2006, Questionnaires	
<p>CERTIFICATION:</p> <p>The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <p align="center"> <hr/> <i>Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</i> <i>by one of the following:</i> Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair, Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair </p> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>			