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# BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES: EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF HIGH CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Cindy Isenhour

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2010

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES: EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY  
POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF HIGH CONSUMPTION

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Cindy Isenhour

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Lisa Cliggett, Associate Professor of Anthropology

Lexington Kentucky

2010

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES: EXPLORING SUSTAINABILITY POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF HIGH CONSUMPTION

This dissertation is an attempt to examine how humans in wealthy, post-industrial urban contexts understand sustainability and respond to their concerns given their sphere of influence. I focus specifically on sustainable consumption policy and practice in Sweden, where concerns for sustainability and consumer-based responses are strong. This case raises interesting questions about the relative strength of sustainability movements in different cultural and geo-political contexts as well as the specific factors that have motivated the movement toward sustainable living in Sweden.

The data presented here supports the need for multigenic theories of sustainable consumerism. Rather than relying on dominant theories of reflexive modernization, there is a need for locally and historically grounded analyses. The Swedish case illustrates that the relative strength of sustainable living is linked not only to high levels of awareness about social, economic and ecological threats to sustainability, but also to a strong and historically rooted emphasis on equality in Sweden. In this context, sustainable living is often driven by concerns for global equity and justice. The research therefore affirms the findings of those like Hobson (2002) and Berglund and Matti (2005) who argue that concerns for social justice often have more resonance with citizen-consumers - driving more progressive lifestyle changes than personal self-interest.

Yet despite the power of moral appeals, this research also suggests that the devolution of responsibility for sustainability - to citizens in their roles as consumers on the free market - has failed to produce significant change. While many attribute this failure to “Giddens’ Paradox” or the assumption that people will not change their lifestyles until they see and feel risks personally, the data presented here illustrates that even those most committed to sustainable living confront structural barriers that they do not have the power to overcome. The paradox is not that people can’t understand or act upon threats to sustainability from afar; but rather that it is extremely difficult to live more sustainably without strong social support, market regulation and political leadership. Sustainability policy must work to confront the illusion of choice by breaking down structural barriers, particularly for people who do not have the luxury of choosing alternatives.

KEYWORDS:  
Sustainability, Consumerism,  
Environmental Governance,  
Political Ecology, Anthropology

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Student's Signature

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Date

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By

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DISSERTATION

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The Graduate School  
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2010



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DISSERTATION

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Dedicated to Amblen & Leif...  
in the hope that the information contained here  
might contribute to a better future for you both

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like all dissertations, this research draws upon the ideas and influence of many great people. While it would be impossible to thank all of the scholars, research participants, mentors, friends and family that have informed this work - I hope that you will recognize your influence here.

Special thanks go to the men and women who graciously contributed their time, knowledge, insights and experiences to this research. I was overwhelmed and flattered by your collective enthusiasm for the project and recognize that many of you gave so graciously of your time in the hopes that this project might contribute to the construction of more sustainable societies. I too hope that the insights you provided and the analysis I present here will advance our knowledge about sustainability policy and practice in Sweden and beyond.

I also wish to extend my sincere thanks to my dissertation committee. My advisor Dr. Lisa Cliggett has not wavered in her support for my work - providing invaluable guidance and encouragement throughout the process. Further, her expertise in economic and environmental anthropology has significantly shaped the ideas presented here. I also wish to thank Dr. Thomas Håkansson whose intimate knowledge of Swedish culture, mastery in economic anthropology and Swedish connections were instrumental as I designed this project. Dr. Sarah Lyon's command of the interdisciplinary literature in ethical consumption and sustainability - as well as her expertise in economic anthropology have guided me to new literatures that were essential as I shaped my ideas. Dr. Mary Anglin's excellent scholarship and thoughtful instruction have encouraged me to dig deeper in my analyses - to question the naturalization of privileged perspectives

and the inequalities they mask. Finally Dr. Ellen Furlough helped me to contextualize this work within a long history of consumer-based movements - adding another layer of depth to this study.

Several Swedish scholars also provided important support and mentorship as I conducted this research. I would particularly like to thank Christina Garsten, Michele Micheletti and Alf Hornborg – all excellent scholars who graciously shared their perspectives with me. Further they provided me with invaluable contacts, institutional support and friendship during my time in Stockholm.

This research would not have been possible without the generous support of the Fulbright Program, the Scandinavian-American Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the University of Kentucky Graduate School. I am deeply grateful to these institutions for their support of this research.

Finally, my most heartfelt thanks go to my friends who have kept me sane, my parents who have always given so selflessly, my sister who gives me the confidence to succeed, my children who inspire me to contribute to a better world, and to my partner whose support, love and companionship make everything more enjoyable.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction: Humans, Adaptation & the Age of High Consumption

*I overheard an interesting conversation on the bus today. It was Friday afternoon rush hour and the ride to Skanstull was painful. The bus was so jammed packed that I couldn't even lift my arm high enough to unwrap the itchy wool scarf from around my neck... and it was really hot, as if the driver were trying to apologize for repeatedly opening the doors to the cold winter air by cranking up the heat. Somehow I'd ended up sardined between two young women as the bus wound its way around Stockholm's southern island. I couldn't get everything they were saying, but the woman to my left was recounting - with pride - a recent shopping trip during which she'd found organic jeans and purchased local meat from the saluhall (indoor market). Her friend agreed that it was extremely important to buy things that were better for the environment and for producers, she was doing the same. The first woman, her blond hair tickling the man's nose behind her as she nodded in agreement, continued, saying repeatedly that she was trying to "utveckla". I thought utveckla meant to develop. But that didn't make sense so I looked it up again when I got home. Utveckla can mean to develop or to evolve. I wonder...did the woman on the bus mean she is trying to evolve?*

Fieldnotes: Stockholm, Sweden (January 25, 2008)

Anthropology has long contributed to our understanding of human-environment interactions, building knowledge about how human societies come to understand their environments and react to perceived changes and challenges. Strangely under-represented within the discipline's contributions, however, are analyses of responses to perceived environmental hazards among citizens of wealthy, postindustrial, urban societies (Kempton et al. 2001). Yet today approximately half of all the world's inhabitants are living in cities (UN 2007) and a growing number of them, like the two women on the Stockholm bus, are trying to change their lifestyles in the interest of long-term environmental and human health.

Certainly over the past half-century environmental concerns have grown. Scientists have warned about the dangerous effects of industrial production; of toxic chemicals in our waterways, soils and living tissues. They've warned about the depletion of non-renewable resources and related factors ranging from soil erosion, deforestation, loss of natural habitat and water contamination. Now there is significant and building evidence to suggest that the combustion of fossil fuels is releasing dangerous levels of

greenhouse gasses into our atmosphere, altering its composition and contributing to global climate changes (US EPA 2010, Pachauri & Reisinger 2007) which threaten the natural environment and have the potential to significantly disrupt human social, political and economic systems.

Many have argued that dense urban populations exacerbate these hazards. According to the 2007 State of the World Report, cities are “the direct or indirect source of most of the world’s resource destruction and pollution” (2007:ii). Yet millions of humans are drawn to urban areas each year by the promise of economic opportunity and a better life. The conditions of urban living and the global nature of production chains raise interesting questions about how these people, most of whom are far removed from direct connections to the land, control of productive resources, or environmental feedbacks, come to understand threats to sustainability. Further, these conditions raise another interesting set of questions about how urban residents attempt to respond to their concerns for environmental and human health given their sphere of influence.

The men and women participating in this dissertation research live in or around Stockholm, Sweden. Selected for this study due to their concerns about the future and their desire to live more sustainably, many of them, like the two young women on the bus, frame their actions in terms of a dire need to adapt. Yet these research participants are thoroughly embedded in a consumer culture and market economy. Most do not have access to productive resources beyond than their own labor, or any control over decisions about their use. As such, many of them operationalize their passion for sustainability and the environment in their roles as consumers, focusing their purchasing power and demand on more environmentally and socially responsible products and services or removing

their demand from the market by boycotting products or practicing generalized anti-consumption. Others are trying to buy second hand or to make their own things in an attempt to signal their values and environmental preferences to fellow consumers, to industry and to the government.

Coined at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, sustainable consumption “focuses on equitable strategies that foster the highest quality of life, the efficient use of natural resources and the effective satisfaction of human needs” (OSLO Declaration, 2005:1). And while the concern with sustainability has been institutionalized internationally by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and many other groups, the concern is also embodied by a growing number of individual consumers who are trying to alter their behaviors in the interest of sustainability. Over the past 40 years we’ve seen an extraordinary expansion in more “sustainable” forms of consumption<sup>1</sup> internationally, from the growth of organic foods markets and the slow food movement to ecolabeled products, recycled goods, boycotts, buycotts, the voluntary simplicity movement, and the rise of groups focused on living with less, including the compacters and freegans<sup>2</sup>. While consumer activism and cooperation are certainly nothing new (Hilton 2009, Furlough and Stridwerka 1999, Hilton and Daunton 2001, Micheletti, Follesdal & Stolle 2003, Theien

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<sup>1</sup> The term “consumption” is ambiguous and problematic. See Wilk (2004) and De Vries (1993) for excellent discussions of the intricacies of the term. Here consumption refers to the acquisition, use and disposal of resources. In American English the term “consumerism” most often describes a cultural orientation in which the “possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success” (Ekins 1991). Juliet Schor describes consumerism as a “particularly pernicious ideology which is not conducive to promoting human wellbeing, which is destroying the planet, which is enabling a rapacious capitalist system” (2008:594). In contrast, “consumerism” connotes consumer activism and cooperation in the European tradition (Hilton 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the compacters see <http://sfcompact.blogspot.com/>, for more information on the freegans see <http://www.freegan.info/>

& Lange 2004), these recent forms are remarkable in both their depth and breadth. According to Binkley, there is “wide agreement that today’s consumers exude a contempt for the commodity form that is of a different sort than those of the past (2008:599). While anti-consumer sentiment was once associated with radicals and intellectuals, today a concern with sustainable consumerism is widespread in wealthy societies (Holt 2002).

Yet despite a significant increase in alternative forms of consumption over the last few decades (Goodman 2004), very little is known about the people who are buying “green” products out of concern for the environment, buying fair trade or “red” products out of concern for social and economic justice, or who are practicing “anti-consumption” by downshifting, reducing and reusing (Anderson and Tobiasen 2004). These marginal and/or resistant consumption practices have often been neglected in debates on consumption (Crewe & Gregson 1998). Despite some valuable survey data on political consumers (e.g. Anderson and Tobiasen 2004, Stolle et. al. 2005, Ferrer & Fraile 2006) and a considerable amount of ungrounded speculation, in-depth ethnographic analyses of consumers who demand, buy, and organize sustainable alternatives are still relatively scarce<sup>3</sup>.

While consumer-based responses to perceived environmental risks have been variously described as a conscience soother for the middle class (Kaplan 1995), a reflection of the tensions between individualism and sociality in depersonalized “liquid” modernity (Binkley 2008, Bauman 2005) or a form of resistance rooted in consumer morality and rationality (Barnett et.al. 2005), the work presented here draws on 14 months of field work to empirically and ethnographically explore how people in wealthy, post-industrial urban societies come to understand environmental risks, how they

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<sup>3</sup>Some important exceptions include Halkier 2001, Solér 2007, Hobson 2007, and Wilhite 2006

conceptualize sustainability and finally, how they act on their concerns given their sphere of influence. The research thus centers specifically on Swedish citizen-consumers<sup>4</sup> who have actively modified their lifestyles and consumer behaviors in the interest of sustainability.

However, in order to contextualize this focus, the research also examines the discourse of sustainability on several levels. While the modern concern with ecological sustainability can be traced to the 1960s or earlier, it wasn't until recently that Swedish, regional or international sustainability policy focused on encouraging more sustainable living. Today a focus on sustainability is en vogue not only among businesses eager to promote their green image, but increasingly among cities, states and even regions. In the race to attract investment and highly educated workers, cities from Stockholm to Paris and Shanghai are increasingly making claims of "sustainability" – the most recent manifestation of modernity (McDonough 2009). In the frame of global competitiveness, sustainability is increasingly seen not only as an opportunity to gain comparative advantage, but also a new venue for economic growth as demand for green technologies, services and products expand internationally. Fredrik Reinfeldt, Sweden's Prime Minister during the Swedish rotation of the EU presidency in 2009 made it a point to emphasize the importance of transitioning the European Union into an "eco-efficient" economy. A website dedicated to the Swedish Presidency of the EU stated,

"The EU switching to an eco-efficient economy before the rest of the world can yield significant competitive advantages for us in Europe. The global demand for natural resources and its impact on the environment will continue

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<sup>4</sup> Historically speaking, the term "citizen-consumer" reflects the merger of citizen and consumer identities in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when patriotism and citizenship became tied to consumption. Here I use the term because it reflects the contemporary neoliberal policy frame in which citizenship is tied to consumerism and because the men and women participating in this study rarely differentiated between their actions in civic and market realms. To refer to them as either citizens or consumers would be a misrepresentation.

with present-day global patterns of growth. This will probably lead to increased market prices for raw materials, increased need for solutions for more efficient use of energy and natural resources and generally increased demand for good environmental performance in all sectors” (2009:1)

As part of this project toward modernity and global competitiveness - many regional, national and city governments have invested heavily in research and development. This also involves driving markets for more efficient technologies and encouraging sustainable consumerism. The EU has recently decided to “put policy to practice” by focusing environmental policy on education and the promotion of more environmentally friendly and energy efficient products (EU 2009). In order to contextualize this recent focus on eco-economies and sustainable lifestyles as well as the perspectives of Swedes concerned about and acting in the interest of sustainability - the project also incorporates an examination of policy and socio-political contexts in the EU, in Sweden and abroad, paying specific attention to larger cultural logics and structures that script for sustainability in Sweden and beyond.

Several factors make Sweden a particularly interesting location for this ethnographic research. First, it has long been an environmentally progressive nation, explicitly striving to pave the road to sustainability internationally. Sweden was the first to lay the groundwork for a federal environmental protection board (1957), to establish an environmental protection agency (1967) and to institute emissions taxes on dangerous pollutants (NO<sub>2</sub> in 1989 and SO<sub>2</sub> & CO<sub>2</sub> in 1991). Today they continue to innovate, leading the international Marrakesh Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles and introducing a climate labeling system for foods in 2009. Yet Sweden’s recent policy focus on the creation of more sustainable lifestyles also raises interesting questions about the degree to which citizen-consumers have responded to sustainability discourse and policy focused

on lifestyle changes, particularly calls for increased consumer responsibility. The articulation of dominant sustainability policy and everyday practice is thus an important component of the research presented here.

### **Outline of Key Arguments & Organization of the Dissertation**

I begin this exploration in the following chapter with a literature review, describing the contemporary focus on consumer-based sustainability movements and drawing on classical consumption theory to explore competing theoretical views on sustainable consumerism. The most dominant theories of sustainable consumerism view it as part of a larger movement toward reflexive modernization in late-modern risk society (Beck 1992), a rational response to globalization and a growing body of knowledge about the “consequences of modernity” (Giddens 1990). I contend that, with few exceptions, Swedish and international sustainability programs and policies are based on these perspectives. However, other scholars have viewed the rise of sustainable consumerism with great skepticism, as a reflection and acceptance of neoliberal, market-based policies, which relegate responsibility for sustainability to consumers while simultaneously concentrating the power to define the ends and means of sustainability with the powerful interests of industry and government.

Chapter III presents a description of the study, providing background and rationale for locating the research in Sweden. I argue that Sweden’s egalitarian ethos, pervading sense of morality, corporatist political culture, and strong commitment to sustainability is curiously juxtaposed with its competitive capitalist economy, culture of consumption, hierarchical social structure, and valorization of all things modern. This tension makes Sweden an interesting place to study consumer responses to perceived

environmental risk, particularly since the Swedish state is known internationally for its progressive sustainability policies and its citizens have been highly receptive to alternative forms of consumerism relative to other nations. These factors raise interesting questions about the cultural and historical factors that have bolstered sustainability efforts in the Swedish context. In the second section of the chapter, I describe the fieldwork experience, outlining sampling strategies, research methods, and data analysis techniques.

Chapters IV through VII draw on the ethnographic data to explore more specific themes as they relate to contrasting views on sustainable consumerism. Chapter IV, entitled, “Shades of Green” introduces variability among Swedes trying to live more sustainable lifestyles. In this chapter I give particular attention to alternative views about the meaning of sustainability, paying particular attention to environmental philosophies and views on nature. I ask, “What perspectives on nature and sustainability underlie alternative value construction and lifestyles? How do environmental philosophies ranging from ecological modernization (Spaargaren & Mol. 1992) to radical eco-socialism (Burkett 1999) influence sustainable practice (Adams 2001)?” I argue that despite significant variation several continuums within the sample intersect in patterned ways. Some unmistakable themes emerge, linking perspectives on nature and sustainability to specific forms of practice. To make these patterns come to light I introduce several research participants who represent common intersections and combinations of environmental views and sustainable practices.

Despite this variability however, I argue that as a whole, these ecologically concerned citizen-consumers hold views about the environment and sustainability that contrast sharply with dominant sustainability theory and practice. For example, their



romantic views on nature stand in sharp relief with the rationalist paradigm that characterizes official sustainability policy. Because of this, most research participants have far less faith in technological solutions than policy-makers assume. I argue that this disconnection has resulted in failed opportunities to encourage the creation of more sustainable lifestyles.

Chapter V entitled, “On Governance and the Limits of Rationality” examines the contemporary movement toward neoliberal sustainability policy and the devolution of responsibility to individuals in their roles as consumers. I examine how concerned Swedes variously leverage and/or resist the market in an attempt to force change. While some purchase ecolabeled goods on occasion, others attempt to escape the market, removing their consumer demand in protest of the profit motive, capitalist production regimes and impersonal market exchange. Further, I will illustrate that many of these men and women extend their concern beyond the realm of shopping, refusing to recognize the distinction between their actions as citizens, consumers and producers. Second, despite the classical assumption, recently reinvented as the “Giddens’ Paradox” (Giddens 2009), that people only respond to risks when they can personally observe negative effects, or when they feel it is in their best self-interest, the Swedes in this study demonstrated a significant concern for morality, which they associate with international equality and fairness. Many of these men and women illustrate the limits of rationalization theory, arguing that if sustainable living were about rationality, they would be doing a lot more. Transitioning into Chapter VI, I conclude chapter V with a brief introduction to some of the barriers that limit sustainable behavior for these aware, interested and engaged Swedes.

Chapters VI and VII focus more specifically on the negotiation of these barriers in everyday practice. Chapter VI entitled “Negotiating Sustainability Everyday: Work, Home, Gender & Care” introduces several of the Swedish families that took part in in-depth household research. These are the families who kept track of their expenditures, completed consumption inventories and allowed me to rummage through their closets, drawers and lives to get a better sense of their lifestyles and consumption behaviors. Their experiences illustrate that even the most aware, interested, and committed families often confront obstacles too difficult to overcome. Many speak of an overwhelming “time crunch” in modern society. Making the time to research and be aware of the environmental and social impacts of one’s consumer and lifestyle choices often proves a daunting task. Further, finding alternatives and modifying habits in order to eliminate certain products or services also takes time. As part of this discussion I allocate special attention to inter-household negotiations and, in particular, the role of gender as families attempt to create and maintain sustainable lifestyles and homes. Most of the couples participating in this study said that the woman in the relationship was more interested in and engaged with sustainable living<sup>5</sup>. The observation that women are more likely to be interested in sustainable living is well documented in the literature (OECD 2008, LUI 1999, Naturvårdsverket 2008, Micheletti & Stolle 2004). Can the fact that these middle class Swedish women are more interested and engaged in the creation of sustainable lifestyles and consumerism than their male counterparts (CNAD 2005) be explained by lower risk thresholds (Micheletti 2003), a feminized propensity to act morally (Gilligan 1982), or a gendered division of labor – as is often assumed?”

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<sup>5</sup> Please note that while it would have been beneficial, there were no homogendered couples in the sample.

Chapter VII, entitled “The Sociality of Anti-Consumption” examines barriers linked to sociality. As such, it explores the social context of consumer culture in Sweden. According to the Center for Consumer Science in Goteborg (2008), Sweden has experienced significant growth in several sectors of household consumption over the last 20 years, including expenditures on leisure, home goods, and clothing. In Stockholm, where an obsession with design and a culture of conformity are well noted by ethnographers and citizens alike (O’Dell 1997), there is strong pressure to consume to heightened consumption norms. Further, with a flood of home remodeling and redecorating shows on television, many Swedes (long known for their emphasis on fashionable and designer home interiors) are redesigning their homes more frequently. Many friends and research participants living in the Stockholm area relayed stories of acquaintances who redecorate on a seasonal or yearly basis in order to keep up with the latest designs in textile, furniture and lighting. Anthropologists have long studied material goods as tools for communication, a means to signal social status, membership in a group, and understanding of shared norms and values. Yet for many of the individuals and families participating in this study, the purchase of a new couch or curtains can be a stressful endeavor as they strive to reconcile their desire to cause less ecological harm with the perceived need to create a home that meets culturally-defined notions of stylishness, cleanliness and comfort (see Shove 2004, Erickson 1997). Certainly those who are trying to consume less are not oblivious to the shared meanings and cultural values placed on the home in Scandinavia. Given the commitment that many of this study’s participants have made to living more sustainably, Chapter VII explores how these families negotiate the need to signal belonging without compromising their

desire to consume fewer resources. I present several case studies to illustrate the strategies that some families use to reconcile these tensions.

In Chapter VIII, I focus more closely on these social barriers that constrain sustainable living, particularly class-based barriers. I note that many of the signaling strategies utilized by ecologically concerned Swedish families are marked by middle class values and a strong desire to maintain and communicate class status and tastes. Many scholars, both contemporary and historical, have written about consumption as a tool for distinction and exclusion, a product of hierarchical and unequal social relations which works to naturalize middle and upper class consumption while condemning the practices and tastes of the working class. I explore here the idea that the recent focus on the consumption of “sustainable” goods is linked to middle and upper-class efforts to maintain social boundaries and naturalized class advantage through the accumulation of cultural capital via “ethical”, “moral” and “sustainable” products. Specifically, I explore what ‘utilities’ alternative consumers are attempting to maximize. Are they ultimately concerned with accumulating status (Weber 1958) and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) and thus inadvertently fortifying social hierarchies (Crew 2003) and reproducing ideologies of growth (Bryant & Goodman 2004)? Is sustainable consumerism best considered a reflection of subtle class conflict in Sweden’s “classless” society (Löfgren 1994, Frykman & Löfgren 1987) or a strategy of privilege in a global hierarchy?

To answer these questions I present research findings which suggest that the middle-class Swedes who participated in this study are concerned with the accumulation and maintenance of cultural capital. Thus, in the Swedish context sustainable consumerism can indeed be seen as related to subtle class conflict. However it does not

appear, contrary to many theoretical assumptions, that it is the movement's intention to critique the "immoral" or "unsustainable" consumption patterns of Sweden's most economically disadvantaged citizens. Instead, my research indicates that sustainable consumerism among the middle class is more accurately viewed as a subtle yet powerful means for the middle class to assert its long-held emphasis on social equality, to critique recent political-economic changes in Sweden which have enabled a growing income gap, and to condemn the "vulgar" and "unethical" consumption patterns of Sweden's growing elite class.

The dissertation concludes with a discussion in Chapter IX entitled "Sustainability as Practice, Morality, Myth and Global Policy Imperative." Pointing to the empirical data presented throughout the dissertation, I argue that imaginings of sustainability are diverse and tangled in struggles to control its meaning. While there is certainly no agreed-upon definition, it is clear that certain conceptualizations are more dominant than others. I argue that there is a need to democratize sustainability discourse and policy, further incorporating the views of those concerned about social, economic *and* ecological health. There is also great need to ensure that women's perspectives are heard, to give voice to rural viewpoints, and to incorporate a recognition that local cultural and historical factors continue to shape our perceptions of risk and appropriate response.

The Swedish case encourages us to compliment and complicate the assumptions of neoclassical economics and reflexive modernization perspectives on sustainable living. Swedish citizen-consumers illustrate that the perceived need for equality, fairness and justice can be a powerful motivator, often times more powerful than perceptions of personal risk and self-interest. This finding encourages us to consider the social,

economic and ecological components of sustainability as well as political solutions that might help to inspire sustainable living. I also argue that the devolution of responsibility for sustainability to rational consumers, inspired by neoliberal policies, must be balanced with sound policy and governmental regulation. While citizen-consumers certainly have agency, which can be extremely powerful when channeled and aggregated, we can learn from Swedish corporatism and the momentum cooperative movements can build for social AND political movements.

While the Swedish case is just that, a case, I suggest that it is instructive in other contexts. First it challenges that naturalization of self-interest so common in western economic theory and raises more intellectually fulfilling questions that do not center on the determination of a single factor which motivates sustainable consumption (Wilk 2002). Instead it attempts to examine how social, economic, political and cultural patterns and contexts influence consumer decision-making processes, perhaps making concerns with equality rather than economic considerations, for example, stronger in particular contexts (see Godelier 1977). Sweden's historical emphasis on social welfare and equality, history of homogenous ethnic identity, dominance of the Lutheran church and corporatist political culture have created a strong emphasis on both morality and pragmatism that lives on, at least in rhetoric<sup>6</sup>. These factors are unique to the sustainable consumerism movement in Sweden. However, the composition of the sample closely mirrors what we know about sustainable consumers in other post-industrial urban contexts from Japan to the US, Switzerland, and Australia. Therefore, while there are certainly cultural and historical nuances in all these locations, this work also has the

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<sup>6</sup> The ideologies of equality and solidarity have recently been challenged in Sweden by anti-immigrant sentiment among a small but passionate group of Swedes concerned about the Islamization of Europe.

potential to speak to a larger international movement, one which reflects a global social hierarchy and the power that the global elite have to shape the sustainability discourse. It also reflects continued urbanization and the tensions that arise when so many humans are separated from control over productive resources and more direct connections with nature.

The dissertation contends that contemporary human society is at a crux. Momentum for sustainability continues to build and many global citizens are concerned about our collective future. Yet at the same time the status quo is a powerful force. There is no need to rehash the structure and agency debate, we know that humans have considerable power, particularly when we cooperate with one another. However, we also know that we are constrained in many ways by our own historical constructions. But one of anthropology's most important contributions to humanity is its ability to demonstrate and remind us that cultural constructions are simply that, human projects which can and eventually will be altered. Whether we define evolution in terms consistent with Darwin or a young woman on a Stockholm bus, change is possible.

## CHAPTER II

### Sustainable Consumption & Development: A Literature Review

*I am really worried about the western world's consumerism and the inability to understand how we have to transfer from the fossil fuel economy into something else really fast. And also how the industry is trying to do that transition in a consumer way, you have to buy more things and more energy smart solutions instead of not buying or turning down the consumerism. Our whole social system is built upon the idea that we have to shop so that we can pay our taxes and take care of our sick people and all these things - and that is not a sustainable economic system. But no matter how much we try to separate our economy from environmental damage, our possibilities will always be tied to our natural resources. And now we are using way too much. There is lots to suggest that we need another economical system, and that is our biggest challenge.* Interview Transcript: Gudrun (April 20, 2008)

Intimately embedded in capitalist economic systems and bound up with its ideologies about growth, continual improvement and progress - consumer culture is a powerful force. Alternatives to our consumer-based lifestyles are indeed difficult to imagine in a global economic system built and seemingly dependent upon growth and consistent consumer demand. And while an ideology based on growth, consumption, and abundance has only dominated in the US and Europe since the 1920s (Edsforth 1987, Leach 1993), it has gained considerable "global" force over the course of the last century. Today dominant economic, globalization and modernity discourses continue to assert that growth, progress and wealth accumulation constitute the "end" toward which our "global" society should be moving (Trouillot 2003).

Despite these dominant philosophies which link consumption to a moral imperative to keep our societies healthy, opposition to the level of consumption that marks our times persists. Many citizens, both contemporary and historical, have questioned the social effects of growing consumption levels (e.g. Shi 1985, Schor 1999, 2004, McKibben 2010). Early critics equated the rise of mass consumption with the erosion of producer values including thrift, constraint, and simplicity. In fact, in its 19th century English use, the word "consume" had a negative connotation, meaning to destroy,



waste, or exhaust (Wyra 1998). Veblen (1899) condemned the conspicuous consumption patterns of the leisure class while Thoreau (1854) advocated a return to the simple life and de Tocqueville (1851) warned that excessive materialism threatened to weaken social networks and make working toward common social goals more difficult. Some scholars have dismissed these critiques, arguing that they represent little more than subjective and problematic moralizing (Horowitz 1985, Miller 2001b). More recently, however, a growing awareness of the energy and ecological “crises” since the 1960s have added empirical fuel the proverbial fire, spurring a revived criticism of consumer culture and an emphasis on ecological discussions about sustainability. As the “consequences of modernity” (Giddens 1991) are made increasingly apparent, environmental critiques focused on the need for sustainability have proliferated. Today discussions about anthropogenic climate change have amplified the international call to moderate consumption. Many critics have pointed to the need to demystify market ideologies which subjugate long term environmental and human health to short term profits (Korten 1995, Sklair 2002, Haque 1999, Barndt 2002, McKibben 2008) and to resist the capitalist growth imperative that encourages people to buy more and more each year. These voices of protest are joined by those of scholars who have argued that in an ecosystem with limited resources, faith in continual growth and incrementally increased abundance is nothing more than just that, faith (Friedman 1999).

Citizens have long echoed these critiques, attempting to live more ecologically- and socially-conscious lifestyles, particularly since the counter-cultural revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the contemporary policy focus on the creation of more sustainable lifestyles in the global North – among international organizations and state

governments - is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the pages to come I briefly trace the emergence of contemporary concern with sustainable consumption, outlining key moments which have inspired this current focus.

### **The Growing Focus on Sustainable Development & Consumption: A Brief History**

While localized concerns about over-consumption and sustainability can be traced to many different geographical spaces and time periods, the contemporary institutional concern for global sustainability can be traced to the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (Adams 2001). Informed by the publication of *The Limits of Growth* (Meadows et. al. 1972) and driven by first world environmentalism, the conference placed considerable emphasis on neo-Malthusian arguments which blamed the global environmental crisis on increasing population rates, particularly in the tropics and poor developing nations. It placed environmental conservation issues at the center of the sustainability agenda, leading many third world nations to argue that it was little more than another attempt by the industrialized nations to control third world resources while neglecting the fact that industrial nations were responsible for a disproportionate level of the world's natural resource use and pollution production (Adams 2001). The ecocentric programs which arose out of this framework have often been referred to as “coercive conservation” (Concha 2005).

The concept and discourse of sustainability were democratized in the years following the conference as UN members from developing nations made their voices heard and the connections between environmental and economic sustainability were articulated and made increasingly clear. Activists supporting the need for economic and environmental sustainability diverted attention away from the harsh neo-Malthusianism

of the 1960s and 1970s and towards the need for more equitable distribution of access to natural resources and changes in global lifestyles. This adaptation of the discourse can be seen in subsequent sustainability documents. In 1987 the Brundtland Report suggested that in order to reach the goal of sustainability it would be necessary to “attain social equity, both between and within generations” (Stone 2003).

In order to reach this goal the Brundtland report recommended altering both the input process (natural resource use) and byproducts (pollution and waste) of production. While the Brundtland report certainly represented an improvement - tying a more explicit recognition of mutual responsibility into its text, it bypassed a consideration of political solutions in favor of an emphasis on technological fixes. Initially, this focus on production and technical solutions reshaped the development agenda, focusing much of the onus for sustainability on the developing world where issues of deforestation, desertification, and watershed protection were linked to local production processes and deemed easily remedied with technological assistance and development aid. The failure to question these narratives on environmental degradation, population, deforestation, desertification, etc... led to the continued acceptance of ideas which place the impetus for achieving sustainability on the developing nations of the South (Neumann 2005, Fratkin and Mearns 2003). Northern responsibility was largely framed in terms of providing technical environmental assistance and capital to the world's less developed economies.

Yet with continued environmental degradation and poverty, it became increasingly clear that the solution would demand more cooperation from the world's wealthiest and most consumptive nations to make serious gains toward global sustainability. In 1991 this philosophy was reflected in the document *Caring for the*

*Earth* (World Conservation Union 1991) which argued that a “concerted effort is needed to reduce energy and resource consumption by upper income countries” (IUCN1991:44). This document had considerable impact on the plenary sessions of the upcoming Earth Summit (Adams 2001).

Just one year later, in 1992, delegates from around the world gathered in Rio for the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development. Growing concern with sustainable production and consumption in upper income countries led delegates to move beyond the production and developing world-focused conceptualizations of the past, to also extend their recommendations for action to issues of consumption in the world’s wealthiest societies. Consider the following two quotes from the Declaration,

“While poverty results in certain kinds of environmental stress, the major cause of the continued deterioration of the global environment is the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, which is a matter of grave concern, aggravating poverty and imbalances” (1992: 4.3)

“Although consumption patterns are very high in certain parts of the world, the basic consumer needs of a large section of humanity are not being met. This results in excessive demands and unsustainable lifestyles among the richer segments, which place immense stress on the environment. The poorer segments, meanwhile, are unable to meet food, health care, shelter and educational needs” (1992:4.5)

The delegates defined sustainable consumption as that which “fosters the highest quality of life, the efficient use of natural resources, and the effective satisfaction of human needs” (Oslo 2005). Consequently many industrialized nations took the call for more sustainable consumption and production seriously. Some governments, like Sweden’s, adopted recommendations for a sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century outlined by the Rio Declaration, investing in infrastructural improvements, more efficient production technologies and pollution reduction measures. National commitments to Agenda 21 led to dramatic

efficiencies in many international contexts (Erickson 1997, Jörby 2002). However, it was soon realized that these advances were being cannibalized by continued and significant growth in per capita consumption, particularly within the developed nations (OECD 2004, Carolan 2004). As a result, international sustainability discourse and policy has recently transitioned from an emphasis on large infrastructural and production-orientated approaches to those centered on consumer behavior and the construction of sustainable lifestyles and consumer cultures (Matti 2007, Sto et. al 2008).

### **A New Focus on Consumers & the Dominance of Reflexive Modernization**

By purchasing environmentally friendly products, participating in boycotts or buycotts, buying organic, local and fair trade goods, or by doing without – consumers have increasingly demonstrated their concern with and commitment to more ecologically sustainable markets. Many were practicing these strategies long before sustainability policy recommended them, but the recent growth of these initiatives is unprecedented (Goodman 2004). Some have suggested that this significant rise of sustainable consumerism is linked to a new expression of politics in market-based societies (e.g. Micheletti 2003), “post-materialist” values (e.g. Wilkström 1997) or rational self-interest (e.g. Paavola 2001). The most popular and internationally dominant theories on ecological consumerism, however, generally regard the phenomenon as a response to globalization (Boström et. al 2004), building loosely upon the work of Giddens (1999, 2009) and Beck (1992) to argue that alternative consumerism is linked to reflexivity and processes of ecological modernization (Spaargaren 1997) in late-modern risk society. Both Giddens and Beck have argued that while humans have always been subject to risks, natural and social, modernity is exposing humanity to new hazards. In *Risk*

*Society*, Beck argues that “risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself” (1992:21). Thus global ecological crises like global warming, pollution, and resource depletion are no longer imagined solely within the realm of the natural, but are increasingly envisioned as part of a structural crisis in modern society (Adams 2001:285). From the micro-application of these ideas, reflexive citizens are seen as acknowledging the ecological risks associated with contemporary production and consumption systems, then seeking out knowledge which will aid them in risk avoidance. This process of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994) involves the continuous re-evaluation of contemporary practices as more information is gathered about ecological risks.

As reflexive critiques become more commonplace and the signs of global ecological crisis more explicit, reflexive modernization anticipates that consumers exercise their agency by acting freely and rationally, changing their habits in an attempt to transform society into something more sustainable. Arguing along these lines Bauman (1995) contends that as reflexive modernization takes hold, individuals will become less concerned with the ethics of conformity (doing as they’ve always done and as other do) and increasingly concerned with the ethics of responsibility (doing what is right for themselves and the common good).

While these meta-theories are certainly attractive, I find they fail to fully explain the ecological consumers I’ve met in Sweden. Using these macro-level theories to explain sustainability movements from a global perspective linked to modernity, these ideas gloss over important local and historical variations that have inspired great

variability among ecologically-concerned citizen consumers in Sweden and elsewhere. Perhaps worse, they imply inadequate policy solutions.

In an attempt to further examine the underpinnings of the rationalist thought that underlies views on reflexive modernization, I briefly explore dominant perspectives in consumption theory; the rationalist perspective, the moral perspective, the social perspective and the political perspective. While I recognize that a brief review and categorization of these theories does them injustice via abstraction and simplification, the intent is not to misrepresent these complex and often overlapping perspectives or to create a “straw man”, but rather to illustrate the overdependence of contemporary sustainability discourse on one particular viewpoint and its reflection of a specific relationship between the state, the market and citizens.

### **Decision Making & Rationality: The Legacy of Neoclassical Economics**

The reflexive modernization perspectives that have recently dominated international sustainability policy agendas (Adams 2004, Hobson 2002), are closely tied to neoclassical economic theories which link economic behavior to rationality and utility maximization<sup>7</sup> (Berglund & Matti 2006). Reflexive modernization assumes that consumers will react rationally when presented with information about the consequences of modernity. As global commodity chains are defetishized and more information becomes available about the risks of certain products, services and practices, it is assumed that the reflexive modernization process will begin and consumer demand for dangerous products and services will decline.

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<sup>7</sup> I acknowledge that there are many examples of excellent economic scholarship which move beyond the formal parameters of neo-classical economics and rational choice, particularly within institutional economics (Boyd & Richerson 2001). However, because the concept of reflexive modernization relies heavily on economistic and individualist assumptions about the consumer, I outline here the foundational assumptions of these theoretical perspectives.

In an article written in 1979, Sen traces neoclassical economics and related neoliberal politics back to Adam Smith and a time when strict government controls ruled prices and severely limited the choices of individual actors. Sen argues that it was out of this context that a theory emerged which proposed that individuals would work to maximize their own self interest if freed from the market controls that prohibit rational behavior. Collectively, this freedom would result in a market based on rationality and the fulfillment of all human needs. People would demand what was rational, the market would respond and all would be well in a cycle of growth and fulfillment. Harold Schneider has argued that economists have long known that these assumptions do not adequately describe society, but continue to believe that by encouraging economic actors to behave in their best interests by removing government interference and barriers to trade, it can be achieved (1974:40).

Market liberalization policies based on this philosophy continue to dominate the international landscape. Based on the assumption that economic growth and wealth accumulation constitute the means to a better life for all, these policies have inspired development programs designed to further integrate societies into the market economy and provide better opportunities for families worldwide to produce and consume on the free market. These policy shifts assume that the market will ultimately "benefit everyone in their economic role as consumers" (Carrier and Miller 1999:38).

Dominant sustainable consumption perspectives based on these ideas place considerable faith in the agency of reflexive and rational consumers to demand and achieve alternative markets without government interference. Hobson argues that a focus on sustainable consumerism at the policy level reflects a specific neo-liberal framing of



the relationship between individuals and the state. Citizens come to be seen primarily as consumers acting in accordance with their preferences for the environment. These preferences can then be played out on the market without any government infringement. She writes that the rationalization approach “makes perfect neo-classical sense. It does not threaten consumption but seeks to incorporate a new preference without impinging upon the individual’s (supposedly) sacred and deeply entrenched lifestyles” (2002:107).

In regard to individual economic decisions, the rational choice theories associated with neoclassical economics “hold that all economic choices are acts of authentic, unmediated selfhood, rational statements reflecting who we are and what we want in life” (Bigelow 2005:1). Consumer-citizens thus act on their own independent values and preferences to rank multiple but scarce means, weigh costs and benefits, and then choose a means which best maximizes their personal utility. Jackson argues that in order to promote sustainable consumerism within this model of rational choice, there would need to be an emphasis on ensuring continued economic growth, limiting policy interventions to ensure market efficiency, restructuring pricing patterns to fully reflect the social, political and environmental costs of production, and ensuring that consumers have the most accurate information available about product benefits and risks (Jackson 2004:6). While price tags by no means reflect true costs currently, these conditions are similar to the goals of the standardization and ecolabeling programs so popular internationally.

Market optimists cite the growth of markets for local, organic, ecolabeled and fair trade goods as a sign of increased consumer rationality and as evidence that consumers have the power to demand and realize significant market improvements. Demand for organic foods and beverages, for example, continues to grow. In the US the sale of

organic fruits and vegetables grew from \$1million in 1990 to nearly \$25 billion in 2009 – making up 11% of all fruits in vegetables sold in the US (OTA 2010). While consumer demand for organic and eco-labeled products is concentrated with wealth in the US and Europe, there is growing demand for certified products in many international markets, most notably Asia (Sahota 2007). Further there has been a proliferation of certification, stewardship and labeling schemes over the past 30 years and on multiple levels, from the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) to the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), the EU Flower and the US Green Building Council’s certification for sustainable building (LEED).

Certainly information and education have played an indisputable and significant role for those consumers who have decided to support alternative production systems. In Sweden, the sustainability movement has been gaining ground in many different forms. Stories about the ecological risks of modernity are a daily feature in newspapers and broadcast media. Sweden’s consumer agency (Konsumentverket), Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), and Ministry for the Environment (Miljödepartementet) have joined numerous other governmental and non-governmental agencies to increase awareness of the ecological risks associated with contemporary production and consumption regimes. Further, Swedes are highly educated and deeply value knowledge and informed cosmopolitan identities (Isenhour 2010). Certainly many Swedes participating in the study associate their desire to live more sustainably with rationality and knowledge.

Yet despite significant efforts to spread information and awareness in many different contexts, sustainable consumption patterns have failed to emerge among the

majority (Hobson 2002). And for those individuals who have attempted to support alternative systems of producing and provisioning goods, research shows that they are often characterized by ambivalence and inconsistencies as the realities of everyday life interact with their own values and rationality (Halkier 2001b). The alternative citizen-consumers participating in this study frequently oppose their knowledge of ecological risk and their desire to support alternatives to the reality of living in a consumer society, the effect of the media and peer pressure, the necessities of everyday provisioning, and the availability and quality of alternative products.

From this theoretical perspective, then, we have to wonder, who is being rational and irrational? Are the sustainable consumers acting rationally given limited natural resources? Are consumers who are aware of the environmental impacts of their consumption practice irrational if they do not modify their consumption behavior? Are they irrational even if the negative effects of their consumption are displaced by thousands of miles and experienced by a distant society? Or are consumers acting rationally as they utilize their possessions to communicate identity, belonging, care and values to other people in an increasingly complex world?

These questions point to the messiness of concepts like rationality. When defined as broadly as it must be to apply to unique contexts, rationality loses its analytical weight. Amartya Sen writes, “there is not much merit in spending a lot of effort in debating the ‘proper’ definition of rationality. The term is used in many different senses” (1979:20). Certainly without a consideration of the contexts that define rationality and personal utility, all that economics can do is assert that individuals try to maximize their satisfaction. This amounts to “little more than a truism” (Burling 1962: 817). Rational

choice theories thus do not lend much insight into the contextuality and contested nature of concepts like rationality and utility. They problematically view humans as isolated and independent individuals rather than human beings embedded in situational contexts, social relations and complicating socio-political structures that define what is situationally rational or even limit the individual's ability to make a rational choice. Carrier and Miller have argued that neoclassical economists have "replaced the study and interests of real consumers with the virtual consumers they invented for the purposes of economic modeling" (1999:38). In so doing, they have exhibited a "methodological lack of empirical interest in motivation" (Carrier and Miller 1999:25) and have largely failed to understand how specific preferences are shaped. Despite a long history of similar critiques, discussions about individual values and preferences are still common in many different disciplines from sociology to political science and marketing.

In response to these over-simplifications, notions of "bounded rationality" and "satisficing" (Simon 1957) have gained popularity among institutional economists and other social scientists in the past several decades – raising questions about the "rationality" of everyday actors who are limited in by informational, time-based and cognitive constraints and highly influenced by the institutional contexts within which they find themselves (Acheson 2002). In looking at the diversity in human form, anthropology draws our attention to the contextual factors that shape what is rational in a certain time and place. Wilk (1996), Sen (1979), and Firth (1968) represent only a few of the theorists to argue that humans make decisions based on a mix of moral, social and ethical rationales. Sen argues that decision making is psychologically complex while

Wilk points to examples of people acting in the interests of others, despite a cost in personal welfare.

And contrary to neoclassical economic theory and ideas about reflexive modernization, irrationality is certainly a possibility. Wilk points to situations in which individuals may take action without a clear set of goals or objectives (1996:66), while Sen points to “weakness of will” or “akratic” behaviors characterized by a disconnect between the actor’s behavior and knowledge, as is the case with overeating, smoking, drinking, or other behaviors that are illogical given the associated risk. Further, it has been argued that because we are creatures of habit and conditioning, often relying on imitation and habit rather than rational thought, we are very often irrational (Wilk 1996:69, Halkier 2001b).

Yet before we label the majority of Sweden’s citizens irrational, perhaps it would be wise to consider other perspectives on consumer motivation which might complicate – but provide us with a more accurate picture of what is rational for ecologically concerned consumers who are embedded in and sometimes constrained by complex social, economic and political structures. Certainly the concept of the rational actor is important in many ways. However, I agree with Sto et. al. (2008), that the concept alone is insufficient for understanding sustainable consumerism.

### **Moral Economy: Commitment and Caring at a Distance**

Adam Smith once argued that a successful market would operate on cooperation, equality, and a standard protocol for justice (Micheletti 2003: 116-117). Today these sentiments are echoed by many consumers concerned about sustainability - who argue that exchange is, in part, a moral issue. Rather than seeing ecological consumption

decisions as the product of rational calculations of personal costs and benefits, the moral economy perspective encourages us to view alternative consumption behavior as, at least in part, a moral concern for other beings, both living and to come (Barnett et al 2005). Sen's notion of commitment brings the realization that people often act simply based on what they think is right (1979). It certainly would be foolish to assume that this conceptualization is always linked to self-interest. Rather, there are many examples in the ethnographic literature, from diverse geographical and temporal locations, that illustrate cultural emphases on fairness, equity, ethics and a communitarian moral code. Goodman writes that sustainable consumerism, by re-linking production and consumption, rises "Polanyi-like from the ashes of globalization" to re-embed "the conditions of production and trade in more ethical economic and social relationships" (2004: 898).

Several decades ago, James C. Scott argued that peasant societies practice a moral economy, one that is intricately concerned with ensuring that all members of the community are able to achieve, at the very minimum, subsistence levels of consumption (1976). Since then, his ideas have been critiqued, adapted and applied in multiple contexts but it certainly seems that sustainable consumerism can be explained as an attempt for citizens to act in a manner consistent with their moral beliefs and to communicate a sense of solidarity with humans, living and to come. Scott's framework of a moral economy seems particularly applicable in the Swedish context where a strong Keynesian social welfare state has not only guaranteed minimum livelihood standards for its citizens but has also solidified a national ideology centered on solidarity, morality and equality. While the ideology of equality has recently been challenged by growing anti-

immigration sentiment and widening income differentials, Epsing-Anderson argued in 1992 that due to the institutionalization of strong social welfare policies in Sweden “poverty and economic insecurity have been largely eradicated and Sweden is the indisputable leader in the equal distribution of incomes or in living standards” (1992:36). Similarly, Rita Erickson wrote in 1997 that Swedish society is imbued with a “heavy moralism” which has been fostered by the historical teachings of the Lutheran church and the humanitarian orientation of the welfare state (1997:84). This moralism may have helped to inspire and support a concern for public virtue through consumerism in Sweden.

On the other hand, alternative consumerism may also be viewed as private virtue. In one study, for example, green consumers were shown to feel such closeness to the environment that they felt they were solving personal problems by consuming “green” (Micheletti et. al. 2004:68). Other families may feel that by consuming green they’re working in the public interest as well as their own as they add their family to the growing list of people working to cut demand for agrochemicals or industrial emissions that endanger human life. This mixing of public and private virtue is well illustrated by the concept of “moral selving” (Barnett et.al. 2005). From this perspective, sustainable consumers are motivated not only by the desire to do the right thing, but also by the promise that sustainable goods will help them to construct a moral and ethical identity consistent with their values and beliefs. This process of moral selving enables consumers to identify with a community of progressive and well educated global citizens working toward both social and ecological sustainability. Barnett and his colleagues argue that sustainable goods displayed in the home or given as gifts communicate not only values

but are intimately bound in a process through which consumers attempt to inform and educate their family and friends about the virtues of a more responsible form of consumption.

### **The Socio-Cultural Perspective: Creative Consumption, Identity and Belonging**

Leading us to the realization that all consumption decisions are embedded in context, the socio-cultural perspective reminds us that consumption is a key means of identity production and method through which we communicate to others. Successful communication requires shared symbols and meanings and is thus inherently cultural. Mary Douglas, a prominent proponent of this perspective writes that “Instead of starting from the individual confronting his own basic needs, cultural theory starts from a system in which a consumer knows that he is expected to play some part or he will not get any income. Everything that he chooses to do or to buy is part of a project to choose other people...the forms of consumption which he prefers are those that maintain the kind of collectivity he likes to be in” (2004:145).

Indeed, many anthropologists have long pointed to the social nature of consumption (Orlove & Rutz 1989, Douglas and Isherwood 1996, Wilk 1993, Miller 2008). It is from this perspective that historians like Bushman (1992) and Carson (1994) argue that during 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the widespread possession and use of fashion bearing status giving artifacts gave increasingly mobile and urban populations the ability to identify themselves to like-minded people. Today, consumption continues to play a key role in identity formation, particularly in urban areas, where there are so many people that one can rarely be recognized by kinship or geographical roots.



Consumer culture continues to serve as a powerful means of communicating social belonging, defining and keeping communities together and ensuring social resilience in changing times. Therefore, asking people to reduce their consumption can be like asking them to give up their symbols of personal identity and social belonging. Even Baudrillard, a prolific critic of the culture industry, has argued that attempts to constrict consumption are “naïve and absurd moralism” (1970:68). His critique is supported by the ethnographic work of Daniel Miller who points to the fact that for many people, shopping is about caring for others and objectifying devotional love (1998). From this perspective, high consumption is not inherently irrational but is rather part of the symbolic and communicative framework of the nation. Indeed, many of the most recent studies in consumption stress the creative and productive aspects of consumption.

Thus in contrast to the individual economic actors described by rational choice theorists, the socio-cultural perspective points to the socially and culturally embedded nature of economic behaviors. These authors argue vehemently that even in so-called impersonal market-based economies, economic actors are inherently social beings. It therefore must be recognized that “specific preferences” are based on what Prattis (1987) refers to as a “situational logic” constructed in the complex and intersecting matrices of class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and generation. The realization that consumption serves a very useful social purpose also points to its inherent contextual rationality.

Yet as Kennedy points out, although individualism and postmodernism in modern capitalist society have created a multiplicity of symbolic values and communities with which to identify, the increasing symbolic nature of consumption “cannot conceal the

underlying materiality of the products to which such meanings are attached, nor the relentless pressure on resources and the generation of wastes that accompanies these lifestyle practices” (2004:26). Thus many theorists have come to critique views like those of Mary Douglas, who would paint the construction and reconstruction of identity through material goods as supremely rational. Bryant and Goodman, for example, write, “We do not support the ambivalent tendencies of commodity-focused studies that sometimes seem to be in danger of reveling in the endless creation of meanings and identities” (2004:349). Indeed, it is hard to disagree with Rita Erickson that much of this work, in its celebration of the creative aspects of consumerism, is essentially neo-functional and thus “precludes a more critical look at industrial consumerism and the crucial questions of sustainability and equity” (1997: 135).

### **Political Economy: Social Differentiation & Structural Reproduction**

While most are free to choose among a set of alternative means when making economic decisions, it must also be recognized that the set of possibilities is often limited by social, political and economic structures. The power of these structures to limit choices varies dramatically depending on factors such as one’s geography, race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, and nationality. The political economic approach to consumerism reminds us that analyses which place sole emphasis on the agency of consumers to affect change likely fail to recognize the influence of differential access to power and structural constraints. Theories that treat all economic actors as equal in their creative capacity thus neglect a consideration of the effects of history, social institutions and political power on economic decisions. Instead, these analyses share neoclassical economics’ tendency to take an ahistorical and apolitical individualist perspective, incomplete in its ability to

explain processes of change or the power relations which limit the economic choices of some actors. An analysis of power, history and ideology are brought to the fore in the theoretical perspectives of political economy.

Many critiques of market-based sustainable consumerism argue that by failing to question the consumerist mentality; sustainable consumption places too much faith in improved production efficiencies and in the power of consumers to drive social and structural change. Critics cite the power of corporations and the culture industry to define needs and the almost religious ideologies of growth and progress in capitalist society. These critics argue that the reflexive actions of individual alternative consumers must be, at least, complimented by government action and a reform of the relations of production and consumption.

Bryant and Goodman (2004) point to the inherent irony in trying to solve problems of over-consumption with more consumption. Others voice concern that many sustainable consumers believe that as long as they're buying green, they no longer have to worry about or take responsibility for environmental degradation (Micheletti 2003). Sustainable consumption has thus been described as a "conscience soother for the middle class" and a "simulated politics of representation that that merely pretends to popular struggle" (Kaplan 1995). Goss writes, "I cannot quite conceive of consumption as itself inherently a form of resistance to capitalism – even the 'negation' of capitalism – as if it is the means by which labor seeks to overcome its alienation, and bring back its products into the creation of humanity" (2004: 374).

Perhaps more damning, however, is the charge that by relying solely on the market, sustainable consumerism allows national and international governance structures

to avoid responsibility for serious environmental problems associated with industry, and thus rely on the “free hand” of the “rational” market to ensure long term environmental health. From this perspective sustainable consumerism’s flight away from traditional politics not only commodifies political action, but it also allows states to “free ride”. Instead of relying on market-based approaches, many political economists argue that the fundamental structure of the capitalist system must be altered in order to balance the current distribution of power which favors those who control productive resources.

Many of these ideas are inspired by theory in political ecology which seeks to understand how access to and control over resources structures environmental degradation and the prospects of green and sustainable alternatives (Watts 2003). From this perspective then, much of the threat to sustainability rests not in consumption, in and of itself, but rather with the unequal distribution of access to natural resources. Thus environmental problems are seen as inherently political and in need of political as well as market-based solutions.

Instead of advocating continued growth, in their report for the Rio Earth Summit, Dutch economists Tinbergen and Hueting (1991) advocated placing limits on further growth in “rich countries” in order to compliment efforts to develop more efficient technologies, stabilize population growth and eliminate poverty globally. Such dramatic restructuring is not likely to result due to market-based resistance, but rather requires strong international governance. Ultimately many political economists have argued that such drastic change requires the deconstruction and dismantling of current market structures and systems of value. Alf Hornborg (1993), for example, has written that

“Perhaps in the long run, the only way to liberate human bodies and souls ...is to refuse to define nature as “raw materials” and life as "labor.”

Part of political economy’s critique of the capitalist market is based on the idea that social relations and class consciousness are mystified in a process of commodity fetishism (Marx 1992). By focusing on commodities rather than the human labor and natural resources embodied in them, consumers are blinded to processes of production or inequalities inherent in the production chain. This mystification thus encourages actions that exacerbate environmental degradation and social inequality. Goss encourages research in this area, arguing that we must come to understand not only individual consumption motivation, but also the pull that all humans in capitalist systems feel to consume. He argues that this pull “is neither simply the product of the pleas for patriotism by political leaders nor exhortation by the representatives of the consciousness industries, but has its origins in the general alienation of labor and the complex phenomenon of the fetishism of commodities under contemporary capitalism” (2004:386). Other theorists link the contemporary focus on sustainable consumerism to the structures of postmodern urban living - where individualism, anonymity and freedom are idealized and humans are increasingly dis-embedded from social life – making consumption a key means of identity construction (Bauman 2005)

On one hand it appears that more sustainable forms of consumerism attempt to both leverage and resist the market in order to make explicit the inequality and environmental destruction inherent in contemporary commodity chains and forms of ownership. On the other hand, political economic analyses suggest that sustainable consumerism, based on the ideology of free individual choice, is a strategy born of

privilege. From this perspective sustainable consumerism is seen as another form of status seeking leading to the creation of “elitist environmental submarkets and lifestyles” (Paavola 2001: 244). Since green and organic products tend to be more expensive, alternative consumption patterns may in part be linked to middle and upper class scorn for working class or “uneducated” views of nature or a desire to differentiate themselves by identifying with an alternative set of values. If only those with adequate resources have the ability to voice their opinions about the market’s direction, critics argue that market-based forms of political participation privilege the wealthy, are not democratic, and, therefore, serve to reproduce social inequalities.

Privileged consumers in the developed economies defend their ability to choose - their wealth enabled freedom of choice on the market - despite the fact that some of these choices have dire consequences for marginalized and vulnerable communities around the world – those without the power to choose. So while consumers in Sweden advocate choosing fuel-efficient cars to reduce emissions and climate change, indigenous people living in Alaska, for example, don’t have any other choice but to relocate as waters encroach upon their communities (Crate & Nuttall 2009). From this class-based perspective, it seems that alternative consumerism is linked not only to subtle boundary maintenance, but also to a global power hierarchy.

The political perspective on sustainable consumerism illuminates how these men and women, despite their level of awareness or desire to support ecological alternatives, are often confined by social and political structures that limit their ability to act “rationally” and influence the market. While knowledge may inspire significant reflection and reflexivity about contemporary social practices and their environmental

impacts, it may not be enough to inspire alternative consumerism if individuals are in a position of relative powerlessness, do not feel that their actions will make a difference, or, for example, that action would jeopardize their ability to fit into their preferred social collective or class-based identities. This perspective points to the consumer's relative lack of power to define needs and create sustainable alternatives. However, in its most extreme forms the political economic critique of sustainable consumerism discounts the potential of human agents to think reflexively and to make a difference in creating and sustaining alternative production and consumption regimes. Jackson writes, "the political economy approach shows little respect for the political judgment or moral integrity of ordinary consumers to represent them as so easily duped by the manipulative forces of contemporary capitalism" (2002:6).

### **The Need for Empirical Research**

Because acts of consumption can be linked to individual or localized experiences and meanings, habits and customs, sociality, reciprocity and servitude, leisure and fun, the reproduction of social relationship and more - trying to map a rationalization approach onto such complex and contingent meanings would be a "pointless" exercise (Hobson 2002). However, it is not my intention to argue that grand theories of sustainable consumerism are without merit and impossible to imagine, nor do I think that consumer decisions are as fragmented and ambiguous to inhibit the identification of trends or commonalities. Rather, I argue that because consumers act on a combination of moral, rational, social and political motivations, the most interesting questions do not center on the determination of a single factor which motivates all global consumers concerned with sustainability. Instead, I suggest that it is more insightful to investigate

the linkages between the social, economic, political and cultural patterns which have influenced consumer decision-making processes, perhaps making moral rather than economic considerations, for example, stronger in particular contexts. In the pages to come I explore, ethnographically and empirically, the context of sustainable consumerism in Sweden to examine rational, moral, social, and political perspectives on consumerism. Despite a considerable amount of speculation by scholars rooted in each of these perspectives, there is considerable need for in-depth, ethnographic analysis of citizen-consumers who are trying to support more environmentally- and socially-conscience production and consumption patterns.

### **The Relevance of a Consumption Study**

The study of consumption “encourages us to see how consumption is linked to that which seems to spiral upwards out of reach” and “reflects a concern for the larger historical development of oppressive, abstract forces that constrain the constant struggle for the re-humanizing of social life” (Carrier and Miller 1999:39). Yet through analyses of consumers who have constructed alternative perceptions of need and thus consume to communicate alternative identities, like those involved in the sustainable consumption movement, we can also gain insight into the attempts of consumers to attribute alternative meaning to material culture and to restructure their relationships with the dominant paradigms surrounding the economy, development and consumption. Thus as Carrier and Miller write, “Studies such as these raise familiar anthropological questions about the relationship among formal cultural models, norms and practical action” (1999:42).

The study of consumption also lends valuable insight into deep categories of value and meaning. Value, expressed through material goods consumed, exists as an etic



category but can help us to understand deeper categories of emic value, in the thoughts and minds of individual members of a cultural community. In reality, objects have no value other than that which is placed on them by the subject. A study of consumption decisions thus allows us to “join the material world of objects to the ideological world of the evaluation of objects” (Orlove & Rutz 1989:43).

Blim writes “There is theoretical room for growth in our understanding of how consumption fits within contemporary capitalism” (2000: 34) and certainly many social theorists have recently taken up this call. This trend toward a study of consumption is also a reaction to growing awareness of inequality in global consumption patterns and a parallel awareness of the unsustainable nature of First World consumption patterns (Korten 1995). In a global ecosystem with limited resources, more and more people are becoming aware that the status quo is simply not sustainable. Therefore, many have turned to consumption studies in an attempt to illuminate the historical and cultural context of our consumption decisions and expose them as such, rather than the manifestation of universal human needs destined to be fulfilled. As Leach writes, “it is urgent for us to see this culture as a time-bound historical creation, especially if we have any misgivings about it, want to change it, or aim to reject it altogether” (1993:xiv).

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **Research Design and Methodology**

*Dear Cindy - I have heard about your research project from Tidsverkstaden's email newsletter. I am willing to help if you need more people. My family has made many changes in our life. We are now sorting and we do our best to choose ecological foods. We also moved into a more efficient apartment in the city. There is more we should be doing but, as people say, "no one can do everything, but everyone can do something."*

-Email from Britt January 13, 2008

Ebba<sup>8</sup> was 12 years old when the news stories broke about the die off of grey seals on Sweden's west coast. Twenty years later, she remembers crying in front of the television as she watched the video footage and photographs of the lifeless seals. The images captivated her and she remained engrossed by stories about animal welfare. She began asking questions about why the seals had died and soon took an interest in many environmental issues including water pollution, the environmental risks of acid rain, the depletion of the ozone layer, endangered fish in the Baltic Sea and, most recently human induced climate change. Yet Ebba didn't take an active stance on many of these issues until recently. "For many years I felt that there was no point doing anything. I was hopeless and felt powerless because I am just one person and so many others don't care", she reflected. It wasn't until she attended a seminar on global climate change that she became active. "I learned there, if I don't do something then I am also responsible for what is happening, and I don't want to have any part in this, harming earth and living things," said Ebba.

After attending the seminar, Ebba started reading "obsessively" about the environment. First she started eating less meat and later decided to become a vegetarian. She uses public transport or her bike exclusively. Recently Ebba quit her job to apply for a graduate program in environmental engineering. She is still studying but said, "I don't

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<sup>8</sup> All research participants have been given pseudonyms and details of their lives have been modified to ensure confidentiality.

think I can be really content unless I know that I am working on these issues in my professional life as well. They are so important that doing anything else seems so completely useless.”

Anything Ebba needs for her apartment she tries to borrow or buy second hand in thrift stores or via *Blocket.se*, a popular online marketplace for second hand goods. Signs of her environmental concerns and actions are apparent throughout her home. The landing outside of her modest second floor apartment is, for example, packed with sorted recyclables, composting supplies and old crates from Ecolådan, a service that delivers fresh organic and local produce.

Ebba is not alone. During 14 months of fieldwork in Sweden I met and spoke with many who shared her concerns and were also trying to reduce their environmental impact. I sought out these men and women because I was interested in learning more about how people - thoroughly embedded in consumer culture, capitalist markets and complex, interdependent, urban societies - come to understand environmental risks and respond to them, leveraging or resisting the market in an attempt to force change.

In the pages to come I outline how I went about exploring these questions, providing an overview of the research design and methodology, describing the fieldwork experience and the techniques I’ve used to analyze the information I gathered. I begin by providing some background and rationale for conducting the study in Sweden. Certainly I could have explored these ideas in many contexts, but my secondary research and literature reviews suggested that Sweden would provide a particularly intriguing setting for the exploration of these questions.

## **(Re)Searching Sustainability in Sweden: Context & Background**

Movements intended to create more sustainable societies are growing internationally, but Swedes have been particularly responsive to alternative forms of consumerism (Micheletti & Stolle 2004). In 2004 Sweden ranked first among European nations in the number of its citizens who boycott (33%) and report purchasing products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons (55%) (Micheletti & Stolle 2004). Just two years later a 2006 study found that 60% of Swedes said that they had boycotted or boycotted certain products or companies, compared to an average of 34% for the rest of Western Europe (Ferrer & Fraile 2006). Swedish interest in ecolabeled and organic products is also high due, in part, to the efforts of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and the Nordic Council of Ministers who introduced ecolabelling schemes in the 1980s. Today the Nordic Swan is among the most successful ecolabels in the world, with 97% recognition (NCOM 2009) and the organic label KRAV has 98% recognition among Swedish citizens.

Further, demographers noted a shift in Swedish consumption patterns away from durable goods and towards experiences beginning as early as a decade ago (Wilkström 1997) and in 2008 the Swedish Retail Institute declared that the Christmas present of the year (*Årets Julklapp*) was not a GPS or the latest mobile phone, but rather an experience like tickets to the opera or a dinner out with friends (HUI 2009). Meanwhile geographers have noted the growing popularity of second hand consumption throughout Europe (Crewe & Gregson 1998) and anthropologist Rita Erickson observed in the late 1990s that only 23 percent of Swedes (compared to 71 percent of Americans) agreed that they should consume more to foster the economy (1997). Further, Erickson also noted that

compared to US citizens, Swedes were much more able to make connections between their own consumption and distant environmental problems (both in time in space).

Indeed, scholars have long noted Sweden's constrained culture of commerce (Alex 1999, O'Dell 2005), and observed that, relative to Americans, Swedes tend to be more concerned about sustainability (Erickson 1997). Erickson links this concern to factors such as the highly personal connections Swedes feel with nature – described by Marianne Gullestad as highly emotional and “almost religious” connections with the land (1987). While a strong and mainstream environmental movement is common in many different national contexts, the latest EuroBarometer study reveals that Swedes are prioritizing these issues much more actively than the citizens of other EU countries. According to the EU, most Europeans do not share Sweden's level of commitment to the environment. While Swedes prioritize the fight against climate change and other environmental issues in their ideas for improving the EU - “Europeans in general do not share the enthusiasm of Swedes for environmental issues” (EU 2009). The authors analyzing the 2009 EuroBarometer write, “Sometimes, it would appear that the Swedish media believe that opinions on environmental issues and climate change are much the same throughout Europe. This may create exaggerated expectations on the European Union's ability and political will to address these questions”(2009:72)

Micheletti (2003) has pointed to the intrigue of the Swedish case, arguing that citizens typically turn to market-based solutions like eco-labels or boycotts when traditional political arenas are inaccessible or unresponsive to their concerns. But this doesn't seem to be the case in Sweden where the state has a long history of political corporatism and has expressed the desire to be an international leader on the path to

global sustainability (Jörby 2002). Further, the environmental movement and activist concerns have been given voice and recognition by the state (Boström 2005, Theien 2004). Micheletti writes, “Sweden rates high on most measures of social capital and the more collectivist and corporatist political culture that characterizes Sweden does not point in the direction of individualized collective action”. In fact the Swedish government has long demonstrated this commitment, leading the international community in terms of sustainability research, legislation, and planning, and in terms of its commitment to the polluter pays principle and development of financial supports for sustainability programs (Rowe & Fudge 2003). The state has also been an active and progressive player in the development of international sustainability discourse, frequently organizing meetings, leading task forces and negotiating multilateral environmental agreements. Yet despite this environmental progressivism, Sweden also has a strong and competitive capitalist economy, high levels of consumption and is well known for its conformist culture. This curious juxtaposition raises interesting questions about how humans respond to perceptions of environmental problems in the context of a strong “consumer culture.” Further, while “sustainable” products still constitute a small market share of Sweden’s total consumption and certainly not all Swedes are concerned about the environment or sustainability more generally, the strength of the sustainable consumption movement in Sweden relative to other nations raises interesting questions about the localized, cultural and historical factors that have supported this orientation.

### **Preliminary Research**

After deciding to locate my dissertation research in the Swedish context, I began by reading more about Swedish life, everything from *Pippi Longstocking* to Moberg’s

*The Emigrants* and countless ethnographies, histories, and travel guides. As I read, a picture of Swedish culture emerged in my mind. In retrospect, it was a rosy one of a country where morality, equality and solidarity are valued above all else, where people are emotionally connected to the environment, and where meaningful cultural concepts like *lagom* – a word without a great English translation – work to moderate Swedish consumption. I was particularly intrigued by the concept of *lagom*, one that all sources seemed to agree was exceptionally meaningful in Swedish culture and particularly relevant for a study of sustainable consumerism. Most Swedish-English dictionaries translate *lagom* as “just enough,” “adequate” or “fair share” but rather than being associated with a “lack of” something, the term generally has a positive and strong moral connotation – which hints at the virtuosity of moderation. While the etymology of the term is not totally certain, many of the books I read suggested that the concept is linked back to the Viking era when *lagom* referred to the amount of mead each person could drink so that there would be a fair share for all around the circle. Erickson (1997), O’Dell (1997), and Löfgren (1995) are only a few of the authors who have suggested that *lagom* works to moderate Swedish consumption.

In the summer of 2006 I stepped off the plane at Arlanda airport; in Sweden for the first time to do some preliminary research and take a language course<sup>9</sup>. I wrote the following excerpt in my field notes the evening after my arrival.

*How ironic. I came to Sweden to study sustainable consumption and the first thing I saw when I arrived was a series of signs lining the interior of the passenger ramp at the airport. Who needs to learn Swedish? “SHOP” they said in huge bold letters. There were even more of them in the terminal, directing passengers to the enormous mall in the center of the airport. I ignored the signs,*

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<sup>9</sup> Preliminary fieldwork was conducted in June and July of 2006 with the support of the Susan Abbot-Jamieson Pre-Dissertation Research Award, administered by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky

*gathered my bags and took the eco-labeled, “climate smart” Arlanda Express into the city. Once I arrived I discretely pulled out my map to find my way to the “eco” hostel where I’d made reservations. I got horribly lost on the way, passing through an amazing network of underground shopping galleries, complete with skylights that streamed sun in from the fountain above. Much was familiar including, the most famous sign of Americanization - McDonalds. Later I walked down a long street filled with stores selling everything from chocolates and Swedish football jerseys to jewelry and string bikinis.*

Fieldnotes: Stockholm, Sweden (June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006)

While my first impressions of Sweden did not negate what ethnographers have written about a restrained culture of commerce or an overriding sense of middle-class morality, they did help to remind me that Sweden is a, wealthy post-industrial country with high rates of consumption. Standards of living are high and the capital city of Stockholm is not unlike many other metropolitan capitals like London, New York, Madrid or Copenhagen. Certainly Stockholm is unique in many ways, but as a major capital city, it is a hub of commerce in a global economic system, providing widespread access to the world’s products and services. Consumer culture is strong in Sweden and sustained economic growth is a national priority.

So despite widespread ecological awareness, an environmentally proactive government, and the actions of many who try to consume less, Swedes consume much more than the average world citizen. According to the Göteborg Center for Consumer Science (2008), Sweden has experienced significant growth in several sectors of household consumption over the last 20 years, including expenditures on leisure, household goods and clothing. On average each Swedish citizen has an ecological footprint of approximately 7 global hectares and emits 5.6 tons of carbon dioxide every year (Naturvårdsverket 2007). While these levels do not compare to the footprint of the average American citizen (9.5 global hectares and 20-25 tons of carbon dioxide



annually), they are far above what is believed to be sustainable (GFN2009). Further, alternative consumers continue to constitute a small minority of Sweden's population and the market share of organic foods and drinks is less than 5% despite rapid growth and significant consumer approval (KRAV 2010). My rosy picture was already becoming more complex, less monotone.

I soon made my way to the more agricultural south of Sweden to attend a language course in historic Lund. As I learned Swedish I also began to conduct some preliminary research. If I wanted to speak with Swedes who were modifying their lives and consumer behaviors because they are worried about the environment, then I had to figure out how to identify them. Certainly I wouldn't have the time or budget to conduct any sort of nationally representative census, so the best option was to identify groups concerned at least tangentially with more sustainable consumerism and to request access to their members. I spent much of the summer talking with Swedes about environmental groups and meeting with academics working on similar issues.

During my six-week stay I was able to form relationships with three scholars, each of whom would lend credibility to my study and provide guidance during my fieldwork the following year. Michele Micheletti, now Lars Hierta Professor of Political Science at Stockholm University, was Professor in the Department of Political Science at Karlstad University. Her work on political consumerism in the Nordic region has deeply informed my work (Micheletti 2003, Micheletti, Follesdal, & Stolle 2003, Micheletti & McFarland 2009). Christina Garsten, Chair of the Department of Anthropology and Research Director at the Stockholm Center for Organizational Studies (SCORE) has studied the organization of markets and written extensively on market ethics and

corporate social responsibility (Garsten & Hernes 2008, Boström & Garsten 2008, Garsten & Hasselström 2003). Her sponsorship of my research provided me with access to Stockholm University, office space and invaluable connections. Finally, Alf Hornborg, Professor of Human Ecology at Lund University takes a long-term, cross cultural and inherently anthropological approach to the study of contemporary markets and human relationships to the environment. His critical approach has helped many, including myself, to question existing social, political, and economic forms, making way for imagined alternatives (Hornborg 2009, Hornborg & Crumley 2007, Hornborg 2001).

Plans for the study were sharpened during the 2006/2007 academic year as funding proposals were written and submitted. Several of my applications were successful<sup>10</sup> and I returned to Sweden in June of 2007 to arrange the logistics of my trip. I arranged meetings with several leaders of groups working on issues related to sustainable consumerism. However, I would learn the hard way that it is almost impossible to arrange meetings with many Swedes during the summer. One afternoon I called the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, the country's largest environmental group with 181,000 members and 60 full time employees in their central office. When the call was answered I explained the purpose of my research and requested to arrange a visit. After a slight pause the receptionist said, "well you would be very welcome but I'm afraid this is not a good time because many people are on holiday." I explained that I would be in town for only a few more days and would not return until the middle of August. Suggesting that it would be nice to meet someone before my departure (I was eager to get permission to do the research), I persisted. Her response: "well I'd be happy

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<sup>10</sup> This fieldwork was made possible with the generous support of the Fulbright Program, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, The American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the University of Kentucky Graduate School.

to speak to you, but I'm afraid I'm the only one here today.” Gathering permission to sample from all five of the groups would have to wait until the fall when my field work officially began.

### **Fieldwork Stage One: Institutional Interviews**

Rather than starting from an individualist assumption that sustainable consumers operate from an alternative and independent set of values, preferences, or ethics, the research aimed to explore the articulation of consumer motivation with political-economic structures and shared discourses on the economy and the environment in order to better understand the meanings that individuals accept or contest as part of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). As such the research was designed to progress in three stages (see Table 3.1).

First I sought to get a sense of sustainability discourse, policy and programming in Sweden. In September 2007 I returned to Sweden with my family, books and research plans in tow and began a series of interviews with representatives of governmental, academic and civil-society organizations working on issues related to sustainability. I traveled throughout Sweden, meeting with leaders in several governmental agencies to learn more about what types of programs had been proposed and implemented to help reduce the impact of Sweden's consumption on the environment. Several interviewees were also tied to international governance bodies and were able to lend perspective on international policy and discourse, including Sweden's role within them. Along the way I gathered as many brochures and policy documents as I could, searching for statements

<b>TABLE 3.1 - RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS</b>	
<b>STAGE I: Institutional Interviews &amp; Leadership Interviews</b>	
	<b>Inter-views</b>
<b>Governmental Agencies</b>	
Environmental Ministry (Miljödepartementet)	1
Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket)	1
Consumer Agency (Konsumentverket)	1
Ministry for Gender & Integration (Integrations & Jämställdhetsdepartementet)	1
Swedish Environmental Objectives Council (Miljömålsrådet)	1
Green Party (Miljöpartiet de Gröna)	1
City of Stockholm, "Consume Smarter" (StockholmStad, Konsumera Smartare)	1
City of Karlstad, "Echo Action"	2
<b>Non-Governmental Organizations</b>	
Swedish Society for nature Conservation (Naturskyddsföreningen)	3
Swedish Consumers in Cooperation (Sveriges Konsumenter i Samverkan)	1
The Time Workshop (Föreningen Tidsverkstaden)	1
The Kernel Farmers Association (Föreningen Kärngårdar)	1
Friends of the Earth Sweden, Stockholm (Alternative Stad)	1
Keep Sweden Tidy (Hall Sverige Rent)	1
JAK Members Bank (Jord Arbeta Kapital Medlemsbanken)	1
<b>Academic &amp; Research Organizations</b>	
Cognito, "The Swedish Green Think Tank"	1
Karlstad University, Research Cluster on Sustainable Development	3
Luleå University of Technology, Division of Social Science/Political Science	1
SHARP program	1
Lund University, Division of Human Ecology	3
Stockholm University, Stockholm Center for Organizational Research	1
Soder University College, Sociology and the Environment	1
Stockholm Environmental Institute	1
Goteborg Center for Consumer Science	1
<b>STAGE II: Individual Interviews</b>	
Members of The Time Workshop (Föreningen Tidsverkstaden)	14
Members of Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (Bra Miljöval Gruppen)	12
Members of Swedish Consumers in Cooperation (SKIS)	9
Members of Friends of the Earth Sweden, Stockholm Group (Alternative Stad)	10
Members of the Kernel Farmer's Association (Föreningen Kärngårdar)	13
<b>STAGE III: Household Interviews</b>	
Adult family members, Bra Miljöval Gruppen	1
Adult family members, Tidsverkstaden	3
Adult family members, SKIS	2
Adult family members, Kärngårdar	4
Adult family members, Alternativ Stad	1
<b>TOTAL RESEARCH SAMPLE</b>	<b>100</b>

that would reveal the assumptions underlying official sustainability discourse as well as any assumptions made about sustainable consumerism<sup>11</sup>.

During this first stage of research I also met with several academics studying sustainability to learn more about their research programs and findings. Finally, I arranged meetings with several non-governmental organizations working on these issues to get a sense of their programs and their own definitions of sustainable action. In total I met with 31 representatives of 24 governmental, non-governmental and academic organizations working on issues related to sustainable consumerism (TABLE 3.1). In this sense the research might be considered an exploration of “cultures of expertise” (Holmes & Marcus 2005), as it examines the power that these institutions and experts have to construct knowledge and meaning – particularly as it relates to our understandings of what is and is not sustainable – and how this knowledge becomes both institutionalized and naturalized.

It is worth noting here that as an American PhD candidate doing research in Sweden, I was surprised by the ease with which I was granted meetings and access to political leaders, heads of NGOs and accomplished academics. It is likely that the Fulbright, Wenner-Gren and American-Scandinavian Foundation names lent credibility to the study. However, my acceptance was also facilitated by several other factors. First, Scandinavia’s political culture is marked by liberal corporatism, or a system in which academics, governmental representatives, industry leaders, civil society and labor leaders

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<sup>11</sup> Invaluable research assistance was provided by Matilda Ardenfors who helped to translate documents into English and to conduct policy reviews. Her expertise in political science, feminist studies and her strong work ethic contributed significantly to this project.

commonly work together to achieve common social goals<sup>12</sup>. Within this context academics are routinely consulted by the government (Micheletti 2003, Theien 2004). There is not the same antagonism and alienation between the government and the non-economic social sciences as is common in the United States. Therefore, my status as a PhD candidate was helpful.

Secondly, access to Swedes was likely facilitated by my nationality. Many remarked that they were intrigued by the proposition of talking to an American about sustainability. Swedes have an interestingly ambivalent relationship with Americans. On the one hand Swedes are intrigued by American culture and have long associated it with modernity (with which they are stereotypically fascinated). On the other hand, for many Swedes, particularly those concerned about sustainability, the US symbolizes over-consumption, waste and excess (O'Dell 1997). These men and women often remarked that they were intrigued by the idea of sharing Swedish perspectives on sustainability with an American. Many view their own efforts as futile and hopeless if the United States does not show increased responsibility and willingness to lend support to global sustainability agreements. With a population of only 9 million, Sweden's hopes for impacting global sustainability via aggregated individual action are slim if, for example, the 300 million US residents do nothing. I got the distinct feeling that many of these men and women hoped that, as an American researcher, I might be able to help communicate this sentiment. Finally, the topic of my research was seen by most participants as extremely important, they were passionate about the need for sustainability and wanted to contribute to a research project that might help to further our knowledge of sustainability

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<sup>12</sup> Corporatism is a term commonly used in political science to refer to a cooperative form of governance, involving widespread consultation and multiple stakeholders. While in popular usage it might seem to suggest heavy private sector involvement or control in political decisions, this is not the case.

policy and practice. Regardless, as a researcher I was fortunate to be granted such easy access to policymakers, non-governmental leaders, academic experts and Swedish citizens.

### **Fieldwork Stage Two: Citizen-Consumers**

After learning more about official sustainability discourse and practice in Sweden, I moved my attention to daily practice and private Swedes, men and women who were trying to modify their lives in response to their concerns. I focused this ethnographic component of the research in and around the Stockholm area. While Sweden's capital city is certainly not representative of Sweden as a whole, no single ethnographic location can adequately represent a nation's diversity. Further, given my intent to work with urban citizen-consumers who are attempting to resist consumer culture as they construct alternative meanings and lifestyles, Stockholm was a logical option. The city is notably design conscious, its selection of products and services for consumption virtually limitless, and its population of wealthy consumers considerable. Combined with Sweden's highly conformist culture, these factors make a study of sustainability in Stockholm all the more interesting as a small segment of urbanites attempt to resist the city's pervasive consumer culture, create alternative meanings and construct more sustainable lifestyles. Studies show that sustainable consumerism is more common in urban areas (Micheletti & Isenhour 2010). Further, due to the concentration of official and civil-society efforts to encourage sustainability in the city, Stockholm presented a logical location for gaining access not only to individuals concerned about making a smaller environmental and social impact, but also to policy makers, social leaders and the

national media. That being said, I was also interested in understanding suburban and rural perspectives and thus conducted interviews within a two hour radius of the city.

Because the population of sustainable consumers was unknown and a census far beyond the scope of the project, I drew upon Haraway's (1991) concept of affinities to identify groups which share "affiliation and... views or interest" centering on sustainable consumption practice (Rocheleau 1995). This "site-based" (Arcury & Quandt 1999) or "cluster" sampling design provided a "way to sample populations for which there are no convenient lists or frames"... "based on the fact that people act out their lives in more or less natural groups or clusters" (Bernard 1994:89). A considerable amount of time was spent identifying Swedish organizations working on issues related to sustainable consumption. While my intent was not to study these organizations specifically, I needed to generate a list from which to sample. Five organizations were selected that published information related to sustainability (e.g. consumer advocacy, voluntary simplicity, or environmental groups) and could provide access to a list serve or membership database. Organizations were selected to maximize variability in urban-rural composition, organizational philosophies, environmental views and activist agendas.

The first organization selected was Sveriges Naturskyddsföreningen (The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation or SNF). SNF is Sweden's largest and oldest environmental organization. Founded in 1909 the SNF has approximately 181,000 members nationally, with local chapters within each Swedish municipality. According to Boström (2004) SNF identifies itself as the leading environmental organization in Sweden, taking an important role in creating pressure and support for policy reform. They have a strong track record working with both industry and the government to push



the sustainability agenda. Traditionally the organization focused on conservation but, since the 1980s it has increased its focus on sustainable consumption and living (Micheletti 2003). Today each local chapter has a variety of groups in which members can become involved. In Stockholm members can get active in groups centered on issues ranging from advocating for green spaces to the creation of more sustainable transportation options in and around the city. One of these groups is *Bra Miljöval Gruppen*, or the good environmental choice group. During the time of this research the group had approximately 15-20 members, the majority of whom were young women living in the city, between 25 and 35 years old. They met once or twice a month to share ideas, learn, and to plan projects centered on building consumer awareness or driving demand for alternative products on the market. The group's agenda was not radical<sup>13</sup> by any means; rather they defined sustainable consumption largely in terms of buying more environmentally friendly goods and sought to work within existing social, economic and political structures to drive demand for greener alternatives. This is consistent with SNF's general message that consumers do not have to make radical lifestyle changes to live more sustainably. Boström (2003) argues that this cooperative, less-radical role is tied to the acceptance of ecological modernization thought within the organization (Hajer 1995, Mol 1997, Spaargaren 1997). I first met with SNF's Bra Miljöval group in the fall of 2007 to introduce my research and seek permission to attend monthly meetings and interview members willing to volunteer. In all, twelve members of the group volunteered and were interviewed.

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term radical to refer to the perspective that sustainability will require the dismantling and reconstruction of contemporary social, political and economic systems.

*Föreningen Tidsverkstaden* (Time Workshop or TV) also allowed me to publicize the research among people who visit their website or subscribe to their newsletter. A young organization established in 2000, TV is related to the voluntary simplicity movement which advocates simple living and an examination of life's priorities – including material possessions. The idea is not only living with fewer consumer goods but also pursuing a life that offers more social and emotional satisfaction. While the group's agenda is not environmental, its founders argue that this approach helps members to see a direct connection between living a simpler life, with fewer things, and emotional, social and environmental sustainability. Unlike SNF, the group does not have a formalized national structure. They do not have “members” per se, but rather serve as a source of information and inspiration for the people who visit their website, subscribe to their newsletter or who have attended one of the group's workshops on time management. As of late 2007 their listserve included the names of approximately 2,000 Swedes living all over the country. The organization has a very individualized orientation, concerned more with personal fulfillment than political change. They do not have an activist<sup>14</sup> agenda but rather emphasize individual lifestyle changes. A message describing this research and calling for participants was posted on Tidsverkstaden's website and sent out via email to their listserve. Fourteen individuals associated with Tidsverkstaden participated in the research.

The third group from which I sampled is Föreningen Kärngårdar (The Kernel Farmers Association or KF). This group, much like the “back to the earth” and local foods movements in the United States, advocates the preservation of traditional farming

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<sup>14</sup> While sustainable consumerism may be seen as a form of activism, or what Micheletti would describe as “individualized collective action” I use the term here to refer to more traditional forms of collective action including participating in demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins or guerilla tactics.

methods and tools for self-sufficiency. It is a very small organization, composed of individuals throughout Sweden. Some members are farm owners who rely on traditional horticultural methods and the tenants of permaculture, others live in cities but support the work of these farms and the preservation of tools for self-sufficiency. Founded in 1982, the group has also created workshops and adult education centered on keeping methods for organic and non-mechanized agriculture alive. Members tend to have a deep mistrust of technical solutions and are concerned about fossil fuel dependency, peak oil and environmental pollutants associated with industrialized agriculture. The organization's membership is older, many of them deeply involved with the environmental movement in Sweden for years. The composition of the group is much more rural than the other groups from which I sampled, lending an alternative perspective on sustainability. Their agenda is radical in many ways, but the group does not have an activist political orientation, focusing rather on the creation and support of alternative networks for production and consumption. After meeting with the organization's President and Board of Directors, I received approval to send emails and letters by post to the organization's members. Thirteen members of Kärngårdar took part in the research.

AlternativeStad (Alternative City), the fourth organization from which I sampled, is the Stockholm chapter of Friends of the Earth (FOE) Sweden. FOE, founded in Sweden in 1971, has a more radical agenda, focused on political solutions and the advocacy of social and environmental justice. FOE Sweden sees itself as the radical wing of the Swedish environmental movement, emphasizing global perspective and solidarity, grassroots participation, and awareness (Boström 2004). They encourage political participation by organizing rallies, and demonstrations. FOE has approximately

2000 members nationally; approximately 420 are also members of AlternativeStad in Stockholm. AlternativeStad, founded in 1969, was originally an independent organization that merged with the environmental federation and then Friends of the Earth in 1995. The membership base of AlternativeStad has for many years worked on issues related to transportation in the city. Their membership is largely urban. After meeting with one of the organization's administrators, an email describing the study was sent to the Stockholm email list. Ten AlternativeStad members participated in the study.

Finally, research participants were also sampled from an organization called Sveriges Konsumenter i Samverkan (Sweden's Consumers in Cooperation or SKIS). In many ways SKIS is more of a one-man show than a formal organization. SKIS's founder and director focuses the organization on consumer advocacy and education, primarily - although not exclusively - as it relates to food. He and his staff research issues and publish a website and newsletter with information about issues of consumer interest. While I was never able to get a confirmation of how many Swedes receive the newsletter, the director suggested it was approximately 2,000. SKIS does not have an activist agenda, and did not encourage participation while this research was taking place. Rather, it is primarily centered on raising awareness and consumer advocacy. The group does not have an explicit environmentalist message although its approach to environmental problems is consistent with market-based environmentalism despite the fact that the director's pessimism about industry and the capitalist profit motive frequently come through in the newsletter and on the website, much to the chagrin of some of their readers. The people sampled from SKIS tended to be more sympathetic to the political right than the rest of the sample, did not consider themselves environmentalists and had

higher incomes on average. In order to gather research participants from SKIS, the organization's director sent an email message to newsletter subscribers in the Stockholm area. Twelve individuals responded but only nine were able to participate in the research<sup>15</sup>.

In total 58 Swedish citizen-consumers participated in this segment of the research. While this is a relatively small sample, Guest, Bruce & Johnson (2006) illustrate that data saturation (in the qualitative analysis of themes) is often reached by the 12<sup>th</sup> interview. I found that the 9-14 interviews from each group proved more than adequate to identify common themes during the coding process. While each of these organizations has their own philosophies and goals, there was significant variability among the members in each group. Further, in many cases, research participants belonged to two or more of these organizations, perhaps reducing the relevancy of the groups themselves.

Initially, each of these individual citizen-consumers took part in a 1 to 4 hour semi-structured interview<sup>16</sup> sometime between November 2007 and May 2008. The interviews were conducted in a location of the participant's choosing, most often in their homes, offices or at a café<sup>17</sup>. These meetings began with a discussion of life histories intended to reveal how each participant became aware of and interested in issues related to sustainability. They were asked to explain their concerns and how they became aware of the connections between their actions and environmental issues. Other topics included

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<sup>15</sup> Members of SKIS were harder to schedule interviews with. Many of them scheduled meetings but had to cancel for personal reasons at the last minute. I cannot be sure if this was due to specific characteristics of SKIS members or chance. However, it is worth noting that SKIS members were generally the least committed to sustainable living, often limiting their focus to natural foods.

<sup>16</sup> The average interview length was 1 hour and 40 minutes

<sup>17</sup> Research participants were given a choice of English or Swedish for interviews. Five interviews were conducted in Swedish. In these instances research assistant Matilda Ardenfors conducted the interview or helped with translation when my Swedish proved inadequate. All other participants opted to do the interview in English. Their comments have not been modified. In the case that they included a Swedish word, translations have been provided in parentheses.

their views on nature and its value, their environmental philosophy, perceptions of environmental risk, views on the economy, the importance of consumption to sociability, and their ideas on the most optimal forms of governance. Participants were also asked to define the “domain” of sustainable living through a series of free lists, pile sorts and rankings (Appendix 1), including a discussion of all the things they are doing, or are trying to do, to reduce their impact.

Although this segment of the research focused on individual citizen-consumers, it was not based on the individualist assumption that these people operate from an alternative and independent set of values, preferences or ethics. Instead, it sought to understand both the diversity and commonalities within this group of sustainable consumers, looking for patterns and shared cultural logics but also the political, economic and social structures that also shape their daily lives. The project was thus designed to take theories of practice and structuration seriously, bringing to light the tensions these consumers face as they attempted to insert their ethical concerns and social values into the economic realm.

### **Fieldwork Stage Three: Household Case Studies**

Finally, each of the participants were asked if they would be interested in participating in more in-depth research which would include tracking all income and expenses for one month, completing carbon footprint calculators, consumption inventories, home visits and tours, a series of iterative interviews, and shopping trips together. Only one individual declined to volunteer. Once all of the semi-structured interviews were completed, each volunteer was contacted again to ensure their continued

interested and the consent of all other adult household members<sup>18</sup>. Fifty five participants indicated their continued interest. Quota sampling based on the age, group membership, gender, and income of the original participant was utilized to select 12 families for this segment of the research (Table 3.2). Each family was asked to keep track of all income and expenses for one month and to complete a carbon footprint calculator. They were also asked to complete a consumption inventory (Appendix 2) providing information about their home, detailing items they owned from televisions and cars to jeans, coffee cups and straight backed chairs. Because I was interested in studying the energy and resources embodied within material culture, it was also important to understand how often families replace their possessions. Therefore, all participants were asked to record which of the items in their inventories were older than ten years and which were acquired second hand<sup>19</sup>.

Throughout this study I relied on participant perceptions of what is “sustainable” in order to define the domain and understand creative agency via consumption practice, whether its effectiveness is real or perceived. While the term “sustainable consumption” is often used to refer to reduced consumption of primary resources such as water and energy, in this segment of the methodology I focused my analyses on the consumption of tangible goods. Because these goods are acquired through conscious decision making processes and directly tied to consumer identity and sociality, they often become explicit indicators of values, morality, belonging and exclusion, thus providing additional insight

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<sup>18</sup> I did not have IRB approval to work with minors and therefore did not request the participation of children in these interviews or research methods.

<sup>19</sup> Please note that the data gathered via the consumption inventory is not included in the dissertation. While interesting it would have made the dissertation unwieldy and distracted the reader from the primary points I wished to make here. I am keeping this data “in pocket” for an article being developed for the Journal of Material Culture.

<b>TABLE 3.2 - Household Research Participants</b>						
<b>Original Participant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>HH Income/year Swedish Kr. 2007</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>HH size</b>	<b>Other household members</b>
1. Ebba	F	31	<250,000	Alternative Stad	1	Committed, lives alone
2. Mats	M	29	<250,000	Alternative Stad	1	Single, lives alone
3. Thomas	M	31	500,001 - 750,000	Alternative Stad	2	Karin (wife, 28)
4. Lars	M	49	>750,001	SKIS	4	Malin (wife 42) Ida (daughter 8) Max (son, 8)
5. Maria	F	35	500,001 - 750,000	Bra Miljöval	2	Folke (fiancé, 29)
6. Emma	F	63	250,001 - 500,000	Kärngårdar	2	Olle (husband, 66)
7. Ingrid	F	66	500,001 - 750,000	Kärngårdar	2	Johan (husband, 70)
8. Charlotte	F	32	>750,001	Tidsverkstaden	3	Kalle (husband, 33) Malte (son,1)
9. Sonja	F	56	>750,001	SKIS	3	Anders (husband, 60) Birgita (daughter, 18)
10. Sigge	M	55	500,001 - 750,000	Kärngårdar	3	Brit (wife,51) Ingrid (daughter,16)
11. Erik	M	34	250,001 - 500,000	Tidsverkstaden	4	Karolin (wife, 33) Elliott (son, 4) Elsa (daughter,1)
12. Jacob	M	47	>750,001	Tidsverkstaden	5	Elin (wife,47) Lisa & Lina (daughters,15 &13) Sam (son, 6)

into consumer motivation. Part of the rationale for this focus is also based on the observation that much attention in the sustainability discourse and literature has been directed toward issues of household consumption of electricity, gas, and water (e.g. Shove 2004, Wilhite 2005), while very little emphasis has been placed on the consumption of energy- and resource-intensive goods (Erickson 1997). Swedes have made significant reductions in the use of energy and raw natural resources. However,



these efficiencies may be overcome by the consumption of energy intensive goods and services (Carolan 2005, OECD 2005). Marx once noted that a good initially appears quite trivial but is proven to be both metaphysical and theological (1961). A study of consumer decisions about tangible goods allows us to “join the material world of objects to the ideological world of the evaluation of objects” (Orlove & Rutz 1989:43).

After completing the inventories, I met with each of the families to take a tour of their homes, to talk about their possessions and ask questions about how views on sustainability and associated actions are negotiated within the household. This was in many ways the most uncomfortable, yet interesting phase of the research. Overcoming my own cultural perceptions of polite behavior proved difficult as I asked participants for permission to explore their closets, cupboards and refrigerators. However, these tours allowed me to get a more objective view on each family’s lifestyle, observing their interpretation of sustainable practice. Some families gave the impression during interviews they were at the forefront of efforts to make a smaller environmental impact, yet when touring their homes it became apparent that they were confronted with the realities of everyday life and had made compromises or perhaps had failed to consider the impact of embodied energy. Others, it became obvious, had made more significant lifestyle changes than they had alluded to during our initial interviews. During our initial interview in a local café, for example, Sonja free-listed only a few actions that an individual could take to live a more sustainable lifestyle. As such, I got the impression that her domain of sustainable living was somewhat constricted and assumed that her own actions were likely consistent with the actions she’d listed. However, when I met Sonja, her husband and daughter at their home several months later I discovered that they

were composting, growing many of their own vegetables, rode their bikes year round, bought some second-hand things and lived in a fairly modest apartment despite their considerable household income. Relative to the rest of the sample they were doing quite a lot.

During these home tours, I spoke with family members about the meanings associated with their possessions. I sought to get an idea of how they assign value to material culture. As such, I also asked all adult household members to think about their three most “valuable” possessions. I did not define the world valuable for them, but rather insisted that they interpret it according to their own logic. This methodology, adopted from my Master’s thesis (Isenhour 2003), provided a way to explore the value constructions and the performance of identity via material culture. With permission, these possessions were photographed and the volunteers were asked to explain the social history and value of these, often inalienable, possessions (Weiner 1992)<sup>20</sup>.

Finally in order to collect data about everyday decision making and consumption behavior, I accompanied several research participants on shopping trips to gather insights into how a consumer’s perceptions, values and identities are (or are not) put into practice. Like Miller (1998, 2001a) I “shadowed” eight<sup>21</sup> of the in-depth research participants, directly observing their consumer behavior and exploring their rationales for purchase (or not). While they were certainly aware of my presence and likely performed their desired identities (Miller 2001a), I compared the insights I gained while shopping with data gathered as I explored the contents of their refrigerators, living rooms and closets. While

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<sup>20</sup> This data, about the households’ most valuable possessions, is not included here for purposes of clarity and future publication.

<sup>21</sup> While all 12 of the households volunteered to participate in this segment of the research I found that it did not yield significant additional insight, particularly relative to the time required. I therefore eliminated this portion of the research for four households with tight time constraints.

my intent was certainly not to judge which families were or were not living sustainably, (whatever that means), these observations allowed me to understand alternative conceptualizations of sustainable living and how they were negotiated both in the shop and within the home.

### **Field Work Lived: Participation & Observation**

Finally, there was also a strong participatory component in the methodology. I found myself in the field during what may come to be seen as a turning point in history. The Stern Report was released in October of 2006, generating a significant rise in the number of environmental news stories in the Swedish Media. This media attention in turn inspired shifts in public opinion about the importance of environmental questions (Jagers and Martinsson 2007). Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*, was also released in Sweden during the fall of 2006. The following year, in March of 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its fourth assessment report on climate change, declaring "unequivocal" scientific evidence for a global warming trend, "very likely" caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Later that year the IPCC and Al Gore were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, raising awareness of climate change issues in Sweden and internationally. By 2007, when I arrived in Stockholm to start fieldwork, coverage of environmental issues in Swedish daily newspapers had more than doubled their 2005 levels (Jagers and Martinsson 2007). In this context many Swedes spoke of a significant, almost palpable, momentum for the sustainability movement, centered on climate change. Although many Swedes like to joke that a rise in global temperatures would be a nice antidote for their normally frigid winters, there is a strong political and scientific consensus about anthropogenic climate change in Sweden, particularly relative

to other nations. According to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency's most recent study on public attitudes toward climate change, 89% of Swedes consider themselves climate conscious and 84% said they have taken at least one measure to reduce their climate impact in the last two years (Naturvårdsverket 2009)

In addition to environmental organizations with a much longer institutional history, new organizations were forming. In December of 2007 a new group called Klimax organized several thousand people for a climate protest in downtown Stockholm. Throughout my stay I participated in several demonstrations, attended the meetings of many groups (including those from which I sampled) and sat in on special events including press conferences, seminars, and symposia. These events provided insight into the context of sustainability initiatives on multiple levels and provided the opportunity to observe people in group settings, acting according to shared cultural logics.

Finally, while living in Sweden my family and I agreed to follow the most recent recommendations for green living. As such we repaired our shoes, rode our bikes, ate our leftovers, learned the public transportation routes, and oriented ourselves using a Google Earth map we made of the city's second hand stores. We focused on borrowing or buying second-hand goods (with a few exceptions for items impossible to purchase second-hand including foods, personal hygiene items like toothpastes and deodorants, and several souvenirs). For those things unavailable second-hand, we tried to purchase local, handcrafted, eco-labeled and/or organic goods. We turned off our lights and computers, monitored and sorted our trash and limited our consumption of meat, exotic, and out-of-season foods. We also tried in earnest to reevaluate our needs and do without. This is not to say that we were always perfect...in fact we were far from it. But this

experience and its contradictions helped us to understand the infrastructure in place for more environmentally-friendly living and how even environmentally aware, engaged, and interested people frequently run into barriers.

### **Data Analysis**

All research participants, including institutional representatives, were informed about study protocol and the potential risks of participation, in accordance with Internal Review Board specifications (Appendix 3). Each signed a consent form before participating in the research. With permission, all interviews, meetings, and informal discussions were digitally recorded. Interviews were transcribed in the field by myself or research assistant Matilda Ardenfors. Transcriptions were entered into Nvivo8 qualitative software and open coded by Matilda and myself to ensure coding reliability (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte 1999). Hierarchical or tree coding was used to group sub-themes. Initially the coding structure revolved around the primary themes of the interviews: views on sustainability, ecological risk and nature (Ch IV); views on the economy and governance (Ch V), the domain of sustainability and everyday practice (Ch VI) and the sociality of consumption (Ch VII & VIII). However, new parent nodes and sub-nodes were created as common themes emerged. In all, Matilda and I coded transcripts at 13 parent nodes, 94 child nodes and 49 sub-child nodes. The coding structure was continuously revisited and amended as additional themes became apparent. Demographic data and responses to the structured and quantifiable segments of the research were entered into a custom-built Access database. Queries were run to examine the relationships between factors like, for example, gender and risk perception.

### **Representing the Sample: Indicative of a Larger Middle Class Movement?**

Throughout the discussions to follow I use pseudonyms when referring to all research participants. In several instances I have also modified minor details of their lives in order to protect confidentiality, most typically the individual's profession or the location of their home. As much as possible I allow research participants to speak for themselves. However, I frequently use ellipses where text has been omitted for the purpose of streamlining the research participant's thoughts. When using this strategy I have tried to be extremely careful not to distort the participant's intentions. Several research participants who preferred to speak in English use "swenglish," technically improper English, in some transcripts. I decided not to modify these small mistakes, not because I wish to demean my research participants, but simply because doing so seemed to make many of these informal and relaxed conversations read as if they were formal interviews.

I have tried to limit the number of research participants I introduce in this text. Certainly all the men and women participating in this work were interesting and provided valuable insights. However, I hope to write in a way that will allow some of their personalities, lifestyles and voices come through to the reader. While I am not always successful in this regard, I hope that at a minimum the reader will have a good idea of who Ebba, Åsa, Karl, Erik and Emma are after reading this dissertation. They in many ways represent ideal types within the sample, people whose lives are typical of common intersections where environmental philosophies, lifestyles and perspectives on sustainability cross in patterned ways.

The 58 individuals who participated in semi-structured interviews self-selected when they volunteered to take part in the study. As such, the sample is not representative of any of the five groups, nor is it representative of the Swedish population in general. While a concern for the environment and sustainability is widespread in Sweden, even when compared to other Nordic nations (Micheletti & Isenhour 2010), and the rest of the EU (EuroBarometer 2009), this sample is specifically composed of those people who are trying to modify their lifestyles in response to these concerns. While they are all concerned enough about sustainability (however defined) to act upon their concerns, not all of them consider themselves environmentalists, per se. None-the-less, by virtue of seeking out information from or membership with one of the five groups, they are not typical Swedes and the research could potentially display a bias toward those more inclined toward civic participation.

Further, the composition of the sample reveals a rather specific social location. In all, 24 men<sup>22</sup> and 34 women<sup>23</sup> participated in individual semi-structured interviews. All members of the sample were located securely within Sweden's middle class (here narrowly defined in terms of income), with take-home household incomes ranging from 36,000 SEK (approximately \$5,580) for a young college student living with his middle class family to 2,000,000 SEK (approximately \$310,000<sup>24</sup>) for a dual income family of four. The sample was also highly educated<sup>25</sup> and was fairly homogenous in terms of

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<sup>22</sup> Mean age 49, ranging from 26 to 91

<sup>23</sup> Mean age 45, ranging from 27 to 74

<sup>24</sup> This is based on an exchange rate of .155 which was the average Interbank exchange rate between Sept 2007 and Sept 2008

<sup>25</sup> Over 90 percent of the 58 individual research participants had a post-secondary degree.

ethnic, racial, and national identification - with very few members of minority groups represented<sup>26</sup>.

This sampling method, despite its disadvantages, was beneficial in that it gathered those people most interested and committed to sustainable consumerism, thus providing a good indication of the types of people interested in the issue. Interestingly the composition of the sample closely mirrors the results of survey-based studies in Scandinavia and several international contexts (e.g. Micheletti & Stolle 2004, Ferrer and Fraile 2006, CNAD 2005). These surveys indicate that people who report buying or boycotting goods for environmental reasons tend to be highly educated, are overwhelmingly middle class, more likely (in absolute numbers) to live in urban areas, tend to be younger than 55 and are more sympathetic to left-wing and green politics (Micheletti and Isenhour 2010).

The men and women who took part in this research are privileged - not only relative to others living in Sweden, but within the global social hierarchy. While anthropology has long made subaltern studies its hallmark, I have been heavily influenced by the post-colonial critique and therefore felt passionately that it made no sense to pursue my theoretical interests in consumerism and sustainability among those who consume so little and with very little power to define sustainability. Given that I am myself a white, middle class scholar – it seemed hypocritical of me to study consumption and sustainability among an ethnic, raced or impoverished “other” – thereby reproducing anthropology’s tendency to focus on the “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003). If part of our goal as anthropologists is to speak truth to power, then we must also examine privileged

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<sup>26</sup> Approximately 14% of Sweden’s population was born abroad and many of the nation’s immigrants live in and around Stockholm. It is not clear if the absence of minority groups in this study is a function of education, income, identity, exclusion or other factors. More research is needed to answer these questions.



narratives and practices with a critical eye. Anthropology is already well aware of the need for access, equality and fairness among many of the world's most marginalized and vulnerable communities. We know much less about the structures of power that reproduce privilege. In order to learn more, we must move beyond critical theorizing and toward an attempt to understand, with cultural relativity, how the perspectives of some become naturalized and reproduced.

While the Swedish sustainability movement is no doubt influenced by localized, cultural and historical factors, it mirrors a larger middle class movement in other wealthy, post-industrial urban societies. It is typical of a “new social movement” – one which focuses on changes in lifestyle, cultures or identity rather than significant changes to existing political and economic policies or institutions. Understanding this larger movement, even if through a specific case, enables a broadening of the analytical lens and the ability to ask questions about the global social, political and economic structures that have bolstered the current focus on sustainable consumerism in so many different cultural and national contexts.

In the chapter to come I introduce the Swedish men and women who participated in this research and their perspectives on nature, ecological risk and sustainability. While survey research reveals that they have a considerable amount in common with sustainable consumers all over the globe, particularly in demographic terms, what follows illustrates that there is certainly something very unique about the Swedish case. Swedish love for nature and mainstream environmentalism has been well-documented, raising interesting questions about the historical and contextual roots of this cultural orientation and its effects on contemporary sustainability movements.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Shades of Green: On Knowing Sustainability**

I begin my tale with Åsa, a communications professional living in the heart of Stockholm, Sweden. In January of 2008 Åsa answered my call for research participants who had modified their lifestyles in the interest of sustainability. She and her family, she wrote in her email, had recently undertaken a significant change, moving from their suburban villa to an apartment in the city centre.

At such northerly latitude, Stockholm was already dark as I walked to Åsa's apartment a few days later for our four o'clock interview. Yet it was relatively easy to find my way to her building since she lived just a few blocks away from a major transportation hub where Stockholm's bus, commuter train and subway lines all intersect. I met Åsa, a petit thirty-six year old woman at her door. With a kind expression, she invited me in and, remarking that she knew I was interested in sustainable consumerism, immediately began showing me around the family's fashionable apartment. She pointed out their new energy efficient appliances in the kitchen, a rug made from recycled fibers in their living room, and a low-flow showerhead in the bath. She was clearly proud of her family's green accomplishments. Åsa's daughter followed us as we made our way around the apartment, presenting a parade of toys along the way. Her son was playing an engrossing video game in his room. Their apartment was fashionable and comfortable, typical for a middle class, thirty-something Stockholm family. In fact, if Åsa had not pointed out their efficient appliances, bulbs and showerhead, it would have been impossible to tell that the family was concerned about the environment or sustainability more generally. As we sat down in the living room for coffee, I asked Åsa why they decided to move to the city. She responded,

We felt... to make a better planet for our kids ...we had to change. We started with the sorting (recycling) and the KRAV (organic foods) and we realized how easy it was. Then we had to make bigger changes. We were driving to work everyday, driving the children to dagis (preschool) and we had an old villa that was not efficient. We have now a fuel-efficient car and live in the city. We are making a much smaller impact and we are very happy here.

Some research suggests that Åsa may be correct about the relative environmental impact of urban living. According to the city of Stockholm, the city's 1.3 million residents have reduced their energy consumption at greater rates than the balance of Sweden's 9.4 million citizens - by more than 7% since the year 2000. Further, Stockholmers release 4 tons of greenhouse gas per person a year, compared to the national average of 6.5 tons (StockholmStad 2007:3)<sup>27</sup>. Today approximately half of all the world's citizens live in urban areas (UN 2007) and a growing number of them, particularly in wealthy, post-industrial societies, argue that urban life is increasingly sustainable as technological breakthroughs, compact living, progressive environmental policies and economies of scale reduce urban footprints. Åsa, for one, felt sure that her urban lifestyle was more sustainable than those of Swedes living outside of the city. She said,

In the city, I think that people think more... they are more informed. Oh my god, now I am really doing a stereotype, because on the one hand they are also the big consumers living in the city. But when you live like this you save things. When you live in a villa by yourself I think you only think about yourself and your own house. You heat the big house and drive yourself everywhere. It is just a different mindset. People who think about these things in the city are people who are well educated.

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<sup>27</sup> There is some data to suggest that when the impacts of all the products Swedish consumers buy from abroad are considered, these figures are significantly altered (Naturvårdverket 2010), a point to which I will return momentarily.

Yet Åsa's comments, common to a small subset of the study participants<sup>28</sup>, stand in stark contrast to those of rural participants who believed their lifestyles were more sustainable. Consider them, for example, in comparison to the views of Sigge, an author and farmer living an hour's train ride outside of Stockholm, who told me,

I moved to the country about ten years ago. I grew up on a farm and my whole life, when I was working or studying in the city, I was always thinking of going back to the countryside. There are always people coming to the country every so often when we realize that life in the city is just crazy, absolutely crazy. Working all the time, your kids are in dagis (daycare). Then you come home, see your kids for a few hours,... if you're lucky, watch TV or work for a while and do it all again the next day. On the weekends you shop to buy the things we don't have the time to make ourselves. But here on the farm, life... is so much more sustainable. We work hard and life is in some ways more difficult because the garden needs me, the children need me and there is cooking to do and writing to do. But we are not so dependent, we are more self-sufficient. We are growing most of our own food so we don't need so much income. And we live in harmony with the nature, we don't try to beat it with techniques, we listen to it and we watch it. Everything I do, nature answers and it becomes a conversation between humans and nature.

My intent is certainly not to reify urban, suburban and rural differences. Cultural geography is complex in Sweden due to relatively late urbanization and a highly mobile population. Urban and rural values can therefore be found in both contexts<sup>29</sup>. While there was a great deal of variety among the research participants, regardless of where they lived, Åsa and Sigge's comments provide just one example of contrasting conceptualizations of sustainability. Certainly the urban assumption that rural residents are uneducated and unable to identify environmental risks or come up with adequate solutions is well documented in the international sustainable development literature (e.g.

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<sup>28</sup> In total, 12 participants expressed negative views about urban (8) or rural living (4). While this is not a large number, it emerged as a significant and surprising theme, particularly given that it was not directly solicited.

<sup>29</sup> Seven of the eight rural participants lived in an urban area at some point in their life. Three of them moved to the country once they were financially stable or retired. These participants are also a bit older than the average age for the sample.

Fairhead and Leach 2003, Neumann 2005, Fratkin and Mearns 2003), and in Sweden where urban discourses on sustainability often discount and exclude rural perspectives (Svensson 2009, Dahl 2007). But there are many other contrasts to be drawn. Sometimes they represent subtle nuances, while at other times they signify considerable tensions and highly political struggles to control the discourse of sustainability.

The research presented in this chapter illustrates variability in the ways that people think about sustainability and sustainable living, even among this relatively small sample of people living in and around Stockholm, Sweden. Many governmental representatives, for example, hold views that are markedly different from those held by Stockholmers who are trying to reduce the negative impact of their lifestyle. Some associate sustainability with energy efficiencies, others with self-sufficiency and a more respectful relationship with nature. This diversity raises interesting questions about how sustainability narratives are constructed and contested, often in highly political ways. As a baseline and means for comparison, I begin this discussion with a description of the official discourse in Sweden and its capital city, Stockholm.

### **Sustainability in the City: Ecological Modernization and the Rule of Experts**

As previously mentioned, Sweden has long been regarded as an international leader in the environmental movement. As such the nation has taken calls for northern sustainability seriously. The Swedish *Riksdag* (parliament) established the Stockholm Environmental Institute in 1989 to continue the work of and support international research related to the 1972 Stockholm UN Conference on the Environment and Development. Then, after the Rio Earth Summit, the Swedish government began the process of implementing the summit's recommendations for a sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The government institutionalized Agenda 21 programs at the local level stating that, "Agenda 21 consists of recommendations and is thus not judicially binding, but in the Government's opinion the action program is politically and morally obligating" (SOU 1992/93:13.5). In 1995 a National Agenda 21 Committee was established to stimulate local activities and report on their progress (Eckerberg & Bjorn 1998). Further, between 1998 and 2003, Sweden's Local Investment Program dedicated 6.5 billion SEK for the modernization of buildings, infrastructure and energy systems at the local level, often resulting in significant improvements (Baker and Eckerberg 2007).

Today the Swedish government operates according to a set of environmental quality goals and a system of green indicators to measure improvements. These programs and the availability of tools linked to finance have certainly promoted municipal action towards sustainability in Sweden (Rowe & Fudge 2003). Until recently, however, most of the initiatives inspired by these programs were tied to large technological projects designed to improve resource efficiencies, typically in urban cores like Stockholm (Baker 2007). This emphasis on technological solutions reflects the dominance of ecological modernization thought in Sweden (Boström 2003). Ecological modernization is premised on the belief that environmental problems can be overcome by further modernizing our societies, through "technical and procedural innovation" (Hajer 1996:249). In fact, ecological modernization theorists have suggested that the only way out of environmental crisis is by going further into industrialization (Spaargaren & Mol 1992). This philosophy is based on a fundamental belief in human progress and the problem-solving capacity of human institutions and technological innovations. Economic growth and ecological sustainability are seen as complimentary, rather than mutually

exclusive goals. In contrast to market environmentalism<sup>30</sup> - which maintains that the laws of supply and demand are sufficient to ensure sustainability - and consistent with longstanding European state policies that have sought to invest in public goods and promote growth, the Swedish state maintains an important role in ecological modernization, helping to stimulate more efficient, modern and technologically innovative societies.

In his report to the UN Johannesburg convention former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson clearly illustrated the dominance of ecological modernization thought, writing, “We must be able to produce more with less resource and less pollution. This will require environmentally sounder and more resource efficient solutions” (SNCA 2002:4). It is also not uncommon to hear Swedish citizens talk about the potential for economic growth, generated by the development and exportation of green technologies. Ecological modernization is certainly attractive in its assertion that contemporary lifestyles can be sustained and that the economy and industry can continue to grow with new techniques that generate both jobs and income.

Yet despite impressive efficiency gains and significant pollution reductions resulting from ecological modernization-inspired programs, they have been heavily critiqued in Sweden and internationally for their focus on expert-led, technocratic solutions that tend to exclude citizens from efforts to define sustainability, its practice, or appropriate policy (Fudge & Rowe 2003, Baker & Eckerberg 2007, Jörby 2002, Khakee 2002, Feichtinger & Pregernig 2005).

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<sup>30</sup> There are many examples of market environmentalism in Sweden and internationally, including corporate social responsibility initiatives, tradable pollution permits and the privatization of natural capital. However, this approach to sustainability is much stronger in the US than in most European nations, particularly Scandinavia.

Over the past decade efforts have been made to address these critiques by working to involve citizens in programs to create more sustainable societies. This new emphasis is also due, in part, to a growing recognition that the positive gains achieved by technological efficiencies were being quickly undermined by growing levels of per capita consumption. International and multi-national organizations from Amnesty International and the United Nations, to the World Watch Institute and the OECD have instituted specific programs on sustainable consumerism. The focus has also been adopted by the EU and myriad state governments. The EU recently remarked on their website, “In 2009, the commission proposed a package of measures to promote eco-friendly products, including greater use of energy efficiency labels like those found on wash machines”.

This focus on sustainable consumerism is also prevalent in Sweden. In 1996 the Swedish environmental protection agency (Naturvårdsverket) released a study suggesting that nearly half of all carbon emissions in Sweden were associated with private household consumption, significantly outpacing the impact of public or industrial emissions. Sweden has since complimented its focus on large infrastructural and production-orientated approaches with programs centered on changing consumer behavior and lifestyles (Matti 2007).

One afternoon, while waiting for a meeting in the lobby of the city’s administrative building, I noticed a brochure detailing Stockholm’s latest environmental program (Stockholm Stad 2008). Inside it said,

Environmentally friendly techniques have brought us a big step on the way, and one never stops admiring how many fantastic and good ideas are constantly being born in this field. The technique, however, cannot take care of everything ...Several of the goals in the environmental program can only be reached if both the city and its inhabitants help.



Several pages later, the document provides specific examples of what Stockholm's inhabitants might do to help achieve the program goals. It lists:

- Change your car to a fuel efficient model— save money and care for the environment
- Use less laundry detergent – good for your wallet and the environment
- Change your light bulbs to low energy bulbs
- When you buy a freezer, choose one from energy class A and save electricity
- Sort your candleholders as metal
- Use the right amount of pressure in your tires
- Switch off all electrical devices
- Recycle your paper
- Leave your dangerous waste
- Take your bike

(2008:5)

These pieces of advice, from the experts in the city's administration, are intended to provide information to citizen-consumers about some easy and effective steps they can take to reduce the negative environmental impact of their lifestyles. These recommendations center on the need to improve the efficiency of contemporary living. Yet, ironically, many of them advocate doing so through additional consumption – the purchase of a new car, light bulbs or freezer. They do not imply that Swedes need to change their lifestyles, but rather can make them “smarter” and more “efficient” by reducing waste and with the use of technologies like energy efficient light bulbs, hybrid automobiles and energy-savings appliances. They are certainly practical suggestions that are both easy to implement and effective when practiced in aggregate. Further they are uncontroversial since they don't require structural changes or encroach upon individual choice.

Given their participation in complex globalized markets and the conditions of alienation associated with urban living, most Stockholmers have very little personal knowledge upon which to form their understandings of sustainability or to make

decisions about which products, services and practices are best. As such, they find themselves dependent on external sources of information like the recommendations listed in Stockholm's brochure.

Back in Åsa's living room on a dark winter afternoon, I asked Åsa to tell me how she knows which practices, goods and services are most sustainable. She remained silent, staring out the window for what seemed like minutes. I followed her gaze. It had started raining so I watched the raindrops reflect the street light as she tested my ability to remain uncomfortably silent. Åsa, like many others in the study, had a hard time recalling the information she uses to determine which products, services and personal practices are most sustainable. She pays attention to eco-labels and origins in the grocery store, but attributes her rationale for most of the actions she considers sustainable to "common sense." Åsa's inability to clearly trace her knowledge about sustainable practice raises interesting questions about how urban residents come to know and understand what constitutes sustainable living.

Yet environmental awareness is high throughout Sweden and many citizens, as anticipated by modernization theorists, have responded to their concerns by seeking out relevant knowledge (Boström 2004). In this context, many seek out information about the social and ecological impacts of their practices and the products they buy. Urban residents have been particularly responsive to environmental and social product labels (Micheletti & Isenhour 2010), life-cycle analyses, carbon calculators, and a whole cadre of scientific, expert-generated sources of information about sustainability. In fact, in general, Swedes tend to welcome expert-led governmental initiatives and recommendations that can help them to conserve and act sustainably (Erickson 1997:4).

Relative to other nations, Swedes have a higher level of trust in their government (O'Dell 1997). This is perhaps due to Sweden's pragmatic political culture (Boström 2002) and long history of cooperative efforts, involving widespread consultation and the solicitation of expert input to solve social and environmental problems (Micheletti 2003). Regardless, many citizens look to the government to get information about sustainable living and take recommendations - like those found in Stockholm's environmental plan - seriously.

This search for information is certainly understandable since the individual's ability to consider their choices hinges on a calculation of the environmental and social costs of products, services, and personal practices. But the science behind life-cycle analyses is incredibly complex and, given the global and opaque nature of most commodity chains, nearly impossible to determine in a grocery store aisle or when contemplating using an existing but inefficient washing machine or buying a newer model that will reduce the resource costs of future loads but take significant resources to produce. Without this knowledge many research participants experience significant and stressful ambivalence (see also Halkier 2001a, 2004). For people who want to make the right decisions but have little personal information upon which to base their actions, simple things like shopping for apples can be stressful. During one occasion, when I was shadow shopping with Johanna, I watched, thoroughly entertained, as she talked her way through the process of choosing an apple at her neighborhood grocery store.

Okay, so this one (picking up a package of four green apples), it says is from Argentina. That is a really long way from here so it takes a lot of energy to come to this store. But it is ecological (organic) and that is important to me because I don't want the chemicals and I don't think it is fair to farmers that grow these things to use chemicals on their land...and for their health. This one (pointing to an origins sign above) says these are from Sweden but they are not

KRAV (organic) and I cannot believe that there are apples on trees anywhere this time of year, even in Skåne (Sweden's southernmost province). Maybe they are not fresh? (she examines, then smells an apple) Can they grow apples indoors? (I replied I didn't know, but didn't think so). If so, it is even more horrible because it takes lots of energy to heat these houses (green houses). I don't know which one would be better. How can I know? (she literally throws the apple back on the pile) Fuck the apples, I do not take any today.

Without information about the relative impacts of products, services and personal practices, many global consumers would have an even harder time making these choices. However, on the other hand, the emphasis on individual choice informed by expert knowledge leaves citizen-consumers little choice but to rely on external sources of information like labels, life-cycle analyses, and impact projections. This alienation from direct environmental knowledge is certainly the product of urbanization and complex global markets. However, the recent call for individual responsibility compounds the problem, placing increased pressure on the consumer while simultaneously concentrating the power to define sustainability with experts. So while there is a push to involve citizens in the creation of more sustainable societies, the recent focus on improving lifestyle efficiencies through more sustainable consumerism continues to “necessitate the use of technologically driven and expert-led solutions” (Hobson 2002:96) which exclude citizens from efforts to define environmental risks and sustainability.

However, as I point out in the pages to come, this brand of sustainability discourse, centered on expert-generated information and focused on improving the efficiency of contemporary lifestyles is only one of many. It is popular in the Swedish mainstream and among some urban research participants like Åsa, perhaps due to its hopeful prognosis that sustainability can be achieved without modification of existing societal structures and without impinging on consumer freedom or market mechanisms.

However, this view of sustainability was not shared by the many of the interested, aware and active citizen-consumers who participated in this research.

### **Shades of Green: Variability and the Domain of Sustainable Living**

This study was designed, in part, to examine what “sustainable consumption” means to those who claim to know the practice, lending insight into variability among claimed practitioners and the political processes involved in the construction of sustainability discourse and practice on multiple levels. Political ecology’s recent focus on discursive structures and their capacity for reproduction (e.g. Tsing 2004, Fairhead and Leach 2003, Arizpe 1996, Isenhour, Checker & McDonough 2009), provides just one example of how contrasting environmental perspectives influence the construction of ideas about sustainability and the practices deserving of the label.

In and around Stockholm, interpretations of sustainable living vary widely, as do the activities people engage in as they try to live more sustainable lives. During citizen-consumers interviews, each person was asked to free list “all of the actions that an individual could take to live more sustainably.” Altogether, the 58 participants listed 755 sustainable actions (for an average of 13 each – a figure that is misleading given that one person listed 37 actions and another only four). These “domains” of sustainable living were then aggregated, generating a list of 151 unique actions<sup>31</sup> ranging from the conceptual, like “think about the purpose of life” to the specific and pragmatic like “put electronics on standby”. These actions were then consolidated into twenty categories<sup>32</sup> (Table 4.1).

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<sup>31</sup> Language differences were reconciled so that actions with similar meaning could be grouped.

<sup>32</sup> These categories were created by the author, in consultation with three research participants.

<b>TABLE 4.1 - Categories of "Sustainable" Actions Listed</b>	
Food (buy organic, local, less meat, sustainable fish, free range)	88%
Travel (fly & drive less, public transport, walk, bike)	86%
Buy less stuff (cut back consumption, less stuff)	66%
Improve home efficiency (short showers, full loads, light bulbs, lights out)	60%
Reduce Waste (less packaging, recycle, compost)	47%
Cooperate (cooperative living, borrow, trade services)	47%
Use alternative technologies (appliances, cars, alternative energy)	45%
Educate yourself (do research, read newspapers, attend conferences)	45%
Change values (prioritize, think about what is important)	38%
Advocate (educate children, friends, blog, etc)	33%
Citizenship (vote, demonstrate, communicate to leaders)	28%
Join groups (support, join, get active)	28%
Do it yourself (grow/cook your own food, make things)	28%
Avoid chemicals (fewer cleaners, eco-labeled products, lawn chemicals)	22%
Reuse/ Repair (make things last longer, use what you have, get creative)	22%
Buy used (second hand, vintage, retro)	21%
Buy quality (longer life, high price, fair labor)	17%
Demand alternatives (talk to retailers, producers)	10%
Work less (work fewer hours, less money, more time with family/friends)	9%
Invest green (invest in environmentally responsible businesses)	2%

As these categories illustrate, the free lists shared many commonalities. The overwhelming majority of research participants (88%) listed activities related to more sustainable food consumption, including everything from the selection of organic foods, supporting local farmers, eating seasonally, eating less meat and using all leftovers, to eating less in general. Another common activity category centered on transportation, with 86% of the respondents listing activities in this category. While “drive less”, “drive a more fuel-efficient car” and “bike” were the most common actions listed in this category, many also listed activities like walking to work, flying less and taking public transportation. Others were more specific, including ideas for cooperatively walking children to school with a “walking school bus” or organizing neighborhood car-sharing cooperatives. Nearly two thirds of the sample (60%) also listed activities associated with improving home efficiencies and nearly half mentioned the use of alternative

technologies (45%) including renewable energy and more efficient machines.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that the collective emphasis on food, transportation and the home reflects the focus of a governmental report published in 2005 entitled *Bilen, Biffen, och Bostaden: Hållbara Laster, Smartare Konsumtion* (The Car, the Steak and the House: Sustainable Burdens, Smarter Consumption), which linked the largest percentages of household impacts to these three categories (SOU 2005). According to the report, Swedish households spend 90% of their disposable net income in these three categories (SOU 2005:26).

However, at an individual level, the free lists also revealed considerable diversity. While many research participants complicated popular categorizations of sustainability-minded consumers as either concerned about personal or collectivist objectives (Lee et.al. 2009, Binkley 2009), others clearly fit into this dichotomy. Some “light green” (Wissenburg 1993) consumers were most concerned about their family’s health and thus purchased “natural” foods and eco-labeled goods on occasion (when available and convenient), while others worried about the economic and social impacts of peak oil and thus concentrated their efforts on energy efficiency, self-sufficiency and alternative technologies. Meanwhile many of those concerned with global solidarity, environmental justice and poverty focused their efforts on boycotting unethical corporations or the consumption of fair trade foods and sweat free clothing. The ideologies represented in the sample were diverse by design yet were all united in their critical approach to the

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<sup>33</sup> These categories overlap since many of the alternative technologies listed were related to home efficiency. The decision to maintain separate categories was based on the fact that many participants listed both. If technologies associated with the home were moved from the “technology” category to the “home efficiencies” category, the percentage of mentions in the “improve home efficiencies category” would be 74%

market – even as most simultaneously attempted to leverage its power to influence change. Within the sample there were those who could be considered simplifiers, market activists, political consumers, green consumers and anti-consumption consumers (Iyer & Muncy 2009, Bryant & Goodman 2004), existing at every point on the spectrum between deep and shallow ecology (Naess 1973), between deep green (Wissenburg 1993) and bright green (Steffan 2010) environmentalism.

Some people, like Åsa, had clearly adopted dominant perspectives linked to technological improvements and greater efficiencies around the home and in the products and services they choose and use. These folks mentioned things like taking shorter showers, buying ecolabeled and energy efficient products, unplugging computers and turning out their lights. Others were more concerned about the impacts of toxics and pollutants in our waterways, air and soils, therefore concentrating their efforts on buying chemical-free and natural products. Some, like Ebba, complimented their consumer-based activities with a greater civic orientation, focusing on participation in environmental organizations, political parties, and public demonstrations. Still others were deeply concerned about social and political sustainability and made efforts to support more equitable global trade by purchasing fair trade, sweat-free or artisan products.

In some cases the actions individuals engaged in were inconsistent or even contradictory. Lars and his wife Malin, for example, were deeply concerned about energy. As such, they had replaced all their light bulbs, put lights on motion sensors, purchased energy efficient appliances and had recently taken advantage of tax credits by trading in their car for a more fuel-efficient model. Despite these efforts, they had



apparently not considered the resources and energy embedded in the toys they buy for their children. During a consumption inventory I discovered that the children's toys were so plentiful that they no longer fit in the children's rooms. They were comically falling out of closets, peaking out from underneath beds, and mixed among piles of clothing scattered on the floor. I asked Lars if any of the toys were second-hand. He didn't seem to think twice before he answered, "No, I don't think so." I got the sense that he didn't understand the significance of my question, my intent to determine if the toys at my feet, threatening to trip me, were purchased new and had thus driven demand for additional production or if, by acquiring them second hand, Lars had removed his demand for the production of a new toy, and thus consumption of additional resources. Like Åsa and her family, Lars was most concerned with making their lifestyles more efficient by utilizing the most energy and resource saving technologies and by making sure not to waste energy flows in the home. Yet despite these concerns, it seems he had not considered the energy associated with the production and shipment of his children's toys.

Many other participants were more clearly aware of their inconsistencies; practicing what Wilk (2009) refers to as "moral calculus" as they weigh the good and bad things they do in the interest of sustainability. Some included a consideration of embodied energy in these calculations. These people had often made more significant lifestyle changes by selling their cars, growing some of their own food, or focusing their consumption of durables on second-hand goods. In fact, 66% of the respondents suggested that they were not only trying to use less energy and water or buy products that were better for the environment, but they were also making a significant effort to reduce their consumption by focusing on buying less stuff overall. For some this meant focusing

on repairing and reusing things, for others it meant purchasing second hand goods or simply doing without. Some had even gone so far as to “downshift” reducing their work hours and income (9%), essentially trading purchasing power for a more simple lifestyle and time with family and friends. While those who advocated working less were certainly aware of economic critiques linked to unemployment, they argue that in Sweden, which tends to have a surplus of well educated workers, such arrangements can make way for more people to work, albeit for fewer hours and a lower, but sufficient, salary.

When exploring the focus on buying less with several research participants, it soon became apparent that it was based, at least in part, on a generalized distrust of the expert led solutions and technological improvements. Jens, a forty-two year old, environmental educator living with his two children and wife in a suburb of Stockholm, for example, took issue with the carbon footprint calculator I’d asked him to complete. I had anticipated the challenge, particularly after spending several days completing 16 internet-calculators in an attempt to locate the most comprehensive and culturally appropriate version for the Swedish context. I knew that the calculator I’d chosen had some weaknesses, but they all did. The program I chose was most appropriate for the Swedish context because it gathered information about country cottages, boats, and other factors like district heating<sup>34</sup> that are often relevant for members of Sweden’s well-educated, middle-class. Jens said about the calculator,

I think it is basically useless because my wife and I both took the calculator and we had the same, 4.2 tons of CO2 last year. But that is crazy. We live in the same house, we took the same vacation, but I do not do so much shopping. She

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<sup>34</sup> Stockholm and many urban areas in Sweden have district heating and cooling, centralized systems designed to improve efficiencies by consolidating heating and cooling for neighborhoods and regions.

(his wife Cara) seems to think that people will not like her if she is not wearing high boots this year and ankle boots next.

His wife Cara replied:

But you have to realize that there are different standards for men and women, particularly professional women. I'm not saying I agree with that, but it is the truth. Men who don't dress nicely are seen as intelligent and quirky. Women are seen as...<sup>35</sup>

And then Jens again (interrupting):

Look at me (gesturing to his wool shirt), I don't care. But you (to Cara) replace your wardrobe every few years. And she'll stand in front of it and say she has nothing to wear. I just don't understand that. And there are always new things around the house. And where are they coming from? They're cheap and probably made in China with bad labor conditions and no environmental protections...that is why they are cheap. What about the energy that it takes to make these things and ship them...? What about the labor and the pollution?

For environmentalists like Jens, who question our ability to calculate all environmental costs, the precautionary principle, exercised in his case by refraining from consumption, is more reliable. While he can never be sure that carbon calculators are correct or if the new "green" technologies are actually sustainable, he can be sure that by removing his demand for new products, he will not be using any additional resources<sup>36</sup>.

And indeed Jens touches on an issue relevant in the Swedish context. Rita Erickson (1997), who conducted a comparative study of a Swedish and American community, argued that Swedes tend to be more concerned about the environment and have made significant efforts to reduce their direct use of energy, fuel, and water. However, she noted that, despite this awareness many Swedes had not considered the energy and resources embodied in the material goods they buy. Approximately ten years later, my research suggests that many of the men and women participating in this research

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<sup>35</sup> This theme, about gendered differences and their impact on sustainability, is explored in Chapter VIII

<sup>36</sup> All households were asked to complete the carbon calculator built by the Swedish Environmental Research Institute (<http://www.climate.ivl.se>). When Jens calculated his footprint the calculator did not account for how often one shops. Since then the calculator has been updated to account for how much one spends annually on items like home furnishings and clothing.

are aware of these inputs. However, it is difficult to compare the two studies or infer about the effects of time. Erickson was working in a mid-sized semi-urban community with a cross-section of the community and my work centers on Stockholmers specifically concerned about and acting in the interests of sustainability.

A significant and growing body of research suggests that Jens and Rita Erikson may be correct about the importance of buying less. Spending power has increased significantly in Sweden since the early 1990s (SCB 2010). And although this increased affluence has been unevenly distributed, the Goteborg Center for Consumer Science reports that - as a whole - Sweden has experienced significant growth in several sectors of household consumption over approximately the same time period, most notably in discretionary spending categories (GCKS 2008). So despite a strong and mainstream environmentalism in Sweden, it is a wealthy nation with the most competitive economy in the EU (World Economic Forum 2010). Standards of living are exceptionally high and Swedish consumers have access to the world of goods. In fact during the same month of the 2007 climate protest, ironically, the nation hit an all-time record in holiday spending (DN 2007). Yet popular holiday presents like clothing, footwear, and recreational equipment all have significant indirect environmental costs (Carlsson-Kayama et. al. 2002, Naturvårdsverket 2010).

So while efficiencies might significantly reduce the environmental costs of many products, sustained increases in per-capita consumption may outweigh any gains (Throne-Holst et.al. 2007, Stø et.al. 2008). Further, many scholars have warned of potential rebound effects, or the occurrence of Jevon's Paradox (Greening et.al. 2000). For example, even though cars may be more efficient, drivers often rationalize driving more

often and further because of these fuel-efficiencies, essentially offsetting any gains. The increasing affordability of energy efficient vehicles also drives demand for the resource extensive production of new cars, regardless of the functionality of existing automobiles or the absence of plans for future use or safe disposal. Therefore, better fuel efficiency per vehicle is increasingly offset in the short term by replacement production and in the long term by a growing number of cars on the road and miles driven. Rita Erickson wrote, “Reducing direct energy consumption will only partially alleviate energy supply and environmental problems as long as there is no reduction of consumption of material goods and energy intensive services. We need to look at material goods in new ways, to acknowledge the true energy and environmental costs of their manufacture, advertisement, distribution, maintenance, and disposal” (1997:168).<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to dominant sustainability discourse and policy in Sweden, many of the men and women participating in this research, each of whom had modified their lifestyles and consumer behaviors in the interest of sustainability, often doubted the promises of ecological modernization. In fact, the overwhelming majority doubted that technological advances could sustain continued growth in per capita consumption. More than three quarters (76%) of the research participants disagreed with the statement that, “Swedes can continue to consume at current levels if production technologies are improved.” In fact, many of them argued that technological solutions more often lead to unintended and disastrous consequences. Take for instance this statement from Lars, who was clearly frustrated by the government’s continued focus on technological fixes,

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<sup>37</sup> Since completing my research, recognition of embodied resources and emissions have improved. In fact, Sweden’s environmental protection agency is studying not only emissions in Sweden’s borders, but also those in other nations driven by Swedish consumption (Naturvårdsverket 2010)

There is one thing that disturbs me and that is the choices of technology that we make... Take these things about bio-fuels. We think we're doing something for the environment but in reality it doesn't mean a thing because it is not a sustainable solution. Yes, there is slightly less carbon dioxide going off from the cars – but on the other hand if you look at the total equation we destroy things in the rainforest. But if we are going that way, we have to waste 10, 15, 20 years. But, I understand why it happens. All these farmers in the US - they see dollar signs in their eyes. It may not be good for the environment but it is good business and it will give people a good conscience for a short while. The net effect will be that we lose time. It is sort of like, if I may say so, like peeing in your pants. It's warm and cozy for the moment but in an hour it gets very cold and uncomfortable.

Others echo Lars' sentiments (although not in such colorful language), arguing that it was only a few years ago that many policy makers and sustainability experts thought ethanol would resolve existing energy challenges. Not long afterward, it became apparent that the production of biofuels has serious consequences for food security, deforestation and climate change. This mistrust of technological solutions and life as usual is not completely unsurprising given that even highly regarded sources of environmental knowledge are often forced to retract or revise their recommendations. While the Swedish state is aware of these issues, they remain committed to becoming the world's first "oil free" economy and are actively pursuing alternative biofuel technologies. Indeed science, technology and sustainable policy are constantly evolving and we often find that well intended expert advice and new technologies have unintended and sometimes disastrous consequences. Beck (1992) reminds us that knowledge about the environment is always uncertain, particularly because it involves such interwoven and multidirectional chains of causality, stretching across both space and time.

For those distrustful of the technological solutions prescribed by ecological modernization theories, attempts to control nature are part of the problem rather than the solution. Indeed, many research participants are taking a closer look at their desires to

consume, citing historical technological advances, like the invention of pesticides or coal technology as the roots of many contemporary problems.<sup>38</sup> In the section to follow, I outline how these alternative views on sustainability and technology have their roots in alternative views on nature.

### **The Roots of Variation: Humans, Nature and Contrasting Environmental Ethics**

Theorists have long attempted to categorize different theoretical perspectives and environmental philosophies as they relate to sustainability. Certainly there are many ways to categorize both concern and potential solutions, from ecological modernization to market environmentalism or the more radical perspectives of ecosocialism and deep ecology (see Low & Gleeson 1998, Adams 2001). Indeed the environmental movement cannot be seen as a single “organized and homogeneous” movement (Amin 1985:279), but rather represents a wide array of alternative viewpoints about the future, nature and sustainable lifestyles.

One of the most common means for distinction among these various brands of sustainability is linked to views on nature and humanity’s proper relationship with our natural surroundings. Wissenburg (1993) has outlined a distinction between “light” and “dark” green philosophies. Similarly, other theorists have written about this distinction in terms of “deep ecology” or “shallow ecology” (Naess 1973). In part, these contrasting perspectives or “shades of green” represent various positions on the continuum that exists between environmental ethics; between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.

Anthropocentrism is an environmental ethic (Lundmark 2007) with roots dating back to the enlightenment. Premised on the assumption of human progress and

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<sup>38</sup> This should not give the impression that all the participants were radical back-to-the-earthers. While these perspectives were present in the sample, they were relatively rare. To the contrary, Swedish culture is highly conformist and most make great efforts to stay comfortably within the mainstream.

rationality, the sustainability discourses associated with the anthropocentric ethic, like ecological modernization, are optimistic that natural processes can be further rationalized and controlled for the benefit of human society. As such, nature is viewed as subordinate to human interests and its value associated with its role as a resource for human development, aesthetic pleasure and physical reproduction. Humans are seen as separate from nature and philosophically granted with more relative worth.

According to Matti (2005), Swedish policy documents reflect a weak anthropocentric orientation and a focus on the instrumental value of nature - as natural resources valuable for human development. In instrumentalism's most extreme form, nature comes to be seen as "bundles of goods and bads to be managed in the name of risk management" (Hobson 2002:98). Technological improvements are seen as necessary to use resources most efficiently and enable future growth, overcoming natural limits. Extreme anthropocentric perspectives are underwritten by the capitalist system which tends to conflate all value with exchange value (Hornborg 1992). Trees, water, and land are viewed as commodities. While Sweden's official approach to sustainability is not this extreme and the nation does not prioritize the right to private ownership over the collective right to resources essential for survival, it is certainly common in many nations with capitalist economies and strong neoliberal political orientations.

The contrasting environmental ethic, ecocentrism, challenges the idea that humans are separate from nature. Instead, this perspective views all life as intricately interconnected and mutually dependent at some level. Further, ecocentrism does not imply a philosophical prioritization of human needs given its view that all living things, both human and non-human have inherent value, as a part of natural systems. As such,



the ecocentric perspective is much more skeptical of human attempts to further subjugate and control nature, and therefore much less hopeful that technological advances can help contemporary societies to achieve sustainability. However, in its most extreme form, ecocentrism goes so far as to prioritize non-human life over human sustainability, often based on the rationale that humans endanger the whole. This extreme perspective can be linked to the coercive conservation and neo-Malthusian-inspired programs of the past. Further, if taken too far, the ecocentric agenda neglects a consideration of social and economic sustainability, often prioritizing conservation over the livelihoods of local people – often alienating the human groups whose participation is absolutely essential for the construction of more sustainable societies.

Despite the seeming simplicity of these distinctions, in reality these opposing environmental ethics present a false polemic. They are contrasting viewpoints on a continuum of environmental philosophies. For the men and women participating in this research, all of whom were concerned, at least to some degree, about sustainability, this distinction is not so easy to make. Many, in fact expressed elements of both ethics. Some more clearly represented the basic tenets of one perspective, while a small minority could be said to be extreme in their anthropocentric or ecocentric orientations. Despite these challenges associated with categorizing the participants, all participants were grouped, based on their statements, in an effort to see if there was any sort of relationship between environmental ethic and the domain of sustainable living.

In all, the sample was evenly split with approximately half of the sample expressing more anthropocentric views and the other half expressing more ecocentric

views. There were also some participants who expressed strong, or even extreme views associated with each ethic (Table 4.2).

<b>TABLE 4.2 - Number of Participants by Environmental Ethic</b>	
Extreme anthropocentric	6
Anthropocentric	23
Ecocentric	28
Extreme ecocentric	1

Karl and Emma are good illustrations of these contrasting perspectives. When I met Karl, a forty-three year old data professional living in Stockholm, I asked him how he became interested in sustainable consumption. He seemed to think for a minute but then was distracted by the arrival of the hot water he'd ordered. I stirred my coffee, looking around the café and back to Karl, as I waited for his answer. The thin, conservatively dressed man across the table seemed slightly nervous. His movements and eyes were quick, somewhat darting, as he reached into his coat pocket. He retrieved a tea bag and placed it in the hot water. After dunking it several times he seemed to become aware of my presence again and explained,

I always bring my own tea. I've had significant medical problems with my diet. Maybe 10 years ago I grandly began to realize that something was wrong and I wasn't healthy. My health was declining and I had headaches and sleeping problems and a temper and so I went to the internet and tried to figure out what could be done about it. Then one thing led to another and I found some dietary supplements and vitamins. The next phase ... I began to realize the problems with food additives and trans-fats and things like that. And then I began to go on the internet and do research about these things, aspartame and other sweeteners, MSG, food additives, artificial colorings.

After a few minutes I began to wonder if Karl was really a good candidate for the study since I was primarily interested in how people respond to perceived environmental risks via their consumer behaviors. But as our conversation progressed, Karl clearly and articulately linked his interest in healthy foods to sustainability, arguing that the

chemicals in our foods are essentially environmental pollutants, in fact that they are the worst kind because they harm human bodies directly. While Karl's story is unique in many ways, he represents an ideal type, an individual who looks at sustainable living primarily through the lens of human health. He is clearly anthropocentric (or even egocentric) in his concern, linking the value of nature to its vital role supporting human health. As such he concentrates his efforts on doing extensive research and on the purchase of foods and products without chemical additives. While he is not unconcerned by issues like climate change and environment damage, and is aware of many social issues tied to consumption, he argues that issues like social justice or consuming locally are just not as important to him when he must prioritize his own health, struggling daily to find things to eat that do not make him sick. Yet even the concern he has about larger environmental issues like climate change are framed in an individualist way. Consider, for example, his comments about potentially moving to the UK,

We are thinking about where we are going to move and possibly to the UK. But I am really thinking about climate change. If this part of the world is going to be uninhabitable, then I really don't want to buy this place. For example, the Mediterranean will be like desert with 120 degrees Fahrenheit in 50 to 60 years. So maybe it is not good... to live in a nice area like this because they will be completely devastated. And the UK will be more and more affected by torrential rainfalls... So maybe then you think about where you want to move and think that maybe houses in the valley would be flooded but those on the hill would be in a landslide. So, I am actually seriously thinking about things like these.

Because Karl is primarily concerned with issues that affect him directly, his domain of sustainable living is fairly limited relative to other participants. When asked to free list all of the activities that one could take to live a more sustainable life he responded with the following list: "get informed and do research, buy chemical free products, opt out of the status race, write letters to companies, demand more from producers, buy higher

quality goods". This domain of sustainable living also reflects Karl's own actions. I asked Karl to tell me how good he felt he was at doing each of the things he had listed, using a five point Likert scale ranging from "really good" to "really bad." Karl rated himself as "really good" at all of the items he listed. He routinely corresponds with producers whose products disappoint him and focuses his efforts on consumer advocacy and rights. He also believes in the power of consumers to drive the market and force the production of better, safer products. He thus attempts to use the market as a tool, to signal his desires and values to the corporations that produce the foods we eat.

Other research participants were more clearly ecocentric, refusing to acknowledge any sort of philosophical prioritization of human needs. Emma represents an ideal type that is in many ways on the opposite end of the spectrum from Karl. After traveling more than an hour out Stockholm by bus, I arrived at her home, a very typical Swedish country cottage with red stained wood and painted white trim. I knocked on the door and was greeted by Emma, a tall, white-haired pensioner with a kind smile. It was a cold damp day and the warmer indoor air also rushed to greet me, bringing along the aroma of wild picked mushrooms, local fish and fresh cream baking together in the oven. After exchanging greetings and remarks about the weather, I realized that there was a chill to the air inside the house as well. I struggled with the decision to remove my coat but didn't want to offend my hosts. I removed my boots and hung my coat just inside the door, as is customary in Sweden, then joined Emma, her husband and a friend at the kitchen table which was, thankfully, close to the wood burning stove that heated the room. Over lunch the four of us discussed the purpose of the study and the meaning of sustainable consumption. Initially Emma and her company had slightly different ideas

about sustainability but it seemed she slowly convinced her guests that sustainable consumption is not just about buying energy efficient light bulbs and sustainable fish, but rather implies a re-examination of human needs and a reconstruction of human-environment interactions.

Around the table she crafted a complex argument linking contemporary consumption and a culture of materialism to deepening social malaise and environmental destruction. I helped myself to some fish as Emma explained, “There are so many people feeling bad...many people have nervous problems and sleeping problems and taking their lives and so on. And that is because they have lost connections to nature and to the real life, the important life, even the spiritual life. It is a materialistic world.” Certainly many scholars have suggested that increases in per capita consumption have not improved perceived happiness in many contexts (McKibben 2008, Cohen & Murphy 2001, Soper 2007) and Emma seemed to echo these findings. If humans can re-embed themselves in the natural world Emma believes that they will not only be happier but will also make better decisions about how to use natural resources and human labor. She remarked that the value of nature is not only for its practical uses, but also for its spiritual value. She said with convincing emotion, “I am part of nature and I very much feel that I am part of it. But we are losing contact. We are part of all the world, the living is not just humans and we cannot destroy everything else”

While Emma does talk about the importance of nature for human well being, she is classically ecocentric. For her humans do not exist outside of nature and our interests cannot be extracted from the interests of the entire life system. She is proactive in her behaviors, and within the sample, is among those who have made the most significant

lifestyle changes. Emma uses a high-efficiency wood burning stove fueled with timber from her own land to heat her home. She has composting toilets, a large garden and underground cellar to store foods. She rarely drives and hasn't flown in years. Emma's domain of sustainable consumption was broad when compared to Karl's. Not only did she list things like buying organic (KRAV) foods, but she also included items linked to transportation, alternative home fuels, reusing things, reducing consumption of meat and non-necessities, recycling and waste reduction, and finally, doing things for oneself including growing food.

While most study participants that express an anthropocentric view are not as extreme or as individualistic as Karl, and most who express ecocentric views are not as committed as Emma, the sample as a whole mirrors the relationship they illustrate between environmental ethic and the domain of sustainable consumption. On average, the number of actions for sustainable living listed by the participants is fewer for research participations with an anthropocentric ethic. On average, extreme anthropocentrics like Karl listed fewer absolute actions in 5.6 different categories, compared to 7.4 categories for those expressing primarily anthropocentric views, 7.7 categories for ecocentrics and 8 categories for the individual who expressed more extreme ecocentric views (Table 4.3). The t-value of the difference between extreme anthropocentrics and ecocentrics, for example was 3.38. Thus, we can be 99% certain that difference between the numbers of categories listed by these two groups is statistically significant.

**TABLE 4.3 - Average Number of Action Categories Listed, by Environmental Ethic**

Extreme anthropocentric (N=6)	5.6
Anthropocentric (N=23)	7.4
Ecocentric (N=28)	7.7
Extreme ecocentric (N=1)	8

While most research participants listed actions associated with more sustainable food consumption, more sustainable travel and improved energy efficiency around the home, those with an ecocentric ethic were more likely to list actions related to reducing and reusing, including the categories “buy less stuff” and “buy used and second hand.” Of the 38 people who listed “buy less stuff”, 22 of them (nearly 60%) were ecocentric and of the 12 people who listed buying second hand, 10 (83%) were ecocentric (Table 5).

**TABLE 4.4 - Action Categories “Buy Used” & “Buy Less” by Environmental Ethic**

Centrism	“Buy Used”	“Buy Less Stuff”
Extreme anthropocentric (N=6)	1	3
Anthropocentric (N=23)	1	13
Ecocentric (N=28)	9	21
Extreme ecocentric (N=1)	1	1

For Emma it was important to use less not only to ensure efficiencies, but also because she feels that living a less materialist life helps her to feel more connected to nature, and because she does not believe that technological improvements and improved efficiencies can adequately protect the “systems of life” that are so important to her. I asked her why it was so important to protect these systems as she was clearing dishes away from the table. Emma took a long time to think about the question. She rinsed a few dishes, then turned to silently look at me. Finally, she replied,

Well human life is not any more important than other life. We have all these animals and plants, all this life that is mutually dependent. I don’t think that human life is more godlike or something, we are part of it. We destroy it for ourselves and for the other ones, which is even worse that we destroy it for other living things I think, because we have no right to do that. We have no right to do it for ourselves, even less right to do it for other living things. Many people talk about technologies that will solve these problems. But it is bullshit. They hope that the technology will save all the problems but it is a matter of changing the system. As I see it, this is the only way but there is great resistance to that. The politicians all want growth, economic growth. I am very much against this technical fundamentalism.

Like Emma, many research participants linked their resistance to technological improvements to a strong belief that sustained economic growth is not possible. While the Swedish government has advocated “decoupling” the economy from society’s natural resource base by focusing on intellectual capital and services derived primarily through human labor as well as resource efficiencies, many research participants remain skeptical. Most do not buy into the idea of the “unlimited good” (Hornborg 2001). In fact 80% of the research sample agreed with the statement, “Sustainability can only be reached if global markets are significantly altered,” mirroring a series of international studies that suggest many global citizens prioritize environmental protection above economic growth, particularly when the economy is stable or fairing well (OECD 1991, Erickson 1997:98, Gallup 2010). Yet as Alf Hornborg points out, citizens are joined by policy makers and theorists in their difficulty imagining alternative economic and social structures or new definitions of growth and well being (2001).

This brings me back to Emma, who argues that nature is valuable despite its use and exchange value. I asked her what she thought was most important to sustain, trying to get a sense of how she thinks about nature and what, if anything she values most. She looked at me, clearly perplexed (if not annoyed) before saying,

Well the air and the water and the soil...but what do you mean by “most”? I cannot say what is most important to protect, everything is important. But then I have difficulty to list them because then I should know what is most threatened. When the cod in the Baltic just started to disappear, that was catastrophe because if a fish disappeared, a fish doesn’t just come back. Then the water you can perhaps clean. Lakes die but you can sometimes make them live again because you’re planting and restoring them. Then it is bad, but ... if it is forever, then it is really bad.

While I intentionally asked questions that might seem to have obvious answers for many people in the sample, I continued to ask them and was always surprised by the



variation in how people described the value of nature or the importance of ensuring the futures of their grandchildren. Emma, like many, seemed frustrated by these questions. However, after completing most of the interviews, I realized that these questions often warranted one of two responses. A handful of respondents tried to explain the value of nature from a scientific standpoint, delving into complex science. Most, however, responded with very gut-felt, emotional responses. Questions about the value of nature or the relative importance of sustainable actions ask them to reflect on things they “just know” and “feel” but are very rarely asked to iterate or express. Emma certainly drew upon her close relationship with nature to argue that she “knows” what is and is not sustainable. She claims a close relationship with nature and her land, one that helps to free her from dependence on the sustainability experts. Visually representing the word frequencies of my interviews with Emma, the word cloud<sup>39</sup> below (Figure 4.1) illustrates Emma’s focus on “knowing” sustainability and “living” in close connection with “nature”. Her focus on acting is also apparent, given the frequency with which she used words like “now”, “start”, “change” and “important.”

In contrast, Karl’s word cloud (Figure 4.2) illustrates how frequently he spoke about “food, including discussions about “organics”, “transfats” and “MSG”. He also spoke frequently about “consumers”, “buying” and his desire for better products from “industry”. The largest word in his word cloud, however, is “think.” Certainly this is a common word in qualitative interviews, particularly when asking research participants

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<sup>39</sup> Generated using WORDLE.com, this figure provides a visual representation of word frequencies. The words with the highest frequencies appear larger and bolder. Some irrelevant words were removed from the clouds to lend more clarity. Words deleted included things like “really”, “more”, “very”, “put”, “lots” and “just”



for their opinions. However, Karl often spoke about the importance of thinking, doing research and becoming more informed. He rarely spoke about “knowing”.

In contrast to Sweden’s dominant sustainability discourse, which encourages more energy and resource-efficient lifestyles based on expert recommendations, many Swedes like Karl, even those with anthropocentric views, do not trust much of the expert information and doubt that efficiencies always result in better products and services. Karl, for instance, is highly skeptical of the profit motive, arguing that it often leads industry to make dangerous products in the name of efficiencies and reduced waste. He therefore argues that sustainability depends on our ability to “think” as consumers, to learn about the products we use and to demand alternatives.

This contrast between Emma and Karl reflects not only their urban and rural perspectives on sustainable living but it also reflects their environmental ethics. Perhaps Karl’s anthropocentric view and emphasis on “thinking” is tied up with western scientific discourse, where information and expertise inform better ways to utilize natural resources for human development. And perhaps Emma’s insistence that she “knows” sustainability is tied to her ecocentric view that she is deeply connected to nature and knows sustainability by watching the effects of her actions at the local level.

### **The Cultural Import of Nature in Sweden**

While the sample was evenly split between those with fell on the ecocentric or anthropocentric sides of the spectrum of environmental ethics, I think it is interesting to note that nearly all the study participants defined sustainable living in terms broader than energy efficiency and technological improvements. Further, even those men and women with the most anthropocentric views tended to be distrustful of technological solutions

and they did not express the instrumental views on nature so common in official sustainability discourse. Further, they did not speak about the forests, trees and water as natural resources important for production. In fact, none of the Swedes participating in the research took an instrumental view of nature similar to Sweden's policy documents. Further, none of these men and women associated nature with its exchange value, no matter how anthropocentric in orientation. The overwhelming majority certainly acknowledge the use-values of nature and its importance as a support system for human life. Yet even for those who expressed anthropocentric views, most were extremely romantic, connecting the value of nature to the human need for reflection and spiritual fulfillment.

Löfgren (1990, 1995), Frykman & Löfgren (1987) and Solmonsson (1996) date the emergence of these romantic views in Sweden back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the rising bourgeois began to view nature from a perspective that was radically different than either the peasant or elite classes to which they opposed themselves. Rather than thinking of nature in a utilitarian and production-oriented way as the peasantry did, or thinking of nature as something chaotic that must be controlled as the elites had, the rising middle class came to think of nature as something valuable in its own right. During this period mountains and waterfalls came to be viewed with new appreciation while Swedish walking, birding, and mountaineering clubs gained incredible popularity. Over time these views have become dominant in Sweden's middle class society, perpetuated by increased urbanization, low population densities, the transition to an information- and service-based economy, and other factors that remove most Swedes from direct dependence on the land. Today romantic reflections on nature continue to characterize the

Swedish middle class, particularly in urban areas. In fact, it was common to hear research participants talk about the emotional value of nature.

Consider these comments from Charlotte who I asked to explain the value of nature (without defining the term for her). She replied,

Nature...the forests, lakes and seas...it is nice to walk there and listen to the birds and it is quite and peaceful. I like very much the archipelago just outside Stockholm. It is one of my favorite spots...just peaceful and nice. The first thing that I would say is that we eat from nature...so that is of course included that we should eat there. And then there is this big fantastic extra bonus to have the recreation to be there and enjoy life. I am just very happy that I enjoy the nature so much and I can be out in the archipelago and I can be there on a cliff and it feels so good. I am very happy that I don't need more to be happy.

Like Charlotte, many Swedes with anthropocentric views referred to nature as something “out there,” separate from human societies, the forests, the mountains and the streams, the wilderness far away from human influence. Price (1999) has argued that this conceptualization of nature has helped many urbanites to counteract the anonymity, alienation, commercialization, technological control, and complexity of urban lifestyles. But perhaps more important given the recent focus on sustainable consumerism, the conceptualization of nature as “out there” may also help to shelter consumers from the realities of natural resource consumption all around them. It therefore reproduces the binary opposition that exists between urban and essentialized “natural” environments.

Scandinavians can be described as having a religious-like connection to the land, one that is both highly personal and spiritual (Gullestad 1989). Many Swedes felt so strongly about nature and their hopes for sustainability that they were moved to tears during their interviews. I was taken aback several times (admittedly due to my own culturally pre-conceived notions about masculine behavior) when middle-aged, professional men became choked up and had to take pause when describing their feelings

about the complexity and wonder of the earth system. For many, their actions signify much more than rational response to these concerns. They were also deeply tied to emotions and a sense of morality, rights, responsibilities, fairness, equality and justice.

And while very few urban Swedes have productive relationships with the local environment, Swedes place great emphasis on spending time out of doors, in the forests, meadows and on the water. While conducting my fieldwork it was soon apparent that Swedes have views about and a relationship with nature quite different from the Midwestern, working class, American perspective I'd been raised with. Yet it took a year in Sweden to put a series of examples together before I realized the full magnitude of this difference.

I think I began to understand Swedish perspectives on nature in the summer of 2006, when I was taking a language course in Lund. My instructor, a big burly guy named Axel was absolutely obsessed with the flow of fresh air into the classroom. Periodically, during our exercises and lectures, he would stop speaking and walk over to the corner of the room to dangle a blank sheet of paper in front of the vent in order to test the circulation. He would mumble for a few minutes about the air flow, adjust some windows or vents and then eventually get back to the discussion at hand. It became somewhat of a running joke among all of Axel's American students who were not used to this Swedish idiosyncrasy. The word "luft" will forever be a part of my Swedish vocabulary.

Later I learned about the popularity of outdoor dagis (daycare), where children as young as four spend the day outdoors, in rain, snow or shine. When I talked to one of my friends about it, asking what they did on days with particularly bad weather, she doggedly

repeated the Swedish mantra that there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes. I'd read about the popularity of this phrase, but never expected to hear it, particularly not from a young mother of two whose little boy was outside all day – often in inclement weather.

But the cake goes to the story of Karolin and her napping baby Elsa. One day Karolin interrupted our conversation about the decision to keep or get rid of the family car to put her baby down for a nap. I assumed that she would disappear into the bedroom for a minute and be back, but instead she bundled her 14 month-old baby Elsa in several blankets, put her in the pram and went outside. Ok, I thought, maybe Elsa can't fall asleep without movement. But only a minute or so later Karolin came back inside without Elsa or the pram. When I asked what she'd done with Elsa, Karolin explained that the baby always took naps outside, it was important for children to get fresh air, even if it was, like that day, windy and somewhat cool. She explained that it is a fairly common practice; it's just because of all the apartment buildings in the city you don't see the babies since they are on the balconies! There are other stories too, of parents whose children wanted nothing more but to read a library book or watch television, but were forced outside to play in what little sunlight a winter's Saturday had to offer.

What is clear is that Swedes place great value on the time they are able to spend outside, and many of them talk about nature with a sense of fascination and deep reverence. I heard examples of these thoughts often during interviews, but they also pop up frequently in the Swedish children's books that I read to my son. They say that you can tell a lot about a culture based on its most beloved children's books. Elsa Beskow's books bring the forests and fields to life, creating a sense of wonder and imbuing nature

with a spirit of its own. Where mushrooms and wildflowers are anthropomorphized and a sprite or gnome can be found under every leaf or pinecone, it certainly makes sense that Swedish children see the forests and fields as living places, with value independent of human need. Together with other popular Swedish characters from the Moomins to Pippi Longstocking and Nils (who takes a great adventure throughout Sweden on the back of a goose), there is a great appreciation for nature and animals throughout children's literature. Swedes learn at a young age to value the outdoors and to appreciate its intrinsic value. As such, Swedes feel a deep, personal connection to nature that is illustrated in many of their practices and thoughts. But this orientation is not purely anthropocentric. In one study, 62 percent of a representative sample of the Swedish public fully approved of giving constitutional protection to the rights of animals and plants to life and reproduction. An additional 24 percent agreed with hesitation (Lundmark 1998:149).

While living in Sweden we found ourselves fortunate enough to be “hosted” by several Swedish families who took it upon themselves to teach us Swedish customs and introduce us to typical Swedish activities, foods and (of course) songs. Along the way we also learned a lot about Swedish perspectives on nature. During our stay we were invited to take advantage of the state's *allmansrätten* (every man's rights) policy which allows people to roam free and gather wild resources, even on private property<sup>40</sup>. We searched for mushrooms, gathered blueberries, made necklaces out of wild strawberries and walked the perimeter of several Stockholm islands with binoculars and bird identification books in hand. While these practices may not be common for all Stockholmers, it is

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<sup>40</sup> There are some limitations on this policy, mandating that hikers and campers maintain a reasonable distance from homes and prohibiting the collection of protected species.



interesting that these were the activities our hosts chose to present to us as particularly “Swedish” pastimes. Based on these experiences and interviews more formally conducted, I can safely say that ecocentric views are common in Sweden, even among those who see nature “out there” and tend to associate its value with human well being.

Perhaps the value placed on nature is linked to latitude and geography. Because Swedish winters can be so long, dark and cold, lending themselves to shut up, dark houses - perhaps the people of Sweden are eager to get fresh air, sunlight and open spaces when the opportunity presents itself. Or perhaps these values find their roots in the historical prominence of paganism which drew less definite lines between the natural and the supernatural. Some scholars have speculated that the love of nature can also be tied to turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century programs to improve patriotism and stop mass emigration out of the country. Löfgren describes how, after nearly a quarter of Sweden’s population had emigrated around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, proposals were put before parliament in 1909 to create a national park system. During this time the national discourse came to be centered less on the nation’s powerful military past, and refocused on creating a new patriotism based on a common love of the land. Löfgren writes, “In Sweden, the love of native land has to a greater extent than in many other countries, been expressed in the metaphorical language of the love of nature” (1995:172).

It also seems safe to conclude that the region’s relatively late, yet extremely rapid industrialization and urbanization helped to shape views on nature and contributed to the strong environmentalism that marks Swedish culture. First, while Sweden has abundant timber and iron resources, there are no significant sources of domestic coal, oil or natural gas that are currently being exploited. As such, the fuel necessary to support rapid

industrialization and urbanization required the creation of international trade relationships and a strong reliance on foreign fuel. Today, energy dependency and the lessons of the 1970s fuel crisis continue to weigh heavily on the minds of many Swedes.

Further, because Sweden was relatively late to urbanize, many study participants grew up in the country or have parents who did. Even for those who did not, it is typical for non-immigrant, middle and upper class Swedes to have access to ancestral country homes, summer cottages or gardens where families often spend the majority of their summer holiday. Thus many research participants attribute their environmental concerns to a period of their life spent in the country where they were able to observe and interact on a more personal level with nature. Lars, for example said, “if you’re born in the countryside then you live very close to nature and you understand that you can’t do whatever we do with nature, so I became more aware. My awareness of nature was already there.”

Anthropologists have long advocated further consideration of traditional environmental knowledge - its situational rationality and validity. While the term “traditional” certainly is problematic, lending itself to discussions about authenticity and the politics of knowledge construction, it is certainly true that people all over the world have held views on their natural surroundings that differ significantly from the “scientific” knowledge used to support programs like the green revolution, the construction of hydro-electric dams or the introduction of synthetic reproductions of human breast milk. While anthropology has a long history of associating such concepts of traditional environmental knowledge with indigenous peoples, I would like to suggest here that the Swedes participating in this research, despite their status among the world’s

wealthiest citizens and their high-tech capitalist economy, also draw upon some traditional environmental knowledge when they think about sustainability. This knowledge not only stems from their very deeply-felt personal connections to nature, but it has its roots in a history of agriculture, late urbanization, low population densities and governmental efforts to create an information, high-tech and service based economy given the absence of domestic energy resources.

### **On Knowing Sustainability**

Strangely, despite the state's progressive stance on the environment, sustainability policy and discourse in Sweden do not seem to reflect the views of Swedes who are trying to live more sustainably, regardless of whether their orientation was anthropocentric or ecocentric. The dominant sustainability discourse does not make many references to ecocentric motivations (Matti 2009) and largely limits the discussion of sustainable living to resource efficiencies. It therefore does not seem to reflect the values that most Swedes place on nature as not only a place for reflection and spiritual growth, but also a living system with value independent of human need. The sustainability experts encourage the purchase of more energy efficient appliances and the reduction of waste but fail to recognize the ecocentric views that motivate many Swedes.

Simmel once described modern life as a world of "unrelenting calculations," the product of a monetary economy. In this world, problems are envisioned as a series of mathematical equations to be solved, daily life is filled "with weighing, calculating, and enumerating," and "qualitative values are reduced to quantitative formulas" (1950:411). Within such a system, the calculation experts, those who calculate energy costs and carbon footprints, are bestowed with significant power, not only to calculate the costs and

benefits of products, practices and services, but also to define concepts like nature and sustainability. Yet these “privileged narratives” (Hobson 2002) and the power relations that enable their production are hidden in highly scientific, technical and managerial discourse. Today the power to define sustainability and sustainable action is located in the institutions that produce scientific discourse (see Allen 2004) including governmental agencies or research institutes dependent on tax revenues and external research funding. Scientists and governmental experts, despite their best intentions, are tangled in webs of capital and a system with significant interests in sustained economic growth.

Thus the contemporary focus on encouraging more sustainable living among Swedish citizen-consumers does not constitute a significant departure from previous sustainability policy. As demonstrated by the list of suggestions for sustainable living proposed by the city of Stockholm (recycling small metal tea candle holders, inflating tires and changing light bulbs), the techno-scientific discourse is highly centered on the rationalization of contemporary lifestyles, not any sort of critical reflection on the construction of needs or the factors that seem to “ratchet” global consumption levels each year (Shove 2004, Galbraith 2000). Hobson thus argues that “a discourse has been formed that does not threaten consumption as a form of practice but seeks to bind it to forms of knowledge, science, technology and efficiency” (2002:106). Therefore, the focus on reflexive modernization is consistent with the growth meta-narrative and the belief that expertise and technology can make our infrastructures, industries, and lifestyles more efficient. Further, research suggests that when Swedish citizens do try to actively engage in the sustainability agenda, experts and politicians often undermined their concerns by making reference to “economic restraints” (Eckerberg & Bjorn 1998:340).

The contemporary focus on the modernization and rationalization of lifestyles continues to exclude citizens from efforts to influence sustainability thought, programs and policy. It assumes that expert information is necessary for Swedes to make their lifestyles more efficient both at home and in the marketplace. As such, the dominant sustainability discourse has alienated civil society and sacrificed the potential to achieve more radical changes (Feichtinger & Pregernig 2005). Halkier has argued that efforts to make lifestyles more efficient and reduce the impact of household consumption, dependent on experts and market mechanisms constitute a “loss of collectivity” and “democratic control” (1999).

In this chapter I’ve tried to illustrate the breadth of sustainability thought, from Åsa’s insistence that efficient urban lifestyles constitute sustainable living and Emma and Sigge’s assertion that sustainability depends on a closer connection to the land and self-sufficiency to Karl’s focus on ensuring human health. Despite this variability, one thing is clear. Swedes place great value on nature. And while some of them equate that value with emotional fulfillment and others with the maintenance of natural systems, most recognize the intrinsic value of nature. Yet this ecocentric orientation, which tends to inspire more progressive action among research participants, is not reflected in mainstream Swedish sustainability discourse. Instead, official programs and policies remain heavily focused on ecological modernization thought, improved resource efficiencies, and expert generated information that tends toward rationalist views on nature and an anthropocentric orientation which subjugates nature to human need.

While a focus on rationality and practicality coexist with ecocentrism and a romantic love of nature in complex ways in Sweden, I argue that this disconnection has likely

resulted in missed opportunities to encourage more sustainable living in Sweden by emphasizing the intrinsic and emotional value of nature so commonly recognized among Swedish citizens. I argue in the following chapter that disconnections like these have their roots in common but false assumptions about both risk perception and the factors that motivate sustainable consumers, in both Sweden and abroad.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **On Governance and the Limits of Rationality**

*Before 1997 and 1998 Sweden had more regulations. Taking away the laws and rules gives people this feeling of freedom but then we need to be careful to embrace the market as the solution. And when we talk about freedom, we need to define what that means. The States, the land of freedom - I really appreciate a lot of the things the United States does - no government interference in people's lives. But when it comes to certain things, nature...then there is a conflict. Freedom is not doing what you please, because then it infringes on other people's freedom.*

Interview Transcript: Pelle (April 3, 2008)

In today's global climate, and with the powerful influence of the world's wealthiest nations, free-market ideologies have been idealized. Whether by design or force, most states have increasingly removed state controls on production and consumption processes with the intent to let the markets run their course, operating freely according to the laws of supply and demand. This trend has reinforced the idea that free and rational consumers have the power and responsibility to demand market change, without government interference. Halkier observes that, "it has become increasingly common to call upon so-called ordinary consumers to solve a range of societal and political problems. Environmental policies and food policies are no exception to this pattern" (2001a:205).

This growing call for consumers to take responsibility for ensuring sustainability reflects a specific and relatively recent neo-liberal framing of the relationship between the individual and the state (Hobson 2002). Cohen (2001), writing about the relationship between the citizen and state in the US, argues that this relationship was drastically reconfigured during the period of prosperity following World War II. Although there was great disagreement among consumer activists and corporate interests during this period, post-war affluence eventually led to the acceptance of the idea that mass-consumer society was ultimately best for both the nation and consumers. There emerged

a “new post-war ideal of the citizen-consumer who simultaneously fulfilled personal desire and civic obligation by consuming” (Cohen 2001:214). The term “citizen consumer” therefore refers historically to a transition from citizen-based to consumer-based identities, linked to the idea that democracy was also dependent on a common standard of living. Johnston has argued that the concept of the ‘citizen-consumer’ has become a widespread contemporary cultural construct, used widely in both academic and activist writing (2008).

Today citizenship has been redefined and consumers placed at the heart of sustainability policy. Yet, some nations, most notably the U.S. and Britain, have gone further toward conceptualizing citizens as consumers. Hilton (2001) argues that British citizens are seen as customer-consumers. In contrast to citizen-consumers who are valued for their potential to influence social change and improve social welfare in their role as consumers, the British and American variant values customer-consumers for their money and role in driving economic growth. Hilton argues that this officially conceived notion of the customer-consumer has absolved consumers of the civic duties once associated with consumerism while simultaneously diminishing the rights of citizens and consumer protections in the name of free choice.

The growth of sustainable consumerism over the past 40 years likely reflects, in part, an acceptance of these consumer-based identities. Certainly many welcome this movement, calling on fellow citizens to act responsibly in light of growing threats to sustainability. Further, some suggest that the ability to act on the market, to integrate environmental preferences into everyday life, is empowering for citizens in post-industrial urban societies, most of whom have very little control over decisions about the



use of productive resources. Micheletti has argued that “political consumerism” allows those who traditionally lacked access to conventional forms of political participation, for example women, an opportunity to express their values and drive change (2003, 2004). Certainly many men and women concerned about sustainability believe that the market provides the most effective means for an individual to force change. During interviews many research participants talked about the need to signal their desires not only to industry, driving demand and bringing down the cost of production, but also to policy makers. These “early adopters” essentially attempt to leverage their market power to get the attention of both policy makers and industry as they seek change.

Yet many scholars have critiqued individualized and market-based actions, arguing that the market simply cannot produce the social and political changes necessary for long-term sustainability. Others argue that free capitalist markets and the profit motive are the ultimate source of the problem. Goss, for example, has written, “I cannot quite conceive of consumption as itself inherently a form of resistance to capitalism – even the ‘negation’ of capitalism – as if it is the means by which labor seeks to overcome its alienation, and bring back its products into the creation of humanity” (2004: 374).

There is also a concern that sustainable consumerism promotes the commoditization of political action, encourages state devolution of responsibility and allows industry to avoid taking responsibility for dangerous or harmful products. Further, Lipsitz argues that this focus on consumerism essentially distracts us from serious structural problems in our society and may in fact limit the potential for resistance. He writes, “If commercial culture makes us think that politics is impossible, that state support of capital is productive but social welfare spending is wasteful, then we may well

have become the people that those interested in unlimited freedom for capital want us to be.” He continues, “To the extent that we... succumb simply to market pleasures as the ultimate horizon of cultural and social experience, the chances for oppositional social movements will certainly be slim” (1998:143)

These are certainly legitimate concerns, yet it is important to realize that consumption has become a site where both politics and citizenship are negotiated. Noting the long history and recent acceleration of consumer activism, Hilton and Daunton argue that these actions have the potential to “set precedents in, re-conceptualize and re-theorize the relationship between the state, the commodity and the collective mass of consumers” (2001:1). The efforts of consumers, who are trying to insert their values and politics into the market in the best way they know how, should not be overlooked or so easily discounted. Indeed, despite the state’s power to determine acceptable forms of consumption, meaning and collective identity, “consumer politics often exist deliberately in opposition to the state” (Hilton & Daunton 2001:11).

Further, my ethnographic research with Swedish sustainable consumers did not lend significant support to the assertion that all of these men and women had fully adopted the neoliberal logic of governmental devolution and consumer responsibility. Certainly many of these men and women have accepted responsibility for ensuring environmental health in their roles as consumers. In fact, many see it as their duty and responsibility to reduce their environmental impact. However, not all of them confine their actions to the market or agree that consumer actions alone are sufficient. There is significant evidence in this study to suggest that many of the citizen-consumers participating do not accept the neo-liberal idea that they, in their imagined roles as

rational consumers, can take sole responsibility for moving the market toward sustainability, or that they have the power to dismantle the social hierarchies that perpetuate consumption.

One day I met Felicia at a café in Uppsala. We were used to seeing each other in meetings and were thus fairly comfortable together as we informally discussed the topics of the interview. When we reached the section about responsibility and governance Felicia looked out the window, visibly frustrated as she spoke about the overwhelming amount of time and information it takes to make a good decision about what products and services have the smallest environmental impact. She wrung her hands in frustration as she said, “I think that today the politicians are trying to put way too much on the consumer, that we have to make all these choices but they don’t do anything to stop the companies that produce dangerous and harmful things. They tell us it is our choice but still we have a hard time to find out, and we are so affected by everyone else around us.”

All research participants were asked who they believed should be leading the charge toward sustainability. More than a third argued that individual citizens should take this responsibility (Table 6), demonstrating a belief, or at least the hope, that consumers have the power to influence change. There is a long history of successful consumer cooperation in Sweden (Aléx 1999), built on the idea that consumer power could be leveraged to create a “third way” between liberal capitalism and radical socialism. By providing consumer education and emphasizing the values of consuming high-quality goods, the movement hoped to overpower unrestrained capitalist commerce. The legacy of these efforts, both historical and contemporary, continues to influence consumer activism in Sweden. One of the largest grocery chains throughout Sweden is

*Coop*, a cooperative with strong market share, particularly among those who have a preference for organic and ecolabeled goods.

Many of these research participants said that it was important to act because the government wasn't currently doing enough, some argued that the government was beholden to corporate interests, but most remarked that citizens had to act due to the urgency of contemporary problems, but not alone. While some felt that citizens needed to lead the charge to motivate both industry and government, nearly a third argued that all segments of society must move simultaneously and immediately (Table 5.1)

TABLE 5.1 - "Who should be leading the charge to create more sustainable societies?"		
RESPONSIBLE ENTITY MENTIONED	Frequency	Percentage
Citizens/Consumers	21	36%
Balanced: Individuals, Leaders & Industry	17	29%
Government/Political Leaders	16	28%
Other: Industry & Media	4	7%

This response reflects the corporatist political culture in Sweden, one based on forming working partnerships between citizen organizations, industry, the media and the government to design mutually agreeable and pragmatic solutions. Historian Theien (2004) has also raised the point that, in contrast to continental Europe and the United States, Scandinavian acceptance of the links between increased consumerism, improved living standards, economic growth and social equality have historically not hinged on the ideology of an unrestrained market. Indeed throughout the fieldwork it was made apparent to me, in numerous ways, that many Swedes welcome state initiatives to help them live and consume more sustainably.

There is also additional evidence to suggest that many research participants do not readily accept neoliberal logic. While all of the research participants work within the

market, simultaneously resisting and leveraging it, most of them do not confine their opposition to their roles as consumers. Many participate in civic organizations, take active roles in their political parties and attempt to create dialogs with policy makers. In fact, when free listing all of the things that an individual could do to live more sustainably, nearly half (47%) listed actions associated with cooperation such as forming cooperatives and trade networks among friends and family. Others talked about the importance of advocacy, writing blogs or letters to the editor (33%). Still others talked about the importance of civic participation through voting, public demonstrations or communicating with leaders (28%). Finally, more than a quarter of the sample (28%) also mentioned supporting or getting involved in civil society groups working on issues related to sustainability. While I didn't ask people specifically, I learned while building relationships with several participants that at least six of them dedicated considerable time, serving as board members for groups working on sustainability, volunteering to offer environmental education to children, or organizing demonstrations. Others worked on environmental or social justice issues in their careers, often taking significant pay cuts in order to do so.

During my stay in Sweden there were several rallies and marches centered on environmental issues. One cold winter evening close to the winter solstice I convinced my family to bundle up and join me for a climate march in downtown Stockholm. We arrived and chose our spot within the moving sea of people, just behind two faux polar bears carrying a banner that read, "rädda mig" (save me). We'd only marched a few blocks before I ran into Martin who I had interviewed the day before. Then as we approached *Kungstragården* I spotted Olaf. Finally, at *Mynttorget*, where we listened to

the rally speakers, I ran into three other research participants among thousands of people. While my call for research participants originally defined the study in terms of sustainable consumerism, many of the people who answered my call clearly did not differentiate between their actions as consumers and citizens.

### **Cultural Interpretations of Neoliberal Logic**

As scholars like DeGrazia (2005) and O'Dell (1997) point out, European nations, particularly Scandinavian nations with their long history of social democracy, have interpreted neoliberal logic in culturally specific and historically informed ways. DeGrazia reminds us that while Europeans have adopted a consumer mentality, Europe's version of consumer capitalism has emerged with a different face than its American counterpart. She argues that consumer ideology is mediated and informed by historical notions of social rights and shared values. As a result, European "citizen-consumers" have taken a much more ambivalent stance toward the promises of the free market when compared to Americans, favoring a more politicized and active role for both the consumer and state.

This orientation is reflected in Sweden, where although the state has hesitated to regulate the market or limit consumer choice, it has taken an active role under the premise of ensuring "informed" buyers (for a similar discussion in the American context, see Cross 2001) and encouraging the citizenry to take responsibility for sustainability. The state has essentially "abandoned neutrality" by moving beyond an emphasis on free consumer choice in favor of stressing consumer responsibility as a civic responsibility and public duty (Matti 2005).

As such, policy recommendations directed toward individuals have focused almost exclusively on expansive information and awareness campaigns or external incentives designed to enhance the individual utility of pro-environmental behavior. Within this model, reflexive consumers are expected to learn from technical experts about the negative environmental impacts of the products and services they buy and consequently change their behavior in favor of less resource and pollution intensive products, (if the personal costs are not too high). Once again, these ideas are based on assumptions inspired by reflexive modernization theory, or the idea that individuals will rationally respond to perceived environmental risks as they become more aware, voluntarily modernizing their lifestyle in response to information about risks to sustainability.

It is not difficult to gather illustrations of reflexive modernization thought in Sweden, in the European Union, or internationally. While attending Karlstad University's "Environmental Sciences Day" (*Miljövetardag*) in the winter of 2008 I sat in a large lecture hall among hundreds of Swedes; students, faculty, government employees, representatives of civil society groups, activists, and interested citizens. Together we listened and scribbled notes at our cramped desks as speaker after speaker talked about the need to provide more education to consumers, education that would encourage people to change their consumption behaviors, their lifestyles and, one by one, the culture of consumption.

The emphasis on education under reflexive modernization theory has its roots in neoclassical economics which links economic behavior to rationality and utility maximization (Berglund & Matti 2006). These ideas anticipate that, if given the right

information about the environment, consumers will exercise their free-will to alter behaviors and demand alternatives on the free market (Adams 2004, Hobson 2002, Matti 2009). Programs like Stockholm's *Konsumera Smartare* (Consume Smarter) and Karlstad's *Echo Action* are built on these ideas, working to pool families interested in sustainable living to provide education and instruction on issues ranging from sorting waste to the selection and preparation of unprocessed foods. Certainly these programs are successful on their own terms, helping participating families to reduce carbon emissions, waste, and often overall consumption (Saar 2008, EchoAction 2008).

Sweden's Environmental Protection Agency justifies the policy focus on informational campaigns on their website writing,

Knowledge of climate change and what can be done about it is significant both as support for decisions and for the preparedness of society and its acceptance of the measures that need to be taken to mitigate the problem of climate change. Information is therefore used in Sweden as a strategic instrument on the path to specified climate targets (Naturvårdsverket 2010).

Yet information and awareness campaigns currently dominate sustainability policy and programs just as they dominated the dialog at *Miljövetardag*. Perhaps this is because, unlike programs designed to alter political systems or regulate market structures, they are fairly easy to implement and uncontroversial since they don't require structural changes or encroach upon individual choice.

### **Disjuncture: On Risk**

Informational brochures, policy documents, and official speeches - all designed to improve awareness of challenges to sustainability - are heavily peppered with calls for consumers to fulfill their civic duty by consuming less. Yet my field work revealed that these calls are frequently based on several assumptions that contradict the perspectives of



those who answer them. First, there is a widespread assumption that individuals will not act in the interest of sustainability until they see and feel environmental risks personally. Drawn from the frequent conflation of “utility” and self-interest and thus the assumption that risk is only relevant when it directly affects the individual, these ideas have long been perpetuated within the discipline of economics. Nils, a leader at one of Sweden’s largest environmental organizations, answered my question about effective sustainability programs with a focus on informational campaigns. He remarked,

Information campaigns have been successful... We know that people make changes when they feel the effects of environmental problems closer to home. Then they will act...it becomes important to their welfare, to their family. But before people see those signs and feel damage, they won’t do anything. Information campaigns though, they can help people to become aware of how these questions are affecting them in, I think, a more personal way.

In another example I overheard Monica, a communication’s specialist with Sweden’s consumer agency telling a colleague that their brochures and posters about the importance of organic foods needed to tell people exactly how agricultural chemicals can affect their family’s health, otherwise people wouldn’t be moved to buy organic. Her comments echo a long standing assumption, one that Giddens’s (2009) has recently named his own. The “Giddens’s Paradox”, or the idea that individuals will not respond to a risk until they can personally see and experience its effects, is common in sustainability discourse. In fact, a few of the research participants also repeated this assumption. Anna, for example, a book keeper nearing retirement seemed to express pessimism that societies could change quickly enough to avert crisis saying,

It will have to fall on us like a ton of bricks, they have to get sick from it. Like when we had the seal thing here in the 1980s, it triggered people. The SNF, I think they never had so many new members...people were worried, but then they forget.

Yet this assumption raises some interesting questions. Sweden was the first nation to establish an environmental protection agency and the first to begin passing environmental protection legislation. Its corporatist political culture has led to a high level of cooperation among the state, industry and environmental organizations, often leading to progressive policies. Stockholm, in fact, was just named the “green capital” of the EU, where fresh and clean edible salmon can be caught in the very heart of the city. While the nation still has its challenges, the average citizen can enjoy clean air and water and is not exposed to some of the environmental hazards that many other global citizens face. So, why then do so many Swedes continue to act progressively if they do not feel environmental risks “closer to home”?

Contrary to the globalized perspectives of reflexive modernization, risk perception is constructed, unstable, and contested (Caplan 2000). Mary Douglas (1985, 1992) and Roy Rappaport (1988) point to the importance of understanding that perceptions of risk are rooted in society’s structures and value orientations. Similarly, the work of Kempton and his colleagues (with Boster & Hartley 1995, with Holland 2001 and with Kitchell 2000), illustrate how our culturally rooted understandings of nature significantly affect environmental risk perception. Despite this recognition in many studies of risk, most sustainability policies continue to reflect the individualist assumption of the proverbial bubble, within which independent and rational actors make decisions about risk based on their own personal and immediate self interest. And while these assumptions are no longer supported in the economic literature<sup>41</sup> without great qualification, they continue to hold strong intellectual weight in the popular imagination.

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<sup>41</sup> There are many examples of economic scholarship which move beyond neo-classical economics and rational choice. However, because reflexive modernization as it has been adopted in sustainability policy

However, Swedes who are trying to live more sustainably tell quite a different story. During interviews, research participants were asked a series of questions about the problems associated with contemporary consumption and production patterns. Their answers illustrated significant variety. Some were concerned about chemical preservatives in food, others about species extinctions, environmental refugees, soil erosion or environmental injustices. However when considered in aggregate, it is apparent that nearly all research participants shared a common concern for climate change, the effect of toxic pollutants, resource depletion and the social and economic effects of scarcity and inequality. The frequency of their aggregate concerns is illustrated in Figure 5.1. Here we see key words like climate, people and food used frequently. Indeed many were concerned about the impact of climate change on agriculture, anticipating that significant changes could affect our ability to produce enough food. Others were concerned about deforestation and the buildup of toxic chemicals in our oceans, air, soils and living tissues.

What is perhaps most interesting given our discussions here, is that when these people were asked whether they felt personally affected by these issues, the majority of the respondents answered that they did not. Only 21 percent of the sample felt they were being directly affected, speaking most often of the health risks of chemicals in foods, poor air quality on busy thoroughfares, or psychological stress associated with a never-ending cycle of working and spending.

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relies heavily on economistic and individualist assumptions, I outline the foundational assumptions of these theoretical perspectives.



In contrast to those like Felicia who feel no personal risk but, relative to other participants, do a lot to live more sustainably (and express frustration that they are powerless to do much more), those research participants who perceived personal risk were often the least progressive in their behaviors. The relationships between participants' domains of sustainable action and their perceptions of risk reveal an interesting pattern. Those who perceived risk primarily to others, future or present, listed sustainable actions in nine different categories on average. In contrast, those who feel immediate risk to self and family listed fewer absolute actions, associated with six categories. A t-test revealed with 99% certainty that the difference between the number of categories listed by these groups was statistically significant with a t-value of 2.68. Thus the domain of sustainable living appears to be more restricted for those who have responded to perceptions of personal risk. Like Karl, who was so concerned about MSG, artificial flavors and other food additives, these people tend to focus their efforts on buying organic foods. In contrast, 55 percent of those who felt that risk was concentrated elsewhere listed actions in the citizenship category including voting, joining activist groups, contacting politicians, or demonstrating (compared to 25 percent for those who feel personal risk). Finally, those concerned about consumerism's impacts on others were also much more likely to list actions associated not only with buying green, but also with buying less (91 percent compared to 50 percent of those who perceive personal risk).

These differences reflect a distinction commonly observed by scholars of sustainable or "anti-consumption" drawn between those oriented toward personal or collectivist goals (Lee et.al. 2009, Binkley 2009). While some are more concerned with personal welfare and the effects of pollutants and emissions on the health of their

families, others are more concerned with, for example, the effects of so called “first world” consumption and emissions on the livelihoods and adaptive capacities of people in the so called “third world”.

Many men and women who participated in this research have clearly acted, often very progressively, despite the fact that they feel no personal risk and have rarely witnessed environmental degradation first hand. They clearly do not discount the future or illustrate Giddens’ paradox. Certainly the men and women participating in this study are concerned about the environment, but it would be a mistake to label them environmentalists and assume they are in some way exceptional. This suggestion not only lacks explanatory value, but is an extension of individualist assumptions, based on the idea that those who have acted do so based on their individual values and preferences for the environment. It thus assumes a direct connection between attitudes and behaviors, a connection that has not been well supported with empirical research. Stø et al write, “many economic-psychological studies are conducted to examine why some people have pro-environmental behavior whereas others do not...tend to concentrate on people’s attitudes toward the environment. Most studies, however, find at best only weak correspondence between reported attitudes and actual behavior. (2009:242-3).

Further, the suggestion fails to explain why those who act most progressively do so based on a concern for displaced others: voiceless species, future generations and today’s most vulnerable peoples. This observation can be contrasted with sustainability programs and policies that emphasize the personal gains associated with environmentally friendly behaviors, based on the assumption of self interest (Isenhour 2006).

Certainly there are many people in Sweden concerned about the environment or impoverished peoples around the world who haven't acted. But in my experience, the basis of inaction is not linked to the absence of perceived personal risk. While living in Sweden we were fortunate to make many friends, independent of the research project and observed that while environmental awareness and concern were widespread among them, most found it difficult to allocate time to modify their routines or search out alternatives. However, the research participants and our friends illustrate that it is not necessary for an individual to see the signs of environmental damage first hand. It is possible to understand them from afar and many Swedes do, regardless of whether or not they have acted. The paradox is not that people fail to act because they don't understand the issues or because they can't see or feel their effects personally. The paradox is that it is extremely difficult for individuals, even the most environmentally committed, to react without leadership, without strong social support, and without a market structure that makes sustainable living feasible.

### **On Motivation & Morality**

I was surprised and overwhelmed when conducting interviews by how many people expressed the need for solidarity and global equality as part of any program designed to ensure sustainability. These people clearly saw their actions as part of an agenda to consume less so that people in low income economies would have the ability to consume more. I met Mats, a research assistant in his late twenties, at one of Stockholm's public meeting spaces late one evening. I discovered that Mats' soft spoken nature and conservative business-casual clothing were mirrored by his carefully crafted and well reasoned arguments. While it was clear that he was passionate about

sustainability, his perspectives were measured, intelligent and thoughtful. Mats, perhaps more than any other research participant, was able to make intricate connections between his own actions and distant impacts. Mats doodled on a pad of paper as he spoke, often with subtle but apparent compassion, about human impacts on the environment and the injustices of resource inequality. His work at the agricultural university in Uppsala, researching sustainable agricultural policy, had already required his reflection on many of the topics covered during our conversation. Yet throughout the conversation a common theme emerged, Mats' deep concern for global solidarity. While speaking about the most promising solutions for ensuring sustainability, he focused on political strategies. He said,

Every human being should have the right to an equal use of nature and resources, you know. I really think equality is important and I don't see why any human being should have the right to consume more than anyone else. And that's on a global level, so that would mean a reduction in consumption in rich parts of the world. We tend to just look at Sweden, and the environment is good here. We blame China for all their emissions. But it is our consumption, our taking too much that is driving their emissions. They are producing for us. We can't view these things separately on a country-by-country basis. We need to understand that many barely have enough and we take more than our fair share.

Mats' comments reflect a widespread and clear emphasis on equality within the sample. While I'm not sure if this focus is unique to Sweden and Scandinavia, it makes sense given the region's political history. There is a pervading sense of middle class morality, solidarity and the need for equality within Nordic culture, inspired by the historical teachings of the Lutheran Church and perpetuated by the ideologies of the welfare state. Scholars have theorized that the rise of social democracy in the region is tied to populations which were relatively ethnically consistent with state boundaries, thus fostering support for ideologies of equality, fairness, corporatism, and class-based politics



(Gallagher and Mair 2006). Dating to 1932 when the Social Democratic Party won their first election, the government implemented redistributive and social welfare policies (Bihagen 2000, Tilton 1992, Erickson 1997), designed to improve democracy and serve the entire Swedish public. While many nations have instituted social welfare programs, the Swedish variant is arguably one of the most comprehensive and successful in the world. Epsing-Anderson argued in the early 1990s that since the institutionalization of strong social welfare policies, “poverty and economic insecurity have been largely eradicated and Sweden is the indisputable leader in the equal distribution of incomes” (1992:36)<sup>42</sup>. While unemployment and the recent influx of Islamic immigrants have recently challenged these ideals, Erickson (1997) has argued that, at least in rhetoric, such progressive policies have worked to advocate the worth and dignity of every human being and foster a sense of compassionate solidarity; creating a moral economy of sorts.

Swedes are indeed limited in their ability to consume conspicuously by a “pervasive moralism and *lagom*, the Swedish principle of moderation” (Erickson 1997:83). *Lagom* encourages “good Swedes” (Löfgren 2001) to avoid excess in all areas of life in order to maintain social harmony and foster the common good. This concept goes a long way in explaining the popularity of sustainable consumerism. Through conservative consumption patterns, therefore, Swedish consumers can not only express their ethical preferences, but they can also conform to the Swedish concept of *lagom*, by ensuring they’ve not taken “too much” - but rather a share of the world’s resources that is “just right”. This identity, constructed around morality, rationality and conformity, may

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<sup>42</sup> The welfare state has recently been weakened by declining support among citizens who view immigration as a strain on the system and a more conservative government coalition, yet it remains exemplary.

also be a means to solidify national identity in opposition to the *slit och slang* (wear and throw away) culture that many Swedes associate with America (O'Dell 1997:64).

In their studies of sustainability policy and the values underlying pro-environmental behaviors among Swedish citizens, Berglund and Matti argue that while Swedish policy assumes that citizens need external incentives to act in a sustainable way, those who practice pro-environmental behaviors more often cite altruistic factors as the motivation for their action (Berglund and Matti 2006, Matti 2009). Hobson came to a similar conclusion in 2002 arguing that alternative discourses of sustainable consumption and critical social science research suggest that the issue of social justice has more resonance with the public than dominant sustainability discourse centered on the rationalization of lifestyles.

Most of the Swedes participating in this research understand the moral dimensions of consumption as a responsibility to the environment, other people and future generations. Through the purchase of “moral products” consumers are thus able to demonstrate their ability to care across both spatial and temporal distance (Bryant and Goodman 2004), the sense of solidarity and equality is not confined by the region’s geopolitical borders. Swedes are among the world’s most well-traveled citizens, are highly educated (UN World Development Index 2005) and have one of the highest levels of newspaper readership in the world (WAN 2009). Indeed Swedes are well aware of many environmental and social problems globally. They associate great value with a cosmopolitan mindset and knowledge of foreign affairs and international travel are key symbols of cultural capital.

Further, while the Swedish government's official position and focus on ecological modernization is consistent with the growth-based imperative and the interests of global competitiveness, it seems at least some segments of the Swedish state are aware that sustainability hinges on more than improving efficiencies and the protection of the Swedish environment. Jörby argues that many governmental measures "not only aim at reducing impacts in order to improve the environment locally; the local governments try to take on their part of the responsibility for the global environment as well" (2002:239). While this language is often difficult to find in official policy documents, it appears more often as government sponsored research. Interestingly, while I was in the field I found very few examples of discourse centered on de-growth – intended as a means for developing nations to consume their fair share - in official policy, discourse and programming. However, more recently in early 2010, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency released a report entitled "The Climate Impacts of Swedish Consumption" which moves beyond discussions of emissions reductions in Sweden to examine the total effect of Swedish consumerism in other nations. Thus instead of claiming that Swedes have reduced carbon emissions by nearly 12% since 1990 (Naturvårdsverket 2010), the government is now taking an active role investigating and calculating emissions in other lands that can be attributed to Swedish consumer demand. This new focus is not only consistent with the popularity of life-cycle analyses in Scandinavia, but it also reflects a concern with global equity and responsibility. There are also a few other governmental documents that advocate consuming less so that people in impoverished areas around the world can have more. One document produced by Sweden's Consumer Agency entitled "Environment for Billions" (Konsumentverket

2001), points to research which suggests that wealthy industrialized countries like Sweden would have to reduce consumption by a factor of ten for every human being on the planet to have equal access to the world's resources.

### **The Limits of Rationality: Barriers to Sustainable Living**

Despite repeated efforts to spread information and awareness in many different contexts throughout Europe and Scandinavia, significant changes in consumption behavior have failed to emerge (Hobson 2002). And although Sweden enjoys high levels of awareness and strong alternative movements relative to most nations, alternative consumers continue to constitute a small minority of Sweden's population. The market share of organic foods and drinks, for example, is less than 5% in Sweden despite rapid growth and significant consumer recognition and approval (KRAV 2010). Further, per capita consumption rates continue to rise rapidly (GCFKS 2008).

Unfortunately policies aimed at educating rational and reflexive consumers often make the assumption of self-interest and therefore rarely utilize appeals centered on collectivist goals. Further, the emphasis on education overshadows discussions of the social, political, and economic barriers that constrain individual choice. While the call for consumer-based responsibility moves liability for ecological sustainability away from the state and places it squarely on the shoulders of citizen-consumers, even deeply committed, aware and active citizen-consumers find it difficult to live more sustainably. Yet the focus on sustainable consumerism does not force the government to impose tougher regulations on industry, or to limit consumer choice. It allows the government to maintain its "janus face" as it simultaneously pleases environmentalists by encouraging more sustainable lifestyles while satisfying business interests by promoting increased

consumption (Sanne 2005). Cross suggests that by buying into the idea that consumers have the power to make free decisions if given regulated information, contemporary policy fails to recognize the extreme power differential between social/consumer interests and dominant corporate interests. Further this focus on the informed consumer limits consumer rights to the “right to be informed about pricing and attributes” (2001:290).

For those individuals who have attempted to support alternative systems of producing and provisioning goods, research shows that they are often characterized by ambivalence and inconsistencies as the realities of everyday life interact with their own values and rationality (Halkier 2001a). The people who participated in the research are engaged, aware and interested. Yet they realize that their consumption behaviors are not solely the product of their rationality, if they were, they argue, they would be doing a lot more. Instead these committed consumers face significant barriers when trying to consume in a more sustainable way. Issues surrounding pricing structures, the availability of alternatives on the market, social pressures in a highly conformist and consumer-based culture, imperfect information, and the amount of time it takes to research and find more environmentally friendly alternatives are only a few of these barriers. Stø et. al. have written, “if the positive values, attitudes, knowledge and symbolic meanings that are developing among consumers should be transformed into sustainable behavior, the windows of opportunity have to be expanded” (2008:246).

Indeed many Swedes find it too stressful to imagine living in a way significantly different from their social peers. Cultural norms are strong in Sweden and many argue that it is simply too hard to be go against the grain of Sweden’s social logics, breaking habits and routines long ingrained in Swedish collective behaviors. Erickson has indeed

argued that when priorities conflict, social and economic considerations are often given more priority than those related to sustainability (1997). Further Svane (2002) has noted that in everyday life it is difficult for consumers to change habits, even if they are well informed and highly motivated.

These barriers are intricately linked to existing social institutions and market structures, limiting the ability of individuals to influence change. Wilk writes, “giving consumers more information and trusting them to make good choices is another wishful strategy with limited practical utility” (2004:27). It is thus important to recognize that even the best informational and awareness campaigns cannot take the place of policies designed to help more people, not just the interested, engaged, and committed to break down and confront these barriers. Certainly Sweden is relatively successful in their endeavors to build a more sustainable society because they have invested heavily in informational and awareness campaigns, but also certainly because they have put many programs in place to reduce barriers to sustainable living, making it easier for citizens concerned about the environment. Yet, as has already been mentioned, despite a high level of awareness in Sweden, and a general consensus that environmental issues are important, many still have not acted. Indeed the state, while one of the most progressive in the world, it seems, has a long way to go to remove more barriers to sustainable living.

In the pages to come I explore several of these barriers and the strategies that families concerned about sustainability utilize as they confront, negotiate and attempt to overcome barriers in daily contexts. To help illustrate these obstacles and the tensions they raise, I introduce several families that took part in the household segment of the research. In the next chapter I focus specifically on inter-household negotiations and the

gendered differences that influence each family's strategies for sustainable living. Their stories help to illustrate the need for programs and policy that can help these engaged men and women and break down barriers. The same policies could also help to usher more families into the sustainable living movement by removing barriers that have previously proven too high to overcome, regardless of awareness and interest.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **Negotiating Sustainability Everyday: Work, Home, Gender & Care<sup>43</sup>**

Well it's very difficult to live as I would like, it's everything from really big structures in society that make it difficult to live in a home that is environmentally sustainable and still get to work. It is the market that doesn't represent true costs. And to really alter my lifestyle, everything has to change because now transportation systems are not,... it's often impossible to go somewhere by train. And then socially, that's a big problem, as I mentioned, not having certain things like a mobile phone, it's not accepted. People think you are really weird, (they say) "why are you doing this?" Even not having a driver's license,... it's not a problem for me but it's questioned socially.

Transcript: Mats 3/3/2008

Understanding the barriers that aware, interested and engaged consumers find difficult to overcome is instructive. Certainly policy makers and marketers cannot expect consumers to take on the responsibility of ensuring sustainability if there are barriers that education and awareness campaigns cannot break through. During interviews research participants were asked to talk about the barriers they confront as they try to live more sustainably<sup>44</sup>. While policy makers and environmental experts often assume that a lack of information and awareness are paramount, when speaking about the most significant barriers they confront, research participants were much more likely to talk about sociality and the difficulty of breaking out of everyday habits, customs, and norms. To a degree, this could be anticipated given that research participants were selected due to their awareness of and engagement with issues of sustainability. For them, information was clearly not the primary problem. The table below (Table 6.1) outlines all of the barriers mentioned by the participants. When these discussions are sorted by the total frequency of mentions, lack of information was listed third, by 18 participants and in 20 different references. However, after reviewing these transcripts, it appears that research participants were often speculating about the obstacles that confront dominant society or

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<sup>43</sup> Sections of this chapter were written in cooperation with research assistant Matilda Ardenfors.

<sup>44</sup> These discussion transcripts were entered into qualitative analysis software and coded under the parent node "barriers."



“others” when they listed informational barriers or those associated with a “lack of interest.” When speaking about information in reference to their own efforts to live more sustainably, in all cases participants spoke about too much information and how overwhelming it is to try and keep up with all of the latest information about what one should not eat and do, the latest technological advancement, or the most recent climate projections.

<b>Table 6.1: Barriers Mentioned, Sorted by Number of Code References</b>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Total Code References</b>
Social barriers	22	27
Habit, customs, norms	18	21
Lack of information and awareness	18	20
Time	15	20
Price	16	20
Inter-household negotiations	8	19
Fashion/media influence	12	14
Lack of interest, unwilling	11	14
Economic system/market barriers	10	13
Availability and supply	9	12
Fear of missionizing/appearing self-righteous	10	10
Information is overwhelming/depressing	7	10
Low self-efficacy	6	8
Not reflexive or thinking	8	8
Fitting in	7	7
Egocentrism	4	5
People have too much money	4	5
Government inaction	4	5
Easy to say and not do	5	5
Assumption that government will take care of it	4	4
Defense of power	4	4
Substandard quality	3	3
Fairness & equality	3	3
Finger-pointing and blaming others	1	2
Peer pressure/relative deprivation	1	1
Social stigma with 2nd hand	1	1
Lack of trust in labels or eco-programs	1	1

Many of these themes share similarities and can be grouped into common categories (Table 6.2). While these groupings, by nature, require abstraction and some references

could certainly be placed in multiple categories, I've tried not to distort the data, placing specific references in the most appropriate category given the participant's words in context.

<b>TABLE 6.2: Categories of Barriers Mentioned, Sorted by Number of Code References</b>	<b># of Participants</b>	<b>Total Code References</b>
<b>Social Barriers TOTAL</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>79</b>
General social barriers	21	27
Inter-household negotiations	8	19
Fashion/media influence	10	14
Fear of missionizing/appearing self-righteous	10	10
Fitting in	7	7
Peer pressure/fear of relative deprivation	1	1
Social stigma with 2nd hand	1	1
<b>Lifestyle Barriers TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>65</b>
Habit, customs, norms	18	21
Time	15	20
Lack of interest, unwilling	11	14
Easy to say and not do	5	5
Egocentrism	4	5
<b>Economic System/Market Barriers TOTAL</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>58</b>
Price	16	20
Economic system/market barriers	10	13
Availability and supply	9	12
Defense of power	4	4
People have too much money	4	5
Substandard quality	3	3
Lack of trust in labels or eco-programs	1	1
<b>Informational Barriers TOTAL</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38</b>
Lack of information and awareness	18	20
Information is overwhelming/depressing	7	10
Not reflexive or thinking	8	8
<b>Political Barriers TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>
Low self-efficacy	6	8
Government inaction	4	5
Assumption that government will take care of it	4	4
Fairness & equality (not fair I do it & others don't)	3	3
Finger-pointing and blaming others	1	2

When grouped, these references represent social, lifestyle, economic, information and political barriers. I think it is important to note, once again, that while policy makers continue to assume that people will create more sustainable lifestyles if given the

appropriate amount of information, these men and women talk much more often about the social pressures associated with buying within the norm, the amount of time and effort it takes to break out of habits and routines to search for alternatives, or market factors like availability and price. Twenty two references were grouped in the category “political barriers.” Related to perceptions of appropriate governance, responsibility, and individual efficacy, these conversations pointed to the helplessness that many people feel when they believe that their actions are insignificant given the overwhelming actions of others (individuals, states, organizations or industries) who don’t seem to care about sustainability. Conversely the category also represents the perspective that many people don’t act because of an over-reliance on or trust in others. For example, Mari, a clothing designer who is trying to start her own line of organic children’s clothes said,

We are, in one way aware, but we are also a little bit too secure. We trust in the society and the government, that they are doing the right thing for us. So we’re not really demonstrating or doing much because we are waiting and we trust that if I put my garbage here someone will take it and it will not go out into the woods and be pollution. We think someone will take care of it because we were raised that way from when we were small...the government they will take care of us...it is all in the system. The system takes care of everything so we don’t have to worry.

Economic and market barriers were also common in conversations, with 58 different references. These discussions most often centered on issues related to price, availability or the substandard quality of environmentally friendly alternatives. While many people care deeply about pollutants found in common detergents, many argue that the “green” versions don’t work nearly as well. The common compromise is to use the conventional cleaner, just less of it. Others talk about a tipping point when, despite their desire to drive demand for organic foods, they will not pay double the price for an organic cucumber. Sweden is, in many ways, a very friendly place for consumers

interested in green consumerism. Organic milk can be found in nearly every convenience store from 7-11 to Pressbyrån due, in part, to a plan brokered by the organic farmers union which helped to subsidize and regulate the price of organic milk, making it comparable to conventional dairy. Further, during my stay in Sweden one of the nation's largest grocery chains ICA introduced its "I Love Eco" line of organic products and clothier H&M introduced an expanded line of organic clothing. Many thus felt, or were hopeful that barriers associated with price, availability and quality were becoming less of an issue. However, others took greater aim at the structure of the global market and the capitalist system itself, claiming that many don't act sustainably because they are vested in the system and have an interest in maintaining that power.

As we discussed these questions at an outdoor café over lunch, Ebba looked on with disgust as a massive black Land Rover with tinted windows and sparkling rims parked on the street in front of us. She threw the man who climbed out of the SUV a dirty look as she said,

It is a paradox because the people that are the most aware are also the people that consume the most in their travels to Thailand and defend their right to take the car to their job without paying congestion taxes. They are aware of it but think, "I can go on living like this, my house is not so bad."

Echoing this only a few days later Katrin said,

We have a really, really good life in the western world, and are we willing to change this to a lower level, to give up our power? If we consume less it does change our economy and how we compete. Maybe that is what we have to do and that is not very popular. I think that is a barrier and then I don't think that people realize how dangerous the situation is.

Others were certain that in today's economic and social system, there is simply too much productivity, too much money in circulation and too much temptation to buy unneeded items with the extra money. This theme, more common among the members sampled

from Tidsverkstaden, is based on the idea that most people in wealthy industrial and post-industrial societies are working so hard for money that they can use to buy things when in reality what most people want is more time for leisure, to spend with friends or to play with their children - carefree. This finding is well documented in the literature in Sweden and elsewhere (CNAD 2005, Erickson 1997, Larsson 2007). Yet people continue to buy things because they can afford them. While some have the opportunity to work part time, many do not and thus rationally demand a fair salary for the work they do, even if it earns the family more money than is necessary. Erik (whose wife Karolin had recently taken their daughter Elsa outside to sleep in the pram) was one of the few research participants who had gone so far as to significantly reduce his work hours. He talked to me about this as his four year old son played on the carpet between us.

I have one statistic. In 1995 to this year, during that time we have in Sweden 31% more money to spend per person<sup>45</sup>. And food and things during that time have been dropping by 30% too. So we have much more money to spend than we did in 1995. Could we choose different things? Could we consume less things? And you have to consume things that are better for the environment and for the global fair trade things. And maybe better quality. But what are we doing with the extra money? Well we can work less or we can give the money back to the people who are producing our extremely cheap computers..

Erik and I concluded, however - based on my research and his work as an environmental educator - that most people in Sweden don't think this way. Rather, most feel entitled to the money they make and typically spend as much as they can afford. The barrier as Erik sees it, is simply that most wealthy northern consumers

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<sup>45</sup> I am not sure of the source of Erik's statistic. However, it is important to note that this statistic is clearly an average/.per capita figure. Not all Swedes are equal in their purchasing power. Further, the wage gap is currently growing in Sweden. According to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), Sweden's wealthiest 10% experienced an 88% increase in their spending power between 1991 and 2007. Meanwhile, the least wealthy 10% of the population only saw their purchasing power increase by 15%. Further, the pace of change is quickening. Between 2002 and 2007, the income gap increased by 20 percent (LO 2009).

have too much money because they are not forced to pay the true costs of the products and services they use, regardless of their origins.

Despite the frequent mention of economic barriers to sustainable living, difficulties associated with overcoming routines, habits and social norms were mentioned even more frequently. Research participants acknowledge that one must be interested in, think about, and care for sustainability in order to undertake the hard work of establishing new routines or to challenge existing societal habits and normative practices. As Löfgren and Frykman write, the “force of habit” is indeed a powerful psychological influence (1996). Our habits and routines are both comforting and necessary; they reduce whole series of potentially complex and mentally taxing decisions to effortless motion. Yet the difficulty of changing one’s lifestyle is not purely cognitive or psychological, these men and women point out that at the most practical level it is a matter of time. Swedes talk often about the “time crunch” or related experiences of “burn out syndrome” - when people become so stressed by their jobs and hectic lifestyle that they have to take a temporary medical leave. As Elizabeth Shove insightfully argues, in today’s society convenience and time savings are absolutely crucial for people. Humans today work harder than ever and we are more productive as a global society than at any point in history, yet we have very little time for leisure<sup>46</sup> (Schor 1992, Sahlin 2005, Shove, Trentman & Wilk 2009). Taking the time to research and enact alternative lifestyle practices, for example, researching what recyclables are acceptable, sorting and storing them in the proper bins, perhaps binding them correctly and then delivering them to the recycling station

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<sup>46</sup> Note that compared to other wealthy, post-industrial societies – particularly the US – many Swedes enjoy relatively generous vacation time and limited work weeks.

often proves too overwhelming for some Swedes, no matter how aware and interested they are and no matter how much guilt they harbor because they threw a newspaper in the trash. Oftentimes, it is simply a matter of time and convenience.

The largest number of barriers mentioned by the men and women participating in this study, however, could be classified as problems of sociality. Many people talked about the social pressure to consume, to live like others, and to keep up with the latest trends in textile design, home decoration and electronics. Men and women alike talked about the popularity of home redecoration and fashion makeover shows on the television. Some expressed concern that others wouldn't understand them if they tried to lead by example by shopping less. They worried that people would consider them missionaries, self-righteous or simply living in bad taste. Interestingly, when I asked people to tell me how good they were at doing each of the sustainable actions they'd free listed during interviews, an interesting pattern emerged. While most people listed "buy organic food" and rated themselves, on average, good at doing it – people seemed to have a much harder time with other actions, despite high levels of awareness. The action that people said they were "worst" at doing, on average was buying less stuff, particularly fewer clothes which people said they were "bad" at doing - on average. I'll revisit these themes in much more detail in Chapter VII. For now, however, I'd like to focus on a specific social barrier listed by several research participants. A strong theme that I should have anticipated (given my own personal experiences) but did not, centered on the social barriers presented by family members. More specifically, many women participating in the study felt that their male partners presented the biggest barriers to sustainable

living, raising interesting questions about the role of gender in creating and maintaining sustainable lifestyles and consumer behaviors.

### **Household Negotiations: Balancing Sustainability, Economy and Sociality**

I begin this story with Sonja, a government employee in her mid-fifties who I met for an interview at an old coffee shop in *Gamla Stan* (Old Town). In the older part of the city the cafes take on a different character. They rarely display the clean lines and fresh airy feel so common in other parts of Stockholm, a city that likes to present itself as the Mecca of modernism. In Gamla Stan the cafes are ornate, complicated by dark carved wood and seemingly fashioned for people much smaller than contemporary Stockholmers. A petit woman with a distinguished look, Sonja fit well into the booth across from Matilda<sup>47</sup> and I as the three of us talked about Sonja's efforts to live more sustainably. I asked her what her biggest challenges were. She replied, without a second's hesitation, "my husband, my family." After we all laughed for a minute I realized that her relaxing face signaled she was not joking. She continued,

Well I don't do it all the way, I am not all straight but of course, it is always a compromise. When my daughter wants to go with friends to Malta in a language course, I let her go because she wants to do it with her friends... but when I think for myself - it's not what I want. It's a compromise...and my husband, when I met him he was not into this at all. I didn't want to eat meat and he wanted to eat a *lot* of meat...And especially my youngest daughter she wants to buy new clothes all the times and she has got her own money and I say this is not right, but I think perhaps when she gets older she is stronger and doesn't look so much to what her friends buy. Yes, another example of the compromise, my husband's best friend's son is getting married in England and I said "yes we are going," but how do we get there if we don't want to fly? I said, "Ok I'll try to find out if there is a way." But, you know that if I can't find something, or if there are no boats, or it is expensive, then he will say we have to fly.

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<sup>47</sup> Matilda Ardenfors, research assistant, often accompanied me for interviews in Swedish to ensure nothing was lost in translation. This interview was conducted in a mixture of both English and Swedish.



This theme, centered on inter-household negotiations, was mentioned 19 times by 8 different individuals during discussions about barriers to sustainability. Yet that wasn't the only time the topic arose. I initially became aware of the theme early in the research when Ingrid stopped me with a question. We were in the structured part of the interview. She'd just finished free-listing all the activities an individual could do to live a more sustainable life and I'd asked her to look back over the list she'd created. I instructed her to use a five point Likert scale to tell me how good she was at doing each of the actions she'd listed. Ingrid glanced down at the paper in between us. The first thing she'd listed was "buy natural foods". She traced her finger along the Likert scale mumbling as she went, "really good, good, okay, bad, really bad..." then placed an "x" inside the box underneath "really good." But when Ingrid came to "turn down the water heat & take shorter showers" she seemed confused. She looked back up at me and said, "Now am I answering this for only me, or also for my husband?" Up until that point I had not considered the possibility of gathering information about household differences, but the possibility was intriguing so I asked Ingrid to continue using an X to indicate her actions and an H for the household when she and her husband differed. I continued to use this protocol for the balance of the interviews and often found that the respondents perceived there were rather large differences within the household. Gert, for example is also "really good" at composting, buying organic foods, reading product contents and buying green detergents and hygiene products. She rated her husband as either "okay" or "bad" at each of these things. Similarly Helen takes special efforts to walk or bike to work, to turn off the lights, recycle and to cut down on travel, especially flying. Yet despite her efforts

and the perception that she is “good” at doing each of these things she considers her two teenage children and husband “really bad” at all of the activities listed.

Sonja, Ingrid and Helen are only three of many women in the sample who are trying to create and maintain more sustainable lifestyles at home but find they often have to compromise their ideals, negotiating with other members of their household, particularly their male partners. In the pages to come I explore these inter-household negotiations and the role that gender<sup>48</sup> plays as families try to build more sustainable lifestyles. Along the way I pay particular attention to several theories that have been proposed to explain these gendered differences.

### **Gender as a Barrier or Pathway to Sustainability: Do Women Care More?**

Research indicates that women in wealthy, post-industrial urban societies are more likely to respond to the call to consume more sustainably than are men. Several studies based in the US and Europe have illustrated that the majority of those who report purchasing goods for ecological reasons are women (CNAD 2005, Micheletti & Stolle 2004, LUI 1999). While the percentages vary from study to study and from one research setting to another, a generalizable trend is unmistakable. A recent OECD report confirms that women are more likely to buy ecolabeled, fair trade, and organic goods and are more committed to recycling and the efficient use of energy (OECD 2008). According to the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (2008), Swedish women are also more concerned about climate change and feel more confident that they can do something about it (87% of women compared to 67% of men). As such, women are more likely to

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<sup>48</sup> It is important to acknowledge that gendered and sexual identities in Sweden exist on a continuum. I do not intend to misrepresent this diversity by referring here to only “men” and “women.” Participants in the household research all identified with the gender consistent with their sex and, as far as I know, were heterosexual. Further research on transgendered individuals and same sex couples is needed.

buy goods from companies that they know make efforts to reduce climate impacts (78% compared to 60% of men). Further, empirical analyses show that Swedish women in fact do have smaller carbon and ecological footprints than men (Johnsson-Latham 2007)<sup>49</sup>. It is thus understandable why many women, including Ingrid and Sonja, express frustration that their husbands are not more supportive of their efforts. Yet these gendered differences raise interesting questions about the source of difference and many, scholars included, have attempted to answer them, proposing theories to explain the phenomenon. It is important to note that, when discussing the differences among men and women in the pages to come and when reviewing the theoretical explanations that have been offered to explain these differences - I am speaking about men and women in specific, (i.e. privileged, European, and highly educated) social locations. Indeed, I recognize that experiences of class, race, nationality, region, religion and sexual preferences intersect with gender, making it precarious to speak about women as homogenous group with shared interests and experiences (Mohanty 2003, Gunewardena & Kingsolver 2007). It is important to recognize that women's experiences differ within the same nation state and within the global social hierarchy (Anglin & Lamphere 2007, Zimmerman, Litt & Bose 2006). Without this recognition, speaking about women's experiences as if universal - based on some naturalized or innate characteristics - "renders inequalities between women, locally and globally, invisible" (Dahl 2007:113).

Unfortunately most of the popular explanations offered to explain why European and North American women are more interested in sustainable consumerism relative to

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<sup>49</sup> These gendered patterns have deep historical roots. Furlough and Strikwerda (1999) have detailed women's roles in consumer cooperatives throughout history while Micheletti (2004) provides a history of women's involvement in political consumerism through time and reviews many theories which attempt to explain women's participation in alternative forms of consumerism.

men do not take these differences into account. But - perhaps worse - the recent focus on sustainable consumerism fails to recognize gendered differences at all.

### **Biological Differences in Risk Perception and Response?**

Perhaps the most common explanation for women's interest and participation in sustainable consumerism is loosely based on perceived socio-biological differences between the sexes. It is common, in both academic and popular literature, to hear the essentialized view that women are naturally more empathetic and nurturing, particularly when it comes to relations with nature (Dahl 2007). This "feminine principle", leads women to be "naturally" tuned into concerns about sustainability (Brandotti 1994) due to their role as primary caregiver for children during the first few years of life. This role, the logic goes, is linked lower risk thresholds and a deeper concern for sustainability among women. In 1996 Davidson and Freudenburg argued that women tend to see health and safety as more important than men and therefore express higher levels of concern about related environmental risks (1996:323).

While there certainly are biological and socialized differences between men and women, the idea that women naturally have lower risk thresholds has been discounted by other studies which raise questions about the biological bases of these explanations. In 1994 Flynn, Slovic, & Mertz found that while women do have higher perceptions of risk, regardless of the hazard, non-white men also perceive higher levels of risk than white men. The study therefore reminds us that an investigation of gendered differences in the perception of risk and sustainable behavior might result in an incomplete picture as risk is mediated at the intersection of several factors. It further casts doubt on the assumption that perception of risk is linked to biological differences between the sexes as some have

assumed. The authors write, “[t]hese results suggest that sociopolitical factors such as power, status, alienation, and trust are strong determiners of people’s perception and acceptance of risks” (Flynn, Slovic and Mertz 1994:1101). These findings remind us that categories like gender and race must be seen as more than personal characteristics since, as Karen Brodtkin has written, they describe “structured relationships of domination and subordination” (2007:xi).

Another, related argument is based on the idea that women are socialized from an early age into the expected social role of a “caring mother” and thus more inclined to be acutely concerned about the welfare of others, regardless of whether or not she decide to have children. Carol Gilligan (1982), for example, wrote about an “ethic of care” among women. She argued that this ethic is based on feelings of connection to and responsibility for others. In comparison to men, who are more likely to associate ethical action with justice, rules and individual rights, Gilligan argued that women are more likely to link morality and ethical action to responsibility for others, fairness and equality.

Many scholars, perhaps most notably Chodorow (1974), have tied this ethic of care to the socialization process. Because women are responsible for early childcare, cross-culturally, she argues that women’s personalities develop in relation and connection to others. Young girls and women are seen and treated the same way, also as nurturers and care givers. Theoretically this so-called “mother effect” leads a woman to react more quickly to risk in an effort to protect the people she loves (Micheletti 2004). From this perspective, it is the socialized propensity to “care” that creates the gendered gap. This propensity is reinforced by the “act of mothering” for those that have children. Walter (2008) has argued that the “intergenerational dimension of mothering,” concerned with

the practicalities of caring for and feeding families provides the perfect opportunity for an enhanced politics of sustainable consumption (Desai 2001, Shiva 1988, Vliesis 2008). Despite the prevalence of these explanations, centered on the importance gendered notions of care, several generations of feminist research have effectively demonstrated that an emphasis on care is not the exclusive domain of all women, nor is it essential to their being (Zimmerman, Litt & Bose 2006).

At the same time, however, we cannot discount the reality that these theorists take their departure from observed differences between women and men (Wreder 2005). As Herd & Meyer (2006) have written, (citing Lister in 1997 and 2000), it is difficult to strike a balance between feminist perspectives that focus on equality or alternatively, difference. At one extreme the denial of gendered differences and gender-blind analyses miss objective and empirical differences between men and women – thus ignoring the effects of historical and cultural gender relations and inequalities. At the other extreme women's experiences and perspectives are essentialized, masking diversity and risking a perpetuation of inequality. To strike this balance it is important to acknowledge gendered differences without neglecting an understanding of the differential experiences of women as gender intersects with race, region, religion, class, ethnicity or generation.

While the idea that the historically and culturally-grounded socialization of gendered differences is supported by my research, my findings suggest that some of the primary assumptions behind this idea may not be as well founded. Literature influenced by these ideas is often based on the assumption that women are more concerned about sustainability because in nearly all cultural contexts, they are socialized to care, more directly, for the immediate health and safety of their own children. However, this study

found that Swedish women who had changed their lifestyles in the interests of sustainability were less likely than men to perceive risk to their families. In contrast, these women were more likely to be concerned with risks to others, both future generations and people in developing countries. In this regard, the gender differences were quite clear. While 29% of the men in the study were most worried that environmental hazards were currently risking the health and safety of their families, only 15% of women felt the same way. Conversely, 26% of women participating in the study were primarily worried about the effects of environmental hazards on people living in less developed economies, compared to 17% of men (Table 7.1).

While women perform the majority of carework in Swedish society - and this work certainly influences their perceptions of risk and response, this study does not support the idea that women are more concerned about sustainability due to their “innate” capacity as mothers to respond to threats to their families, as is often assumed. Instead, the research indicates that women are concerned not only about their children and immediate families, but also displaced others.

<b>TABLE 7.1 - RISK PERCEPTION by GENDER</b>			
<b>Location of primary risk</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Immediate to self and family	21%	29%	15%
Long term to self and family	5%	4%	6%
Displaced immediate	22%	17%	26%
Displaced long term	33%	33%	32%
Generalized	19%	17%	21%

Certainly women in Sweden and around the world are more likely to shoulder the burden of carework for their families as the result of historical and cultural processes (Zimmerman et.al 2006:4). Several scholars have suggested that this carework can stimulate political activity (Lister 1997), and has prompted “legions” of women to join

environmental organizations due to their experiences caring for children or elderly relatives (Herd & Meyer 2006).

Kneafsy and colleagues (2008) have argued that an interest in sustainability among women can be described as the difference between caring *about* versus caring *for*. Caring *for* others implies an action undertaken specifically to benefit another whereas caring *about* might include concern and action, but not *for* another. Fisher & Tonto (1991) have argued that due to the fact that women shoulder the overwhelming burden of carework (cleaning, caring for children, cooking, laundry, meal prep, shopping) they are more open to the prioritization of others' needs and concerns – and thus more willing or better able to integrate them into their own actions<sup>50</sup>.

From this perspective, buying fair trade or organic goods or living in a more sustainable way can be seen as a way to care not only for one's family members, but also for distant others (Barnett et. al. 2005, Kneafsy et. al. 2008). From this vantage point, choices about sustainable living are best seen as “public, other-related, and therefore moral action(s) rather than a self-interested, private and therefore a-moral affair(s)” (Sasatelli 2004:11).

### **Gender Equality, Parenting & Progressive Sustainability**

Many of the men participating in this research confirmed that the women in their lives were more interested in and engaged with sustainable living. They credited their wives and partners with the development of their interest and engagement in questions of

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<sup>50</sup> While the process of “caring for” may in many ways be linked to caring for children, this certainly does not imply that women without children are less inclined to “care for” the environment or marginalized peoples. Femininity - culturally and historically linked to women - continues to disproportionately bind women to familial obligations of care in the household, in extended kinship networks and within the community.



sustainability. Consider, for example the following passage taken from my conversation with Erik, again as his four year old Elliott played between us.

Karolin, my wife...is the most important person. She is a step ahead of me. She is not as influenced as I am by material things and buying trends. In the radical things about eating less meat and getting rid of the car, she is really trying to push me all days. So I really feel like the typical conservative man. It is not a good feeling I can tell you.

However, if a concern with sustainability is linked to carework then men who share in this work should theoretically exhibit a stronger ethic of care than men who do not participate in the reproduction of the family and household. My research, although based on a small sample size, shows compelling evidence for this assertion. Qualitative, in-depth household interviews conducted with participant households made apparent issues surrounding gender roles and their impact on sustainable living. Twelve families were selected to participate in this segment of the research. In the table below I've indicated the member of the household who is the primary driver of sustainable living by listing their name in bold and underlined type (TABLE 7.2). Ebba and Mats were both single and thus do not significantly factor into the current discussion about inter-household tensions surrounding gender, sustainability and care. The other ten households were composed of dual-gender couples<sup>51</sup>.

Relevant to the current discussion about care and everyday efforts to live more sustainably, two couples, Thomas & Karin and Lars & Malin agreed that they were evenly matched in their interest in and efforts to live more sustainably. While these couples certainly had their differences, for example Marta was more concerned with

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<sup>51</sup> It is important not to naturalize normative notions of family. While the data represented here was unfortunately limited to nuclear and heteronormative households – the dominant form among middle class, white Swedes - there are many different ways to constitute a family in Sweden and elsewhere. I look forward to seeing similar research extended to include this diversity.

global social justice and Thomas was primarily interested in Sweden's environmental health, they both made significant efforts to research and establish a sustainable lifestyle. This is particularly interesting given that both Thomas & Karin and Lars & Malin considered their division of labor within the household equitable.

<b>TABLE 7.2 - Household Research Participants with Drivers in <u>BOLD</u></b>						
<b>Original Participant</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>HH Income/year Swedish Kr. 2007</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>HH size</b>	<b>Other household members</b>
1. <b><u>Ebba</u></b>	F	31	<250,000	Alternative Stad	1	Committed, lives alone
2. <b><u>Mats</u></b>	M	29	<250,000	Alternative Stad	1	Single, lives alone
3. <b><u>Thomas</u></b>	M	31	500,001 - 750,000	Alternative Stad	2	<b><u>Karin</u></b> (wife, 28)
4. <b><u>Lars</u></b>	M	49	>750,001	SKIS	4	<b><u>Malin</u></b> (wife 42) Ida (daughter 8) Max (son, 8)
5. <b><u>Maria</u></b>	F	35	500,001 - 750,000	Bra Miljöval	2	Folke (fiancé, 29)
6. <b><u>Emma</u></b>	F	63	250,001 - 500,000	Kärngårdar	2	Olle (husband, 66)
7. <b><u>Gert</u></b>	F	66	500,001 - 750,000	Kärngårdar	2	Johan (husband, 70)
8. <b><u>Charlotte</u></b>	F	32	>750,001	Tidsverkstaden	3	Kalle (husband, 33) Malte (son,1)
9. <b><u>Sonja</u></b>	F	56	>750,001	SKIS	3	Anders (husband, 60) Birgita (daughter, 18)
10. <b><u>Sigge</u></b>	M	55	500,001 - 750,000	Kärngårdar	3	Brit (wife,51) Ingrid (daughter,16)
11. Erik	M	34	250,001 - 500,000	Tidsverkstaden	4	<b><u>Karolin</u></b> (wife, 33) Elliott (son, 4) Elsa (daughter, 1)
12. <b><u>Jacob</u></b>	M	47	>750,001	Tidsverkstaden	5	Elin (wife,47) Lisa & Lina (daughters,15 &13) Sam (son, 6)

The other eight families felt that one half of the couple was leading the household's efforts to live more sustainably. In six of those eight, the couple agreed that the woman drove the process toward more sustainable living, pushing harder for actions ranging from buying less, eating seasonal and local foods, recycling more, or abstaining from flying and driving. Interestingly, in all six of these cases the women also held the primary responsibility for household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping, and caring for the children. In the two remaining households, Sigge's and Jacob's, the men were identified by both partners as more progressive in regard to sustainable living. Interestingly, in both instances, the men acted as primary caregivers in the family. Both Sigge and Jacob took more responsibility for the children, ensuring adequate care, cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks associated with the reproduction of the household.

I spoke at length with Jacob about his love for his children, the care he provides for them and how his role as a father helps to inspire his interest in and commitment to sustainable living. However, we also spoke about how his love for his children often translates into compromises as he and Elin try to raise two teenage daughters in the context of a strong consumer culture. In an interesting turn of events for Jacob, who is by profession trained to provide therapy for others, I listened quietly in his office as he spoke at length about the contradictions and ironies that arise in everyday life as one tries to teach their children about the importance of sustainability in the context of a consumer society. He said,

You want your kids - not to be exactly in the mainstream of the culture you're living in because there are disadvantages. But, on the other hand, trying to raise your kids to be a little bit on the side, because it would be better for them, is also difficult because it's easiest for kids to be in the very middle when it comes to

friendships. Because personally, I'm old enough not to care much about what people think of my way of dressing and so on. I'm not really into...I don't provoke people, but I mean it is really my business and if they consider it my problem...then it really is their problem. But you can't really have that way of looking at your kids. It is much more difficult. So, in a way you get the family where the parents are off a bit from the culture and the kids are still in the middle. It is a difficult situation really. My kids, they really wanted to go skiing in the Alps last year. Why? Well because it is fun and their friends want to do it. It was really important to them so I went with my two girls and they were very pleased. I was not very pleased ...it is not an easy question. I mean who is to decide what is important with an 11 and 13 year old. You just can't tell them that that is nothing. I mean I would say it is not an important thing to do...there are so many other places and ways of finding happiness. But to them it was important and on their level and in their life...so we did it.

These comments were also echoed by Sigge who also drives the push toward sustainable living in his home. An organic farmer and accomplished author Sigge works from home and therefore takes responsibility for household reproduction, including baking, cooking, and caring for the children since his wife Brit has to commute to work in the city each day. Until recently the family had no television but Sigge recently broke down when his wife sided with his two teenage children, claiming a television as a necessity. Sigge said,

People are buying all kinds of machines to go in the kitchen to, for example wash the dishes. We do it by hand. And most of the people are buying machines because they want to sit in front of the television. Okay, we have a television but I look very little on the television because I have other things to do. We bought it three years ago, before that we didn't have one because our children were small and then we played with them. But they are so big now and we had to get the TV because it was three against one. The children wanted to have the television. My daughter she is 16 years and then it is a little bit difficult to say no. You have to make compromises. I didn't have a choice because we want to have a democracy here in the family too and we voted and it was three to one.

While it is hard to generalize based on a pattern that emerged from such a small number of households, it certainly seems that the process of caring *for* others may enhance concern for and commitment to sustainable living, regardless of sex or gender. If nothing else, this pattern suggests and warrants future research on the subject. However,

regardless of the conclusion, the fact remains that in most societies, women continue to take primary responsibility for domestic duties, including caring *for* the family (Walter 2008, Warde et.al.2007). In the section to come, I argue that while Sweden's family planning and gender equity policies have helped to encourage more sustainable living by giving more men the opportunity to care *for* their families, the current emphasis on sustainable consumerism places a disproportionate burden on women.

### **Women and the “Time Bind”**

Sweden is known internationally for its policies geared toward ensuring social rights, including those linked to gender equality. The Swedish state has taken a very progressive approach to ensuring equality through a series of *Jämställdhet* (equality between men and women) policies, designed to support women's unpaid carework. While many wealthy, post-industrial societies have encouraged the privatization of care as women move into the workforce, the Swedish strategy has been to provide these services through the public sector (Hernes 2006:312).

In the early 1960s public child care was introduced, linked to a discussion of the emancipation of women. Today the government provides guaranteed and subsidized childcare for children as old as six and after school care until the age of 12. Parents also have the right to up to 60 days per year to care for a sick child and can choose to reduce their work load to 80%. Sweden is also well known for its generous maternity and paternity leave insurance. In 1974 a parents' insurance was implemented to replace maternity insurance, giving fathers the equal right to compensation for taking care of a child. In 1995 a “father month” was introduced in an attempt to increase the number of men staying at home. Today the parents' insurance offers up to 16 months of parental

leave and can be used until the child turns eight years old. Almost every family with children in Sweden uses the parents' insurance. Yet despite these progressive programs, use of the parental leave system is unequal (SOU 2005:73), reflecting lingering inequality in employment. In 2006 men used only 20% of the days in the parents' insurance. For most families this decision is based upon economic realities since the insurance does not compensate the family at 100% of income and men earn more than women in all sectors of the Swedish economy (Rosén & Lindblom 2007, Larsson 2007). In recent years there has been a push among feminists and policy makers alike to encourage fathers to spend more time with their children and to take their share of the parental leave.

Herd & Meyer (2006) argue that policies that subsidize carework free women from economic dependence on men and allow them to simultaneously participate in the work force and care for their families without living in poverty. They write, "Relative poverty rates among single mothers in Norway and Sweden are the lowest in the world, at less than 5%" (2006:323). Further these policies have enabled women to participate in the formal workforce almost to the same extent as men, and women are in general more highly educated than men (Göransson 2007). In 2005 women's employment rate in Sweden was 71.8%, the third highest among OECD nations (OECD 2007).

It is likely that policies which have helped men and women to balance their work and family life have also helped to support the sustainable living movement in Sweden. This is not only because men are sharing in carework and experiencing the practice of *caring for* others, but also because these policies, free both men and women to participate in family and work life, as well as civic and political life. Indeed, Herd and Meyer

hypothesize that this more equitable distribution of carework can help to “encourage and revitalize civic engagement (2006:325).

As Frazer (2006:293) points out, the Swedish Institute (responsible for marketing Sweden as a modern, progressive and sustainable nation to the international creative class) reflects this emphasis on ensuring each citizen’s equal ability to participate with the following statement from their website,

Swedish gender equality policy is fundamentally concerned with the ability of each individual to achieve economic independence through gainful employment. Just as important are measures to enable both women and men to combine jobs with parenthood...and participate in all aspects of community life according to their capabilities.

Because of this orientation - relative to many other nations – Swedish women are highly involved in political and civic life. Men have more experience caring for the family and both men and women enjoy family planning policies that allow for a more flexible negotiation of work and family life. Sweden should be viewed as an international role model in this regard. However, gender equality is far from a reality in Sweden. The burden of carework is still carried disproportionately by women – often making it difficult for even those most interested in sustainable living to act on their concerns.

Despite significant formal employment rates, women make less money for their work and continue to shoulder primary responsibility for the unpaid work necessary in the domestic sphere. Perkins demonstrates how the logics of capitalism and patriarchy are entangled, by pointing out that women’s domestic labor is not factored into discussions about the market (1997:106). Yet the market depends on the time women spend on

consumption and other reproductive activities to keep it running, without this labor, the market would not function (Leacock 2000).

But this carework combined with formal employment and the time it takes to research and enact more sustainable lifestyles means that the women participating in this study are often extremely burdened. Compared to 30 years ago, the average Swedish couple with young children is working ten additional hours. This increase in work time, along with a significant increase in household consumption, has deepened the time crunch for families (Larsson 2007:3). While mothers and fathers both experience significant demands on their time, women find – despite the state’s progressive role in providing care for dependents - that they experience more pressure (both social and self-imposed) to care for the children, shop for the household, care for elderly parents or disabled family members and complete domestic work - adding significant pressure. A report presented in 2003 on the Swedish time usage shows that even though there were changes between 1990/91 and 2000/01, especially when it comes to the decreased amount of time women spend on work within the home, inequalities still exist. Women devote twice as much time to household work and their spare time is more fragmented than that of men and is often interlaced with household duties. Further, the everyday care of small children is handled primarily by mothers in Sweden (SCB 2003, Larsson 2007).

Under these circumstances many women concerned about sustainability place emphasis on time and convenience when making choices about what types of goods and services to purchase or utilize (Ward 1997, Walter 2008). The need to save time works against many women’s concerns for sustainability since readily available convenience products and habitual actions require a smaller investment of time. Women also feel the



time bind when attempting to perform their femininity. Many women in the sample expressed significant tension about the dual pressures of expressing femininity and their own desire to pay less attention to fashion or buy only sustainable goods. Ebba for example said,

Well, 70% of all the clothes I buy are second hand, I don't buy anything and sometimes I feel sorry for myself and ugly as a woman because I don't go into H&M and buy something. I don't do that, but I can't because it is against my values and it really makes me feel sick and ashamed.

Yet shopping second hand or for sustainable clothing and fashions takes a significant amount of time and money, two scarce resources for many women in Scandinavia and elsewhere. Although I deal with this topic specifically in Chapter VII, it is worth noting here that women feel the pressure to live up to gendered expectations of homemaking in a culture which is extremely home-centric (Rosengren 1985,1991). This orientation places significant pressure on women who continue to be associated with the performance of “home-makers,” particularly if they care about sustainable living and want to create an indoor environment with used, second hand or recycled materials.

The social pressures placed on women to be good mothers, wives, professionals and homemakers place women in an awkward position as they strive to balance these performances with a concern for sustainability (which often means buying less or spending significant time to find suitable alternatives). Walter writes, “since mothering is a relational practice and women’s gendered performance of it is evaluated by their ability to feed their families, women work hard at juggling” (2008:2). Activities like growing food, cooking, taking the train instead of flying, researching the most environmentally friendly washing machine, or seeking out the perfect second hand coffee table – all these activities take a significant amount of time. These barriers to sustainable living frustrate

many women who argue that they don't have adequate options to care for their families in a sustainable way. Many end up compromising their ideals and experiencing cognitive dissonance which they describe as being torn.

And while these barriers prove insurmountable for many women, others invest significant time and money to build more sustainable lifestyles at home and in their communities. As the primary consumers of goods for the family (OECD 2008), women in Sweden (in a more obvious way than men) experience the ethical and political opportunities that present themselves in the realm of consumerism (Micheletti & Stolle 2004:158). In Sweden, as in many places, the gendered division of labor is such that women make the decisions about goods most likely to be branded as environmentally friendly. In some OECD countries, women make over 80% of consumption decisions. This is because women tend to buy the cheaper basic essentials such as food, clothing and household articles, while men are more likely to buy expensive capital goods (OECD 2008).

But the question remains, how sustainable are these sustainable lifestyles if individuals, particularly women, are left to shoulder the burden for so many? Helena, who was often very tough on herself, feeling that she was not doing her fair share to ensure sustainability, spoke about a female friend who is particularly good at living more sustainably. She said,

For me, I am so inspired by the people who take it the whole nine yards and really feel that they should put their energy into it, ...they work in projects and organizations that everyday contribute...and they are always frustrated that they are not doing enough, that they're not pulling their weight. They are burning themselves out because they cannot carry this heavy burden for all of us.

## **Moving Beyond Gender-blind, Neo-liberal Policy**

Recent sustainability policies, focused on encouraging consumers to take responsibility for sustainability via their consumer choice, neglect the gendered implications of these market-based suggestions. These policies and programs appear to be “gender-blind” or “post-gender”, but in reality they have significant if not hidden implications for women. They place even more burden on women as consumers and continue to devalue women’s work. Further, they place the onus of moral responsibility on women as individuals - despite significant structural barriers. Finally, this orientation runs the risk of repeating history’s mistakes if it continues to neglect the reality that sustainability is linked to production, distribution *and* consumption. Furlough writes about the failings of the French cooperative movements in the early twentieth century, pointing to the gendered divisions that splintered the movement. She writes, “the gender identification of femininity solely with consumption and masculinity with both production and consumption undermined the transformative potential of socialist cooperation since it imagined consumption as a separate women’s activity without a link to production” (1999:184). Further, because women have less access to alternative spheres of power (Micheletti 2004) including formal political mechanisms, these market-based policies provide many women with few options for building more sustainable homes and communities outside the market. My research seems to reflect this. Participating women hold much more hope for achieving sustainability through their consumer action than men (41% of women vs. 29% of men). Men, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on working through traditional political channels (33% of men vs. 24% of women) (TABLE 7.3).

<b>TABLE 7.3: Governance by Gender</b>			
<b>Responsible Societal Entity</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Citizens	36%	29%	41%
Government	28%	33%	24%
Business/Markets	5%	8%	3%
Media	2%	4%	0
Balanced	29%	25%	32%

Ecofeminists link the oppression of women to the same patriarchal ideologies used to justify the domination of nature. These theorists argue that sustainability depends on new consumption and production regimes that respect the integrity of healthy ecosystems and on the achievement of social equity between and within generations. From this perspective, sustainability cannot be achieved until the patriarchal system, which relies on the subjugation of nature and women, is overcome. Interestingly, this philosophy was iterated by several Swedish research participants, both men and women. Consider the following statement from Mats, the pensive and thoughtful research assistant so quietly insistent that equality is the key to sustainability. He said,

On average men use a lot more resources. Well, you can ask yourself why. Maybe it's just part of this patriarchal structure, that those who have power and resources use more resources. I think unless we live gender equal lives, democracy is impossible. If you look at the world today and see how much in the world is linked to patriarchal structures, then for me it's a holistic answer to say that it is part of the same, this patriarchal oppression is linked to environmental destruction.

### **Conclusion: Is Equality a Prerequisite?**

Since the publication of Boserup's seminal article on women and development in 1970, we have become more aware of the implicit masculine bias found in many development policies and have come to center the development debate more squarely on issues of equality. However, until the Decade of Women conference in Nairobi (1985), the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet (1991), and the publication of

*Women, the Environment and Sustainable Development* (Braidotti et.al. 1994), recognition of women's roles was, for the most part, limited to discussions about how women's work contributed to economic growth in developing economies. Far less attention was paid to the roles that northern women play in building more sustainable societies. Allen and Sachs note that while Northern women have invested significantly in efforts to create more sustainable lifestyles, it is ironic that so "few of these efforts focus specifically on improving gender relations" (2007:2). Many women who participated in this study expressed passionate *care for* not only their families, but also for less privileged people in places they've visited or read about. They viewed their attempts to consume less or to at least consume differently as a gesture of solidarity – an attempt to take less so that others could have the right to their own fair share. While it is important not to subscribe to the dangerous logic that vulnerable communities in the south must be "saved" by enlightened feminist consumers in the global north (see Parreñas 2007, Mohanty 2003, Bryant & Goodman 2004), it is important to consider that many of the women who work so hard to live more sustainably do so at incredible expense. Many of them say they do it because it is ultimately about being fair – and about equality.

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate that while there are many barriers to sustainable living in Sweden, some of them are closer to home, literally. Inter-household negotiations and gender inequalities leave many with little choice but to compromise their ideals in the interest of sociality, time or the fear that a child will be ostracized. I have also tried to demonstrate that interest in sustainability is tied at least in part to the ideology and process of caring *for* others. Perhaps policies designed to give men more

time with the family will encourage the process of caring *for* others and an ethic of care among men that extends into the global ecosystem and to distant others.

However, today, women and men continue to have different views on sustainability and different experiences as they relate to the creation of sustainable lifestyles. Contemporary policies need to take these differences into account, recognizing the gendered implications of market-based policies inspired by neoliberal framings of the responsible consumer. In today's world, the idea of placing primary responsibility on the consumer actually means putting a lot of responsibility on a specific group of people who are already subject to disproportionate burden. So despite the appearance of gender-neutrality, sustainability policy which places responsibility for sustainability primarily in the realm of the consumer, notably women, is neither apolitical nor gender or class neutral (Barndt 2002). Giving families more flex time and encouraging gender equity will help to address female time poverty, giving both women and men more time to focus on issues of sustainability, seek out alternatives, and invest time and energy in more sustainable lives.

### **Social Barriers Within & Beyond the Family**

In the pages to come I continue to discuss social barriers to sustainable living, but now focusing on social pressures beyond the household. In order to do this I concentrate on families who are trying to reduce their environmental impact by buying less stuff. Yet given that material culture is a key tool for the construction of individual identities and the communication of social positions, social barriers often prevent many environmentally-concerned citizen-consumers from consuming less, despite their interest in and commitment to sustainability.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Swedish Home & the Sociality of Anti-Consumption

*There are so many things that are good in life that don't cost anything. I don't know why there is so much focus on buying things and having the right things...and also having the perfect home. I mean Swedes are mad about their homes. I can say that, as I was living abroad for 8 years. They (Swedes) are spending so much money on their homes buying things and all kinds of stuff. I can't really see that they need it, but it is so important to have a beautiful home. If you listen to people on the subway you can hear that they are talking about houses and plans and buying and selling and where you are living and how much did it cost, all about houses and decoration. I mean it is good that some people are focusing on fair trade and ecological things...but still the focus on buying lots of things is the problem. If everyone around the world lived like we did, then there is no way...Why should we be allowed to live like this if other people are not. It would be good for some people to have a refrigerator, these basic things, but then we have to consume less.* Transcript: Fredrik (February 22, 2008)

Between 1960 and the year 2000 there was a four-fold increase in household consumption expenditures worldwide (World Watch 2004) as more and more global citizens acquired refrigerators, television sets, cars, mobile phones or the latest made-for-TV electric grill. Today as a global society we produce and consume more than at any point in human history. In fact our global resource use has doubled over the course of only the last three decades (World Watch 2010). While growing population rates certainly contribute to these statistics, we must also recognize that consumer goods which were once considered luxuries are now common household necessities in many parts of the world as discretionary spending continues to rise. Internationally the growth of this “consumer-class” has significantly increased demand for resource inputs, most notably energy. Human society’s demand for energy has nearly doubled since 1980 and is projected to surpass 2006 levels by an additional 44% in the year 2030 (USEIA 2009).

Many scholars have set out to explain why consumption has become so central to contemporary societies and why our collective perceptions of need seem to grow with each passing year (e.g. McKibben 2008, Wilk 2002, Robbins 1999, Leach

1993, Schor 1999, DeGrazia 2005). The answer to this question is complex but is directly and indirectly linked to the constitution of capitalism. It is related to capitalist relations of production and alienation, the dominance of supply-side economics and more recent neoliberal policy, hierarchical social structures and emulation, the push for democracy conceived as equal access to consumer goods, the need to communicate in globalized and largely urban post-modern societies, the growth of the advertising and fashion industries, growing individualism, and the transition from producer to consumer identities (just to name a few).

However, in this chapter I continue to focus on the social barriers to sustainable living, linking these barriers to the idea that the importance of material culture in our everyday lives is related to a heightened need for communication in the increasingly complex, post-modern, global societies inspired by contemporary capitalism (Crewe 2003; Holt and Schor 2000; Leach 1993). As was illustrated in the previous chapter, many research participants say that social barriers to sustainable living are the most complicated and difficult to overcome. This is a testament to the reality that consumption fulfils an important social function in our societies, helping us to signal belonging, mutual understanding and adherence to shared societal norms and cultural logics. As humans are increasingly alienated from productive resources and move into urban centres looking for waged work, they find themselves without hometowns, relatives or the products of their labour to anchor their identities. Today those of us living in complex post-industrial societies have little choice but to build our identities around symbolic objects that strangers can easily understand - possessions. Anthropologists have long studied material



goods as tools for communication, a way that we signal our social status, our membership in a group and our understanding of shared norms and values.

If this social perspective on consumption is correct, then it seems that Swedes have become much more expressive in recent decades. Sweden has experienced significant growth in several sectors of household consumption over the last several decades (CFCK 2008). In Sweden, where a culture of conformity is apparent to ethnographers and citizens alike, there is a strong pressure to consume to these heightened levels. Yet, if we view consumption as a means of constructing and communicating identity, then these significant increases in consumption are not inherently irrational, as some have suggested, but are functional in an increasingly complex society like Sweden's.

Meanwhile, as discussed throughout this dissertation, the past several decades have also seen growing anti-consumption sentiment. With a growing awareness of the links between household consumption and environmental problems, many Swedes are moving beyond buying environmentally and socially responsible goods and are trying to buy less. They argue, along with a growing number of scholars (e.g. Carolan 2004; Schor & Price 2002; Wilhite 2008, Hornborg 2009), that shopping for environmentally-responsible products will not be enough to ensure sustainability if the efficiencies gained with greener products continue to be outpaced by significant increases in per capita consumption. These consumers point to the irony of trying to solve problems associated with over-consumption with even more consumption, regardless of how green and efficient production processes become.

So, it seems that there are two opposing trends in Sweden. On the one hand, people are heavily embedded in a consumer culture, one dependent on material possessions as symbols of cultural capital, relationships, social status and personal values. On the other hand, there is a pervasive environmentalism in Sweden and a small but growing number of people who are trying to focus on buying less, buying second hand, reusing and repairing. This chapter is concerned specifically with those people and a particular set of questions: if material culture has become increasingly instrumental in complex, post-industrial urban societies over the past several decades, then how are those consumers who are trying to buy less able to communicate without all the stuff? Does the need to signal identity and belonging constitute a significant barrier that even the most ecologically-concerned Swedes find difficult to overcome?

### **The Swedish Home as Protection & Performance**

In order to answer this question, I focus on the home as a vehicle of identity performance. As Rita Erickson (1997), Marianne Gullestad (1989), Orvar Löfgren (1995), Tom O'Dell (1997) and Annette Rosengren (1991) and countless research participants have pointed out, social norms surrounding the home are very important to people in Scandinavia. Löfgren describes the Swedish home as not only a shelter in an often harsh environment, but also as a stage where hosts are subject to considerable judgement. As such, many Swedes, even those concerned about the environment, do not question the use of energy or environmentally-irresponsible products when it comes to meeting culturally-mandated standards of housekeeping, appearance or hospitality (Erickson 1997).

Further, with the advent of home remodelling and redecorating shows on television, many Swedes are redefining standards for a fashionable home and are redecorating more frequently. Indeed, many of my friends and research participants living in the Stockholm area relayed stories of acquaintances who redecorate on a seasonal or yearly basis in order to keep up with the latest designs in textiles, furniture and lighting. Certainly those who are trying to consume less are not oblivious to the shared meanings and cultural values placed on the home in Scandinavia. Yet for these individuals and families, the purchase of a new couch or curtains can be a stressful endeavour, as they strive to reconcile their desire to cause less ecological harm with their desire to create a home that meets culturally-defined notions of stylishness, cleanliness and comfort. Ida, for example, seemed particularly aware of these tensions. She talked about her teenage daughter who was reaching the age that she was embarrassed by their sufficient but unfashionable apartment and increasingly hesitant to invite friends over. Ida said,

Like in my home...it is okay. It has everything that a home needs, but no new furniture. When new people come to my home, I know the feeling. And now there are all these shows, design programs about how your home is supposed to be and what you should shop. I think people redo their homes more often now, way more often. They replace the furniture every five years and it is hard not to be influenced because you want to have a nice home, everyone does.

Given the frequency in which I heard comments like these, I was surprised to find that many, if not most of the homes I visited during my research looked as though they might have been featured in a Swedish home décor catalogue<sup>52</sup>. Some looked like replicas of IKEA stores while others were decorated in beautiful old antique wood furnishings. Still others looked as though they were straight out of the 1950s, the heyday

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<sup>52</sup> While I met many research participants in cafes or in their offices, I visited 27 of the research participants at their homes during some stage of the research.

of modern Scandinavian designs. Swedes, particularly Stockholmers, are highly influenced by design and, while I didn't realize it initially, many research participants owned designer lighting fixtures, furniture, textiles or decorations. In 1996 Löfgren noted that Swedes spent more on home furnishings and decorations than citizens of any other European nation. And today it seems the pressure to create a suitable home is only becoming more acute.

I confronted this pressure directly while living in Sweden. We were very fortunate to receive many invitations during our stay; to dinner parties, holiday celebrations, and other special events. We were always impressed by the efforts our hosts made to present beautiful meals, often full of Swedish tradition. We were treated to pre-dinner aperitifs and appetizers in sitting rooms, multi-course meals in dining rooms and digestifs on patios. And even when I visited my research participants in their homes, I was always offered more than their perspectives on sustainable living. It seems many of them had prepared for my visit not only by cleaning and straightening up, but also by baking and brewing coffee. These invitations illustrated what Erickson (1997) argued, that a fear of being thought of as poor or stingy drives consumption for many Swedish families.

In an attempt to reciprocate (beyond our frequent invitations to host a future visit to the United States), we hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for a few of our closest friends at our apartment. Yet I soon realized, after extending the invitation, that the dinner party would require much more work than a few days of cooking. It would also require us to supplement our small collection of second-hand and borrowed flat-, serving- and stem-ware. Further, while my husband, three year old son and I were content to "camp out" in

a mostly empty apartment for the year, hosting a dinner party would not only require us to borrow or buy some more things to sit on, but it also made me feel (whether warranted or not) that it would be necessary to do a little decorating. As such, I spent the week before our dinner party not only searching the city for Thanksgiving ingredients uncommon in Sweden (fresh cranberries, a pumpkin, and a whole turkey - most notably) but also borrowing utensils from other friends and canvassing the second hand stores for candles, napkins and a few pillows to brighten up the apartment. I also (admittedly) drove my partner crazy that week, insisting that we needed to clean the apartment carefully. I even bought some conventional cleaning solution when its environmentally-friendly equivalent proved inadequate for cleaning the stovetop. While our guests had already become good friends and I knew that they certainly understood our commitment to sustainability and the reason for our lack of material possessions, it was nonetheless difficult to convince myself that we could have a Thanksgiving dinner suitable for our Swedish guests without, at bare minimum, an apartment consistent with Swedish notions of cleanliness, some candles, wine glasses for eight and a serving dish large enough to serve a turkey.

I'm happy to say that the Thanksgiving dinner turned out beautifully, but perhaps the best thing about the dinner was that it provided first hand experience with the social pressure that many Swedes feel as they attempt to create a home that is at once fashionable, comfortable, clean and equipped for hospitality. While many readers can likely relate to these pressures, regardless of nationality or cultural background, these pressures are compounded in Sweden by a highly conformist culture where most feel

pressure to consume at socially-approved levels in order to remain comfortably within the mainstream.

While Swedes like to say that they don't care what others think, their conformity to even the most informal rules and social norms (e.g. standing in queues, frequent utilization of the honor system, discomfort with confrontation), would suggest otherwise. I once watched (highly amused and in disbelief) as several dozen Swedes waited patiently for one restroom during a short (and long overdue) break at a press conference about Sweden's environmental objectives. All these men and women waited patiently despite the fact that the next door, clearly labeled *personal* (personnel) stood ajar, revealing an empty restroom.

There is also a pervasive concept in Swedish culture, *jantelagen* that helps to reinforce adherence to cultural standards and unspoken social rules. Readily recognized by Swedish ethnographers and research participants alike, *jantelagen* describes a collective ethos which condemns individuality and exceptionalism while emphasizing the importance of adhering to collective social goals. The term originated with a 1933 novel by Norwegian author Askel Sandemose who wrote about the fictional small town of Jante, where the law emphasized that all people were equal and one should not think of themselves as better, more intelligent or more exceptional than one's fellow townspeople (Sandemose 1972). While this might seem an arbitrary reference, living in Sweden illustrates the pervasiveness of the concept, which certainly predated and inspired Sandemose's novel. Today Scandinavians are ideally humble and modest. It is not seen as socially graceful to speak explicitly of one's accomplishments or to conspicuously display markers that demonstrate exceptionalism. It wasn't until my fieldwork was

nearing its end and I more fully understood this concept that I was finally able to explain why so many Swedes seemed perplexed by my interest in studying their culture. Many expressed doubt that there was anything exceptional about the Swedish way of life. The bullish patriotism and national pride so commonly expressed in America was largely absent among Swedes who seemed to underestimate their collective and individual accomplishments. Lina, a consultant specializing in international sustainable development, helped me to understand this concept, so relevant to the pressure Swedes feel to consume and create the perfect home. As we spoke on the phone one evening she said,

Jantelagen is a hidden rule we have in the Nordic countries. The first rule is that you shouldn't think that you are somebody... you never hear people talk about this in Sweden but it is sort of, in our collective unconscious... This is the kind of fear that we work with, that you should hide in the masses, otherwise there is a risk. And it is better not to do anything out of the ordinary than to do something and people say you did it wrong.

Along these same lines Karl said, as he drank the tea he brought from home,

To disappoint you a little bit, I personally don't like Sweden that much. I think that Sweden is introverted and backwards in a number of ways. Sweden is very much a consensus culture where people don't dare to stick out - which means that we do what other people are doing and you try to be in the middle of the road... Although Sweden is very much environmentally aware it is also very much a mainstream culture.

This strong culture of conformity in the face of equally strong environmental concern raises all sorts of interesting questions about how Swedes interested in consuming less create a fashionable home and stay comfortably within the mainstream without buying all the new stuff. In what follows, I present several case studies to illustrate the strategies that families use to reconcile these tensions, to overcome some of these social barriers to sustainable living. It is important to note, however, that I am

presenting these cases as ideal types. In reality, these strategies often blend together, overlap and sometimes oppose one another within complex and dynamic households.

### **Strategy One: Conspicuous Green Consumption**

Rather than dealing with the tension between the desire to consume less and the need to communicate via consumption, many attempt to circumvent it by purchasing goods that have a smaller environmental impact and are explicitly branded 'green'. As Richard Wilk (2004: 27) argues, it is not necessarily about 'reducing consumption' per se, but about making sure that the 'goods and services people buy, use and throw away' consume fewer resources. The men and women who subscribe to this idea make great efforts to research and locate products that are better for the environment. In their eyes, it is important not only to support alternative markets and drive demand for products that are less harmful to the environment, but it is also important to signal to others that alternative forms of consumption are possible and do not require significant sacrifices.

Gustav and Erika's family provides a good example of what might be called conspicuous green consumption. Gustav is self-employed and works at home, while Erika works in middle-management for one of Sweden's largest communications corporations. In their late 40s, they live with their two children in an affluent suburb of Stockholm. While the family members are aware of the energy and resources embodied in things, they focus primarily on the consumption of less environmentally-intensive goods and services. Their flooring, for example, is made of sustainably-harvested bamboo, all of their lighting systems and household appliances have been replaced with the most energy-efficient models on the market,



they heat their home with a combination of solar and geothermal power and they drive a fuel-efficient car. Gustav and Erika are proud of these green possessions and are quick to point them out. Walking through their house it is not difficult to infer that the family is working to build an explicitly green identity. From their environmentally-labelled dish soap and kitchen composter (which sit proudly on the counter rather than below the sink) to their hemp-upholstered couch, there are signs of green living everywhere. Gustav and Erika are in a unique position to live green lives. They were the wealthiest family in the sample with a combined annual income after tax exceeds SEK 2 million (about \$US 310,000), so they can afford many of these expensive alternative products, a luxury that most, no matter how ethical or ecologically-minded, cannot.

The research participants who follow this strategy tend to be those who have only recently come to identify with environmentalist concerns, typically engaging for the first time with questions of global climate change. These individuals and families are generally not as aware of the energy and resources embodied in products, and thus focus on reducing their energy use by turning off lights and replacing light bulbs or by purchasing eco-labelled products. Instead of buying less, they are trying to buy more efficiently; at least in theory and in the long run. They believe that sustainability can be reached without significant changes in the way they live, as long as technologies continue to improve. Their efforts do not take them outside the realm of mainstream consumerism as they are, in many ways, participating in an extremely fashionable movement toward green living. Their consumption habits signal membership in an emerging group of upper middle-class

people who can afford ethical goods targeted toward those willing to pay more for a greener lifestyle.

By working within the confines of the market and the social structures that define mainstream needs and values, consumers like Gustav and Erika are responding both to their own desire to have a smaller impact on the environment and to normative constraints on their consumption decisions. This delicate balance is well illustrated by the concept of ‘moral selving’ (Barnett *et al.* 2005), which points to the ways that sustainable consumers are motivated not only by the desire to do the right thing, but also by the promise that sustainable goods will help them to construct a moral identity consistent with their values and beliefs. Through the purchase of ‘moral products’ consumers are able to demonstrate their ability to care across both spatial and temporal distance (Bryant and Goodman 2004). Barnett and his colleagues argue that conspicuously-ethical goods displayed in the home or given as gifts are intimately bound in a process through which consumers attempt to inform and educate their family and friends about the virtues of a more responsible form of consumption and serve to communicate the consumer’s values and what they call the consumers’ ‘ethical credentials’ (Barnett *et al.* 2005). Ironically, however, many of these people end up consuming more, particularly in the short term, in an effort to create their green identities, replacing functional items with newer, greener and more ethical goods.

### **Strategy Two: Retro Chic**

Another strategy for dealing with these tensions is illustrated by a young professional couple living in downtown Stockholm. Karin and Thomas both work

for organisations concerned with sustainability: Thomas for a governmental agency linked to environmental issues, and Karin for a non-governmental organisation involved with international relief. They extend their concern for sustainability into their personal lives and are extremely committed to reducing their environmental impact. In addition to activities such as buying organic, fair trade, local and seasonal foods, reducing their meat consumption, using a bicycle or public transportation and refraining from flying, they also try to buy as much as they possibly can from second-hand shops.

Three of the four walls in Thomas and Karin's living room are lined with bookshelves from the 1950s. Designed by Nils Strinning, a central figure in Scandinavian mid-century modern design, the bookshelves are extremely fashionable and in high demand. Thomas and Karin had to be extremely patient to gather all the modules needed to line their walls. In fact, they invested a significant amount of their time over several months searching second-hand stores throughout the city to decorate their apartment with furniture and lighting from this period. But they do not stop with second-hand retailers. Karin and Thomas also go 'dumpster diving' (searching for something desirable in other people's trash) on occasion to look for discarded mid-century furniture. Interestingly enough, they have been quite lucky, finding, among other things, a bedside table that perfectly matched one they already owned.

Yet Thomas and Karin do not do these things out of economic necessity. They have a comfortable household budget for a couple their age, with a combined net annual income of approximately SEK 690,000 (\$US 106,950). While many

people continue to associate second-hand shopping or dumpster diving with economic disadvantage, many of the vintage pieces that Karin and Thomas own are significantly more expensive than new reproductions of the same design. Further, Thomas and Karin think that their second-hand consumption, even if less economical at times, is more ethical than new, mass-produced furniture, which, while inexpensive, is often made far from Sweden, in places where environmental and labour standards are weak, and where significant resources must be used to transport these goods to Sweden.

Further, by focusing on one time period to decorate their home, perhaps the heyday of Scandinavian Modern design, Karin and Thomas have insulated themselves from the whims of contemporary fashion. At the same time, they are able to communicate their membership in Stockholm's highly-educated class of cultural creatives who value design: these sorts of objects are quite fashionable among Swedes in their late 20s to early 40s. Further, Karin and Thomas are able to consume less in a way that does not signal that they are living in poverty or that they do not share middle-class values and tastes. This was a concern for Thomas. When speaking about the challenges of consuming less, he said:

Sometimes people that don't know you very well don't understand if you're not buying anything new. They think that you are poor or that you're not well educated, that you don't have nice taste or that you are not successful. It is not that I really care what people think about me, I am secure. ... I know what I like, and I have always been interested in Swedish design.

Karin and Thomas have been able to reduce their environmental footprint, partially because they purchase second-hand furnishings and décor that were produced many years ago and thus require no new resource inputs. At the same time, their home

does not explicitly communicate environmental concerns. The style is fashionable regardless of its environmental merits and those who create such homes do not sacrifice their mainstream status. Rather, they enhance it, while living in a manner consistent with their values.

### **Strategy Three: Prestige Posh**

A third and related strategy is what we might call ‘prestige posh’, perhaps best illustrated by Charlotte and Kalle, another young couple. They live in a highly desirable location in central Stockholm, in a quiet neighbourhood on the water, with their infant son. Both have advanced degrees from one of Sweden’s best universities, and their combined annual net income is SEK 780,000 (\$US 120,900). Like Thomas and Karin, with their retro chic, Charlotte and Kalle have furnished and decorated their highly-fashionable home with goods passed down from family members or purchased second hand. In this case, however, I want to emphasize a slightly different strategy, the possession of prestigious, expensive, high quality goods. In this apartment, which is relatively small for three, the family also makes an effort to purchase second-hand goods. However, when they do buy new, they place special emphasis on exclusive, high-quality goods.

During my last visit with Charlotte and Kalle, they showed me that they had recently purchased a top-of-the-line standing mixer. Kalle, who was currently at home on parental leave with their son had started making most of the family’s bread and wanted the mixer for baking. The couple also has a state-of-the-art video projection system in their living room for watching television and films. While these high-quality and expensive items were both purchased new, Kalle and Charlotte

argue that if they are going to buy new items, it is more important for them to buy a few high-quality items that will last a long time than it is to buy cheap items that might have been produced with poor labour or environmental standards, or that might not last very long. Like Karin and Thomas, Kalle and Charlotte are able to communicate their class status despite their commitment to buy less (absolutely) and to buy what they deem necessary either second-hand or via exclusive, top of the line, high quality products and services.

#### **Strategy Four: Beyond the Mainstream**

While some attempt to negotiate the tensions that arise when trying to consume less, others have learned to embrace them. These individuals and families are more comfortable stepping outside the mainstream. While it is difficult to generalise about the people who practice this strategy, they tend to be those who have been involved with the environmental movement for quite some time, many since the 1960s and 1970s, or are highly engaged and passionate young people who do not yet have families.

To illustrate this strategy I return to Olle and Emma, who I introduced in the forth chapter. These pensioners, both in their early 70s, might in many ways be said to operate outside the Swedish mainstream. Emma had long been active in the environmental movement, becoming engaged in the 1970s when debates about nuclear power and proliferation were at their peak in Sweden. She was also active in the creation of Sweden's Green Party and in the establishment of non-governmental organisations focused on social and environmental sustainability.

Today Emma and Olle share a simple life on their small farm a little more

than an hour outside of Stockholm. Olle sails most of the summer and spends his free time the rest of the year repairing or, as Anna says, ‘fidgeting with’ machines and tools. Emma focuses on caring for the garden, the orchard and the sheep. She acknowledges that she and Olle try to represent the simplicity of their life in their home. Most of their possessions are older, many historical, and it does not appear that they seek to communicate social status with the possession of rare or valuable things. However, they prominently display books throughout their home, signalling their cultural capital and high levels of education. Emma and Olle are quite comfortable in their social position as simple, environmentally-concerned pensioners. She notes that most of their friends and family understand them as such. Further, she has become comfortable with the idea that those who do not share or understand these values are not her ideal friends.

Emma and Olle, and other people like them, are much more concerned with consuming less than are conspicuous green consumers like Gustav and Erika. They place much more emphasis on reusing, repairing and doing without. Most people who do this have spent significant time considering their impact on the environment and associating with like-minded people. For them, reduced consumption may compromise their relations with people who do not share their concern for the environment. However, this reduced level of consumption is also essential for their membership in groups of people who place value on the environment, simplicity and asceticism. At the same time, most such people are highly educated, well travelled and typically have urban, upper middle-class backgrounds. As such, their definitions of good taste reflect those backgrounds, and very few of them compromise their

ability to communicate their cultural capital, whether through the display of books, artwork and travel souvenirs or through their mastery in the kitchen or garden.

### **When the Tension is too Much: Confronting Barriers**

For many who try to consume less overall, the social tensions created by living in a manner that is different than the mainstream prove insurmountable. Many, in fact, experience significant stress as their lives diverge from their friends'. Erik recalled that, as he became more interested in downshifting and buying less so he could spend more time with his family, he suddenly found he had less in common with his childhood friends. Many of them could not understand why he began shopping at second-hand stores or why he seemed aloof when they spoke about the latest electronic equipment. Nor did Erik's friends understand his decision to cut back on his work hours. He suspects many of them thought that he was being lazy and a bit 'weird'. They did not understand that he intentionally took a cut in pay so that he could focus on buying less and spending more time with his family. As a result, Erik felt ostracised and found himself searching for alternative social networks, new friends to whom he could relate and with whom he could communicate. He said,

My friends, they are aware but they are not acting. They are highly educated and they are earning a lot of money. They are socially competent and they use that for having good work and a lot of money. And when you have a lot of money you consume things. And then you are talking about the stereos and the furniture you're going to buy. In the last six months or so I realized, maybe we are going to have to meet new friends. That is a really big thing. They think I am extreme. They know that I am doing the right thing, they know it but they haven't got a husband or a wife thinking the same way. If my wife wasn't thinking the same way, I am not sure that I would be doing the things I am doing. But it is a really hard thing to give up your friends. You are grown up (raised) to have good contact with your friends. Or maybe you don't have to break up with them but



you also have new friends and just not the same contact with your old friends. So you have to re-learn. We are just in the beginning of it.

These examples certainly seem to illustrate that it is difficult for even the most interested and committed individuals to consume less and simultaneously maintain their social relationships. Indeed, we have long known that people choose goods that help them to signal their belonging in groups that share their values and interests. From this perspective, consumption is indeed productive, helping to form and maintain social relations (Crewe 2000, 2003; Miller 2001a). However, these case studies also illustrate that it is certainly not true that it is hard to communicate with fewer things. In fact, that is exactly what these families were worried about. In consumer-based societies with hierarchical social structures, sparse, older or unfashionable furnishings and decor are frequently read as a sign of poverty or lack of taste rather than choice. For these well-educated, middle-class Swedes the trick is not one of communicating without a lot of stuff. Rather, it is communicating their belonging in a conformist consumer culture and their social position in a society that tends to associate high levels of consumption, particularly of either modern and fashionable or old prestige goods, with cultural capital.

### **Sociality, Cultural Capital and the Implication of Class**

The significant rise in consumption over the past 20 years in Sweden might be explained, in part, by factors that have increased social complexity and thus the need to use material culture to communicate. However, as the case studies illustrate, there is no simple relationship between the volume of consumption and the ability to communicate. Indeed, even individuals who have very little communicate quite a lot. Increases in consumption are, therefore, not just tied to a heightened need to

communicate in complex societies; they are tied to a heightened desire to communicate particular social boundaries and class differences.

Douglas Holt (2000) draws on Bourdieu to argue that to be cultured is a potent social advantage for the individual. Yet strangely enough, because the powerful discipline of economics treats tastes simply as individual preferences, this fact is rarely acknowledged. Holt argues against the popular assumption that there is a direct, linear relationship between income and consumption. He found in the United States that consumers with the highest levels of cultural capital are more interested in distinguishing themselves by way of aesthetic consumption that is ‘socially scarce’ (Holt 2000: 218). Echoing what Bourdieu said in *Distinction*, Holt (2000: 247) argued that when there is pervasive materialism, the only way for cultural elites to differentiate themselves is, “structurally speaking, ... to develop a set of tastes in opposition to materialism: consuming which emphasizes the metaphysical over the material. Thus unreflexive materialism is associated with ‘showy,’ ‘ostentatious,’ ‘gaudy’ or ‘unrefined.’”

Marianne Gullestad’s (1985) classic ethnography of working-class mothers in Norway illustrates this opposition well. She describes the scorn that cultural elites direct towards the working class and their consumption patterns. While liberal, educated members of the middle class in Norway place great emphasis on recycling and buying second-hand goods, they condemn the consumption practices of the working-class mothers who equate value and economic success with new, if inexpensive, home furnishings.

These examples and the case studies presented in chapters V and VI illustrate

that, despite a high level of awareness and concern for sustainability in Sweden, even the most interested, engaged and committed Swedes confront barriers when trying to live more sustainably, many of which are too difficult to overcome. This suggests that alternative perspectives on sustainable consumerism, beyond the idea of the reflexively modern consumer, are necessary. Further, the prevalence with which these ecologically concerned citizen-consumers listed social barriers suggests that a reconsideration of sustainable consumerism must include attention to issues of social structure and class. In the chapter to follow, I specifically explore class-based perspectives on sustainability. I argue that Sweden's egalitarian ethos has likely worked to encourage sustainable living - based on a concern for global equality and solidarity. At the same time this emphasis on equality is also curiously juxtaposed with Sweden's increasingly hierarchical social structure.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Consuming Morality: On Ethics, Equality and Class in Sweden

*A big part of the problem, the biggest problem is that we have so many people who are too rich, it's just crazy. They have all this money and they have to do something with it, right? So they fly and they buy and they spend, they just don't care what is happening because they feel entitled. They have the money so they can fly away and buy land somewhere else if something goes wrong here. They can buy their water - the right to water, no problem. And then there are the people who don't have much. They can't afford to have high quality things; they choose what is cheap even if it was grown in chemicals and taken half way around the world. But maybe they don't know to think of these things - they don't have the choice. It is worse when you know and you just don't care.*

Transcript: Nora 1/26/08

Sustainable consumerism is largely a middle-class movement. Studies of consumers who boycott or boycott goods due to their concern for sustainability - in many different international contexts from China (Hubbert 2009) to the US (CNAD 2005) and Europe (Ferrer & Fraile 2006) - reveal that these men and women are relatively wealthy by global standards but can, for the most part, be considered “middle-class” within the context of their own societies (as defined by a combination of income, education and occupation). While the sample of Swedish citizens gathered for this research was based, in part, on self-selection, the demographic make up of the sample closely mirrors the middle class composition of representative, survey-based studies on Swedes who report buying goods for political reasons (Micheletti and Stolle 2005). As mentioned in Chapter III, the sample is, with very few exceptions, ethnically Swedish, well educated, slightly more likely to be sympathetic to the political left and middle class. Net annual incomes for the sample ranged between 36,000 SEK (approximately \$5,580) for a young college student living with his middle class family, to 2,000,000 SEK (approximately \$310,000) for a dual income family of four. Discussions with research participants and friends

unaffiliated with the research confirmed that this income range is consistent with Swedish perceptions of the middle class<sup>53</sup>.

The concentration of interest in sustainable consumerism within the middle class, cross-culturally, raises interesting questions. Why is support for sustainable consumerism strongest among middle class citizens in wealthy post-industrial urban societies? Is an interest in sustainable consumerism promoted by the existence of a strong middle-class, relative equality, privilege or simply the purchasing power to buy goods and services that are often more expensive?

### **Post Materialist Values and the Strength of the Swedish Middle Class**

Several authors, including Micheletti (2003) and Boström et.al. (2004) have argued that growing interest in sustainable consumption is linked to economic stability, affluence and the associated emergence of “post-materialist values” (Inglehart 1971). Nearly forty years ago, following the massive environmental, anti-war and civil-rights protests of the late 1960s and early 1970s, political scientist Robert Inglehart wrote, “A transformation may be taking place in the political cultures of advanced industrial societies. This transformation seems to be altering the basic value priorities of given generations, as a result of changing conditions influencing their basic socialization” (1971:991). Inglehart centered his argument on two assumptions. The first was that needs such as food and shelter precede “higher order” needs, one of which he considered concern for the environment. Inglehart hypothesized that, “given individuals pursue various goals in hierarchical order - giving maximum attention to the things they sense to be the most important unsatisfied needs at a given time” (1971: 991). Therefore,

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<sup>53</sup> Several friends and research participants questioned the 36,000SEK income of the student at the low end of this spectrum until they realized his age and that he lived with and still received support from his middle class parents.

Inglehart assumed that citizens of countries with high levels of economic affluence and stability, and thus declining economic scarcity, were able to take economic concerns for granted - focusing their values, needs and goals on non-material issues. Several years later Inglehart wrote, "All other things being equal, the proportion of non-materialists will rise as average household income within a nation rises above a level-perceived as necessary to provide the basic necessities of life. As the margin of surplus income increases, the citizen's expenditures of energy in support of economic issues will yield a diminishing marginal utility and the non-materialist is born" (1987: 1309). On the aggregate level, certain nations characterized by high levels of affluence over long periods of time are hypothesized to also have high levels of post-materialist values and civic culture. Inglehart implies that these patterns can shape national political culture over time, making the peoples of some countries more open to ideas about achieving collective aims like equality or environmental conservation.

Given Sweden's large middle class, strong social welfare state, and a long history of peace and economic security, Inglehart's post-materialist thesis would seem to make sense in the Swedish context. Indeed, a recent World Values Survey reveals that post-materialist values are highest in Australia, Austria, Canada, Italy, Argentina, the United States, Sweden, the Netherlands and Puerto Rico (Inglehart et al. 2004: 384). Yet while Sweden ranks seventh on this list, many other environmentally progressive nations, who have strong civil and state commitments to economic security and sustainability, are not included. Further, the United States, which precedes Sweden on the list, is frequently accused within the international community for blocking efforts intended to create a more sustainable global society.

According to Micheletti, “increased wealth implies the economic means to consider aspects other than the relationship between material quality and price” (2003:74). While this is certainly true, it must be explicitly recognized that the wealthy are not alone in their consideration of social, political and environmental factors when making consumption decisions, nor are they alone in their ability to act in the interests of sustainability. Comparative studies have certainly made it clear that the world’s wealthiest citizens do not hold a monopoly on post-materialist values or concerns about ecological, social or economic sustainability. Social and environmental justice movements (Checker 2005), consumer boycotts among marginalized African-Americans (Greenberg 1999) and the Swadeshi movement in India are only a few examples which illustrate that the ability to think about and act upon concerns for the environment and sustainability are not dependent on the existence of economic security. Without this explicit recognition however, the post-materialist thesis risks an association with antiquated unilinear development theories, which would imply that wealth is a precondition for collective action and sustainable behavior. As such, the post-materialist thesis constitutes little more than a defense of the current capitalist order (Chilcote 1981: 27).

Indeed, the political implications of the post-materialist thesis are troubling. Despite the fact that environmental degradation is more often associated with affluence rather than poverty (Adams 2001), these ideas ironically constitute a defense of the growth imperative in the name of sustainability. Further, in its assumption that the marginal utility of economic advantage results in the “birth” of postmaterialism for those who have already met their basic needs, these ideas would seem to suggest that there is a

direct correlation between increased wealth and the incidence of concerns for issues like the environment and sustainability.

Yet as the research presented in this chapter illustrates, concern for the environment and other post-materialist values such as equality and democracy do not seem to be more prevalent among the world's wealthiest citizens. In Sweden they are rooted solidly in middle class values. I therefore argue that while the post-materialist thesis is problematic, materialist and class-based perspectives continue to hold analytical weight and cannot be neglected in the Swedish context.

### **Sweden's "Classless" Society**

Despite the fact that class-based politics are strong in Sweden - it is not uncommon to hear Swedes make references to their "classless" society. With a welfare system that has long considered adequate income, health and education the political right of all citizens, Sweden has taken progressive steps to redistribute wealth and protect its citizens from the booms and busts of a global capitalist system. These interventionist and redistributive policies have significantly reduced income-based inequalities (Gullestad 1985, Löfgren 1987, Bihagen 2000). In their place, strong ideologies of solidarity and equality have emerged over the last several generations which, at least in rhetoric, emphasize the equality of all humans and foster a sense of compassionate solidarity<sup>54</sup>. This "egalitarian ethos" is thus tied to a culturally constructed sense of morality centered on equality. Yet more relevant to this discussion, this ethos has also produced a society in which class differences are intentionally "muted" (Löfgren 1987), "played down" and

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<sup>54</sup> These ideas have recently been challenged by growing anti-immigration sentiment among some Swedes, a topic to which I will return later in this chapter.



“undercommunicated” (Gullestad 1985) - rendering explicit discussions of difference taboo.

The work of several theorists would seem to support to the Swedish assertion of “classlessness”. Katz-Gerro (2002) outlines several perspectives which claim the declining saliency of class in contemporary societies. The “new middle class” perspective is built on the assertion that because the vast majority of individuals in industrialized nations share a common standard of living, that class is no longer a primary nexus of differentiation. Secondly, the “new identities approach” argues that as societies become increasingly complex, an individual’s nexus of identity is based on other variables including gender, education, lifestyle or ethnicity. Finally, others argue that the welfare state in postindustrial societies has created a situation of relative material and ideological equality which negates the potency of class in analyses of difference.

However, these “post-class” or “new middle class” arguments have been refuted by theorists who argue that while power and social position are certainly determined at the intersection of multiple identities (for example gender, class and ethnicity), class continues to play an important role, even if its importance has been downplayed or, as in Sweden’s case, the material basis of difference diminished (Bihagen 2000), particularly at the low end of the continuum.

I argue that even though the material bases of difference have been minimalized by progressive social democratic policy in Sweden and class differences are purposefully downplayed, it is important to consider the multifaceted understandings of class associated with Max Weber (1958) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984 and 1990) to understand how class plays out in unique ways.

Weber (1958) argued for a multi-tiered conceptualization of class which differentiates between class, status and party. Where class refers to the economic bases of difference, status refers to non-economic criteria of prestige including education, lifestyles and culture. Party refers to one's political affiliation. Similarly, Bourdieu distinguishes between several different forms of capital which allow him to account for social differentiations which arise as individuals accumulate education, cultural knowledge, friendships or other forms of capital. Weber, and later Bourdieu, thus bring our attention to the idea that class differences can arise from culture, manners, and consumption, just as they can from control over the means of production. While Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital illustrates the mutually-reinforcing nature of economic advantage and status, it also allows adequate space for a consideration of the ways in which cultural capital may take on a life of its own - independent of its original economic base. While the economic, social, political and cultural aspects of class are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, the case of Sweden with its large and powerful middle class, suggests that status differences can come to the fore of class conflict even when their material bases have been diminished.

Löfgren argues in *Deconstructing Swedishness* that the contemporary ideology of classlessness in Sweden has, in reality, resulted in subtle yet powerful class conflicts (1987). He writes, "The ideology of classlessness can be contrasted with an everyday obsession with rituals of social distinction and boundary markers...in the age of consumerism, taste and tastelessness became a new cultural arena of muted class conflict" (1987: 81). Löfgren's argument suggests that class differences, based in economic realities but projected through cultural capital, can help to explain the

continued rise of consumerism in Sweden. This may particularly be true given the ‘democratization of desire’ (Leach 1993); when a strong focus on equality, a culture of conformity and cheap mass-produced items all combine to encourage Swedes to consume at the same, gradually-increasing level. It may also help to explain why it is so difficult for middle-class people who are concerned about the environment to consume less.

Taking Löfgren’s observations into account, I explore here class-based theories which assert that the consumption of “sustainable” goods is linked to middle and upper-class efforts to maintain social boundaries and naturalized class advantage – accumulating cultural capital via the consumption of “ethical”, “moral” and “sustainable” products. I find these theories particularly interesting in light of “classless” rhetoric in Sweden, and even more so when considering a recent survey from Denmark (also a “classless” society) which revealed that the association between income and sustainable consumption practice was completely “spurious” while the association between such behavior and one indicator of cultural capital, education, was “quite significant” (Anderson & Tobiasen 2004).

### **Sustainable Consumption, Cultural Capital, and the “Good Swede”**

Karl Marx, the father of political economy, recognized the symbolic and communicative quality of commodities under capitalism. He once wrote, “Through consumption ...the material thing is subjectified in the person” (1986:8). In relation to analyses of class, symbolic violence occurs not in the consumption of these material symbols or in an individual’s ability to identify him or herself with them, but rather in the ability of the powerful to control the meaning attached to them (Bourdieu 1984). Bourdieu argues that the powerful segments of society are able to maintain the social system through the perpetuation of mental categorizations that are the embodiment of

objective divisions. These symbolic systems are more than forms of knowledge; they are also forms of power which effectively mask the reality that they have their genesis in material and objective advantage.

Bryant and Goodman (2001), Appadurai (1986), Carrier & Heyman (1997), and Bourdieu (1984) are only a sampling of the authors who have suggested that consumption is intricately related to social status, relations of privilege and social control in hierarchical capitalist societies. While many consumers are able to achieve material goals with the help of inexpensive mass goods in contemporary society, regardless of class, this “democratization of desire” (Leach 1993) remains in constant conflict with elite attempts to maintain social borders through the continuous refinement of style and good taste.

This argument echoes the work of Pierre Bourdieu who, according to biographer Bridget Fowler, argued that “the game of culture which is at stake in relation to consumption always has the working-class as its negative classificatory foil” (Fowler 2000:11). This “class racism” inspires the privileged to continuously reclassify their tastes and aesthetics in order to differentiate themselves from those less privileged who they deem as common, undistinguished and lacking in taste and sophistication.

These arguments are interesting in the context of contemporary sustainable consumerism and the current popularity of “green living”. They imply that perhaps sustainable consumers are utilizing their consumption of “sustainable” goods and services not only as a means to identify with like minded people, but also as a means of excluding members of the lower classes who may not be able to afford these goods or who may not share middle and upper class values concerning nature, equality or capitalism.

Certainly families like Karin and Thomas' and Charlotte and Kalle's illustrate that many Swedes are concerned that they might be mistaken as poor, cheap or lacking taste if they reduce their consumption without compensating for this diminution via the consumption of socially scarce or expensive high status goods - clear markers of class distinction. Thus, some scholars have expressed concern that sustainable consumerism might result in another form of status seeking leading to the creation of "elitist environmental submarkets and lifestyles" (Paavola 2001: 244).

A related argument is that the consumption of sustainable goods and services enables the construction of negative commentaries on the immoral and environmentally irresponsible "other", while simultaneously making invisible the economic factors that constrain the actions of lower-income Swedes. Certainly as many critics of sustainable consumerism are quick to point out; sustainable consumerism is by no means democratic. Not all actors are equal in their economic capacity to create the identities they desire.

If these perspectives are correct, then perhaps class tensions emerge as "sustainable consumers" direct symbolic violence against "unsustainable others" - assuming that their decisions not to alter consumption practice are founded in ignorance rather than economic constraint. These ideas would certainly be consistent with the education-based policies so popular in sustainability discourse and programming internationally.

While these arguments certainly seem to have merit, helping to explain how subtle class-based tensions are played out in a society caught between capitalist hierarchy and national ideologies and practice centered on equality, there is very little empirical evidence, from Sweden or elsewhere, which can be used to refute or support a link

between sustainable consumerism and class conflict. This study, therefore, attempted to empirically examine these questions.

To illustrate the strategy used to explore these questions, I turn back to my discussion with Jacob, a healthcare administrator in his mid fifties who drives the concern for sustainability among his family, his wife and three children. Our first meeting was scheduled in his office, a spacious room lined wall to wall with neatly shelved medical journals, books and papers. His bike stood propped against one of the shelves behind him, with a helmet dangling from the handlebars. We talked about his teenage daughters and the challenges he faces as he tries to live according to his own sustainable ideals without compromising their ability to remain comfortably within teenage consumption norms. He talked about these household negotiations as the most significant barriers he faces. I followed up by asking, “And what do you think are some of the largest barriers for those who haven’t acted in the interest of sustainability.” While I was certainly interested in his speculations, I designed this segment of the interview as a means to reveal any negative discourses on the “unsustainable other.” As Jacob and his fellow research participants answered this question, I listened closely for any assumptions about other segments of society which were not acting in the interest of the environment<sup>55</sup>. This seemed the best strategy given that, according to anthropologists and ethnographers with significant expertise in Scandinavian culture (e.g. Gullestad, Löfgren), many Swedes find explicit discussions of class difference, particularly at the individual and interpersonal level, uncomfortable. As such I was concerned that a direct line of

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<sup>55</sup> In a few interviews, when people seemed to draw a blank when thinking about the barriers that inhibit others from consuming more sustainably, I asked participants more directly if there were some segments of society that were stereotypically less concerned about sustainability than others.

questioning about class could potentially set off alarms with Swedes sensitive to discussions of difference or concerned about being or appearing to be politically correct.

After delaying our question for a few minutes while Jacob took an important telephone call, I repeated the question – “What do you think are the biggest barriers for people who aren’t trying to live more sustainably?” Jacob looked up at his office ceiling, squinting his eyes as if he were trying to see the answer written above. He remained like that for some time as he thought about the question. Eventually he responded,

It is one thing if we are doing wrong before we know that it is bad ... they didn’t know this 50 years ago, so then it wasn’t really a moral issue. But now it is. Do I have the right to destroy the world for people to come? No. But many people do nothing.

Here Jacob seems to suggest that the challenge is not one of education and awareness, but rather morality. He went on to describe those who do nothing as “careerists” and “jetsetters” who care about little other than money. He said,

They don’t give a damn, they won’t even talk about it...they won’t even adapt to the reasoning, - ‘well we really need to keep using everything to keep our living up.’ They have bought into the economic argument that if people spend less, we will have less money for hospitals and societal services and things like that. So I know plenty of people who are going to buy totally big, unnecessary cars, flying everywhere. My own sister, she works at a very large company. She will go by private jet just to save a couple of hours...by herself. I mean stuff like that it is just sickening to me. And she is totally impossible to reach on these issues because she has this, very... when you’re a hot shot in a big company and you make lots of money you suddenly get a strange perception. She is so important that those rules shouldn’t apply to her - because she is so important that she doesn’t have the time to care about these things. That is what is going on in her brain so you can’t reach her about these types of things. And, we do small things to save a little bit of energy and then you see her go by jet plane. And one of those jets is going to take a lifetime - if we really tried to turn off the lights and things like that, if we do that for a whole lifetime, we can save about as much energy that she could save in one damn flying trip, going by plane, on her own, to Boston from here.

While some might attribute Jacob's scorn for his sister and other members of Sweden's elite to *den kungliga svenska avundsjukan* (the royal Swedish envy) or generalized disapproval for anyone who consumes above the norm - this certainly did not seem to be the case with Jacob. He and his wife are both extremely successful in their careers and together had one of the highest incomes in the sample. They certainly could afford to fly to Boston or New York as they pleased. And while they lived in one of the most desirable areas of Östermalm (an exclusive and desirable neighborhood in central Stockholm), their apartment was furnished with many second hand goods and decorated by artwork produced by their children. I do not think his anger towards "overconsumption" was based in envy, but rather frustration that he had worked so hard – investing significant time and effort – to live more sustainably when others could so easily undermine his efforts. If Jacob's scorn was linked to envy, I suspect it would be envy related to the ease of living when one is either oblivious to or too greedy to consider the implications of their choices and decisions.

A few minutes later, and in a very subtle way, Jacob seemed to excuse those - unlike his sister - who were unaware of these issues, saying,

One way of looking at it is - that if people don't really know anything and they haven't grasped the question yet, then if you're living according to your own moral standards, you're not immoral even if your standards are bad because you can't realize a better way of living.

I asked Jacob if he believed that some people were unaware of issues related to the environment and sustainability given high levels of education in Sweden, the prevalence of stories about sustainability in the media and that newspaper readership in Sweden is among the highest in the world (WAN 2009). He agreed that most Swedes are aware of the issue and conceded,



If you do understand the problems and you go on living the old way and you realize that this is not right and you still don't change, then, as I said, of course it is a moral question.

Jacob thus seemed to pardon Swedes with lower levels of education, popularly associated in Sweden with working class and immigrant populations. The most damning critiques that Jacob leveled against an "other" were instead directed at Sweden's growing elite class.

Although Jacob and his family are relatively wealthy compared to the rest of the sample, the location of his family's apartment in one of the city's most desirable and expensive neighborhoods leads Jacob to feel as though they were living a relatively modest life. Further, this experience also made him feel as though his family's concern for the environment was rather exceptional. He said,

When I try to find somebody who is really into this impractical living ...I really can't find an example. Maybe I say that I am one of the better examples myself but I am not a good example... I don't throw away clothes, I don't care if they are - I mean I use clothes until they are worn out and then if they are worn I throw them away... I don't go by car and so on. I am not extreme but maybe...but that is because I can't find a better example.

In my conversation with Jacob and with all the other research participants, I was listening for descriptions of the unsustainable, immoral "other." Yet contrary the works of Veblen and Bourdieu, which argue that the working-class is typically the subject of scrutiny, very few negative commentaries on Sweden's less powerful groups emerged from these discussions. In fact, only four research participants mentioned "those with less", "the poor", "the working class", or the "lower class". In contrast, nearly half of the sample (28 individuals or 48 percent) mentioned the consumption practices of Sweden's

wealthiest citizens – the “rich”, the “jet-setters” the “wealthy” or the “upper class” – during their speculations about why others don’t live more sustainably<sup>56</sup>.

I would contend that these observations can be explained, in part, by the ideology of classlessness and the cultural import of equality in Sweden. While class politics have a long history in Sweden, particularly in public settings, interpersonal discussions of differences in wealth are not typical in Swedish society, particularly given its conformist culture, unspoken rules of *jantelagen* and the tendency for nearly all Swedes to consider themselves middle class. The highly educated, middle class Swedes participating in this research were hesitant to speak in a negative way about Sweden’s less powerful groups, particularly in an explicit way. It is interesting to note, however, that 17 research participants did associate unsustainable behavior with low levels of education (a key marker of cultural capital in Sweden). While these associations might certainly be interpreted as a proxy for negative commentaries on the working class, the number of people who mentioned them certainly pale in comparison to the number of people who associated immoral or unsustainable behavior with Sweden’s elite. Further, in contrast to the somewhat forgiving language used to describe the consumption patterns of Sweden’s uneducated or low income citizens, the words used to describe Sweden’s upper class were often harsh and emotionally charged. Like Jacob, many people described the actions and consumption patterns of the elite as “immoral,” “unethical,” “crazy,” “selfish,” “egotistical” or “incomprehensible.”

Yet many Swedes would argue that middle class environmentalists do not have a monopoly on morality, arguing instead that it is moral to consume, to support producers

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<sup>56</sup> While many research participants didn’t provide any description of “unsustainable others,” other common demographics mentioned centered on gender (with about 29 people or 50% making mention of men) and education (with 17 people or 29% making mention of low education levels)

around the globe and in one's home town. This debate played out in an extremely public way while I was living in Sweden. Just before Christmas, on December 10<sup>th</sup> 2007, *Svenskt Näringsliv* (The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise) published a full page in *Dagen's Nyheter*, one of Sweden's premier daily newspapers. The advertisement (Appendix 4) entitled "*Sagan om Gumman som Handlade för Lite*" (The Story of the Little Old Lady Who Bought too Little) explicitly linked consumerism to one's moral duty to support the economy and Swedish business. The text of the add read:

There was once a little old woman who liked to buy things. Some things she bought for her own pleasure, others to please those near and dear to her. Next to her lived an old man who owned a business. It was to him that the old woman went to shop. And she went often. Therefore, the old man could continue to operate his business, and in turn buy things for others and things that made him happy. It wasn't only old ladies who needed to shop, but old men also needed things of course. The little old lady naturally loved Christmas, which was coming soon. No other time of year gave her so many reasons to buy things. Presents, ham, a Christmas tree, candles, Christmas must<sup>57</sup>, and tinsel. Everything for making the holiday as magical as it can be. Even the old man was happy. He was looking forward to sinking his teeth into the good holiday foods and longed to give presents on Christmas Eve. And of course he was happy also that everyone would soon be coming to his store to shop so that he would earn money but also because it was fun when customers came back year after year. The little old lady was one of them. Every year she had bought her Christmas things in the old man's store. But one day the little old lady saw the culture pages in the newspaper. There, some angry aunts and uncles had written that Christmas was bad because people only shopped the whole time. Shopping they wrote was bad. Bad for the soul. Bad for the poor. Bad for the planet. Rather, the angry aunts and uncles thought that the little old lady and little old man should begin making their own Christmas presents. This year, the little old lady thought to herself, I will not buy so much. The little old lady's friends and everyone in the little town began to think the same way. When nearly no one came back to shop at the old man's store, he had to close it. The Christmas food and presents that he had looked forward to, he had to search for in the stars. It was going to be even worse for the poor workers around the world who had made many of the things in the man's shop who wouldn't have jobs any longer after no one bought anything. And how did it end for the old lady? She had a very boring Christmas. So that is the way it could go if you listen to the angry aunts and uncles and stop shopping.

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<sup>57</sup> Julmust is a special Christmas spiced soda somewhat comparable to Coca-Cola, sold during Christmas and Easter.

The story of the old lady received passionate and prolific response from readers in multiple formats - on blogs, in editorials and in everyday conversation. Among other things, Svenskt Näringsliv was accused of setting “a fantastic low water mark in a time when people are finally beginning to wake up” and of having the “nerve to say poor people benefit from our consumption.” The same critic went on to ask, “Can you for one time go out of the western-world bubble and discover how people in impoverished lands live?” (Svenskt Näringsliv 2007).

But given the context of the discussion here - about class conflict and the morality of high consumption (or conversely of limiting consumption) - a satirical response posted in Dagen’s Nyheter the day after Svenskt Näringsliv’s ad appeared was most telling. The response, entitled “*Sagan om Gubben med Råbiff i Hakskägget*” (The Story of the Old Man with Steak Tartare in his Beard), clearly subverted the morality of consumption, making discussions of class-based morality and conflicts explicit. The response read:

Once upon a time there was a club for rich men and so few women (who the men had admitted begrudgingly for conferences and parties and such). They loved to take. They owned manufacturing and service businesses; they imported cheap products from odd nations, whose citizens were prohibited from visiting the European continent. They sold cheap products widely at prices adjusted for the old man’s market and, oh my goodness, what a profit they made! They gave nothing to the children who produced the things, but the old men in the capitalist front became richer as the days passed. It was a lovely time in total. The old men... saw only one cloud in the milk-colored winter sky – and that was the sick tendency to pull at the heartstrings of the people of the land, aided by the daily newspaper’s communist-controlled culture pages. The people had gotten the idea that it could eventually be a little unfair that consumer power in their part of the world was dependent on poverty in other parts of the world. That unchecked production and consumption could have negative effects on the environment, perhaps so negative that it was the time to think about it. On Stockholm’s southern island, for example, a working culture family chose to buy a second-hand doll house on Blocket<sup>58</sup> for their little daughter’s Christmas present instead of buying a new one on Faetter BR<sup>59</sup>. The rumor of this consumption criticism

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<sup>58</sup> Blocket.se is a popular online marketplace for second-hand goods.

<sup>59</sup> Faetter BR is a large toy retailer, somewhat akin to ToysRus in the US

became a puss blister on the body of society, reaching the men and, by grace, the women in the capitalist front. "Senseless! Unconscionable! Shameless!" screamed the leader of the club. Steak tartare shot out of his mouth and part of it stuck in his chin-beard...He fell down and cried so bitterly, worried that Christmas business would land on the same level as last year instead of setting a new record. For a wage laborer it can possibly be a bit difficult to understand how relatively innocent thoughts about justice and the environment could bring such an earth shattering reaction for someone. But then it should be remembered that the owners of the means of production had developed a clinical paranoia towards cultural journalists since the 70s. When the tears stopped the wrath of the club leader was awakened. Sweden's small media landscape and editorial culture were populated entirely with self-confessed Stalinists. Many consumption critics' notices and advertisements, or whatever name they called that shit they produced - had they not challenged the people to stop shopping for things and to go less often by airplanes? The chairman suspected that in the past year they'd written of the environment, maybe a million stories, all designed to tear the bread out of his mouth. He stood up and yelled for the undocumented lady who cleaned his office, "get my coat, nowwww!" ...Now it was his life, his money, and all that he believed. He began by launching an advertising campaign that would go on a full page of the newspaper, a wonderful, moralizing and profoundly guilt-ridden tale that he called, "The Story of the Old Lady who Bought too Little." Then he went to the home of the family on the southern island who had bought a used dollhouse for their little daughter. He burned down the little growth-inhibiting toy and hissed at the terrified family: "This will teach you once and for all!"

This commentary clearly illustrates the class-based and political tensions that are permissible in satire. Yet these sentiments echoed the words of many research participants who linked unsustainable consumption to Sweden's economic elite.

I therefore suggest that some members of Sweden's highly educated, sustainably-minded middle class - made powerful by the nation's longtime emphasis on equality and economic redistribution - is engaged in the process of creating new meaning. They are attempting to disentangle the symbolic markers of cultural capital from material accumulation. For these men and women the accumulation of cultural capital is more closely tied to knowledge, cosmopolitan identities and participation in moral global economies than the accumulation of objective material advantage or personal property.

## **The Morality of Wealth and Consumption**

While these observations might seem to refute long-standing and classical consumption theory which links consumer-based critiques to attempts to condemn the working class - I argue that it certainly makes sense in the context of contemporary Sweden where recent changes have significantly altered the class landscape (Ginsburg 2005). Despite a long history of rhetoric centered on equality and aggressive wealth redistribution programs, Sweden has experienced significant changes in the last several decades. With rising unemployment during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a financial crisis in the 1990s, and growing debates about market liberalization – public support for deregulation, market-and trade-based policies, and reductions in both public spending and tax burdens have grown. Further, an influx in the arrival of immigrants from the Middle East, primarily Islamic in faith and Arab in ethnicity, has increasingly challenged Sweden’s welfare state and the associated ideology of equality within the nation. In fact the nationalist party in Sweden, *Sverigedemokraterna*, although still very small, is one of the fastest growing parties in Sweden. It is centered on a rejection of multiculturalism and stands in opposition to the extension of Sweden’s generous social services to refugees and immigrants. These movements have also created, in many instances, Islamophobic discourse, reflecting Sweden’s struggle with an internal Islamic other (Bunzl 2005) and challenging the long-standing emphasis on solidarity and internal equality.

During the same time period, Sweden has experienced an increase in wealth differentials, with many of Sweden’s wealthiest citizens moving quickly away from the rest of society in terms of income. According to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), Sweden’s wealthiest 10% experienced an 88% increase in their spending power

between 1991 and 2007. In 2004 this top ten percent had slightly more than 22% of total income (SCB 2006). Meanwhile, the least wealthy 10% of the population only saw their purchasing power increase by 15% over the same period. Further, the pace of change is quickening. Between 2002 and 2007, the income gap increased by 20 percent (LO 2009). Ginsburg (2005) argues that these changes have created a growing tension between the upper and the middle class in Sweden. I argue here that the popularity of sustainable consumerism among the middle class in Sweden can therefore be explained not only by processes of reflexive modernization among well-educated middle class Swedes, post-materialist values, or a movement to assert the continued relevance of equality and solidarity in Sweden. The popularity of more sustainable forms of consumerism is also linked to a class-based attempt to rein in what many middle class Swedes see as immoral, irresponsible, and rampant materialism among the world's wealthiest citizens, including the Swedish elite. This explanation points to Sweden's interesting juxtaposition of an egalitarian ethos and an increasingly hierarchical social structure.

While the influence of social democracy, the welfare state and the Lutheran church have historically worked to emphasize humanitarian values of equality, solidarity, and fairness – over time Sweden's redistributive policies have also led to the establishment of a large and powerful middle class. As Frykman and Löfgren argue, Sweden's middle class is so influential that its interests are often simply interpreted as Swedish culture. Today the middle class still has the power to define the moral and it seems that many of them who participated in this research are attempting to do so via their consumption behaviors. These members of the middle class are literally “consuming morality” in opposition to both the “uneducated” and the “elite.”

Sustainable consumerism, in the Swedish case, thus becomes a process of middle class cultural production.

Bourdieu and Wacquant once wrote, “if we grant that symbolic systems are social products that contribute to making the world, that they do not simply mirror social relations but help constitute them, then one can, within limits, transform the world by transforming its representation” (1992:14). Bourdieu thus opens the door for an examination of the processes through which powerful structures are created, reproduced, contested and modified, leading us not only to a more complex understanding of class and the different forms of capital which can constitute difference, but also to a more nuanced, and I would argue, accurate understanding of social change. While sustainable consumers may have more cultural capital with which to define “sustainability” and the “unsustainable” actions of others, we must also consider the possibility that these middle class and typically well-educated Swedes are attempting to, in the best way they know how, to live in a manner more consistent with their ideals of an egalitarian and just society. All of the research participants spoke of their efforts in terms of responsibility, rights, morality and ethics. These people are making efforts to live in a way that does not impinge upon the rights of others in the Third World or in the future - often with great commitment and personal cost.



## **CHAPTER IX**

### **Sustainability as: Practice, Morality, Myth & Global Policy Imperative**

I really don't think it matters so much how we do it, as long as we do something. The earth cannot take much more of this. And we have to be honest with ourselves. We do not know when the tipping point will come. It might be tomorrow. I hope it is not too soon because I am afraid for our kids, what kind of a world we will leave for them. And all the people who live in places that can't afford to clean the water or buy new land if theirs becomes flooded. How is it gonna be for them? So I am not so worried about us up here, I am more worried about them. It isn't fair. So I don't really care what we do, but we have to do something.

- Helen (Transcript November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

#### **Part I: Sustainability as “Practice”**

This research, at the most basic level, was an attempt to ethnographically examine how humans in wealthy, post-industrial urban contexts understand sustainability and attempt to put their concerns into practice given their sphere of influence. As such the project took theories of practice (Bourdieu 1977) and structuration (Giddens 1979) seriously. It sought to move beyond the common assumption of the atomized individual – one who acts freely on the market in accordance with self-interest and preferences for the environment. These ideas - based on the assumption of increasingly reflexive modern consumers - are certainly attractive in their simplicity. Barnet and his colleagues have written that the contemporary demystification of commodity chains has increasingly come to mean that “the regime of consuming subjectivities is ... the target of a critique, its contradictions exposed, the hidden costs – individual, political, cultural – revealed” (Barnet et.al. 2005:24). In this way improved knowledge about the chains of consequences that accompany goods and services enables “reflexive consumerism” (Goodman 2004). With this awareness, consumers exercise their own agency, attempting to influence the market and those aspects of contemporary production they find disagreeable or perhaps even immoral.

Ebba, Johan, Ingrid and Emma all certainly exercise their individual agency in an effort to reduce their environmental impact - often at great personal costs. They do so, in part, due to their awareness of environmental problems and global inequalities. Sweden's long-term investment in education and progressive efforts to improve environmental awareness has, no doubt, contributed to the growth and relative strength of sustainability movements in Sweden. However, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, reflexive modernization theories, based on the assumption that generic consumers exercise their agency in response to growing risks in late-modern society, fail to adequately explain the men and women who participated in this research.

Erik, Mats and Helen also demonstrate that many consumers - no matter how aware, reflexive, concerned about sustainability and committed to making a smaller environmental impact - are constrained by contemporary social, political and economic structures with deep roots. Their attitudes, behaviors and actions are not solely the product of their own personal values, interests and agency. Humans are social creatures and we are all governed by the societies in which we live. Crewe argues that it is important to consider the social structures that shape human decisions because they can "unveil production relations in order to expose the ways in which ...consumption (is) implicitly shaped by and dependent on power relations and regimes of exploitation, illusion and exclusion" (2000: 281).

The current neoliberal emphasis on consumer choice can be seen, in many ways, as a defense of contemporary global structures of inequality. While the world's most privileged defend their ability to choose, unfortunately they often choose products or practices that are extremely harmful for the world's most vulnerable communities – who

do not have the right or ability to choose if, for example, their waters are used for the production of goods which will be shipped to Sweden, their rainforests should be felled to make room for beef production destined for European or American markets or their neighborhood will become a dumping ground for industrial wastes. Arguing that consumers should be able to choose whether or not to buy organic foods is essentially like saying that those families who cannot afford non-toxic products do not have the right to feed their children clean foods or that agricultural laborers are not entitled to safe working conditions. Further, the rhetoric of choice assumes that corporations are forthcoming with information about the hazards associated with their products and services – that consumers have perfect information. However, there are myriad examples, both historical and contemporary, which illustrate that corporations often continue to produce dangerous products and services even after they understand their negative impacts (e.g. cigarette manufacturers, pharmaceutical corporations, the tire industry). While consumers can definitely exercise their agency on the market, choosing among an overwhelming array of products and services – it is unreasonable to assume that consumers in a flooded marketplace have perfect information about product ingredients, the energy embodied in services, the origins and production methods of product components or the working conditions for the laborers who assembled their goods. The illusion of choice and the neoliberal logic of consumer responsibility is therefore not only dangerous for disadvantaged producer communities and exclusive for those with the luxury of choice, but it also places a significant burden on consumers who, despite a desire to do the right thing, do not have adequate information about the

dangerous effects of many products and services. In reality the consumers' sphere of influence is often constricted to a choice between packages or branding campaigns.

The defense of consumer choice can thus be seen as a defense of power and privilege. Protecting our families from dangerous and toxic products or services associated with high energy consumption and emissions should not be a question of consumer choice. It should be a question of sound policy and governance. Indeed many of the Swedes participating in this research supported governmental intervention to remove dangerous products from the market. Yet the contemporary focus on sustainable lifestyles and consumerism places the onus for sustainability on consumers and the "culture of consumption" - as if "consumer culture" were independent of historical and contemporary political and economic structures.

The World Watch Institute's 2010 *State of the World Report* is entitled "Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability." It serves as yet another example of the recent focus on consumerism. And while it is absolutely true that many of the world's most wealthy are consuming too much, a trend which must be changed, it is imperative that we recognize that "consumer culture" is more complex than aggregated individual choice. Our cultures are products of history and context. They rise out of, reflect, and simultaneously structure our material realities, productive systems, methods of exchange, social organizations and political structures. To assume that consumer education and behavior modification can alter the culture of consumption without a simultaneous change in these deeply embedded structures is at best overly optimistic and at worse simply naïve. Certainly consumers - rich and poor, environmentally conscious and not - are constrained in their economic choices by everyday structures that make

sustainable living hard or even impossible. They are constrained by a deep division of labor, alienation from productive resources other than their own labor, a capitalist market that functions on continued growth and a hierarchical social structure that encourages emulation. People in countries like Sweden are also constrained by more localized cultural norms that script for what is and is not socially acceptable or even conceivable. We must continue to remind ourselves of the power that existing structures have over individual choice.

This is not to say that significant change requires revolution or a complete upheaval of all contemporary human creations. However, it is to say that without public policies and programs designed to ensure a more equitable distribution of both natural resources and environmental risks, significant long-term change is not likely - no matter how many people change their light bulbs or buy ecolabeled laundry detergent.

And certainly we must examine the movement toward more sustainable living with a lens of cultural relativity. As social beings, deeply embedded in multiple social networks and normative ideologies about what is needed, necessary and superfluous, many consumers in wealthy, high-consuming, urban societies are not willing to abandon their current lifestyles, to withdrawal from the capitalist system and revert to a subsistence-based lifestyle or to sacrifice their ability to signal their class-based identities. Living in a way fundamentally inconsistent from the rest of society is hard work and stressful. No matter how committed one is to environment or social justice and no matter how passionately one feels that acting in an environmentally responsible way is the right thing to do, in practice, compromise and negotiation are necessary. This viewpoint is illustrated by Glickman who suggests, "Consumption cannot be viewed as bad or good, it

is a tension between democracy and inequality, conformity and protest, work and play” (1999:13) and Barnett and his colleagues who write, “it is extremely difficult to approach the topic of consumption without touching upon contentious issues of how to reconcile autonomy and responsibility, individual agency with collective obligations” (2005:26).

Swedish consumers concerned about sustainability actively interpret ideologies centered on growth and sustainability, often arriving at their own nuanced meanings and values. Consumers often display complex, multiple and contradictory consumption imperatives based on values that both contradict and reflect conformity to social structures and the expression of their own agency (Crewe 2000). These people may resist the capitalist system in ways that are subtle and therefore less effective, but that are not nearly as costly in terms of coherence to the normative structures in which consumers’ everyday lives and meaning are embedded. Further, their actions do help to build momentum for a movement, momentum which can be drawn upon to validate the structural changes – for example economic regulations and political policies designed to reduce inequality - that must be put in place before sustainability can be achieved.

## **Part II: Sustainability as Morality**

The Swedish case illustrates that understanding consumer-based responses to perceptions of environmental risk requires more than the deceptively simple idea of reflexive modernization. Macro-level theories gloss over important local and historical variations that have inspired great variability among ecologically-concerned citizen consumers in Sweden and elsewhere. Perhaps worse, reflexive modernization - its assumption that reflexivity hinges on awareness and education - implies inadequate policy solutions.

My intent is certainly not to imply that education and awareness campaigns are not important. To the contrary Sweden's long-time investment in education has certainly contributed to the relative success of Sweden's sustainability movement. Yet this explanation is incomplete. First of all this conjecture assumes an easy and strong correlation between attitudes and behaviors that simply doesn't exist empirically (Stø et al. 2008). There are a lot of people who are aware of environmental and social problems and are deeply concerned, but do nothing. It is certainly easy to say they don't act because it is not in their self interest – because they don't feel personally affected by these issues and acting on them would be more costly than beneficial. However, it seems that an entire generation of informational campaigns, designed around this logic to appeal to an individual's self interest, have proven largely ineffective. This case study, centered on men and women committed to changing their lifestyles, demonstrates that these individuals do not discount the future or exhibit Gidden's paradox. They've acted, quite progressively in many cases, but not primarily in response to concerns for personal welfare and immediate self-interest. Humans have the capacity to understand and react to perceptions of environmental risk from afar. Further, in the Swedish case they are often more deeply motivated by moral concerns for global and generational equality and fairness. We must remind ourselves that utility and self-interest should not be conflated. These findings are supported by Berglund & Matti's (2006) work in Sweden and Hobson's (2002) research in the UK, both of which illustrate that concerns for equality and environmental justice have more resonance with people than dominant sustainability discourse centered on the rationalization of lifestyles.

These observations, while contrary to dominant assumptions about sustainable consumers and the most effective strategies for motivating more sustainable living, lead us to a more complex understanding of “consumer culture.” They also lend insight into the relative strength of the sustainable consumerism movement in Sweden – one grounded not only in an understanding of reflexive choice but also in history, power and ideology.

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden was an ethnically homogenous country. Perceived similarity and the existence of a small elite class and large body of peasants created favorable conditions for the emergence of class-based consciousness and politics. This orientation contributed to movement toward social democracy in Sweden, one that has since emphasized the morality of equality. While it is certainly not the case that all are truly equal in Sweden, the ideology and rhetoric of equality are strong and work to foster a concern for equal rights, and “just sustainabilities” (Agyman et. al. 2003) that extend beyond Sweden’s boundaries.

I have also argued that the emphasis placed on equality in the Swedish context has worked to create an “egalitarian” ethos and ideology of a “classless” society. Yet these ideals can be contrasted with Sweden’s hierarchical social structure, which has grown more distinct over the last twenty years (SCB 2010). In this context, many middle class Swedes are using their “sustainable” consumerism as a negative commentary on Sweden’s growing elite class – as a means to rein in what they see as unfair, unequal and immoral consumption.

There are also other factors that have certainly played into the relative success of sustainable consumerism in Sweden including the country’s lack of domestic fossil fuel resources (which makes them much more cognizant of energy issues), relatively late



urbanization and low population densities (which have provided many Swedes with rural experiences and close connections to the natural environment), a history of nature-based spirituality (which helps many Swedes to think about the inherent value of nature), and even a climate and latitude (that leave people longing to go out of doors and into the sunshine whenever possible). Swedes are also fascinated with modernity (O'Dell 1997) and many see the movement toward more sustainable societies as a reflection of that value set, a movement toward the realization of “modernity.”

Yet one thing is clear, the sustainability movement in Sweden is, at least in part, bolstered by middle-class morality, centered on a concern for global equality, solidarity and fairness. In the Swedish case, sustainability is often defined as morality.

### **Part III: Sustainability as Myth**

However, Daniel Miller has urged us to consider “The Poverty of Morality” as an explanatory tool (2001b). As *Svenskt Näringsliv*'s story of the old woman who decided to buy less demonstrates, not all Swedes associate alternative consumerism, particularly anti-consumerism, with good moral values. Certainly morality is subjective and often highly politicized.

Indeed, despite Sweden's clear and well publicized intention to lead the charge toward the creation of a modern sustainable society, my research demonstrates that sustainability means many different things – to different people. Deborah Gewertz and Fredrick Errington have described sustainability as “ubiquitous in use and protean in meaning” (2009:1). As I illustrated in chapter four, the dominant view on sustainable living in Sweden is based on an urban perspective, one focused on the improvement of resource efficiencies *and* economic growth. Indeed most government agencies and

policy makers hold great faith in ecological modernization. Armed with life-cycle analyses, carbon calculators, and a whole cadre of scientific tools, ecological modernization's proponents argue that contemporary lifestyles are becoming increasingly sustainable as technological breakthroughs, compact living, progressive environmental policies and economies of scale reduce ecological and emissions footprints.

Indeed it is hard to be critical of Swedish sustainability policy, particularly given the measurable results the nation has achieved via sustainability programs and policies. Further, Sweden continues to innovate, incorporating the environmental movement, industry leaders, academic experts and civil society in discussions about environmental goals and methods for achieving them. Yet ecological modernization programs have clearly failed to generate significant change, even in Sweden where, despite improvements the average citizen still consumes and produces far more pollutants and waste than is sustainable (IVL 2010). Feichtinger & Pregernig write, "Critical assessments of global change since 1992 indicate that the prevailing politico-administrative system seems not to be fully capable of implementing the goals of sustainable development in a comprehensive and substantial way. Genuine and far-reaching policy change often requires the status quo to be put in jeopardy" (2005:237).

Certainly there is, at least, a need to democratize notions of sustainability, in Sweden and internationally. Despite Sweden's corporatist political culture and the state's willingness to incorporate environmentalist concerns into policy deliberations – their remains a fairly narrow vision of sustainability tied to improved resource efficiencies. Yet this orientation, coupled with the recent focus on consumer responsibility places even more emphasis on expert-generated definitions of what is and is not sustainable. While

Swedish citizen-consumers are expected to do their part to consume less, this devolution of responsibility, consistent with neoliberal sustainability policy, leaves citizen-consumers with little choice but to rely on external sources of information like labels, life-cycle analyses, and impact projections. This call for consumer responsibility thus continues to “necessitate the use of technologically driven and expert-led solutions” (Hobson 2002:96), which frequently suggest that the path to sustainability is through more consumption and more growth. So while consumers are expected to take responsibility, they continue to be excluded from efforts to define both environmental risks and sustainable action. Unfortunately the expert-generated definitions of sustainability consumers rely upon are all too often limited to calculations of kilowatt hours or parts per million. Rarely do they include discussions about social and political sustainability or inequalities as they relate to the consumption of energy or the production of emissions.

When citizens do attempt to actively engage in the sustainability agenda in Sweden, Eckerberg & Bjorn argue that experts and politicians have often undermined citizen initiatives “by referring to economic restraints” (1998:340). As such, the dominant sustainability discourse has alienated civil society and sacrificed the potential to achieve more radical changes (Feichtinger & Pregernig 2005). Halkier has argued that efforts to make lifestyles more efficient and reduce the impact of household consumption, dependent on experts and market mechanisms constitute a “loss of collectivity” and “democratic control.”

Yet many of the men and women participating in this research demonstrated that there are alternative visions of both sustainability and what constitutes sustainable practice. Sigge and many other research participants, for example, argued that truly

sustainable societies must be more self-sufficient and live in closer connection with nature, working within natural confines – rather than toward technologies that further rationalize resources and natural systems. These participants argued that localized understandings of nature are paramount for understanding both environmental risk and appropriate responses.

Others, like Jens, argue that improved resource efficiencies, introduced via technological advances, are important but that science often fails to calculate all the costs of progress, resulting in unforeseen and disastrous consequences. For environmentalists like Jens, the precautionary principle, exercised in his case by refraining from consumption, is more reliable. While he can never be sure that carbon calculators are correct or if the new “green” technologies are actually sustainable, he can be sure that by removing his demand for new products, no additional resources will be used.

Mats and other argue that sustainability is ultimately linked to ensuring equality. He argues that global society must overcome the paternalistic ideology of entitled dominance over both nature and lesser-developed economies. He also argues that women’s perspectives on sustainability must also be heard.

This is not to say that sustainability discourse focused on improving the efficiency of contemporary lifestyles is unpopular in Sweden. To the contrary many research participants were very content and satisfied with their efforts to use less energy by biking to work, unplugging their toaster and changing their bulbs. And certainly their efforts are important. Åsa’s family and many others found this focus to be the perfect balance between acting on their concerns and maintaining normalcy for their family.

This diversity among views about sustainability suggests that perhaps sustainability is more akin to Malinowski's or Lévi-Strauss' notion of myth than the self-explanatory concept that many take it for. Like a myth, the concept of sustainability illustrates an important, shared cultural ideal. Yet it is impossible to understand the value or meaning of the myth through a single iteration of the story. In order to understand the cultural import of the myth of sustainability, one must examine all its iterations as a whole (2001). Examining multiple perspectives on and visions of sustainability in the Swedish case demonstrates that dominant sustainability discourse is intricately linked to webs of power and must be democratized if the sustainability movement is to make more significant progress. The discourse of sustainability is indeed political and wrought with tensions as different groups struggle to control its meaning - as Åsa's disagreements with Sigge about the relative merits of urban and rural living suggest.

Tensions arising from competing notions of sustainability are not only felt in Sweden, but also on an international level as illustrated during the negotiations and protests that surround World Trade Organization meetings or the UN Climate Change Conferences. While wealthy nations continue to take a techno-ecological approach to sustainability, often framing it in terms of either gaining more control over nature or environmental conservation, many living in lesser developed economies envision sustainability as the fulfillment of basic human needs and environmental rights.

#### **Part IV: Sustainability as Global Policy Imperative**

Despite Sweden's relative success leading international and national discussions about sustainability and instituting programs which resulted in measurable improvements, there is still a lot of work to be done, both in Sweden and abroad. Today our global

society has not achieved consumption levels which ensure that all humans are able to meet their needs without compromising the needs of future generations. Swedish culture's focus on equality and morality has certainly helped to advance the sustainability movement, motivating many to change their lifestyles and consumption patterns out of a concern for global equity, shared responsibility and human rights. This finding, at very least, suggests that a concern with personal self-interest and economic benefit is not "human nature" as is all too often assumed – an idea propagated by the discipline of economics.

The Swedish government's official position and focus on ecological modernization is consistent with the growth-based imperative and the interests of global competitiveness. Stockholm, like myriad other global cities have come to associate modernity and global economic advantage with sustainability. During his rotating presidency of the EU, Fredrik Reinfeldt's website stated,

A large part of the solution entails switching the European economy to become an eco-efficient economy. Greater competitiveness and growth are to be achieved while creating a sustainable energy supply, making efficient use of resources and meeting our climate targets and environmental objectives (SPEU 2009)

While growth through ecological modernization and free consumer choice is a national priority in Sweden, it seems that at least some governmental agencies recognize that sustainability hinges on more than improving efficiencies and the protection of the Swedish environment. Jörby argues that many governmental measures "not only aim at reducing impacts in order to improve the environment locally; the local governments try to take on their part of the responsibility for the global environment as well" (2002:239). There are, in fact, a few governmental documents that advocate consuming less so that people in impoverished areas around the world can have more. One document produced

by Sweden's Consumer Agency entitled "Environment for Billions" (Konsumentverket 2001), points to research which suggests that wealthy industrialized countries like Sweden would have to reduce consumption by a factor of ten for every human being on the planet to have equal access to the world's resources. Consider for example the following quotations:

Fair environmental space means in short that every country has the right to an equal amount of resources per person, and that our total consumption can't exceed what the earth endures. If everyone keeps within ones fair share of the environmental space we can get a sustainable society.

- Miljö för Mijarder (Konsumentverket 2001)

Sweden is one block in the global village ... what we do or not do is added to other countries and contributes to determining the future of the world"

- Bilen, Biffen & Bostaden (SOU 2005:24)

While ideas about degrowth or how to ensure that people don't consume too much are contentious - Sweden has long been a voice for international equality. In fact, the concept of *rättvist miljöutrymme* (fair share of environmental space) seemed to resonate well with both study participants and many of the governmental representatives with whom I met - regardless of whether they defined sustainability in terms of self-sufficiency or energy efficiency. Perhaps the concept of *rättvist miljöutrymme* is so salient in Sweden because it invokes the core cultural concept *lagom* - a share of the earth's resources that is "just right", "appropriate" or "in moderation" - just enough so that everyone can drink from the earth's proverbial cup of mead. Regardless the concept seems to have potential for moving the sustainability agenda forward, despite ongoing conflicts about the best way to proceed. The idea was introduced in Sweden by the environmental and social justice organization Friends of the Earth (Miljöförbundet Jordens Vänner). They argued that

social, economic and ecological sustainability depends on our ability to ensure that all human beings have the right to consume a “fair share” of the world’s resources. It is premised on the calculation of environmental space which includes all of the energy, non-renewable resources, land, forests, water and other natural resources that scientists agree can be utilized without causing irreparable damage to the earth or future generations.

The fair share idea is intended to help Swedes understand the impact of their lifestyles relative to a fair share for each human being, with the hope that such understanding would inspire reduced consumption in wealthy nations to make way for sustainable development in the developing world. The concept of fair environmental space draws upon an ethic of care (Barnett et. al. 2004) to create networks that extend over both geographical and temporal space and “effectively reduce physical, psychological and cultural distances” (Goodman 2004:906). Based on this logic, the organization calculated that in the year 2050 Swedes would only be able to emit 1.1 tons of carbon dioxide annually if they are to stay within the fair environmental space (MJV 1999). This would constitute a significant reduction relative to contemporary levels, although not nearly as drastic as that required in the United States where citizens currently emit between 20 and 25 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per person every year.

While the concept of fair environmental space is also an expert-generated measure of sustainability that undoubtedly reproduces rationalist views of nature and reduces complex relationships to a set of numbers, my research suggests that these calculations offer some potential for reframing the sustainability debate, particularly in Sweden where it appeals to many research participants, regardless of how they define or practice sustainable living. Further, based on its foundation in the morality of equality, it seems



that it has the potential to inspire more committed sustainable action than policies that only appeal to individual self interest. While many research participants believed that sustainability would ultimately depend on more localized connections to the land - a turning inwards of sorts toward more localized production and consumption - Escobar (2001) argued that local efforts to appeal to the moral sensibilities of the powerful rarely work. Further, they fail to address environmental issues on a scale adequate to the task (Allen 2004). This is certainly not to say that localized understandings of nature and sustainability need be compromised or standardized into a single dominant definition and practice. Rather it is intended to illustrate that concepts such as fair environmental space, have the potential to link people with very different conceptualizations of sustainable practice. Such a “double-helix between local activism and global networking”, can create powerful networks, based on alternative understandings of the environment and associated problems that can not only challenge dominant urban perspectives, but that also has the potential to reinvigorate debate and international negotiations (Appadurai 2004:66). This concept can also link citizens all over the world into larger movements for environmental rights and raise awareness that sustainability is not only about improving production and consumption efficiencies, but also about a more equitable distribution of natural resources and environmental risks.

And while a focus on sustainable consumerism and sustainable lifestyles imagines individuals in their roles as consumers and thus “neglects any recognition of the motivations of citizens oriented towards rights or social justice” (Berglund & Matti 2006:559), a fair share movement has the potential to reactivate individuals as citizens. My research indicates that many environmentally-concerned Swedes do not limit their

actions to the market realm. Instead they are clearly eager to participate in sustainability initiatives in their roles as citizens, if given the opportunity.

If fair share calculations can not only encourage reduced consumption but also inspire individuals to act in their roles as citizens, there is potential for these calculations to produce more significant change. Escobar (2001) writes, “In constructing networks and glocalities of their own, even ...in their engagement with dominant networks, social movements might contribute to democratize social relations, contest visions of nature, challenge current techno-scientific hype and even suggest that economies can be organized differently from current neo-liberal dogmas” (2001:166). I suggest here that a rights-based discourse can provide a positive source of external pressure in support of the market, political and social reforms necessary to remove significant barriers to sustainable living. Such pressure has the potential to move the sustainability discourse beyond its technocratic, rationalist, and apolitical focus. It can also help us to build what Wilk calls “multigenic” models of sustainable consumption policies – those that move beyond the “practical realms of price and utility, to much broader social and political policy issues” (Wilk 2002:12).

Further, this human-rights orientation allows us to question the political-economic relations that script for environmental inequality and to push the sustainability discourse towards more participatory solutions. It certainly seems to have promise given that sustainable solutions not only require technical improvements, but also political and economic systems which can remedy power imbalances and ensure that all people, regardless of geography, race, gender or generation, are able to consume at levels sufficient to meet their basic needs and achieve human dignity.



## **APPENDIX 1: Semi-Structured Questionnaire**

### **History of interest in sustainable consumerism**

As you know this is a study about sustainable consumerism. Could you begin by tracing the development of your interest in sustainable consumerism? (prompts for childhood, parents, education, media influence, friends) How did you become aware of the connections between your consumerism and environmental risks/personal well being? How did you become involved with XXX organization? Why do you try to consume differently? (Prompting...) Is it a moral issue, an economic issue, or a matter of rationality for you?

### **Perceptions of risk**

What do you think presents the biggest risk to global sustainability? What do you think about mainstream consumerism here in Sweden? What are some of the biggest risks associated with contemporary consumption patterns? Which of these consequences do you think is most dire? Do you feel you have been personally affected by these consequences? Who has? Who do you worry about the most?

### **Views on the Environment and Nature**

What are the greatest environmental risks if we do not modify consumer behavior (if they haven't already outlined these)? Is it most important to consume sustainably for reasons of economy, society, or the environment? What is most important to "sustain"? When you think about protecting nature, what do you think about? What is it that is most important to protect? In what ways is nature valuable?

### **Views about Sustainability in the Market & Economics:**

In a perfect world, what are some of the solutions that you imagine? Who should take the lead in solving challenges to sustainability? What is the consumer's role/government's role/market's role/media's role in achieving sustainability? What is the relationship between sustainability and a healthy economy? What are the markers of a healthy economy? Can we reconcile the capitalist need for growth with sustainability? What are the largest barriers to sustainability? What is standing in the way?

### **Identity, Class & Social Distinction**

Why do you think more people don't consume in the interests of sustainability? What factors present barriers to sustainable consumerism? Can you speak a bit about the most environmentally friendly person you know (without giving names of course)? And can you speak a little bit about the most un-environmentally friendly person you know (again, without giving names of course)?

### **Social Support Networks**

Do you find it difficult to change your lifestyle to the extent you would like and still "fit in"? Do your friends & family know that you try to consume in an environmentally-friendly way? How do they know this? Do they respect and support this decision? Do they find it odd at all? Do you have friends who also try to consume ecologically? How do you know this? Is it difficult for you to modify consumer behavior in the framework of your social connections? How do you overcome this?

Where do you find information about alternative lifestyles? What sources of information are most valuable to you? Do you find that these groups or peer networks help to reinforce your decisions? Do you feel pressure to keep up with your friends in neighbors in terms of consumption? Are there certain items that you feel you must have to fit into society, despite their environmental costs?

**Free List & Self Assessment**

**“List all the things that an individual could do to live a more sustainable life...”**

LIST	RANK	Really Good	Good	OK	Bad	Really Bad
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**Likert Scales: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Swedish society is too focused on shopping and spending.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Swedish society is too materialistic.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Excessive materialism is causing harm to the environment in this country.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Excessive materialism is causing harm to the global or world wide environment.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Excessive materialism is causing harm to my family and our health	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Swedes can continue to consume at current levels without negative consequences.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Swedes can continue to consume at current levels without negative consequences if production technologies are improved	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Protecting the environment will require most of us to make major changes in the way we live.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My own buying habits have a negative effect on the environment	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sustainability can be reached without modification of global markets	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sustainability can be reached if global markets are modified.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Sustainability can only be reached if global markets are significantly altered.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My friends, family and colleagues generally support me in my decision to consume alternatively	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I find it difficult socially to alter my lifestyle to the extent I would like	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
If we can learn to consume smarter, we should not have to consume less	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
It is more important to conserve electricity, fuel, and water than to consume fewer things	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
How often in the past year have you done the following, for environmental reasons?...					
Bought organic food or ecolabeled products	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Bought second hand items	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Bought redesigned or recycled goods	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Bought locally produced or handmade goods	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Bought fair trade goods	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+
Decided not to buy something that you wanted	0	1-5	6-10	11-20	21+

**Demographics & Personal Info**

ID # \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Home phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile phone \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship Status \_\_\_\_\_

Employment Status \_\_\_\_\_ Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Partner Employment Status \_\_\_\_\_ Partner Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title/Duties \_\_\_\_\_

Yearly Household "Take Home" Income \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Adults in the Household \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children in the Household \_\_\_\_\_

Education (ego & partner if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Area(s) of Study \_\_\_\_\_

Father Occupation/Education \_\_\_\_\_

Mother Occupation/Education \_\_\_\_\_

Languages Spoken \_\_\_\_\_

Political Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Newspaper Subscriptions \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational Memberships \_\_\_\_\_

Interested in participating in more in depth research: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2: Consumption Inventory

**Consumption Inventory**

Begin by recording some information about the size of your household and its members. Please identify each household member by name, gender and age. Don't forget yourself! Next, record your household possessions. Note the items listed in left column... using the columns to the right indicate how many of these items belong to each household member. For example, consider a household possession, "the widget." If there is 1 widget that cannot be distinguished as belonging to a specific household member (HHM), write a 1 in the column labeled "shared." If HHM1 has 1 widget, put a 1 in HHM1's total column. If HHM5 is a collector and has 10 widgets, write a 10 in the column HHM5 total #. Finally, I am interested to know if any of these items were acquired second hand (bought or passed down) or have been in the household for 10 or more years. If HHM5 got 2 of his 10 widgets second hand...please indicate this by putting the number 2 in HHM5's column labelled # 2nd hand. If HHM1 has had her widget for more than 10 years, put a 1 in the HHM1's column labelled # > 10yrs. Please note that the "Total" category uses a

Household Information	Residence			Household Members	Name	Carbon Footprint (www.climate.lv/se)			Age	Gender
	1st	2nd	3rd			HHM4	HHM5	HHM6		
Household Information	1st	2nd	3rd	Household Members	Name	HHM4	HHM5	HHM6	Age	Gender
Apartment (1), Villa (2), House (3)				Household Member 1						
Number of rooms?				Household Member 2						
Size in sq. meters?				Household Member 3						
Number of bathrooms?				Household Member 4						
Source of heat?				Household Member 5						
Electric source?				Household Member 6						
List of Household Possessions	Shared	HHM1	HHM2	HHM3	HHM4	HHM5	HHM6	Total		
Number of Possessions	# total #	# total #	# total #	# total #	# total #	# total #	# total #	# total #		
widget (example)	1	1						12		
television								0		
mp3 player								0		
mobile phone								0		
jeans								0		
blender								0		
bicycle								0		
hairdryer								0		
sports shoes								0		
motorcycles/motorbikes								0		
microwave								0		
washer								0		
dryer								0		
kitchen knives (excluding flatware)								0		
coats/jackets								0		
purses/backpacks/shoulder bags								0		
chairs (arm and straight)								0		
boats								0		
tea/coffee cups								0		
computers (desk-laptop & handheld)								0		
dishwasher								0		
car								0		



## APPENDIX 3: Approved IRB Consent Form

IRB Approval

07-0513

THIS FORM VALID

8/17/07 - 8/15/08

### Samtycke att deltaga i en forskningsstudie

“Undersökning av hållbar konsumentpolitik som en respons till uppfattad miljörisk”  
Cindy Isenhour – PhD-kandidat i departementet för antropologi, University of Kentucky, USA

#### VARFÖR HAR DU BLIVIT ERBJUDEN ATT DELTAGA I DENNA FORSKNINGSSSTUDIEN?

Du har blivit erbjuden att medverka i en forskningsstudie om alternativ konsumentpolitik och hållbarhet. Du har blivit vald p.g.a. ditt medlemskap i en grupp som delvis fokuserar på alternativ konsumentpolitik eller som en del av en kontrollgrupp. Om du anmäler dig som frivillig till den här studien är du en av ca 100 personer som deltar.

#### VEM ÄR ANSVARIG FÖR DEN HÄR STUDIEN?

Personen som är ansvarig för den här studien heter Cindy Isenhour. Hon är doktorand vid departementet för antropologi vid University of Kentucky, USA. Forskningen utförs i samarbete med Humanekologiska avdelningen i Lund, departementet för Statsvetenskap vid Karlstads universitet och departementet för Socialantropologi vid Stockholms universitet. Huvudansvarig för studien är Dr. Lisa Cligget vid University of Kentucky.

#### VAD ÄR SYFTET MED STUDIEN?

Forskningen fokuserar på hållbar konsumtion i Sverige med avsikt att förbättra vår förståelse för mänskliga-ekonomi-miljö interaktioner. Studien avser att utforska förhållandet mellan alternativ konsumtionsmotivation och handling i Sverige och 1) synen på ekonomi, globalisering och hållbar utveckling, 2) uppfattningar om natur- och miljörisker, 3) kön, 4) klasstillhörighet samt 5) tillgång till alternativa konsumtionsnätverk.

#### VAD KOMMER DU BLI TILLFRÅGAD ATT GÖRA?

Studien kommer att pågå mellan september 2007 och september 2008. Frivilliga som deltar i studien ska förvänta sig att medverka i en till två intervjuer som upptar ca en till tre timmar vardera, mellan oktober, 2007 och januari, 2008. Alla intervjuer kommer att äga rum på de platser som är lättillgängliga för de frivilliga. Frivilliga kommer också att bli kontaktad i slutet av våren 2008 för att slutföra en undersökning online. Den delen förväntas inte ta mer än en timme. Online-undersökningen kan utföras från vilken dator som helst med Internetuppkoppling. Den totala tiden som de frivilliga avsätter beräknas vara mellan 2-6 timmar mellan oktober, 2007 och juni, 2008.

En liten grupp på 20 personer kommer att bli tillfrågade att medverka i en mer djupgående studie. Om du skulle vilja anmäla dig till den studien kommer du att bli tillfrågad att bidra med intervjuer, konsumtionshistoria och konsumtionsanteckningar samt bli medföljd på en till två shoppingturer. Den mer djupgående studien kräver ytterligare ca 4-8 timmar mellan januari och augusti, 2008. Frivilliga som deltar i den djupgående studien kommer eventuellt att ha intervjuer på andra platser, däribland deras hem, mataffär eller köpcentrum.

#### FINNS DET ORSAKER TILL VARFÖR DU INTE SKA MEDVERKA I STUDIEN?

Det finns inga kända skäl till varför du inte kan medverka i den här studien.

#### VAD ÄR MÖJLIGA RISKER?

Utifrån vår vetskap finns det inga extra risker med studien utöver vad du gör varje dag.

#### ÄR DET NÅGON FÖRDEL MED ATT DELTA I FORSKNINGEN?

Det finns ingen garanti på att du kommer att tjäna något genom den här studien. Vi kan ej och kommer ej att garantera att du får några personliga fördelar genom att deltaga i studien. Däremot bidrar din medverkan till att hjälpa samhället att bättre förstå detta forskningsområde.

#### MÅSTE DU DELTAGA I STUDIEN?

Om du bestämmer dig för att medverka i studien bör det vara för att du vill vara frivillig i en forskningsstudie. Du kommer ej att förlora några fördelar eller rättigheter som du innehar genom att inte deltaga. Du kan avsluta din medverkan när som helst under studien och fortfarande ha de fördelar och rättigheter du hade innan studien påbörjades.

#### OM DU INTE VILL MEDVERKA I DENNA STUDIE, FINNS DET ANDRA VAL?

Om du inte vill deltaga i studien finns det inga andra val än att inte medverka i studien.

**IRB****VAD KOMMER DET ATT KOSTA FÖR ATT DELTAGA?**

Det finns inga andra kostnader annat än den tid som du ger till studien.

**KOMMER DU ATT FÅ NÅGON ERSÄTTNING FÖR ATT MEDVERKA?**

Studien är helt och hållet frivillig och du kommer inte att erhålla någon ersättning eller betalning för att delta i studien.

**VEM KOMMER ATT SE INFORMATIONEN SOM DU GER?**

Den information som du ger kommer att kombineras med information från de andra deltagarna i studien. När forskarna skriver om studien kommer denna kombinerade information att användas. Du kommer ej att bli identifierad i detta skrivna material. Forskarna kommer att aktivt försöka bibehålla din anonymitet. All forskningsmaterial med personlig information kommer att vara inlåst och endast åtkomlig för primära forskare.

**KAN DIN MEDVERKAN I STUDIEN SLUTA TIDIGT?**

Om du bestämmer dig för att delta i studien har du rätten att avbryta din medverkan när som helst under studiens gång. Du kommer ej att behandlas annorlunda om du avbryter din medverkan. De individer som utför studien kan bli tvungna att avbryta din medverkan. Det sker i de fall då du ej följer de givna instruktionerna, om studien innebär fler nackdelar än fördelar för dig, eller om organisationen som finansierar studien bestämmer sig för att avbryta studien p.g.a. olika vetenskapliga skäl.

**OM DU HAR FRÅGOR, FÖRSLAG, BETÄNKLIGHETER ELLER KLAGOMÅL?**

Innan du bestämmer dig för att tacka ja till denna inbjudan, går det bra att ställa frågor eller ge funderingar om studien. Skulle du ha frågor, förslag eller betänkligheter under studiens gång har du också möjlighet att ge dessa genom att kontakta Cindy Isenhour via emailadressen: [cynthia.isenhour@uky.edu](mailto:cynthia.isenhour@uky.edu). Om du har några frågor om dina rättigheter som frivillig, kontakta personalen vid Office of Research Integrity vid University of Kentucky på telefonnummer: 001-859-257-9428 alternativt kostnadsfritt telefonnummer på 001-866-400-9428. Vi kommer att ge dig en signerad kopia på detta formulär.

**VAD MER BEHÖVER DU VETA?**

Forskningsstudien är finansierad av Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, the US Student Fulbright Program samt University of Kentucky. Du kommer att bli meddelad om ny information uppkommer som kan påverka din medverkan eller din vilja att delta i studien.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Underskrift av person som accepterat till att delta i studien

\_\_\_\_\_  
datum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Namnförtydligande

\_\_\_\_\_  
Namn på forskningskontakt i studien

\_\_\_\_\_  
datum

## APPENDIX 4: Svenskt Näringsliv's Ad in Dagen's Nyheter



# SAGAN OM GUMMAN SOM HANDLADE FÖR LITE

Det var en gång en liten gumma som tyckte om att handla saker. Vissa saker handlade hon för sitt eget nöje, andra för att glädja sina nära och kära.

- Bredvid henne bodde en gubbe som ägde en affär. Det var till honom gumman kom för att handla. Och det gjorde hon ofta. Därför kunde gubben fortsätta driva sin affär, och i sin tur köpa saker som kom andra och honom själv till glädje. Inte bara små gummor behöver handla, utan gubbar också såklart.
- Gumman älskade naturligtvis julen, som var i antågande. Ingen annan tid på året gav henne så många anledningar att köpa saker. Klappar, skinka, julgran, stearinljus, must och änglahår. Allt för att göra julen så magisk som den kan vara.
- Även gubben gladde sig. Han såg fram emot att få sätta tänderna i den goda julmaten och längtade efter att på julafton ge bort fina presenter. Och självklart gladde sig gubben förstås också åt alla människor som snart skulle komma till hans affär för att handla, både för att han tjänade pengar på det men också för att det var roligt med kunder som kom tillbaka, år efter år.
- Den lilla gumman var en av dem. I alla år hade hon handlat sina julsaker hos gubben. Men

en dag råkade gumman få syn på en kultursida i en tidning. Där skrev några arga tanter och farbröder att julen var fel eftersom människor bara handlade hela tiden. Handel, skrev de, var dåligt. Dåligt för själen. Dåligt för de fattiga. Dåligt för planeten. Helst, tyckte de arga tanterna och farbröderna, borde små gummor och gubbar tillverka sina egna julklappar.

- Och vår lilla gumma läste och tog åt sig. I år, tänkte hon för sig själv, ska jag inte handla så mycket. Gummans vänner, och hela den lilla staden, började snart tänka likadant.
- När så nästan ingen kom för att handla hos gubben med affären fick han stänga. Julmaten och klapparna som han hade sett fram emot fick han titta i stjärnorna efter.
- Än värre gick det för den fattiga arbetaren på andra sidan jorden som hade tillverkat många av sakerna i gubbens affär och som inte fick jobba längre eftersom ingen köpte sakerna.
- Och hur gick det för gumman? Hon fick en jättetråkig jul. Så kan det gå om man lyssnar på arga tanter och farbröder och slutar handla.

FLER SAGOR HITTAR DU PÅ [WWW.SVENSKTNARINGSLIV.SE](http://WWW.SVENSKTNARINGSLIV.SE)



## Key Definitions

Carework – refers “to the multifaceted labor that produces the daily living conditions that make basic human health and well being possible – includes home management, housekeeping and the related domestic tasks laundry clothing repair, meal prep, care of others” (Zimmerman et. al. 2007)

Citizen-Consumer - Historically speaking, the term “citizen-consumer” reflects the merger of citizen and consumer identities in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when patriotism and citizenship became tied to consumption. Here I use the term because it reflects the contemporary neoliberal policy frame in which citizenship is tied to consumerism and because the men and women participating in this study rarely differentiated between their actions in civic and market realms. To refer to them as either citizens or consumers would be a misrepresentation. Johnston argues that the concept of the ‘citizen-consumer’ has become a widespread contemporary cultural construct, used widely in both academic and activist writing (2008).

Consumerism - In American English the term “consumerism” most often describes a cultural orientation in which the “possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status and national success” (Ekins 1991). Juliet Schor describes consumerism as a “particularly pernicious ideology which is not conducive to promoting human wellbeing, which is destroying the planet, which is enabling a rapacious capitalist system” (2008:594). In contrast, “consumerism” connotes consumer activism and cooperation in the European tradition (Hilton 2009).

Consumption - The term “consumption” is ambiguous and problematic. See Wilk (2004) and De Vries (1993) for excellent discussions of the intricacies of the term. Here consumption refers to the acquisition, use and disposal of resources.

Corporatism - Corporatism is a term commonly used in political science to refer to a cooperative form of governance, involving widespread consultation and multiple stakeholders. While in popular usage it might seem to suggest heavy private sector involvement or control in political decisions, this is not the case.

Sustainability – is an extremely difficult concept due to define. This research demonstrates that the term is defined, practiced and experienced in a multitude of different ways and bound to political struggles to control its meaning. Despite this, I work from the base definition that sustainability is fundamentally related to a state in which all humans, both future and present, will have adequate resources to live healthful lives. This definition therefore includes recognition of ecological, social and economic sustainability and the “just sustainabilities” essential for success (Agyeman et. al. 2003)

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2009 *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*. London: Berg.

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Spaargaren, Ingrid and Arthur P. J. Mol.

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Stockholmstad (City of Stockholm)

2008 *The City of Stockholm's New Environmental Programme*. Stockholm: Stadsledningskontoret.

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United Nations

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United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA)

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US Energy Information Administration

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 2003 Political Ecology. In A Companion to Economic Geography. Sheppard and Barnes, editors. New York: Blackwell. Pgs 257-274.
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- Weiner, Annette B.  
 1992 Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While Giving. University of California Press.
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 2008 Consumption and the Transformation of Everyday Life: A View from Southern India. Basingstroke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.  
 2005 Why Energy Needs Anthropology. Anthropology Today 21(3):1-3.
- Wilk, Richard  
 2009 The Morality of Drinking Bottled Water. Paper Presented to the University of Kentucky Social Theory Seminar Series in Lexington, Kentucky on February 6<sup>th</sup>.  
 2004 Questionable Assumptions about Sustainable Consumption. In The Ecological Economics of Consumption, edited by Lucia Reisch and Inge Røpke. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Pp. 17-22.  
 2002 Consumption, Human Needs and Global Environmental Change. Global Environmental Change 12:5-13.  
 1993 Altruism and Self-Interest: Towards an Anthropological Theory of Decision Making. In Research in Economic Anthropology. 14, Pp. 191-212.  
 1996 Economies and Cultures. Boulder: Westview Press.

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1993 The idea of nature and the nature of distributive justice. In, *The politics of nature*, Dobson & Lucardie eds., Pgs. 3-20. London: Routledge.

World Conservation Union (WCU)

1991 *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living*. Gland, Switzerland.

World Watch Institute

2010 *State of the World Report 2010 - Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability*. World Watch Institute.

2007 *State of the World Report 2007 - Our Urban Future*. World Watch Institute.

2004 *State of the World Report 2004 - Special Focus: The Consumer Society*. World Watch Institute.

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2005 *I Omsorgens Namn: Tre Diskurser om Äldreomsorg*, Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.

Zimmerman, Mary K., Jacquelyn S. Litt & Christine E. Bose, eds.

2006 *Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

# VITA

## Cindy Isenhour

### Education

#### **University of Kentucky**

Ph.D. Anticipated August 2010, Anthropology

Dissertation - "Building Sustainable Societies: Exploring Sustainability Policy and Practice in the Age of High Consumption" Advised by Drs. Lisa Cliggett (chair), Mary Anglin, Sarah Lyon, Thomas Håkansson, Ellen Furlough (Department of History)

#### **Colorado State University**

M.A. 2003, Anthropology & International Development

Thesis – "Following the Buffalo: Lakota Value Construction and Consumption in Shifting Economic Environments" Advised by Drs. Kathleen Pickering (chair), Kate Browne, Jeff Snodgrass, & Janet Ore (Department of History)

#### **Miami University**

B.A. 1997, Communications (Dual Minors in Marketing and Management)

Dolibois European Center, Luxembourg 1996 - International Study Certificate

### Research Interests

Economy-Environment Linkages, Political Ecology, Sustainability, Urban Anthropology, Environmental Policy, Economic Anthropology, Consumption, International Development, Globalization, Applied Anthropology, Class Theory, Gender, (In)Equality, the US & Europe

### Professional & Research Experience

#### **University of Kentucky, Department of Anthropology**

Instructor – August 2008 to Present

Responsible for the design, instruction & evaluation of an introductory anthropology course (F 08 & W 09) and "Cultural Diversity in the Modern World" (F 09 & S 10)

#### **Lund University, Karlstad University, & Stockholm University**

Dissertation Research Affiliate – July 2007 to September 2008

Conducted in-depth ethnographic dissertation research centered on sustainable consumption ideology, policy and practice in Sweden

#### **University of Kentucky, Department of Anthropology**

Research Assistant– August 2004 to August 2007

Responsible for the ethnographic component of a NSF project to develop decision support software for welfare case managers, helping them to link families to community resources



**Trees, Water & People, International Non-Governmental Organization**

Development Director/Program Consultant – May 2002 to August 2004

Secured financial support, conducted participatory research, and evaluated community-based sustainable development initiatives in Central America and the American West

**Colorado State University, Department of Anthropology**

Research Assistant – May 2001 through May 2002

Helped to implement a NSF funded study of the informal economy on the Pine Ridge Reservation and conducted independent research on Lakota consumption and exchange

**Colorado State University, Department of Anthropology**

Research Assistant– October 2000 through May 2001

Responsible for data organization, maintenance, and SPSS analysis for a NSF funded study on environmental and human health in Tanzania and Kenya

**Select Honors, Fellowships & Grants**

- 2010 Margaret A. Lantis Award for Outstanding Graduate Research
- 2009 University of Kentucky Graduate Research Travel Award
- 2008 Roy A. Rappaport Student Paper Prize Finalist, Hosted by the Anthropology and Environment Section of the American Anthropological Association
- 2007 Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Dissertation Fieldwork Grant: “Exploring Sustainable Consumerism as a Response to Perceived Environmental Risk” (\$15,000 reduced to \$10,000 due to duplicate funding)
- 2007 J. William Fulbright Fellowship: “Exploring Sustainable Consumerism as a Response to Perceived Environmental Risk” (\$18,500)
- 2007 American-Scandinavian Foundation, Dissertation Grant: “Exploring Sustainable Consumerism as a Response to Perceived Environmental Risk” (\$20,000 reduced to \$7,400 due to duplicate funding)
- 2007 UK Dissertation Enhancement Grant: “Exploring Sustainable Consumerism as a Response to Perceived Environmental Risk” (\$3000)
- 2007 The Swedish Institute, Guest Researcher Fellowship (\$20,000 declined due to duplicate funding)
- 2007 National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant (Recommended but declined due to duplicate funding)
- 2006 Susan Abbot-Jamieson Pre-Dissertation Research Award (\$2,000)
- 2005 University of Kentucky Graduate Research & Travel Grants (\$800)
- 2001 Colorado State University Graduate Travel Grant (\$500)
- 1996 Marion Havighurst Memorial Fellowship (international tuition)

**Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles Accepted for Publication**

- 2010 Isenhour, Cindy. Building Sustainable Societies: A Swedish Case Study on the Limits of Reflexive Modernization. *American Ethnologist* 37(3).
- 2009 Isenhour, Cindy & Matilda Ardenfors. Gender and Sustainable Consumption: Policy Implications. Theme issue, “Gender and Development” *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development* 4(2/3):135-149.

- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy & Beth Goldstein. The Welfare Contract & Critical Case Management. *Journal of Poverty* 12(1).

### **Book Chapters**

- N.D. Isenhour, Cindy. Sacrificing Cultural Capital for Sustainability: Identity, Class, and the Swedish Staycation . Accepted for publication in *Contested Economies: Global Tourism and Cultural Heritage*. Sarah Lyon & Christian Wells, eds. Alta Mira Press.
- 2011 Isenhour, Cindy. On the Challenges of Signaling Ethics without All the Stuff: Tales of Conspicuous Green and Anti-Consumption. In *Ethical Consumption: Social Value and Economic Practice*. Carrier, James G. and Peter Luetchford (eds). New York: Berghahn.
- 2011 Isenhour, Cindy. Belonging. In the *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*. Dale Southerton, editor. Oxford: CQPress.
- 2010 Micheletti, Michele & Cindy Isenhour. Political Consumerism. In *Consumer Behavior in the Nordic Context*. Karin M. Ekström, editor. Stockholm: Studentlitteratur.

### **Editorial Experience**

- N.D. Isenhour, Cindy, Melissa Checker & Gary McDonough. Sustainability as Myth and Practice in the Global City. Under review as a special issue of *City & Society*.

### **Manuscripts in Preparation & Under Review**

- N.D. Isenhour, Cindy. How the Grass Became Greener in the City: Urban Imaginings and Practices of Sustainability. Under review with *City & Society*.
- N.D. Isenhour, Cindy. Trading Fat for Forests: Tales of Environmental Concern, Food and Sustainability in Sweden. Unpublished MS, in preparation for submission to *Ethnology*. Department of Anthropology, University of Kentucky.

### **Recent Presentations**

- 2010 Isenhour, Cindy. Isenhour, Cindy. Sacrificing Cultural Capital for Sustainability: Identity, Class, and the Swedish Staycation. Paper presented to the Society for Economic Anthropology (SEA), April 2010– Tampa, Florida.
- 2010 Isenhour, Cindy. Trading Fat for Forests: Tales of Environmental Concern, Food and Sustainability in Sweden. Paper presented to the Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA), March 2010– Merida.
- 2009 Isenhour, Cindy. How the Grass Became Greener in the City: Urban Imaginings and Practices of Sustainability. Paper presented to the American Anthropological Association (AAA), December 2009 – Philadelphia.
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. Sustainable Consumerism in Sweden: Ecological Risk Perception & Response in the Age of High Consumption. Finalist - Rappaport prize and panel, presented to the AAA, November 2008 - San Francisco.
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. On the Challenges of Signaling Ethics without Stuff: Tales of Conspicuous Non-Consumption. Paper presented to the European Association for Social Anthropology (EASA), August 2008 - Slovenia.

- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. Green & Conspicuous Non-Consumption. Paper presented to the Norwegian Consumer Research Agency (SIFO), August 2008 – Oslo
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. Theorizing “Sustainable” Consumers. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sustainable Consumption Conference, May 2008 in Arlon, Belgium.
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. Ecological Modernization and the Sustainable Consumer in Sweden. Paper presented at the 2008 European Fulbright Seminar, April 2008 - Berlin, Germany.
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. From the Compact to Köpstopp: The Mainstreaming of Sustainable Consumerism? Paper presented at Karlstad University, January 2008 - Karlstad, Sweden.
- 2008 Isenhour, Cindy. Green Consumerism in Sweden: Consumer Culture's Answer to Environmental Adaptation? Paper presented to Luleå Technical University's School of Social Sciences, January 2008 - Luleå, Sweden.
- 2007 Isenhour, Cindy and Beth Goldstein. Disciplining Case Managers: Contestations between Documentary and Discursive Evaluations in a U.S. Welfare Agency. Paper presented to AAA, December 2007 - Washington, D.C.
- 2007 Isenhour, Cindy. The Political Economy of Conspicuous Green Consumption in Sweden's “Classless” Society. Paper presented to the Karlstad University Sustainable Development Cluster, October 2007 in Karlstad, Sweden.
- 2006 Isenhour, Cindy. Moral, Egoistic or Rational?: Comparing Assumptions about Sustainable Consumers in America and Sweden. Poster presented to the SEA, April 2006 - Ventura, CA.
- 2006 Isenhour, Cindy and Beth Goldstein. Social Welfare in the Information Age: Including Communities on the Edge in Software Development. Paper presented to the SFAA, March 2006 - Vancouver, BC.
- 2005 Isenhour, Cindy. The End of the Commodity Chain: Donation Dumping and Environmental Justice on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Paper presented to the AAA, November 2005 in Washington, D.C.
- 2005 Isenhour, Cindy. Prized Possessions: Lakota Value Assignment in Shifting Landscapes. Poster presented to the SEA, April 2005 in Hanover, New Hampshire.
- 2002 Isenhour, Cindy. Following the Buffalo: Comparative Lakota Value Construction and Consumption in Shifting Economic Environments. Paper Presented to the AAA, November 2002 - New Orleans, LA.

**Conferences, Panels and Seminars Organized**

- 2009 Co-Organizer of an invited session entitled, “Sustainability as Myth and Practice in the Global City” for the 2009 American Anthropological Association Meetings. Co-sponsored by the Anthropology and Environment Section and the Society for Urban, National and Transnational/Global Anthropology Section.
- 2008 Organizer of the Sustainable Consumption Roundtable at Stockholm University's Center for Organizational Research with introductions by Richard Wilk & Michele Micheletti
- 2006 Organizer of a session entitled, “The Anthropology of Welfare Bureaucracies” at the 2006 AAA Meetings, with discussions by Sandra Morgen & Catherine Kingfisher

### **Teaching Interests**

The Social Science of Sustainability, International Development Theory & Practice, Economic Anthropology, Political Ecology, Applied Anthropology, North American Anthropology, Cultures of Scandinavia, Urban Anthropology, Consumer Cultures, Anthropological Theory

### **Teaching Experience**

**Instructor: Cultural Diversity in the Modern World**, University of Kentucky  
Solely responsible for a course designed to introduce students to a wide range of human cultural forms. Topics included: subsistence systems; human ecology; political & social organization; kinship; religion; gender & sex; ethnicity, race & racism; and human rights.

Spring 2010 – 38 students

Fall 2009 – 110 students in two sections

**Instructor: Introduction to Anthropology**, University of Kentucky

Solely responsible for a four-field course designed to introduce students to the holistic study of the human species. Topics included: humans in big history, primate & human evolution, human reproduction, language, culture change, subsistence, kinship & political organization

Fall 2008 – 54 students

Winter 2009 – 12 students

**Teaching Assistant: Intro to Cultural Anthropology**, Colorado State University

Responsible for supervised lectures and student evaluations for an introductory course. Topics included: political organization, economy, social hierarchies & class, symbolic & interpretive anthropology, hip-hop culture, Melanesia, Sweden, ethics & methods.

Fall 2001 – 148 students

Spring 2002 – 150 students

**Supervised Teaching: Religion in Society**, Colorado State University

Responsible for supervised lecture and student evaluation for an upper-division course designed to introduce students to theory and diversity in religious practice. Topics included: theory, magic, witchcraft, organized religion, spirituality & oppression, and symbolism

Fall 2000 – 50 students

### **Guest Lectures**

AP300 Anthropological Theory - Department of Anthropology, Colorado State

PS336 Culture and the Individual - Department of Psychology, University of Denver

### **Instructional Training**

University of Kentucky Training Programs: Teaching Assistant Orientation, Effective Classroom Management, Academic Integrity, Technology in the Classroom, Blackboard

## **Professional Affiliations & Service**

American Anthropological Association (AAA)

American Association for Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)

AAA's Anthropology and the Environment Section (A&E)  
Committee Member, "Greening the AAA" Initiative 2008 - 2009

Society for Economic Anthropology (SEA)

Society for Applied Anthropology (SFAA)  
Coordinator, Human Organization Editor Search 2009

University of Kentucky Anthropology Graduate Student Association  
Vice-President 2006-2007, Distinguished Lecture Committee 2006-2007,  
Secretary 2005-2006, Fundraising Chair 2005-2006

University of Kentucky Department of Anthropology  
Applied Anthropology Faculty Search Committee, Student Representative 2008  
Departmental Colloquium Committee, Student Representative 2006

## **Media & Community Outreach**

April 2010 "[Graduate Student Spotlight](#)" UK, Department of Anthropology

February 2010 "[Alumni News](#)" Colorado State University, Department of Anthropology

September 2009 "[Success Stories](#)" University of Kentucky, College of Arts and Sciences

September 2008 "[Hon Studerar God Konsumtion](#)" Miljömagasinet

December 2007 "[Marsch för Klimatet i Stockholm](#)" Dagens Nyheter