

Material Attachment, Identity, and Sustainability: Understanding Consumers' Ethical Decision-Making in the Free Market

Evan Berry

Department of Geography, McGill University, Montréal (Québec), Canada

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Supervisors: Dr. Kevin Manaugh and Dr. Sarah Turner

North American consumer culture, paired with deregulated neoliberal capitalism, has created a global system of production accounting for a wide range of problems, such as environmental degradation and human rights violations. However, despite many educated consumers' knowledge of the negative impacts of these commodity chains, many still neglect to make sustainable purchases. This thesis investigates the accessibility of sustainable consumption to college-aged consumers from the United States by understanding where these individuals learn about sustainability, how sustainable decision-making differs among products they buy, and what barriers prevent these consumers from making these decisions. This thesis examines 30 semi-structured interviews with students discussing topics such as sustainability values, knowledge of commodity chains, and influences on their consumption. The key findings suggest differences in sustainable decision-making between certain products, as well as a socioeconomically based opportunity gap shaping individuals' access to sustainability-related knowledge and sustainable purchasing decisions. These findings suggest room for growth away from "green" niche markets and classist cultures around sustainability to accommodate more diverse consumer populations.

Determinants of Participants' Sustainable Consumption

