

**PUTTING A PRICE ON ENVIRONMENTALISM: A STUDY OF
MAINSTREAM ENVIRONMENTALISM, CONSUMERISM, AND
CLASS**

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that within Canadian society, mainstream environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity that fundamentally excludes low income households and serves to support a capitalist economy. Historically, humans' relationship to the environment has been based on economic benefit and so people readily accept this construction of environmentalism as it conforms to established social norms. Contemporary research has shown that eco-labeling is one of the primary marketing tools that give the impression of social structural change while keeping capitalism intact.

This thesis critically examines documents from three Canadian sources: the Toronto Star newspaper, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government. By applying the theories of social constructionism and representation, I show that these documents and articles have multiple levels and meanings about environmentalism that favour the capitalist agenda. This analysis also identifies four main ways in which these sources contribute to and reinforce the exclusion of low income families from Canadian mainstream environmentalism: 1) sources primarily promote 'green' consumables and disregard the associated cost of these goods, 2) sources do not acknowledge the constraints associated with level of access to non-consumable green resources, 3) sources shape environmental problems as economic issues by focusing on corporations, and 4) increased time commitments associated with green behaviour are not acknowledged. These three sources would suggest that the current form of environmentalism, as a consumer based construct, exclude low income household in mainstream Canadian society. By illuminating some of the problems with the current construction of environmentalism, it becomes possible to construct new perspectives on environmentalism that are both effective and inclusive.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Climate change, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss are worsening and are three ways in which humans are reaching the Earth's environmental limits. Once these limits are reached, the damage will be irreversible and the environment will be affected in ways that have been unparalleled for centuries. Research from across the globe has predicted and established the impending catastrophic and irreversible changes these environmentally-based problems will generate if left untreated (Hannigan 1995; Cudworth 2003; M'Gonigle and Starke 2006; Barry 2007; Friedman 2008; Gore 2009; Overpeck and Weiss 2009; McKibben 2010; Hart 2011; Lynas 2011; David Suzuki Foundation 2013a). These warnings have generated awareness and solutions amongst various nations, governments, and industry alike; however, the success and efficiency of these are highly debated (Eriksson 2003; Friedman 2008; Gore 2009; Singer 2010; Lynas 2011). Because humans are responsible for this damage, it also falls upon us to make the necessary changes to rectify these problems, the act of which has become known as the environmental movement.

The environmental movement has significantly evolved since its roots in the 1960s. In 1962 Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring* which brought awareness concerning the harmful consequences of pesticide use. This book also demonstrated to citizens that certain policies and practices should and could be questioned for the sake of personal health and the environment. Carson eventually used her credibility among citizens to turn to nature conservation and Americans responded. Carson has been cited as one of the first people to begin the idea of environmental consciousness (Black 2006:122-125). Carson's legacy paved the way for the development and a rise in membership of environmentalist groups and non-government organizations throughout the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Sierra Club and the National Parks and

Conservation Association (Black 2006:126). These groups primarily lobbied policy makers to create new environmental laws that would serve to conserve the environment, control the environmental impact of corporations, and challenge established norms (Black 2006:126-127). The 1980s and early 1990s saw a surge of eco-radicalism which utilized public and often damaging forms of environmental protest (Black 2006:129). Deep ecology was another extreme group that emerged in this period, focusing on dismantling contemporary society. Eco-radicalism and deep ecology were viewed as inaccessible to most people who subscribed to middle-class ideals (Black 2006:129). In order to make environmentalism more accessible, the contemporary environmental movement has slowly started to shy away from these roots of political activism¹ to one where citizens can participate in environmentalism through their consumptive power (Sandilands 1999; Erikson 2004; Pedersen and Neergaard 2006; Moisander 2007; Singer 2010). This new structure of environmentalism will be examined within this research.

Pederson and Neergaard (2006) have argued that eco-labeling, the practice of corporations producing goods with labels that imply environmentally-friendly benefits, has become one of the primary marketing tools that give the impression of social structural change while keeping capitalism intact. Many mainstream environmentalist solutions that are used to address environmental deterioration have focused on the individual and the family participating in acts of consumerism within Western society (Sandilands 1993; Moisander 2007; Singer 2010; Lynas 2011). In this context mainstream environmentalism will refer to any products or activities that require optional spending and contain labels such as, but not limited to, ‘environmentally-friendly’, ‘green’, ‘sustainable’ or ‘organic’.² Throughout this research I will demonstrate how mainstream environmentalism has been constructed as a primarily consumption-based activity.

¹ Although political activism still exists it is not a common part of environmentalism for the everyday citizen.

² Examples of participating in environmentalism through consumption can be the spending of income on household renovations, hybrid cars, or everyday household items that are labelled as environmentally-friendly.

However, this type of environmentalism requires surplus income, time, and access to resources, making it less accessible to those with a low income status (Burningham and Thrush 2001; Moisander 2007). I argue, therefore, that within a Canadian context, mainstream environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity that fundamentally excludes low income households.

‘Poverty’ can be defined in a myriad of ways and an individual can be said to be living in poverty based on subjective factors that also denote a sense of status; given this, Statistics Canada uses the term ‘low income’ to calculate if an individual is economically deprived in comparison to other Canadians (Statistics Canada 2011:6). Because my study is based within Canada, utilizes government and institutional documents, and does not include external factors such as social status, I will apply Statistic Canada’s definition of ‘low income’ to refer to those living in a “situation in which the income is lower than a level deemed sufficient to meet basic needs” (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2008). This living situation is determined by a calculation based on a family or household income (Statistics Canada 2011:6).³ When a family is living below the low income cut-off they are below an income threshold that necessitates a greater percentage (approximately 20 percent) of income to be devoted towards basic human necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing than higher income families (Statistics Canada 2011:7). This cut-off fluctuates and is calculated based on a number of factors including family and community size (Statistics Canada 2011:7).⁴ While those who are considered part of low income households can be further separated into different groups based on education, occupation, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, or region this dissertation will primarily focus on the way low income affects participation rates in environmentalism.

³ A family is defined as any group of people living in the same dwelling that are related by “blood, marriage, common-law relationship or adoption” (Statistics Canada 2011:6). A household can refer to an individual or group of people who live in the same dwelling (Statistics Canada 2011:6). A single individual could be implied when referring to a low income family or household.

⁴ For further explanation regarding the calculation of low income cut off please refer to Statistics Canada (2011) and Murphy, Zhang and Dionne (2012).

This construction of mainstream environmentalism excludes low income individuals due to their inability to consume as much as the average citizen. This is not to argue that people living in low income households do not participate in environmentally-friendly behaviour,⁵ as studies have shown that those living in low income situations are more likely to reuse items, nor that all environmentally-friendly practices which are rooted in consumption are inherently negative or will not help the environment.⁶ Rather, I will argue that constructing mainstream environmentalism primarily through consumption excludes those living in low income households.

Much of the literature surrounding environmentalism has examined issues involving consumer practices, particularly greenwashing, which refers to situations in which products are advertised to have ecological benefit but do not deliver (Dahl 2010:247).⁷ Factors that encourage or dissuade environmentally-friendly behaviour have also been the subject of numerous research papers (Mohai 1984; Bratt 1999:650; Burningham and Thrush 2001, 2003; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:849; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27; Pendersen and Neergaard 2006; Dobson 2007; Kilbourne and Pickett 2007: 885; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010; Albayrak et al. 2011; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). This study will attempt to bridge the gap between these two research areas in order to understand how environmentalism has become institutionalized and part of a wider cultural norm of consumerism that significantly contributes to exclusionary practices. Products are not only being greenwashed but environmentalism is being promoted, perceived, and treated as a consumer activity. As such, this study seeks to understand if this consumerist and exclusionary ideology is embedded within a wider cultural message that is being promoted by very influential Canadian claim-makers. I will

⁵ Environmentally-friendly behaviour can be defined as those of any individual, whose purchase behaviour and actions are mindful of the harmful consequences these actions can have on the environment (Moisander 2007:405; Albayrak et al 2011:189).

⁶ Still, many products are greenwashed, an issue that will be discussed below.

⁷ There are seven different ways that companies can commit greenwashing; for a full list and descriptions please refer to Dahl (2010:249).

specifically look at the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government in order to understand how environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer activity within a Canadian context. Although there may be other institutions that also promote environmentalism as a consumer activity, or with more frequency, these claim-makers are predominantly considered credible by the public and are widespread within Canada making them ideal for this research.

Chapter Two will consist of a literature review that will focus on a number of themes which characterize the state of contemporary environmentalism, such as, class and environmentalism, what persuades individuals to participate in environmentalism, the commercialization of the environment and the capitalist agenda, the importance that society places on capitalism and its impact on environmentalism, how viewing nature as a resource and reinforcing capitalism has led to the privatization and commercialization of environmentalism, and greenwashing. This chapter will also provide insight into how the individual perceives environmentalism and which cultural practices have become constructed as important.

Chapter Three will outline my methodology and describe in more detail why I chose, and how I analyzed articles and documents from the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government. In my fourth chapter I will review theories of social constructionism and representation in order to explore how social norms can be shaped by claim-makers and how underlying cultural norms are constructed. Environmentalism has become dominated by claim-makers such as (but not limited to) the media, scientists, governments, and non-profit organizations. Social constructionism also helps explain how environmentalism is most likely to be constructed by prominent claim-makers and how specific claim-making techniques can construct environmentalism as a consumer activity; given this, social constructionism is a highly useful theory to understand the ways in which environmentalism is constructed within Canadian society. Representation theory will allow me to accept the

denotative meaning of these articles and documents as well as interpret possible connotative meanings which contribute to the understanding of the underlying discourse of consumption that has become normalized within society. In this way environmentalism can be represented through the language used in these documents so that a new meaning of environmentalism is constructed.

Chapter Five will bridge my literature review and theory to provide an analysis demonstrating how mainstream environmentalism in Canada has been constructed as a consumer-based activity that excludes low income families. Finally, my last chapter will offer some conclusions, limitations, and future research directions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review will be divided into six sections that will cover: 1) Class and environmentalism, 2) Personal motivations for participating or disengaging from environmentally-friendly behaviour, 3) Commercialization of the environment and the capitalist agenda, 4) The impact of capitalism on environmentalism, 5) Privatization of environmentalism, and 6) Greenwashing and corporate intentions. The purpose of this literature review is twofold. First, it will provide a basic overview of the state of environmentalism in the twenty-first century in first-world Western societies. Second, it will demonstrate how low income families may perceive environmentalism and the ways in which low income families are currently excluded from mainstream environmentalism.

Examining studies that unpack personal motivations for participation in green behaviour will allow me to analyze underlying cultural messages through the use of social constructionism and representation theory. This will be followed by a review of how the environment has been commercialized in order to fit the capitalist agenda. The importance of capitalism within society will then be explored as this has contributed to the construction of environmentalism as a private and consumer-based activity. Lastly, I will review the literature on greenwashing and the impact this marketing has on environmentalism and its construction as a consumer-based activity. Promoting false green products reinforces the belief that the environment itself should be treated as a commodity and helped using consumerism. In addition, promoting green purchasing serves to hinder environmentalism by altering citizens' perceptions of what constitutes effective green products and actions. These six areas of concentration will provide an understanding of the ways in which environmentalism is being constructed, perceived, and acted out within twenty-first century Western society.

2.1 Class and Environmentalism

There are many factors that contribute to an individual's likelihood of participating in environmentalism. Several studies have demonstrated a correlation between access to resources, both personal and external, and environmentally-friendly behaviour (Bratt 1999; Burningham and Thrush 2001, 2003; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010). Practical barriers that those living in low income neighbourhoods may face which the middle and upper class typically do not experience, such as limited access to garbage bins, recycling, education, and public transportation, have been seen to influence environmentally-friendly behaviour (Burningham and Thrush 2001; Wilson and Snell 2010). This suggests that a low income status is a significant factor in determining whether an individual will participate in environmentally-friendly behaviour.

The lack of resources available to those living in a low income family is often considered a deterrent to green action. In 2010 Wilson and Snell conducted two focus groups during which they interviewed 'socially deprived young people' to determine their view, knowledge, and concern surrounding environmental problems. The 'socially deprived' youth who participated in Wilson and Snell's 2010 study expressed more enthusiasm for activities that were convenient and easy to participate in, such as recycling at school, an attitude which was also consistent with studies conducted with adults (Mohai 1984; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). The youths in these low income communities expressed concern about the environment and were knowledgeable regarding degradation within the environment⁸ but their actions did little to support this concern. For example, trash cans were described as commonly being unavailable (so they could not be used as weapons) and this led to higher rates of littering – a problem that is not faced in wealthier communities (Wilson and Snell 2010:160). This illustrates how support for the environment does not always lead to participation in environmentally-friendly behaviour due to a

⁸ Elementary school (specifically geography and science classes) was the primary way these 'socially deprived youth' gathered information about environmental degradation (Wilson and Snell 2010:159).

lack of resources, a theme that was prominent among many papers and studies (Bratt 1999:650; Burningham and Thrush 2001; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:849; Pendersen and Neergaard 2006; Dobson 2007; Kilbourne and Pickett 2007: 885; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010; Albayrak et al. 2011; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). This also demonstrates that knowledge and education regarding the environment does not necessarily alter behaviour, complicating how a low income status will affect environmentally-friendly behaviour.

Adults living in low income neighbourhoods also demonstrated reasons for not behaving in an environmentally-friendly manner that did not directly correlate to cost but still revolved around their low income status (Burningham and Thursh's 2001). For example, limiting car use was not a practical option for those living in a low income neighbourhood, since public transit did not service their area (Burningham and Thrush 2001:10). Additionally, recycling was not picked up in their community and recycling plants were regarded as too far away to be practically utilized by low income households; as a result, recycling was not a frequent activity (Burningham and Thrush 2001:11). Cost of environmentally-friendly goods and activities has also been shown to play a significant role regarding an individual's level of participation in environmentalism, especially for those who hold a low income status. Moisander (2007:405) proposes the argument that action is usually determined by one's ability to accomplish this action, and ability is determined by resources and opportunity.⁹ For example, moving to the parts of the city where less driving is required and recycling services are more abundant was regarded as impractical due to higher rent and more expensive groceries in the area (Burningham and Thrush 2001:10). Some low income families explained they lacked sufficient information and did not know where to obtain education surrounding green issues (Burningham and Thrush 2001:15). What the above examples have demonstrated is that low income families may face additional barriers when trying

⁹This argument was supported by Morland et al. (2002) and Baker, Schootman and Barnidge (2006) who argued that low income families are less likely to have healthy dietary practices due to a lack of resources and opportunity.

to participate in environmentally-friendly activities that do not directly involve monetary reasons but still revolve around their low income status.

Even though low income families could be perceived as frequently participating in environmentalism it is a type of environmentalism that is considered more practical and immediate. Since members of a low income family cannot consume as much as mainstream society they are forced to reuse items (Wilson and Snell 2010:162). However, it does not matter how effective reusing items is as an environmentally-friendly act because environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity, making the symbolic act of consumption more important. This construction serves to exclude low income families from mainstream environmentalism because they are unable to consume as much as the average individual.

2.2 Factors that Encourage or Inhibit Environmentally-friendly Behaviour

Several studies have shown that, even in the middle class where there is existing support for the environment, people participate significantly more in mandatory environmentalism than voluntary (Bratt 1999; Wilson and Snell 2001; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). As mentioned earlier, professed support for the environment not synchronizing with behaviour is a significant theme within environment literature (Bratt 1999:650; Burningham and Thrush 2001; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:849; Pendersen and Neergaard 2006; Dobson 2007; Kilbourne and Pickett 2007: 885; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010; Albayrak et al. 2011; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). This begs the question, why do individuals who claim that they support environmentalism and have access to resources, opt out of participation? Studies have revealed many factors that contribute to an individual's level of dedication to environmentalism. The perceived outcome of an individual's actions by outsiders did not seem to affect personal norms; however, personal norms did affect a participant's degree of environmentalism (McMackin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:859), although another study revealed

that status and symbolism were important factors (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27).¹⁰ Common reasons for the disengagement of the middle class from environmentalism included feelings of disempowerment (McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:859), a belief that they could rely on the collective to be environmentally-friendly (Bratt 1999:631), low trust in their government (Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011:278), and scepticism of the actual effectiveness of their actions (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:24, 25; Albayrak et al. 2011:191). As discussed above, barriers to low income families also included environmentalism being too costly (Burningham and Thrush 2001, 2003; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:24, 25) as well as the lack of access to resources or opportunity (Mohai 1984:822, 831; Burningham and Thrush 2001, 2003; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:850; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010:160, 163-165). While the cost of environmentally-friendly products and lack of access to resources or opportunity could also be considered barriers to green behaviour to those with a higher economic status, low income families are affected disproportionately.

Support for environmentalism can come from people's belief that their actions will have an impact on the environment, positive or negative (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:24-25; Albayrak et al. 2011:190-191). Having knowledge about ecological problems and the consequences of one's actions can result in behaviour change regarding perceived environmentally-friendly practices, such as the increased consumption of goods labelled as sustainable.¹¹ Kilbourne and Pickette argue that this change in behaviour occurs because people "experience cognitive dissonance that must be resolved to preserve their self-image. Individuals simply do not like to see themselves as profligate consumers whose desire for material goods is destroying the environment" (2007:891). People who have knowledge about ecological problems

¹⁰ This will need further study to determine whether status and the possible stigmatization of those who are not perceived as participating in environmentally-friendly behaviour is an important factor. The studies were conducted four years apart which could suggest that status has become a more important factor.

¹¹ Goods will refer to all objects for retail sale including but not limited to food, clothing, and items for personal use.

resolve their cognitive dissonance in two main ways, by changing their views surrounding consumption or by changing their views regarding the consequences of their actions (Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:891). Materialism has become a driving force within Western society and as a result it is generally considered easier for people to alter the perceived consequences of their actions than their actual consumptive practices (Jhally 2005:8-11; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:891). While environmentalism has only been prominent within mainstream Western society since the 1970s, consumption has been a significant part of society since the industrial revolution (Cudworth 2003:66; Jhally 2005:10). Consumerism has only increased with the advent of advertising and when advertisement agencies realized in the 1920s that they could imply that human desires, such as happiness or love, could be obtained by purchasing objects, materialism and the general passiveness surrounding environmentalism increased (Jhally 2005:10). Materialism has become socially constructed as an important value within North American culture, it has become the standard through which many value judgements are made, and has helped shaped our identities (Jhally 2005:5). This creates tension with environmentalist knowledge because environmentalism typically tries to decrease consumption and any “information that is inconsistent with one’s primary values or that creates dissonance within the self-image, is selectively removed and/or distorted to conform to that image” (Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:891). Since consumption is a prominent value within mainstream Western society those things that interfere with this value, such as ecological risk, become secondary. By purchasing products citizens believe to be green, individuals can resolve their cognitive dissonance as they are simultaneously following the cultural norms of consumption while believing they are contributing to eco-sustainability.

Additional factors that can contribute to participation in sustainable behaviour include the belief that environmentally-friendly upgrades will make homes more comfortable or more efficient (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27), setting a good example for children through

general altruism (McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:858-860), having high trust in the government (Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011:278), habit or because of a family member's influence (Bratt 1999:632; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011:268), convenience (Mohai 1984; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011; Bratt 1999:635, McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:850; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27; Wilson and Snell 2010:160), if it is compulsory (Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011:269), if disincentives or incentives are offered or if it is cost efficient (McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:859; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27; Wilson and Snell 2010:154), and health and safety (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27). These factors contribute to an individual's willingness to spend excess money, time, and other resources towards environmentally-friendly behaviour (Cho and Krasser 2011:4). People thus participate in environmentalism not necessarily because of concern for environmental wellbeing but for personal benefits.

Many of the studies cited above were conducted years apart but all focus on reasons why professed support for the environment does not always align with action. The variety of factors identified in these studies makes it difficult to pinpoint a single influence that determines whether an individual will act in a sustainable way or not, but cost, convenience, and access to resources were at least mentioned in almost all studies (Sandilands 1993; Bratt 1999; Burningham and Thrush 2001; Mertig and Dunlap 2001; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002; Eriksson 2003; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006; Dobson 2007; Moisander 2007; Singer 2010; Wilson and Snell 2010; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011), demonstrating that economic status plays an important role in environmentalism.¹²

¹² There are a number of other factors that can influence environmentally-friendly behaviour such as education, occupation, race gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and region; however, these important points will be not be addressed here due to length and time constraints though they should be given further consideration.

2.3 Commercialization of the Environment and the Capitalist Agenda

This section will explore the ways in which policy makers treat the environment as a commodity and resource used to advance the capitalist economy and the negative effect this can have on the way the environment is perceived.¹³ As a result of the environment being treated as a resource, environmentalism has also been constructed through a consumerist discourse in order to offer a solution to environmental degradation but more importantly preserve the economic system. The next section will explore the ways in which the economy and the environment are perceived as being supported by constructing environmentalism in economic terms, which can have negative social consequences.¹⁴

Capitalism and the consumption of goods and services has become the basis of developed nations' economic systems (Barry 2007:217; Singer 2010). Governments and corporations advance their capitalist agendas by treating the environment as a resource, something to be dominated and exploited. This is demonstrated on a yearly basis as many environmental policies are only issued if the benefits outweigh the costs.¹⁵ Examples of nature being treated as a resource can be found throughout history. In the early 1900s nature was viewed purely as a source of resources used to advance capitalist markets (Hannigan 1995:114). This inevitably led to the treatment of the environment as simply a resource, negating all intrinsic worth. In 1919 America's national park service known for tree conservation, was significantly advanced when the Southern Pacific Railroad offered support because they realized that the railroads could provide easy access to the parks for tourists that would generate revenue (Hannigan 1995:114). The railroad even distributed millions of pieces of literature that promoted the beauty of the national parks in order to generate business (Hannigan 1995:114). The willingness to cut down

¹³ Governments and policy makers can have a considerable influence on social norms and therefore have a significant effect on the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity which excludes low income families.

¹⁴ Consumerism may also be an ineffective environmentalist tool. I will not explore this issue but will examine greenwashing in particular below.

¹⁵ For example, if a policy can help generate capital or prevent resource depletion.

trees in order to promote national park tourism demonstrates that tree conservation was considered secondary to the profits that could possibly be generated by tourism.

Modern day exploitation of even pristine and remote environments continues, as can be seen with the Tatshenshini River, located in the Yukon, British Columbia, and Alaska. Cited as one of the last wild frontiers, it was slated to be the location of an open pit mine that would include the construction of a road right along the river (Hart 2011:4). Environment groups were able to argue that the river should be left untouched because its ‘unique biological and cultural diversity’ would hold interest for science as well as generate revenue through tourism (Hart 2011:4). Mainstream environmentalism no longer includes the conservation of nature that is not vital to society; instead, environmentalism is constructed as a consumer-based activity that must benefit capitalist companies (Barry 2007:225). Using a cost-benefit analysis as an argument has made valuing land for its intrinsic worth an archaic notion and reinforces the belief that land is a commodity to be traded and negotiated based on its monetary value. The problem of using economic benefit as a standard through which to view environmentalism is that “the privileged position occupied by economics in environmental policy-making has the effect of drowning out other ‘voices’, other forms of reasoning, valuing and thinking about the environment...economic theory functions as the dominant way in which environmental policy-making is debated, thought about and ultimately decided” (Barry 2007:223-224). While preserving great areas of land is an important task, feeding into the culture of the capitalist economy can have many negative social (and environmental) consequences. This is not to say that economics will not play a part in solving the environmental crisis, but having it as the dominant ideology severely limits the ways in which mainstream environmentalism and practical actors can approach conservation.

2.4 The Impact of Capitalism on Environmentalism

This section will look at how constructing environmentalism as a consumption-based activity has been readily accepted by audiences because of the importance placed on capitalism

and its standing as a social norm. Economic theories will be very briefly presented to help explain how capitalism has been constructed as an indispensable part of society. The next section will explore how environmentalism, as a way to support the economy, has been constructed and internalized as an individual or privatized activity.

The political ecology theory argues that the treadmill of production creates the “inherent need of an economic system to continually yield a profit by creating consumer demand for new products” (Schnaiberg cited in Hannigan 1995:19-20; see also Cudworth 2003:107). Political ecology can provide a partial explanation for how the environment has come to be viewed from a cost-benefit standpoint. Norms are influenced by what the political ecology theory calls the productivist ethic – the “belief that constant economic expansion is a necessary and inescapable component of capitalist economy, that such growth is socially beneficial for rich and poor alike, and that if left unfettered it will produce solutions to societal problems of inequality and environmental degradation” (Singer 2010:131). Those who follow the productivist ethic believe the two main options for the economy are to either grow or collapse (Singer 2010:132). This fosters a ‘growth for the sake of growth’ mentality that does not consider long-term sustainable development (Barry 2007:210, 226). The apparent necessity of economic growth does not take into account the planet’s inability to support the continuous and unrelenting use of many finite resources, which is ironic considering the way in which so many economies rely on the Earth’s resources (Barry 2007:207; Lynas 2011; Singer 2010:133).

Alongside scientific and technological innovation, capitalism is an important part of Western society’s relationship to the environment. Many sources argue that environmentalism is no longer an optional activity and that current practices must be adjusted (Hannigan 1995; Cudworth 2003; M’Gonigle and Starke 2006; Barry 2007; Friedman 2008; Gore 2009; Overpeck and Weiss 2009; McKibben 2010; Hart 2011; Lynas 2011; David Suzuki Foundation 2013a) however most nations are unwilling to let their economic system falter. Not only are many

institutions and governments directly responsible for commoditizing resources in order to generate national profits while disregarding the limit of environmental boundaries, but politicians are also often seen as solely focused on advancing those who support them, the capitalist economy, and corporations (Schnaiberg cited in Hannigan 1995:19; Cudworth 2003:82). The combination of these institutional practices results in the environment being viewed as a means to an end: profit. Political ecology argues that the “individual’s consumption is not the problem; the problem is an economic system that is dependent on the expansion of consumer markets” (Sandilands 1993:46; see also Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:885, 891). The environment therefore becomes perceived and treated as if it is only useful so far as it can provide resources that will contribute to economic needs (Cudworth 2003:82; Barry 2007:214). This forces policymakers to examine resources solely in terms of cost-benefit, which does not account for latent benefits such as intrinsic beauty, or how depletion of different resources can contribute to environmental tipping points. Since economic growth is not typically known to have limits, this puts a huge strain on the environment (Barry 2007:214). Taking the economy into consideration above all else has become the norm within Western society which leaves environmentalism as a secondary concern (Barry 2007:222).¹⁶

2.5 Privatization of Environmentalism

Western society has based its value judgements around the economy to the point that the environment is no longer an important consideration when making political or economic decisions (Barry 2007:207) while conversely, when making decisions regarding the environment, the economy remains the primary concern. As a result, environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based privatized activity because it helps generate spending and satisfies the need to

¹⁶ There have been attempts to alter the economy in ways that include the environment such as ecological economics and green political economy, however these remain as only subsets of economic thought and the dominant forms of political economy remain intact (Barry 2007:227-238). For more information on ecological economics and green political economy please refer to Barry 2007:227-238.

consume. By understanding why environmentalism has been constructed and accepted as an individual or privatized consumer activity it becomes clear why low income families are excluded from environmentalism.

Consumption has become so normalized it has become a part of our identities and can significantly influence how people structure their homes and lives, making it difficult to change any practices that involve consumerism or create social norms that do not involve consumerism (Jhally 2005:5). Given this, environmentalism is more readily embraced when presented in economic terms but this serves to exclude people living in low income households who have less revenue with which to consume. Treating nature as a commodity has become so embedded within society that “most people would go along with the economic view of the natural environment, i.e. that it has only instrumental value to humans and its instrumental value is of an economic form. This economic value of the natural environment is in terms of its function as a ‘resource’ or ‘input’ to the human economy” (Barry 2007:239). In this way nature is perceived as useful only insofar as it can benefit citizens economically which aligns with how policy makers view the environment.¹⁷ Individuals thus internalize environmentalism as a consumption-based activity.

As environmentalism gains traction, it will become increasingly important for governments to balance their obligations to help develop businesses within the ecological demands from various social groups. To do this, the government constructs environmentalism as an individualized and consumer-based activity which reconciles the tensions between business and voter sentiments by creating environmentally-friendly activities that involve consumption (Hannigan 1995:20). This allows the government to improve economic growth, in addition to increasing their perceived morality by citizens (Hart 2011:69-72). Hart argues that the Canadian government encourages its citizens to view the environment through a cost-benefit lens, ensuring

¹⁷ Advocacy groups also reinforce this notion of the environment only being useful for its economic benefits when they frame their arguments through a cost-benefit lens.

that when citizens are making choices regarding environmentalism they react properly so that participating in environmentalism becomes a way to control citizen's' behaviour (Hart 2011:56). Environmentalism is also promoted today through the colloquial mantra of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' which contributes to environmentalism becoming a privatized activity. As a result of this privatization of environmentalism, the "social and economic relations [that are] destructive to the environment remain fundamentally intact" (Sandilands 1993:46). That is to say, if environmentalism is constructed as a consumer activity then the underlying practices that contribute to the degradation of the environment do not need to be addressed and the dominant discourse within society, in this case, consumerism, remains unchallenged. Sandilands and others argue that privatized actions such as reducing, reusing, recycling, and consuming green products are political activities and at best stall a changing relationship between society and the environment, and at worst will hinder solutions completely (Sandilands 1993:46; Cudworth 2003:82-83; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:888). Sandilands argues that privatizing green action carries many political nuances:

The privatization of environmental change undermines both collective and individual resistance; it turns politics into actions such as squashing tin cans, morality into not buying overpackaged muffins, and environmentalism into taking your own cloth bag to the grocery store. None of these actions challenges capitalist economic growth; none of these actions makes public or collective or co-operative the process of ecological restoration; none of these actions provokes a serious examination of the social relations and structures that have brought about our current crisis. Rather, the idea that these actions are part of "saving the earth" would seem to turn attention away from the subversive, collective, or public solutions. In short, environmental politics are not, and cannot be, simply a question of life-style. Yet they are fast becoming entrenched in the private sphere; indeed, they are taking the shape of a progressively more intrusive moral code at the expense of sustained political critique (Sandilands 1993:46).

In this way, the underlying structures that have led to degradation within the environment are left unchallenged and environmentalism can be constructed as a consumer-based activity that is primarily the responsibility of the individual. Privatization also means that there is increased unpaid labour at home, which as explained above, can be a major deterrent to environmentally-friendly actions. It has been argued that eco-labeling has become one of the primary marketing

tools that give the impression of social structural change while keeping capitalism intact (Sandilands 1993:47; Cudworth 2003:82-83; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007). Green consumerism reinforces the belief that environmentalism is the responsibility of the individual and not corporations.

2.6 Greenwashing and Corporate Intentions

Greenwashing has become a serious concern within the literature on environmentalism.¹⁸

While the existence of greenwashing indicates that there is an increased desire for environmentally-friendly goods, products and company policies labelled as sustainable that do not deliver provide no real positive change to the environment. It has been shown that consumers are increasingly willing to pay more for products they believe are ecologically sound and because corporations are trying to turn a profit, supposedly green products are becoming increasingly available (Sandilands 1993:45). However, there is very little regulation within Canada or the United States regarding company policy and the advertising of products as environmentally-friendly; corporations are able to manipulate consumers' activist ideologies by making any claims they wish in regards to the sustainability of their products (Sandilands 1993:45; Eriksson 2003; Ramus and Montiel 2005:377; Dahl 2010:248). In addition, companies that publicize their sustainable policies do not necessarily need to be committed to following those policies because there is little regulation regarding what constitutes an environmental policy; this can serve to mislead the public into falsely believing a corporation is part of an environmentally-friendly industry (Ramus and Montiel 2005:378, 383).¹⁹

¹⁸ Terrachoice identified "2,219 products making green claims...98% of those products were guilty of greenwashing" (Dahl 2010:247).

¹⁹ Environmental policies are different from basic compliance laws, in that environmental policy can be vague and is not regulated. A company can be said to have an environmental policy if it "commits to more than regulatory compliance and *sustainable development* to refer to any policy, such as reduced use of fossil fuels, that is aimed at creating an environmentally sustainable business" (Ramus and Montiel 2005:378).

Companies are significantly more likely to create an environmentally-friendly policy or product if there is a perceived economic benefit (Ramus and Montiel 2005:408). Since there is no regulation, if consumers believe a company to be credible there is very little downside to greenwashing and it can only improve corporations' reputation or revenue (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:19). It is also argued that companies often align themselves with specific causes such as environmentalism in order to appear morally upright and thus obtain a stronger consumer base by seeming more trustful (King 2006: 12; Ramus and Montiel 2005:378). Because there is almost always an economic benefit for companies that issue environmental policies the capitalist market expects companies to issue environmental policies regardless of intended action (Ramus and Montiel 2005:278, 386, 409). Expecting green policies and products encourages greenwashing²⁰ and reinforces the association between industry and consumption-based environmentalism. This not only inflates the perceived level of ecological concern for both corporations and consumers but it also makes it difficult for consumers who genuinely want to participate in environmentalism to accomplish such a task (Moisander 2007:405). If all greenwashed products were actually environmentally-friendly they would serve a legitimate function within environmentalism, but in reality, these products only serve to construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity as other environmentalist options are not often explored. My argument is not to debase all green products as frauds or suggest that they cannot offer some benefit to society or the environment, as there certainly are products out there that will genuinely improve quality of life, the environment, or offer safer alternatives to current practices. The issue however, is that the number of greenwashed products is far greater than the number of products that actually offer a real benefit to society and the environment.

There are a number of official certifications that products can obtain to substantiate claims that they are environmentally-friendly. Energy Star, for example, tests and regulates the

²⁰ As not all companies have actual sustainable goods but are expected to produce them.

products they certify (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:32-33).²¹ Various labels, however, are often offered on a host of products and unless consumers are familiar with all of the certifications, they may not be able judge the relative merits of these labels. Many consumers are unaware of the significance of eco-labels and when an eco-label is even identified many consumers could not give the correct meaning (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:19; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:31; Dahl 2010:250). While creating a label that evokes an ecological feeling is not false per se, it misleads consumers into believing that a company is altering their business models to be environmentally-friendly when really they are just altering their marketing strategies.²² This lack of knowledge surrounding eco-labels makes it easier for companies to manipulate consumer beliefs and convince them that a product that is not sustainable may in fact be so. However, too much confusion surrounding eco-labels can also make consumers more skeptical of green products overall, making consumers less likely to purchase any green products (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:19-20; Dahl 2010:250). Some companies do receive ecological certifications through independent labels which have been verified by government approved companies; however, many companies will simply give themselves the appearance of being ecologically certified²³ (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:17; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:32-33). Third party labels which are generally seen as more stringent and regulated when endorsing products with eco-labels are far outnumbered by private greenwashed labels. As a result it is much harder for third party labels to gain the trust of consumers, especially with the lack of knowledge surrounding eco-labels (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:20; Dahl 2010:251-252).

²¹ Although some research has shown that Energy Star has also greenwashed products (Dahl 2010:252).

²² For a more in depth description of which companies specifically use eco-labels and the history behind eco-labels please refer to Pedersen and Neergaard (2006:18) and Dahl (2010:250-252).

²³ One way of doing this is that some products that claim to be green suggest that they have 'eliminated' something that they never originally contained. For example, a company may advertise their product is 'now BPA Free', even if their product never originally contained Bisphenol A. Companies can also use symbols that are associated with environmentalism such as a water droplet, a tree or the colour green and in doing so invoke subjective associations from consumers, making them more likely to purchase the product (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:19; Dahl 2010:249).

Companies and citizens can also be perceived as altruistic by participating in events such as ‘Earth Day’ and there is little call to further action than simply participating in fundraisers of this type (King 2006:41). When the government and corporations provide citizens with these outlets of consumption and fundraising events, it ensures that the responsibility of environmentalism lies with the individual and the family, resulting in the depoliticizing of environmental issues and making them economic issues instead (Sandilands 1993:46; Hart 2011:57). Encouraging citizens to become complacent in their morality and fixing the problems of “pollution, resource decline, and waste disposal” rather than preventing these problems in the first place maintains the status quo of the capitalist discourse (Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:885; see also Cudworth 2003:82; King 2006:38). The focus of environmentalism becomes internal change at the individual level rather than external, structural change within institutions (King 2006:xi, 43-44). When environmentally-friendly products are promoted it dissuades companies from making structural changes if consumers are willing to purchase these products in order to seem morally right (Sandilands 1993:45-46; King 2006: xi, 43-44). When these products are greenwashed it does an additional disservice to the environment as consumerism becomes promoted and internalized as an altruistic, environmentally-friendly action. In reality, however, the environment is not actually helped and the underlying problem is not treated.

The last critique against relying on green consumerism as the primary combatant against environmental degradation is that it places too heavy a burden on the individual. There is an inherent conflict between environmentalism and the individual because environmental goals are to persuade people to consume less whereas the individual goal is to be able to consume more. This conflict makes it difficult for the individual to be the foundation upon which to build environmentalism (Moisander 2007). In addition, environmental problems for the most part are not caused by the individual or by household consumption and so cannot be solved by changes to individual consumption. It was observed that in the European Union, 20% of greenhouse gas

emissions were produced by households, with 70% of that proportion going towards heating homes. This leaves 80% of greenhouse gas emissions that are produced by other facets of society (Moisander 2007:408). These numbers make it clear that the majority of pollution does not come from the individual and that stopping climate change, cannot only or even mostly be the individual's responsibility. Due to this conflict, simply relying on citizens to address environmental problems and creating policies that only affect the individual, such as the plastic bag policies issued across the world, are likely to be ineffective solutions to climate change regardless of attitudes (Dobson 2007:277). Creating fiscal incentives may change behaviour but if these policies are lifted consumers are likely to return to their old habits, demonstrating that social norms must adjust first in order for behaviours to change permanently and contribute to effective, long-term sustainable change (Dobson 2007). This has led to Eriksson's (2003) conclusion that green consumerism cannot replace official regulation of the government and corporations. The theme across much of the environmental literature is that green consumerism is ineffective, highly unregulated, and offers not much more than altruistic feelings for the consumer. While not all purchases and individual implementations are completely without cause or positive results, such as education of the public, the literature supports the idea that an environmentalism which revolves around consumerism requires significantly more regulations and must be done in conjunction with government and corporate changes.

The prevalence of greenwashing demonstrates the increase of corporations' involvement in environmentalism but the response to the demand for green products has resulted in the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. Greenwashing also hinders actual environmentally-friendly products, makes people less trusting, and only treats surface level issues, if any. The strong association which has developed between the economy and environmentalism serves to exclude low income families because they cannot consume as much as middle and high income households.

2.7 Summary

As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, Western society primarily perceives the environment through an economic and consumerist discourse. By understanding the reasons why people engage or disengage from environmentally-friendly behaviour, the ways in which low income families are excluded become clearer. Environmentalism became constructed as a consumer-based activity because the environment was originally viewed as a resource to advance the capitalist economy, once protecting the environment became a necessity this capitalist mentality was applied to environmentalism and focused on individual participation. Audiences accepted this because consumption has become a social norm and part of our identities based on a 'growth for the sake of growth' mentality that favours the economy above all else. This is supported by companies taking part in greenwashing in order to obtain a larger consumer base and generate revenue which in turn reinforces the need to consume and the idea that environmentalism must be connected to a consumptive base. Low income families thus become excluded from environmentalism because they are unable to consume.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this thesis, I analyze three different sources: the Toronto Star newspaper, the David Suzuki Foundation website, the Ontario provincial government's environmental subsidies, and the Canadian federal government statements and media reports concerning Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol. Newspapers, field experts, and governments act as credible claim-makers and as a result have a significant impact on cultural values and the ways in which people perceive the world (Hall 1997; Loseke 2003:36; Jhally 2005:6, 15). I will use these sources to argue that they have presented environmentalism to the Canadian public in a way that directly encourages consumption and excludes those living in low income households.

Articles and documents were chosen for analysis based on whether they contained subject matter that was related to environmentalism and were directed towards individuals; key words which indicated this included, but were not limited to: "green", "sustainable", "organic", "environment", or "environmentalism". Articles and documents were also selected from the authors or columns that claimed to be based in environmentalism. All of the articles from the Toronto Star came from September, October, and November of 2012. The majority of my articles from the David Suzuki Foundation website came from September, October, and November of 2012 however as I continued my research it became necessary to make some exceptions in order to supplement my resources. The Government's environmentally-friendly incentives I examined were active during 2012, with some ending in March of 2012 and while Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in December 2011, official reports and statements were provided in 2012, with a final statement given in May 2012. Although this event fell outside my originally-planned research period, it was a significant environmentalist event that I believe is important to include in my research.

After gathering my literature and articles and documents I organized the general themes into terms of reference. These terms of reference were then used to identify ways in which low income families are excluded from mainstream Canadian environmentalism within my selected documents and articles. These areas of exclusion were then analyzed through a social constructionist and representation theory discourse. Although I originally had many terms of reference during the first stages of analysis I ultimately condensed to four terms of reference: 1) Environmental consumables and cost, 2) Access to non-consumable resources, 3) A focus on company promotion, and 4) Time commitment.

3.1 Toronto Star

The Toronto Star was chosen as my newspaper source because it is one of the largest newspapers in Toronto, the most-read newspaper in Canada and its website receives the most news-related web traffic in the Greater Toronto Area (Pigg 2012). Print media continues to be the public's primary source for news, and newspapers are reportedly read by 80% of the Canadian population (NADBank 2012). As the Toronto Star reaches a significant portion of the population, it could have a considerable influence on Canadian environmentalist perceptions. In total, thirty-one articles from the period between September and November 2012 were analyzed. I gathered archived articles that had relevant headlines and abstracts using the Queen's University database. In addition, although the Toronto Star does not have an environment section, the website revealed that they had two weekly environmentalist reporters, Tyler Hamilton and Ellen Moorhouse. This environmentalist label provides them with more credibility, and as a result they have a significant influence on the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. Therefore, all archived articles by these two authors from the research period defined above were also analyzed (Toronto Star 2013a, b). Other articles were written by different columnist who also included environmentalist issues in their article. Kristin Rushowy, for example, is a reporter for education

and childhood development, but wrote a piece about the importance of eating organic (Rushowy 2012).

Of the thirty-one articles analyzed, eighteen articles supported my thesis and eight articles were exceptions (see Chapter Five). The remaining five articles were analyzed and classified as neutral pieces because they did not have a strong exclusionary message nor did they critique current environmentalist practices. As such these articles do not detract from the mainstream construction of environmentalism, for example, one article documented the Durham Region's Guinness World Record for battery collection (Moorhouse 2012a; see also Di Napoli 2012; Scallan 2012; Spears 2012; Toronto Star 2012). For a full list of the Toronto Star articles used in this research please refer to Appendix A.

3.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

The David Suzuki Foundation is regarded worldwide as an expert and leader in ecological sustainability. Dr. David Suzuki, one of the co-founders and the face of this foundation, is a recipient of many awards and honorary degrees for his work in sustainable ecology including a United Nations Environment Program Medal. In addition to this, he has authored forty books that have won national and international awards, hosted a number of critically acclaimed educational media programs since the 1970's, and taught at the University of British Columbia. The David Suzuki Foundation has participated and organized many successful International and Canadian environmentalist campaigns, and its work has been included in the Rio Earth Summit *Earth Charter* (David Suzuki Foundation 2013c). These accomplishments have ensured that Dr. Suzuki and his foundation are known across the world as leaders in sustainable ecology (David Suzuki Foundation 2013b). Experts are considered credible by audience members; the David Suzuki Foundation website utilizes peer-reviewed research and David Suzuki himself which only increases their credibility and as a result their influence (Loseke 1999:26).

While my research does suggest that the David Suzuki Foundation website promotes consumer-based environmentalism, it should be stressed that this is not the only approach taken or advocated. Because the David Suzuki Foundation was founded to specifically research and lobby for eco-sustainability it is a qualitatively different source than the Toronto Star and the Government of Canada which may be expected to promote increasingly mainstream consumer-based solutions (see Chapter Four). This qualitative difference is further marked by the accomplishments and types of arguments used by the David Suzuki Foundation. The foundation's overall approach to environmentalism demonstrates that they have a broader and more comprehensive understanding of environmental issues than my other sources. The types of solutions proposed by the David Suzuki Foundation implies that they are more aware of the consequences of their actions, including those solutions that would challenge the treadmill of production and consumer-based social norms as discussed in Chapter Two. Numerous resources found on the David Suzuki Foundation website such as petitions to send to government bodies or scientifically based reports represent resources that do not promote a consumer based approach to environmentalism; I did not analyze these resources directly as they do not encourage environmentalism that could be used to directly improve or construct personal green behaviour. However, I do recognize that the petitions may offer an easier way for the public to become politically involved in environmentalism while the scientific based reports may act as a deterrent (see Chapter Five) (David Suzuki 2013a).

Even the specific David Suzuki Foundation articles that promote privatized consumer-based solutions will be qualitatively different than those found in the Toronto Star and by the Government of Canada because as a whole the David Suzuki Foundation is a more environmentally comprehensive organization. As a result my research findings are not representative of the foundation's overall objectives, values, or approaches to environmentalism. This limitation should be kept in mind when interpreting the proceeding sections. Nevertheless

my research does suggest that exclusionary consumption-based solutions to environmental degradation are promoted by the David Suzuki Foundation website. As discussed in Chapter Two and Four this may be a result of environmentalists having to frame their arguments through a consumerist lens least they be ignored by policy-makers and other audiences who have internalized the capitalist economic discourse.

My research aims to understand how articles that encourage the public to participate within the environmental movement at home - such as blogs or permanent information pages like 'Four places to cut your carbon' (David Suzuki Foundation 2013b) - can construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity that excludes low income families. In total twelve articles were analyzed from the David Suzuki Foundation website, mostly from September, October, and November of 2012. Two articles came from earlier in the year (May and August) and one article came from December 2012. For a full list of the David Suzuki Foundation website articles used for this research please refer to Appendix B.

3.3 Government of Canada

There are a vast number of government environmentalist resources; however, constraints of time and space limited what I could fit into my analysis. I chose to concentrate on Ontario environment incentives and rebates because these were heavily promoted as a way for citizens to participate in environmentalism and provided a strong message about environmentalism to the public. Many of these incentives were offered as early as 2007; a number of those analyzed ended in 2012, though some continue to run today. Due to the long-term nature of these incentives, I could not confine my analysis of them to between September and November 2012. These incentives were found on the Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada website. The majority of these environmentalist incentives were aimed at corporations but I specifically focused on environmentalist incentives directed towards individuals since these would provide a stronger message to citizens about environmentalism. In total, ten incentives that were active

during 2012 were analyzed. For a full list of the incentives analyzed for this research please refer to Appendix C.

In December 2011 Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol which may have spurred an increased debate about and awareness of environmental problems in the following year. While the Kyoto Protocol does not necessarily focus on the individual, Canada's withdrawal from this program transmitted a strong connotative message to citizens about the importance the government places on the environment. In turn this message influences citizens' perceptions of environmentalism and could potentially alter trust in the government which research has shown persuades environmentally-friendly behaviour (Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011:278). The main information on this issue was gathered from four government statements that posted on the Kyoto Protocol (Environment Canada 2011b; Environment Canada 2012; Kent 2012; Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2012) and four articles from various newspapers (Associated Press 2011; BBC 2011; Curry and McCarthy 2011; Wallace 2011). For a full list of these documents and articles please refer to Appendix D.

It should also be noted that although several Canadian government websites offered advice about individual environmentally-friendly actions, it was not possible to include these in my analysis as they did not necessarily fall within my timeframe. In addition, the majority of websites only offered short paragraphs explaining basic issues for a vast number of subjects making it difficult to analyze. These government websites are so numerous and extensive that in my opinion, a separate study should be conducted to understand the full extent of what they recommend and if the government is actually following their own suggestions.

3.4 Summary

In summary, I chose to analyze the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government because they all act as influential claim-makers. All three of these sources will have a significant impact on how audiences perceive the environment and

environmentalism. My next chapter will explore the theory used in this dissertation and how it will be applied to the understanding of environmentalism as a consumer-based exclusionary activity.

Chapter 4

Theory

This chapter will summarize key components of the theories of social construction and representation. These theories will be used to explore and analyze the ways in which environmental problems and solutions have been presented by influential claim-makers. In particular, these theories support the qualitative analysis of selected documents from the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government, which I argue hold latent meanings about environmentalism with significant implications for Canadians living in low income households.

While social constructionism cannot provide solutions to the environmental crisis, “it cautions that environmental issues and problems constantly rise and fall, as do our definitions and understandings of nature, ecology, risk and other elements of the environment-society nexus” (Hannigan 1995:185-6). With this in mind, I will use the theory of social constructionism to demonstrate how mainstream environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity by influential claim-makers. The Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government are three major sources which have contributed to the construction of environmental degradation as a social problem in Canada which should be addressed through consumerism. These claim-makers are readily able to construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity because they support capitalist agendas,²⁴ they hold credibility among audiences, and utilize convincing claim-making techniques. These claims serve to address many concerns of the powerful within society and as a result are often readily accepted by audiences.

²⁴ While it can be argued that the David Suzuki Foundation does not prioritize capitalist ideals, the foundation is forced to use an economic lens lest their claims be ignored by policy-makers and other audiences who have internalized the capitalist economic discourse.

Representation theory explores how language and codes are used to construct meaning and express important social norms found in different cultures. By treating meaning as an unstable concept and understanding how language can transmit underlying ideas about society, representation theory enables a critical analysis of the selected documents. I will argue that the language and concepts used in these documents to apparently promote environmentalism also have underlying meanings associated with the support of consumption.

4.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism has its roots in phenomenology, in that both argue that the social world cannot be studied in the same manner as the natural world (Loseke 2003:188-189). Humans differ from the rest of the physical world as we have the ability to create meaning, unlike plants and animals. Social constructionism aims to understand how meaning is created, interpreted, and used to make sense of life (Loseke 2003:189). Ethnomethodology also informs social constructionism in a more grounded way, by analyzing how actors within a given society maintain objective reality. Social constructionism uses phenomenology and ethnomethodology to understand how social interaction contributes to the “creation and maintenance of human meaning” (Loseke 2003:189). Social constructionists focus on the meanings assigned to the objective world and how these meaning affect human actions, events, and social norms (Loseke 2003:14). In other words, under this theory no physical object or event has any inherent meaning; culture constructs every object’s function, how events are understood, and how society reacts to these objects or events.

Social constructionism is useful for understanding the social production of objects and events, i.e. how people, through interaction, understand the world by giving it labels and categorizing it through language.²⁵ ‘Strong constructionists’ argue that there is no objective

²⁵ The importance of language in the construction of meaning can also be understood through representation and is discussed later in the chapter.

reality but instead are only social constructions about the world around us. ‘Weak constructionists’, on the other hand, argue that there is an underlying objective reality but the meaning attached to this reality is socially constructed, which is the stance taken in this dissertation (Henry 2011:137). This basic understanding of social constructionism can be applied to social problems and how they are created, defined, and solved.²⁶ Just like poverty, racism, or drug abuse, environmental problems and solutions are socially constructed. In this dissertation, therefore, I will use social constructionism to understand and explore how environmentalism has been constructed within mainstream society.

Social problems can usually be identified and analyzed by studying, concurrently or individually, the physical conditions that the social problem creates, the people that are held responsible for the social problem (‘villains’), or the people affected by the problem (‘victims’) (Loseke 2003:6). Therefore, environmental degradation can be constructed as a social problem by analyzing the physical damage done by global warming, who or what has contributed to climate change, as well as looking at the victims of climate change. These are the objective conditions of constructing climate change as a social problem as they consist of measurable conditions, victims, and villains (Loseke 2003:7-8). Objective indicators are often the focus of studies, news, and policy; however, objective indicators can be ignored and do not always lead to the construction of a social problem. Subjective definitions can also construct a social problem. Subjective worry exists whenever people express concern regardless of whether there is actual evidence that warrants this concern. Subjective worry must exist or else an objective condition will not be constructed as a social problem (Loseke 2003:8-9). This can be observed today with

²⁶ A social constructionist would argue that, in theory, anything can be a problem since it is the meaning we apply to social situations that constructs them as problems within society that need to be addressed. This is why what is considered a problem can change throughout history and certain problems are considered more important at different points in time, locations, and cultures (Loseke 2003:5-6). What is considered meaningful within society is never unmediated by human interpretation or values which are in constant flux. An obvious example is how racial discrimination, at some points in history was the norm but is now considered a significant social problem.

the dismissal of many environmental problems. Scientists provide objective data regarding ecological degradation, but because there is a lack of subjective worry, these claims are often not successful in constructing environmental degradation as an important and immediate social problem. While environmental problems can objectively exist, the ways in which they are understood, defined, and approached are socially constructed.

Typically there are four conditions that must be met before an issue is widely constructed as a social problem. Firstly, it must be something that is negative or harmful to society; secondly, this harm is affecting a large percentage of the population and is not just a personal problem; thirdly, the social problem can be changed by humans; lastly, people must believe it should be changed (Loseke 2003:6-7). However, just because these conditions are met, this still does not necessarily mean a social problem will be addressed; people must give meaning to these conditions. Social problems are so unstable that there are many disagreements about what is considered an important social problem and which side of the debate people will support. A prime example is climate change, which did not exist as a social problem until scientists were able to demonstrate to governments and citizens that climate change was occurring using objective data. Governments and citizens are increasingly accepting climate change and other forms of environmental degradation as a social problem but there is still significant debate about how – or even if – we should address this problem.

In Canada, the media, activist groups, and the government all present solutions to citizens concerning the best ways to address environmental degradation and in this way, are acting as claim-makers. A claim-maker is a person or organisation who identifies a behaviour or condition that is seen as problematic and tries to convince others that this condition is a problem (Henry 2007:135). In this case, claim-makers try to identify

solutions to environmental degradation and convince others to use these solutions.

Claim-makers are the main creators of meaning when constructing social problems and their solutions. When claim-makers are successful their proof becomes socially shared and produces a culturally-constructed social problem or social norm (Loseke 2003:190). Claim-makers are able to change what is 'objectively' understood about the world within society (Loseke 2003:21). Typically a potential solution to the identified situation must be provided and claim-makers will need to defend their argument from counter-claims if society is to accept the situation as a social problem (Henry 2011:137). There are many climate change deniers and solutions to climate change have been hotly debated, thus delaying widespread acceptance of climate change as a social problem.

While everyone can act as a claim-maker in daily life, there are those who hold more power, such as the government, lawyers, or politicians. Certain institutions can attach their name to a cause giving the claim-makers increased credibility (Loseke 2003:32). The hierarchy of claim-makers is important as certain claim-makers automatically hold more power in the construction of social problems and solutions. Scientists and academics have more status within society so that their claims are perceived as more legitimate. Experts within certain fields are next in the hierarchy but their claims are less likely to be accepted without question. Experts typical consist of scientists and academics, but can include anyone at the top of a given field; this title can be achieved by obtaining certificates, extensive experience, or endorsement by other claim-makers. Claim-makers without such qualifications are at the bottom of the claims-making hierarchy and do not often have successful claims; neither do those living in low income households, unless specifically sought out by those with more social capital

(Loseke 2003:36). Other types of claim-makers, such as the media, the government, and individuals, can influence whether a problem, social norm, or solution will be constructed. These external claim-makers can construct persuasive enough claims to propel certain problems and solutions forward. There are probably many problems that require immediate attention but will not be acknowledged due to the lack of external claim-makers bringing them to the forefront.

Claims are the information or arguments about a condition that claim-makers employ and can be any “verbal, visual, or behavioral statement that seeks to persuade audience members to define a condition as a social problem” (Loseke 2003:26). The solutions presented to others about how to combat environmental degradation and frame environmentalism in general are all claims. When claims are successful they create meaning which makes people think and feel in particular ways and helps to construct both social problems and their solutions. Claims can target a person’s rational side by using science and statistics or can appeal to their emotional side by constructing victims and villains (Loseke 2003:26-27). Either way, it is important for claims to be convincing in order to grab people’s attention due to the number of claims that exist within society.²⁷ The claims made by poor people are rarely “heard by the middle-class audiences [and] are important only if they are important to more powerful claims-makers” (Loseke 1999:36). Low income family claims are silenced and as a result those living in low income households are significantly disadvantaged when trying to make claims about environmentalism.

Anyone who listens to claims acts as an audience member and is influenced by claim-makers. In order for a social problem or solution to be constructed, audience members must interpret claims and determine whether those claims are valid; social problems will not be constructed within society if audience members deem the claims irrelevant (Loseke 2003:20-

²⁷ For example, there are many important claims in our society such as those around homelessness, poverty, racism, drug abuse, gun control, etc. Audience members can only address so many claims at once creating what Loseke calls ‘claim competition’ (1999:19).

21).²⁸ The audience does not always need to be the majority of people in order to validate a claim and there is a hierarchy of influence for claim acceptance among audiences. This power can stem from social inequality such as the middle class being more persuasive than the poor (Loseke 2003:28).²⁹ It should be clarified that audience members are not simply passive. Audiences do not automatically determine whether a claim is valid or not but rather use their practical experience, popular wisdom, cultural themes, and ‘cultural feeling rules’³⁰ to inform their decisions about claims (Loseke 2003:29-30). It is impossible for audience members to avoid all claims particularly when we take into account the nature and influence of consumerism and the number of ways consumerism is promoted under the guise of environmentalism (Loseke 1999:63; Jhally 2005:6).

Analyzing environmentalism through a social constructionist lens does not imply that humanity is not reaching the breaking points of sustainability, as I firmly believe that climate change is occurring. However, this type of analysis allows us to understand how different claim-makers, specifically the media and the government, recognise environmental problems and how they construct solutions (Hannigan 1995:185). Many documents make the claim that environmental degradation is occurring and present further claims detailing the best solution to these problems and how society should approach environmentalism. I seek to understand what claims about environmentalism prominent claim-makers are using. I argue that these claim-makers are reinforcing the dominant discourse within society – consumerism - when constructing environmentalism.

²⁸ Not every citizen must be convinced of a claim to construct an issue as a social problem; however, specific groups who will be affected must accept them (Loseke 2003:27), in a similar way to how in a court case the whole country need not be persuaded of a verdict in order to find the defendant guilty or innocent, only the jury.

²⁹ Power can also be attributed to the particular issue where it is more important to direct claims towards the ruling power as opposed to those they command. As a result it is not always imperative to have a large audience, although it can be useful, in order to validate a claim (Loseke 2003:20-21).

³⁰ Such as morality or what is considered a cultural norm (Loseke 2003:30).

There are many active claim-makers involved in the social construction of environmentalism. These claim-makers include scientists, the media, experts, the government, and citizens themselves. I will provide a brief description of the media, experts, and the government as my research will focus on the influence of these claim-makers.³¹

4.1.1 Media

The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion; the average citizen is not well-versed in the specifics of many social issues and gathers most of their information about these social problems and solutions from media sources. The news, as an institution, is responsible for making sense of external events, and the ways in which it frames this information contributes to the construction of how the public understands those events. Media institutions are one of the largest contributors to social knowledge and can create a large divide between those who obtain reliable information and those who only obtain information from the media. Thus the media contributes to the formation of “structured ignorance of the general public” (Hall et al. 1978:64). Since the majority of events reported in the news occur outside the direct presence of most people, the media becomes a very persuasive claim-maker and shaper of public opinion (Hall et al. 1978:56; Loseke 2003:41). When an event is placed within the news, audiences tend to view it as objective and real; it becomes valid and is more likely to be considered something the public should care about (Hall et al. 1978:64). When there is significant audience concern the problem is more likely to be addressed, and addressed in the way that is presented by the media (Loseke 1999:28). As a result, what is in the media can have a very important influence on what social problems and solutions will gain social support. Even if audiences do not always necessarily believe what they have seen and heard, it remains that the media are still the main

³¹ Scientists and citizens are two prominent claim-makers and for information on their influence please refer to Loseke (1999, 2003)

source of information regarding world events and inevitably influences public opinion (Loseke 2003:41).

My analysis of how the media acts as an influential claim-maker in the social construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity will focus on newspapers, and in particular, on the Toronto Star. Reports from a 2011-2012 study show that 75% of adults (18+) in Toronto “read either printed or online edition of a daily newspaper each week, 49% every day” (NADBank 2012). The study also showed that most readers prefer the classic newspaper format and in the major cities across Canada (Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, and Edmonton) readership is around 80% (NADBank 2012).³² This shows that newspapers, and by extension, their claims, continue to reach large audiences, securing their perceived place as an influential and credible claim-makers.

As shown in my literature review, the capitalist economy and encouraging consumerism are dominant discourses in Western society. One function of the news is to reproduce dominant discourses, and as a result, many of the underlying messages promoted and discussed in newspapers have to do with the economy, particularly when discussing environmentalism, which traditionally tries to limit consumption. There are a number of problems associated with the media acting as active claim-makers in the environmental movement. The media, especially newspapers, can be hesitant to report on environmental issues that involve corporations operating in their hometown, for fear of upsetting the status quo (Hannigan 1995:67). In order to maintain the status quo, news institutions often reproduce and reinforce the social construction of dominant ideologies within society such as consumerism, which hinders the advancement of other claims surrounding environmentalism in the news.

Hall et al. (1978:55-59) notes five ways that newspapers typically reinforce dominant norms: 1) by limiting the types of articles present in the newspaper to those that address dominant

³² The impact of non-traditional news sources acting as claim-makers, such as independent internet bloggers is a topic that will require further study.

class concerns; 2) by offering only one perspective on issues, typically aligning themselves with the perspective of the dominant class so that certain social ills that do not align are ignored or manipulated; 3) by presenting information at a single educational level, which reinforces the dominant perspective because low income families are typically less informed about political events and will be less likely to question the status quo; 4) by utilizing sources that they know will support the dominant perspectives they require and want to reproduce; 5) by producing the news in a way that will appeal to the dominant classes in order to generate a profit, since those in the upper classes are more likely to have a disposable income. This reproduction of dominant norms through newspapers is not necessarily deliberate or even conscious, but it is embedded within the way the presentation and reporting of the news has been constructed (Hall et al. 1978:65-66) and the types of articles that will or will not be included and how they are presented can oftentimes be predicted (Loseke 2003:43). Reporters are thus set up to mainly reproduce dominant norms, which typically align with the capitalist economy.³³

Other constraints exist for news outlets that prevent them from exploring issues that do not align with the dominant discourse. Time constraints lead to formulaic reporting and issues that fall outside this formula are less likely to be addressed (Rock and Murdock as cited in Hall et al. 1978:57; Hannigan 1995:59). Newspapers are also prevented from running articles that might dissuade audiences from participating in consumption or lead to distrust of the government. This constraint can come from laws that exist specifically to censor reporting and oftentimes this law prevents environmental issues from becoming public (Hall et al. 1978:59). Lastly, newspapers do not want to seem subjective or politically-motivated in ways that challenge the status quo, “opting instead for news frames which emphasise conservation, civic responsibility and consumerism”

³³Although not all media reproduces dominant norms, and different kinds of newspapers and websites do produce articles that drastically go against dominant ideologies, these are typically not the dominant form of news. Many claim-makers on the internet do not have legitimate information; however, it should be noted that claim-makers do not necessarily need to present the truth as long as they are able to persuade influential audience members.

(Hannigan 1995:68). These constraints make environmental issues difficult to tackle in the news, as they often do not follow set guidelines, do not fit in specific sections of the newspaper, can be very political, and have contradictory information associated with them (Hannigan 1995:64).

Reinforcing dominant norms such as consumerism also makes environmentalism more difficult to encourage as consumerism is often at odds with environmentalism (Sandilands 1993). If the majority of news stories are promoting civic responsibility and consumerism, then environmentally-friendly news pieces that arise can seem contradictory or even deviant. As a result, when newspaper articles do critique the way corporations and governments deal with environmentalism, it is often only big environmental disasters such as oil spills that gain headline media attention and these disasters tend to be blamed on individuals and specific corporations instead of questioning policies and social norms (Hannigan 1995:65). By creating a villain and focusing on victims, reporters do not need to delve into deeper issues and upset the status quo regarding social and economic practices.³⁴

Although the media has been paying more attention to environmental problems since the 1980s, these issues have transformed into a discourse surrounding the economic and commercial problems associated with environmentalism (Hannigan 1995:63-64; Cudworth 2003:67). Environmental problems are inserted into the economy section of newspapers, as this serves to regulate the environmental news, making it faster and easier to produce; however, this produces the message that environmental problems can be and should be solved by supporting the economy through consumption (Hannigan 1995:71). Since citizens generally trust science and technology and support the growth of the economy, this makes it difficult for reporters to address solutions that directly contradict this idea (Hannigan 1995:69).

³⁴ As discussed in my literature review, it is easier to construct environmental problems as the responsibility of the individual or family unit than to deal with institutionalized societal norms and practices that create the problems.

4.1.2 Professionals and Experts

Professionals with credentials or experts in a given field are ranked as amongst the most influential claim-makers (Loseke 1999:26). The David Suzuki Foundation website is understood to be informed by experts and leaders in environmentalism, chiefly Dr. David Suzuki himself, and as a result their claims are highly regarded as credible by audiences (David Suzuki Foundation 2013b). Peer-reviewed research written by academics is also frequently used by the David Suzuki Foundation website when presenting claims to audiences which holds significant claim-making power over audiences (Loseke 1999:35). The David Suzuki Foundation website also frames many of their arguments using influential claim-making strategies, either by appealing to morality or creating victims and villains (Loseke 1999:48).³⁵ As a result, the David Suzuki Foundation is an influential claim-maker in the social construction of environmentalism.

4.1.3 Government

The government is often viewed as a legitimate claim-maker because they are voted into office by citizens in order to make informed, responsible decisions for the country. The government is a particularly influential claim-maker because their policies and actions can affect entire populations or targeted groups (Loseke 2003:102-103). Because politicians must do what is economically best for their own country, they often view decisions through a cost-benefit lens, which can have very negative impacts on the environment (Hannigan 1995:97). However, many environmental problems, such as global warming, and the factors that contribute to these problems, usually cannot be attributed to a single country or activity. This allows for a diffusion of responsibility so that individual countries do not feel that it is their responsibility to fix these environmental problems, especially when they have many other social problems and portfolios that need addressing such as the military, healthcare, and education. As a result some solutions to social problems, particularly those dealing with the environment, may be technically doable but

³⁵ For a full list of how moralities can work as part of influential claim-making please refer to Loseke (1999:48-65).

are not considered politically reasonable (Loseke 1999:115). Governments are also especially influential claim-makers because they can create policies and laws that citizens, scientists, and the media must adhere to. While the government has substantial power as a claim-maker, its influence is not absolute. Many decisions may be questioned or altered by citizens who feel that the policies are ineffective at addressing important environment issues. However, typically the government will advance the agendas of the wealthy and ignore the powerless, such as the poor, children, criminals, and mothers and tend to adhere to the claims of voting citizens (Loseke 1999:116-117). Those who tend to vote are typically middle or upper class, placing much of the political power in wealthier hands and those with less power must work much harder to advance their claims (Loseke 1999:116-117).

Environmental problems are so intricate it can be difficult to simplify solutions into manageable projects and break down all the active claim-makers and targeted audiences for a given issue. For example, issues surrounding climate change can range from global problems and solutions to individual ones. Determining which claims to believe and which solutions to follow can be an overwhelming task for audiences.³⁶ By breaking down the essential components of environmental problems and solutions as social constructions and investigating the influence that different claim-makers have, we can analyze which groups hold more power and which groups will be excluded as a result of certain constructions.

4.2 Representation Theory

Stuart Hall (1997) has demonstrated that representation can be applied to every aspect of the development and understanding of culture.³⁷ I will use representation theory to analyze

³⁶ In particular, for audiences who have no special training in the social problem at hand, known as practical actors (Loseke 2003:7).

³⁷ Hall explains many of Ferdinand De Saussure's and Roland Barthes concepts; I will be primarily utilizing Hall's explanation. For a more comprehensive understanding of De Saussure's work please refer to his seminal work *Course in General Linguistics* (De Saussure 1959) and Roland Barthes works *Elements of Semiology* (1967) and *Mythologies* (1972a, b).

selected documents and the language that constructs certain (underlying) meanings when promoting environmentalism. According to Hall, representation is the act of “using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” (Hall 1997:15).³⁸ This definition of representation, however, is something of a simplification; the way that representation connects meaning and language is a complex process that begins with concepts (Hall 1997:15).

A concept is the knowledge that everyone has in their mind of what objects are and how they function (Hall 1997:16).³⁹ When the object is no longer visually present, concepts give people the ability to picture the object and know its function: “You recognize what it is because your thought-processes decode your visual perception of the object in terms of a concept of it which you have in your head” (Hall 1997:16). Hall argues that people think of concepts not objects; by assigning words to these concepts and deriving meaning we are using representation. Representation is therefore “the link between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (Hall 1997:17). That is to say, when we use language to represent something that we have in our mind as a concept, we create meaning. In this way, many documents, advertisements, and government policies use language that describes or refers to the Western concept of consumerism and the meaning derived from this is usually that consumerism is desirable and beneficial.

³⁸ In other words, when we use language to describe an object, for example, cleaner, the specific language we choose to use (e.g. liquid in a spray bottle that is meant to sanitize countertops) represents the object. From this representation it is more likely that a product such as *Lysol* will be pictured as opposed to a product that is meant to clean windows such as *Windex*. This demonstrates how representation of the product changes the meaning.

³⁹ For example, a person is able to look at a short cylindrical object with a handle that is in a kitchen cupboard and know that it is a coffee mug because it fits their pre-existing concept of that object.

4.2.1 Mental Representations

I have alluded above to two systems of representation, the first being mental representation and the second, language. Mental representations are similar to concepts in that both are used to interpret the environment, objects, people, and events. When we see objects we use concepts to understand what the object is and our mental representation to interpret it meaningfully. Concepts and mental representations can exist for things that are abstract or imaginary, or things that people do not encounter on a regular basis (Hall 1997:17). For example, people can have a concept of global warming, which cannot be actively seen and may not affect certain people directly, but the way in which people interpret the representation of global warming gives the term meaning. The concept of global warming is (very simply put) the process of greenhouse gases raising the global temperature which is, in turn, disrupting weather patterns (Gore 2009:30). This mental representation of the concept of global warming gives it meaning, i.e. that global warming has negative consequences which should be prevented.⁴⁰

Mental representations are part of a system of representation because they operate within a grouping of concepts that form conceptual systems that then construct meaning; individual concepts do not create meaning in the same way (Hall 1997:17). Understanding concepts in terms of similarities and differences are one way concepts can form a relationship (Hall 1997:17).⁴¹ Concepts are not organized randomly but are grouped together based on the complex relationships that we connect to them. Meaning and the formation of complex ideas depend on this relationship between anything we perceive and our conceptual systems (Hall 1997:18).⁴² For example, the relationship between the physically present environmentally-friendly cleaner and

⁴⁰ Alternatively, an individual's concept of global warming could be that global warming is exaggerated or altogether false and the mental representation that they would create from this would probably be to take no action at all.

⁴¹ Causality or sequence can be other classifying systems of conceptual systems (Hall 1997:17).

⁴² For example, it is clear that birds and planes are similar because they both fly but we also understand they are different because one is organic while the other is mechanical. In social constructionism this is known as typification which has been argued to be a necessity within the human mind due to the complexity of the world. Without these conceptual systems or typifications people would be unable to interpret the world around them or imagine abstract ideas (Loseke 2003:17).

our conceptual system of environmentally-friendly cleaners gives it the meaning that it is better for the environment and a viable way to approach environmentalism. The environmentally-friendly cleaner could be grouped under the similar conceptual system of 'cleaners' in general, but more meaning is derived when they are viewed in opposition. If all cleaners were labelled as environmentally-friendly, it would not have the same meaning, but because it is labelled in opposition to a regular cleaner, a complex idea and meaning can be formed. This meaning could be that purchasing this cleaner is environmentally-friendly behaviour. Thus when the articles and documents under analysis here discuss environmentalism alongside products and goods that are meant to be consumed, they construct environmentalism and consumption as part of the same mental representation. The language of consumerism creates a mental representation that environmentalism intrinsically involves consumerism.

When people have different conceptual maps they understand the world in different ways. While everyone has slightly different conceptual maps and unique thoughts (because we are all individuals), people in a shared culture generally share a basic conceptual map. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, a strong conceptual map in Western society is that consumerism and promoting capitalism is a generally beneficial and desirable thing. This conceptual map influences what governments and citizen see as important (e.g. that while the environment is important the economy is more important) and what social norms are promoted (e.g. that everyone should save the environment but do so by consuming). These are accepted because people have internalized this conceptual map of consumerism. Without a shared conceptual map people would be unable to communicate, or know social norms (Hall 1997:18). In order to communicate the meaning and concepts attached to anything we perceive or imagine, there must be a shared language (Hall 1997:18). Mental representation and language work in conjunction as systems of representation. Language is a necessary tool used to express to others how mental

concepts correlate with physical objects or anything we wish to communicate and how shared meaning comes to exist.

4.2.2 Language as Representation

Without language, objects and thoughts would not have meaning.⁴³ People use language to interpret and understand everything in the world and communicate this understanding as a complex idea to others in a way that they will understand (Hall 1997:16-17). Language is constructed out of signs. Hall uses the term *signs* for the general description of any form of communication – writing, speaking, or even colours – that communicate a meaning (1997:18).⁴⁴ There are no inherent meanings in signs, however. Signs are the objective representation of concepts and the relationship between concepts, which in turn construct and communicate meaning about a culture (Hall 1997:18). When many signs are brought together they create language and this is how we communicate our concepts, representation and meaning to other people (Hall 1997:18). Hall uses the term language very loosely; language in this sense is not regulated simply to different types of speech or written words. Language can refer to visual images or any kind of transfer of knowledge which can communicate meaning such as photographs, music, facial expressions, or even fashion (Hall 1997:18-19). Language is therefore used to describe multiple signs that come together to carry meaning (Hall 1997:18).⁴⁵ For example, musical notes are signs and can come together to form a language. A song such as the *Wedding March* by Felix Mendelssohn uses this language to transmit a meaning; typically that a

⁴³ De Saussure breaks language down into *langue* (the language system such as grammar and proper syntax) and *parole* (the physical act of speaking or writing). *Parole* is only possible when there is a shared *langue*. *Parole* rests with society and is not inherent within us (De Saussure 1959:9-13).

⁴⁴ The sign for De Saussure, however, is broken into two parts. The first part of the sign is the form, which is the physical word, image or photo; De Saussure calls this the signifier. The second part of the sign is the idea or concept in your head that the form is connected with, which De Saussure refers to as the signified (De Saussure 1959:65-67). The signifier and the signified function in the same way as described earlier with the example of a coffee mug. The signifier and the signified are both important elements of meaning creation “but it is the relation between them, fixed by our cultural and linguistic codes, which sustains representation” (Hall 1997:31).

⁴⁵ Going forward the term language will refer to this inclusive use of any groups of signs which produce meaning.

bride is walking down the aisle to be joined in marriage and this can only be properly understood in opposition to other music which carries separate meanings. This language only transmit a meaning because of our culture has assigned meaning to this music and to other cultures this song would carry no meaning at all.

Signs are given more meaning when viewed in opposition to other signs; in the written and spoken form, changing a single letter can completely change the meaning of a word (Hall 1997:31). Binary opposition is primarily seen as the easiest way of distinguishing differences, e.g. if it is not night than it must be day (Hall 1997:31-32).⁴⁶ Since there is no inherent meaning everyone encountering a sign must use interpretation. This accounts for different meanings that arise for one object and how readers may come to a separate conclusion than what the writer originally intended. When communicating meaning, the reader and writer are equally important (Hall 1997:33). As a result different meanings can arise from a single text, demonstrating the importance of language and interpretation and the kind of effect they can have within society (Hall 1997:32). In this way my selected documents can be interpreted as having deeper meanings beyond their surface level meaning such as explaining a new technology. For example, a document which is promoting environmentalism in terms of goods such as hybrid cars, but does not offer cost-free alternatives to transportation can be understood as promoting consumerism over environmentalism.

4.2.3 Deeper Meanings

In theory, we could use any collection of letters to transmit the same meaning and Hall (1997) questions how any indexical signs come to represent a concept and how most people in a

⁴⁶ For complete understanding of opposition please refer to De Saussure (1959:121-122). Binary oppositions have been critiqued as being overly simplistic as there can be many subtle differences; however, recognition of binary opposition has allowed us to study linguistics on a deeper level (Barthes 1967: 80-83; Hall 1997:31-32). De Saussure argued that language consists of signifiers, but in order for language to contain meaning the signifiers must be organized into separate categories and in understanding this opposition signifiers can signify (De Saussure 1959:87-88).

shared culture agree upon their meaning.⁴⁷ Meaning is not inherent in the object we are describing; meaning is socially normalized using language. Codes are what allow us to view a sign and know the concept that is attached and vice versa; codes help stabilize meaning so that the relationship between signs and concepts remain consistent (Hall 1997:21).⁴⁸ Without codes meaning cannot be easily transmitted since the relationship between concepts and language is not fixed. Different cultures use different codes and socially (if unconsciously) construct the relationship between concepts and language as this is not an inherent process (Hall 1997:22). Every culture has a separate relationship to codes, meanings, language, and representation and by analyzing this relationship we can gain insight into these cultures (Hall 1997:22). In other words, the language that is used is the best indicator as to what concepts are important to other people and cultures. Environmentalist documents use signs and language that represent concepts of consumerism (codes stabilize this relationship) which constructs the meaning that environmentalism involves consumption when products and companies are promoted more than environmentalist issues.

4.2.4 Constructionist Approach to Representation

There are three main approaches to representation: the reflective or mimetic approach, the intentional approach and the constructionist approach. All of these approaches attempt to answer the questions: “Where do meanings come from?” and ‘how can we tell the “true”

⁴⁷ Indexical signs have “no obvious relationship at all to the things which they refer” while signs that resemble their physical object are known as iconic signs (Hall 1997:21). Whether a sign is iconic or indexical people always have to use their conceptual systems to determine what objects are and their function because no object carries inherent meaning (Hall 1997:19). This means that all interpretations may be slightly different from the original intention depending on how closely an object acts as an iconic sign (Hall 1997:32).

⁴⁸ Since the meaning of codes can change based on culture and setting there is no inherent meaning found in any codes. Members of a culture ‘agree’ that certain words imply certain meaning but it does not inherently exist (Hall 1997:24).

meaning of a word or image?” (Hall 1997:24); however, Hall argues that the constructionist approach is the most logical and focuses on it the most in his work.⁴⁹

I also favour the constructionist approach here because it acknowledges that meaning cannot be inherently fixed within an object or through an individual’s use of language. Meaning is constructed through the representation of things, concepts, and signs. Constructionists still acknowledge the objectivity of the material world; however, the material world does not intrinsically create meaning through which representation operates. Rather, social actors use representational systems to construct meaning about the world and communicate that meaning to others; the meaning then becomes normalized and part of culture (Hall 1997:25). This again demonstrates the importance of shared culture on the one hand, but also on the individual’s conceptual maps on the other in the construction of meaning. Meaning cannot exist intrinsically in objects or in language. Signs can exist in the material world but the representational systems:

consist of the actual *sounds* we make with our vocal chords, the *images* we make on light-sensitive paper with cameras, the *marks* we make with paint on canvas...Representation is a practice, a kind of ‘work’, which uses material objects and effects. But the *meaning* depends, not on the material quality of the sign, but on its *symbolic function*. It is because a particular sound or word *stands for*, *symbolizes* or *represents* a concept that it can function, in language, as a sign and convey meaning—or, as the constructionists say, signify (sign-i-fy) (Hall 1997:25-26).

This demonstrates how all these terms are interconnected and their importance in the work of representation. While the physical objects and the determined meaning may be the most visible points, the process that occurs between the two is how meaning comes to exist and can be manipulated. The meaning of the documents analyzed for this research comes from their symbolic function. The documents represent the concept of goods which convey the meaning of consumption. While on the surface level the document describes environmentally-friendly practices and goods, because it is discussing goods and not cost-free environmentally-friendly

⁴⁹ For more information on the reflective and intentional approach please refer to Hall (1997:24-25).

alternatives, representation shows us that the codes associated with this language constructs environmentalism as a consumer-based activity.

4.2.5 Barthes and Lévi-Strauss

Semiotics has flourished from this foundation and can be defined as the general study of signs within culture and the general understanding that culture itself can be treated as a type of language (Hall 1997:36). Semiotics works on the basic principle that since “all cultural objects convey meaning and that cultural practices depend on meaning”, everything must make use of signs (Hall 1997:36). Therefore, because cultural objects and practices need signs to convey meaning, they are subject to the rules and analysis of language as explained above (Hall 1997:36). As a result of these distinctions Roland Barthes took the *semiotic* approach to analyze popular culture activities such as wrestling. Barthes was able to treat these

activities and objects as signs, as a language through which meaning is communicated. For example, most of us would think of a wrestling match as a competitive game or sport designed for one wrestler to gain victory over an opponent. Barthes, however, asks, not ‘Who won?’ but ‘What is the meaning of this event?’ He treats it as a *text* to be *read*. He ‘reads’ the exaggerated gestures of wrestlers as a grandiloquent language of what he calls the pure spectacle of excess (Hall 1997:36).⁵⁰

In this way the documents that I analyze will not be understood in terms of the surface level message such as learning about donation centers, cloth diapers, or government incentives.

Instead I will look at these documents to understand the underlying meaning and what cultural messages they portray. In this way I will be able to show that many documents that discuss environmentalism are actually reinforcing the dominant cultural norm of consumerism.

Claude Lévi-Strauss also used semiotics to study meaning within culture.⁵¹ Lévi-Strauss

studied the customs, rituals, totemic objects, designs, myths and folk-tales of so-called ‘primitive’ peoples in Brazil, not by analysing how these things were produced and used in the context of daily life amongst the Amazonian peoples, but in terms of what they were trying to ‘say’, what messages about the culture they communicated. He analyzed their meaning, not by interpreting their content, but by looking at the underlying rules and

⁵⁰ See Barthes seminal work *Mythologies* (1972a:15-25).

⁵¹ See Lévi-Strauss 1963 book *Structural Anthropology*.

codes through which such objects or practices produced meaning and, in doing so, he was making a classic Saussurean or structuralist ‘move’, from the *paroles* of a culture to the underlying structure, its *langue* (Hall 1997:37).

Thus Lévi-Strauss analyzed the system from which these actions originate and not the physical actions themselves (Hall 1997:33). In a similar way, the environmentally-related documents from the Toronto Star, The David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government can therefore reveal messages about Canadian culture.

Two separate but linked practices will be used to analyze how representation contributes to meaning production. To begin, a basic cultural code is determined, which links a particular action or physical product to our mental conception of it – that is to say when we look at an object or read a document we determine whether it can be considered environmentally-friendly (Hall 1997:38). Once this process is complete we can look at the underlying meaning. This is where we understand whether a product involves consumerism by understanding signs in opposition or binary opposition to each other; because these documents speak more of physical products to be bought rather than changing norms, the documents can be read as promoting different ‘environmentally-friendly’ consumption. This reveals that consumerism is an underlying meaning that is being portrayed through the language of environmentalism. The shared conceptual map in Western society is to consume, so it can be understood how this underlying cultural message about environmentalism promotes consumerism.

The production of certain goods and assigning them our concept of what is environmentally-friendly is what Barthes terms the level of *denotation*. The second level is *connotation*, which is when we assign meaning to products or activities. Both levels employ codes (Hall 1997:38).⁵² In this way, denotation is the surface level meaning that has an obvious interpretation; the codes clearly link the signs to the meaning. On the other hand, connotation requires deeper interpretation, where the meaning must be read and reveals wider cultural themes

⁵² For a more in depth description of connotation and denotation please see Barthes 1967 work *Elements of Semiology* (89-94)

(Hall 1997:38). This interpretation is influenced by social norms, beliefs, and values held within society (Hall 1997:38-39). In these documents the connotative level is that these environmentally-friendly goods are more desirable than non-consumptive environmentally-friendly behaviour and that while the environment is a concern the economy is more important.

4.2.6 The Myth

The last important point from representation that I will use is Barthes' idea of the *myth*. When we use semiotics to analyze a system there are multiple levels of understanding, much like denotation and connotation. We can look at these different levels by analyzing a magazine cover, Paris-March. The cover, which consists of a black soldier saluting the French Flag, has the literal or denotative meaning that all races support France (Barthes 1972b:116-119; see also Hall 1997:39). By employing the concept of the myth, Barthes argued that the magazine cover has a larger cultural meaning. The first step is to understand the relationship between the individual objects of the image, and their assigned concepts which gives us the denotative meaning. However, "at the second stage, this completed message or sign is linked to a second set of signifiers [form] – a broad, ideological theme about French colonialism. The first, completed meaning functions as the signifier [form] in the second stage of the representation process, and when linked with a wider theme by a reader, yields a second more elaborate ideologically framed message or meaning" (Hall 1997:39; see also Barthes 1972:116-119). This second stage is what Barthes labels the myth. The myth is an important concept as it acknowledges that there are basic denotative meanings but by using this basic meaning as the new form we are able to analyze deeper cultural meanings and the impact these can have on culture. In this way we can look at environmental articles and accept and recognize the denotative message but then we can also analyze the myth and see how it is linked with a wider cultural meaning.

4.3 Summary

Social constructionism is ultimately a narrative, analyzing how institutionalized norms, social problems, and societal norms come to exist or are defined. Looking at claim-makers and the types of claims made will be utilized in this research to analyze how certain claim-makers are more influential and can more easily address larger audiences. As a result, these claim-makers play a significant role in the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity.

Social constructionism also explains that these claim-makers may have certain agendas and will construct claims that fit these agendas. This also reinforces the idea that environmentalism will be constructed as a consumer-based activity, because consumerism is a dominant discourse within society. The Toronto Star and the Canadian government are likely to use their credibility to support this discourse. The David Suzuki Foundation website must use a consumerist discourse as a claim-making technique in order to address audience concerns and desires. Lastly, social constructionism explains how certain claim-making techniques can make claims more believable to audiences; qualitative analysis will reveal certain claim-making techniques utilized in these documents and articles. Rather than only focusing on how the individual interprets information to create meaning, social constructionism looks at types of claims, how claims are being made, who is making the claim, and how influential they are to audiences to create change within society, in addition to identifying the importance of audience interpretation.

Representation theory explores how meaning is produced through concepts and signs and how cultures come to share and perpetuate these meanings. The codes and language used in the promotion of environmentally-friendly products and events influences personal concepts and therefore the meaning that individuals bring to future environmentally-friendly activities. Meaning is thus constructed surrounding what is considered environmentally-friendly behaviour, regardless of whether it is objectively environmentally-friendly in reality. This meaning contributes to the promotion of environmentalism as a consumer act. Conceptual systems help

group mental representations into categories and allow people to more readily understand representations through opposition. The documents I analyze exclude non-consumer-based environmentally-friendly acts and focus on goods and companies that would advance the economy. Through this opposition it can be argued that environmentalism is being promoted as a consumer-based activity. Semiotics acknowledges that there can be two levels of concepts and interpretation of these levels is important. The first level provides the surface meaning while the second level provides underlying meaning about cultural norms. In this way I am able to read these documents and accept their denotative meaning but analyze the underlying meanings surrounding how citizens are encouraged to participate in environmentalism.

I will be using social constructionism and representation theory to analyze how the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian government promote environmentalism. The claim-maker, claim techniques, and underlying messages construct environmentalism as a consumer-based act that ultimately excludes low income families which will be used to inform my next Chapter.

Chapter 5

Findings and Analysis

In order to evaluate whether low income families are significantly excluded from participating in Canadian mainstream environmentalism, I analyzed articles and documents from the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian government.⁵³ My findings suggest that many of these documents promote environmentalism as a consumer-based activity that potentially excludes low income households. Four areas of low income family exclusion were identified: 1) sources primarily promote ‘green’ consumables and disregard the associated cost of these goods; 2) sources do not acknowledge the constraints associated with level of access to non-consumable green resources, 3) sources shape environmental problems as economic issues by focusing on corporations, and 4) increased time commitments associated with green behaviour are not acknowledged as potential barriers to participation. This chapter will open with a general overview of how my theoretical discourse applies to the construction of mainstream environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. This overview will help inform the next section; an exploration of each area of exclusion and how each claim-maker promotes and reinforces this exclusionary consumptive practice. This will be followed by the exceptions found within these sources. Finally, the last section will provide a summary of this chapter before moving on to conclusions, limitations, and possible future research.

5.1 Theoretical Application

Social constructionists and representation theory argue that there is no inherent meaning in objects and events like environmentalism and as a result, different meanings and social norms

⁵³ As mentioned in Chapter Three, I specifically looked at thirty-one Toronto Star articles and twelve David Suzuki Foundation website articles. The majority of these articles were posted between September and November 2012. I also looked at ten Ontario green incentives posted in 2012 as well as eight articles/documents about Canada leaving the Kyoto Protocol.

can be developed based on social and cultural context (Hall 1997:21; Loseke 2003:189). Claim-makers help shape and construct meaning, and the acceptance of their claims is based on their position within the established hierarchy (Loseke 2003:32). These claims are often made more persuasive by using claim-making techniques such as creating victims or appealing to the audiences sense of morality which, as will be shown, is frequently used when constructing environmentalism (Loseke 2003:26-30). As a result claim-makers significantly contribute to how the world is 'objectively' understood (Loseke 2003:21), and in the case of environmentalism, claim-makers are serving to manipulate how audiences members perceive the environment and the ways in which environmentalism should be approached.

The Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian government were examined because they are all persuasive claim-makers due to their established credibility among audiences.⁵⁴ These claim-makers' articles and documents formulaically claim that there is a problem with the environment before following up with suggestions rooted in capitalism that can be used to fix these problems. Promoting environmentalism through consumerism is an easy claim for audiences to accept because: it follows already established social norms, it resolves their cognitive dissonance surrounding the need to consume and desire to be environmentally responsible,⁵⁵ and it is easy and convenient to accomplish - an important part of encouraging participation (Mohai 1984; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011; Bratt 1999:635, McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:850; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:891; Wilson and Snell 2010:160). Due to this construction of environmentalist issues, low income families become excluded as they cannot as readily participate in environmentalism when it is based on consumption.

By using representation theory, it becomes apparent that claim-makers are constructing environmentalism as an activity based in the economy. Hall argues that by using a broader term

⁵⁴ For a better understanding of why these claim-makers are more credible please refer to Chapter Three and Four.

⁵⁵ This need to be environmentally-friendly can be exacerbated by certain claim-making techniques as explained by social constructionism in Chapter Three.

for language, everything has an underlying cultural message which can be ‘read’ to uncover latent cultural meanings (1997:36). The language used to describe a concept shapes the derived meaning, altering how people interpret the world (Hall 1997:17). In this case, environmentalist documents include a consumer-based language by discussing consumables, companies, and economic benefits, thereby constructing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. Eventually, environmentalism could be coded so that whenever the conceptual system of environmentalism is thought of or communicated, consumption will be the natural meaning associated to environmentalism. The *myth* accepts that these documents have a literal meaning to convey, but this literal meaning acts as a new language to interpret and uncover deeper cultural messages (Hall 1997:39). In this way I accept that, for example, many of the selected articles discuss new technologies and donation centers on the literal level, but on the connotative level, consumerism is being promoted and constructed as the way to approach environmentalism.

De Saussure argued that signs and language were given more meaning by using binary opposition (De Saussure 1959:121-122; Hall 1997:31). Many of the documents made the idea of consumerism more poignant by excluding any non-consumer-based options as explained by binary opposition. Although binary opposition can be over simplified, the complete lack of non-consumer-based options does serve to encourage the main cultural message of the importance of consumerism (Hall 1997:31-32).

5.2 Environmentally-friendly Consumables and their Cost

As found in my research, one of the most prominent examples of the marginalization of low income families through the Canadian environmental movement is the promotion of consumables perceived as environmentally-friendly. Since environmentally-friendly items tend to be or are perceived as more expensive than their classic counterparts, this creates a barrier for low income families who want to participate in environmentalism. This section will examine the numerous environmentalist articles and documents that promoted consumer-based goods, and

how these claim-makers typically ignored or glossed over more inclusive non-consumptive alternatives.

The personal and economic benefits were almost exclusively featured as reasons to switch to green products throughout the articles advocating environmental action.⁵⁶ The detrimental effects of current practices were often given as little attention as alternative non-consumptive solutions, begging the question as to whether the focus of these articles was really an environmental issue or simply the new green product. This type of marketing disregards the underlying origin of many problems rooted in social norms and promotes fixing only surface level issues as discussed in Chapter Two (Singer 2010).⁵⁷ Messages regarding environmental benefits were primarily only communicated insofar as they showcased a product's waste, energy, or water saving ingenuity, while the reasons why this behaviour was important were left to be self-evident. Sustainability thus becomes an optional message, open to interpretation by the reader, while consumption diligently remains the core subject of the document. For example, in a Toronto Star article promoting the use of light-emitting diode (LED) light bulbs, it was explained that "They know, generally that LED lights use up to 75 per cent less energy than incandescent bulbs and can last up to 25 times longer – three times longer in the case of compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)" (Hamilton 2012a). Here, saving energy is the extent of environmentalism; understanding how or why saving energy will help the environment is omitted. The cost of this sustainable technology is mentioned but disregarded as a non-issue: "Sure, the bulbs are more expensive – a typical 60-watt-equivalent bulb goes for between \$25 and \$30– but the price continues to fall" (Hamilton 2012a). An increased cost for light bulbs is an expense low income families may not be able to afford as readily as higher income families since low income families

⁵⁶This is described by Ottman, Stafford and Hartman (2006) as a more efficient way to sell products; explaining what the product can do for the consumer.

⁵⁷ For example, creating technology to recycle excess waste will not be as effective as altering the social norms that are responsible for the excess waste.

typically spend more income on immediate needs like food, shelter, and clothing (Statistics Canada 2011:7).

5.2.1 Toronto Star

Discussing new technology as a way to offset wasteful practices was a common way the Toronto Star articles skimmed over environmental issues. One Toronto Star article remarked on deforestation and paper waste: “as a society, we’re fine with cutting down trees just so we can make products – namely paper – that are used once and then just tossed away as trash” (Hamilton 2012b). The primary focus of the article however was on a new product: ““Step Forward Paper” – a mix of 80 per cent wheat straw and 20 per cent Forest Stewardship Council-certified sustainable wood – hit the shelves in Staples Canada stores as part of a partnership with environmental group Canopy” (Hamilton 2012b). It becomes apparent that consuming a different type of paper was considered preferable to using less paper or eliminating paper altogether. By explaining the wasteful nature of deforestation, morality acts as a claim-making technique; by presenting an economic solution, audience members will associate consumption as a way to be environmentally-friendly. This meaning is then likely to be internalized because purchasing Step Forward Paper aligns with already established social norms and is a convenient way to relieve guilt. A message that does not involve consumerism - one which all socioeconomic classes could benefit from - is not included, and as a result those living in low income households are more likely to be excluded from mainstream environmentalism.

Another article in the Toronto Star gives the impression that it will be discussing the government’s energy policy: “Two weeks before resigning her cabinet post and announcing her intentions to run for leadership of the Ontario Liberal Party, the MPP for Don Valley West signed amendments to two pieces of legislation that could potentially fill a gaping hole in the province’s troubled energy policy...that empower all municipalities in Ontario to take a lead on energy and water conservation programs” (Hamilton 2012c). The connotative message of this article,

consumption, is obvious when looking through a representation lens: “The amendments mean that municipalities can leverage their ability to raise cheap capital through bond issues. They can then turn around and offer low-interest financing to property owners looking to insulate their homes, add energy-efficient windows, install smart thermostats, and upgrade to high-efficiency furnaces, air conditioners and water heaters” (Hamilton 2012c). Whether these government policies are beneficial or not is irrelevant according to representation theory. The underlying message that the article is asserting is that in order to conserve energy, help the environment, and save money, property owners should consume new appliances and invest in household renovations. The suggestions to increasing energy efficiency is not class inclusive as they do not offer non-consumable alternatives such as adjusting existing thermostats, running appliances on cold and only when full, and hanging laundry to dry. Even with subsidies, or low-interest financing low income families may not be able to afford the upfront costs or increased property taxes required to pay for renovations or energy efficient appliances which generally cost more than standard models (Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006: 24, 25, 28-30). Those living in the lowest income percentile also have the lowest percentage of home ownership (Rae, MacKay and LeVasseur 2008:10) further excluding them from this form of environmentalism as they are unlikely to be able to renovate rented properties.

When environmentalism is framed as a consumer activity, the cost of these green products is taken for granted as a necessary component of participation. In my research, articles explaining the economical benefits of new technology are among the most common examples that promote the consumer-environmentalist duality, and these same articles seem ambivalent about the high costs of the associated products. A prime example is BMW’s new hybrid car, the i8, and electric vehicle, the i3, which “currently starts at \$54,500. And what about the uber-sexy i8 Coupe? Stadler tells me “It won’t be our most expensive car, and it won’t be our cheapest”” (Bleakney 2012). Another is the Urban Cultivator, “a dishwasher-sized appliance with interior

grow lights. Inside are racks that hold flats designed to contain one of three growing mediums...the residential model sells for \$2,200” (Sanderson 2012). These products represent costly environmentally-minded products. It does not matter if or how much these products actually help the environment, as simply by associating environmentalism with consumerism and no other alternatives, environmentalism⁵⁸ is represented as a consumptive based activity (Hall 1997:36-37). Low-income families are unlikely to be able to afford the initial cost of a \$54,500 car or a \$2,200 gardening appliance.⁵⁹ The articles that highlight these products do not reference other non-consumptive practices that could be more class inclusive and beneficial to the environment, such as alternative forms of transportation in the case of the i3 or i8, or conventional gardening in the case of the Urban Cultivator. By excluding low-cost alternatives, environmentalism as a consumer-based activity only becomes more pronounced and reinforced as a social norm seemingly designed to exclude low income families.

5.2.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

While it could be argued that the Toronto Star only addresses environmentalism as an extension of consumerism because it is a for-profit organization – and by extension, pro-consumer culture – this argument is weakened when we examine the non-profit David Suzuki Foundation. The David Suzuki Foundation website promotes environmentalism to its visitors in several ways. Part of the site is devoted to providing resources that facilitate green behaviour, and another portion of the site seeks to advocate visitors to undertake environmentally-friendly behaviour. Petitions form a sizeable portion of the former category, providing the visitor with a concise paragraph explaining an issue the organization would like to protest and a prefilled out document which can be forwarded to government bodies via the website (David Suzuki Foundation 2013d). Though this system does make it easier to participate in certain

⁵⁸ This would be an instance of binary opposition or looking at concepts through similarities.

⁵⁹ The Urban Cultivator also did not mention increased energy use or costs.

environmentally-friendly actions, it requires a computer, internet access, and free time, things that low income families are less likely to have access to. The portion of the website, designed to educate and persuade visitors to be environmentally-friendly, could be argued to make its claims more relatable and believable by using certain techniques. Appeals to the audience's sense of morality are made by referencing the wellbeing of future generations, personal health, and the destruction of the planet, providing an exemplary model of a social problem under constructionists' villains and victims claim-making technique (Loseke 2003). Some examples from the website which demonstrate these techniques include: "It's time to clean up our act" (David Suzuki Foundation 2013e), "asking for sustainable food will support healthier oceans for generations to come" (David Suzuki Foundation 2013f), and "our favourite temptation [chocolate] is full of dirty secrets. Destruction of rainforests. Child labour. Impoverished farmers and rich corporations. A high price to pay for a cheap treat!" (Paglaro 2012a). These types of claims are more likely to sway audiences into believing an article's claim and as a result reinforce the underlying messages found through representation (Loseke 2009). In general the claim is that certain practices are harmful to the environment and should be replaced with more sustainable behaviour. The problem facing impoverished Canadians is that the encouraged sustainable behaviour is often closely tied to a personal act of consumerism that has a net cost to the consumer in either time, money, or both.

Another theme amongst the recommendations on the David Suzuki Foundation website is one of privatized action. Many articles were specifically directed towards individuals, and when analyzing these articles using a representation lens, the underlying cultural message seems to be that environmentalism is an issue for consumers. Furthermore, these suggested changes involve alternative purchases for the consumer instead of alternative ways to complete tasks given existing resources. Some of these changes include encouraging solar panels installation rather than just using less energy (Kadowaki 2012), purchasing environmentally-friendly house cleaners

(Coulter 2012), promoting the purchase of fair trade, organic chocolate which itself proclaims, “Sure, ethical chocolate costs more” (Paglaro 2012a), and advertising reusable cloth diapers (Paglaro 2012b). These environmentalist suggestions disregard the comparative high cost of these actions which is likely to deter low income families from participation. A few of the articles featured prominently on the website contain some suggestions that do not involve specific purchases, but still construct environmentalism as a consumer activity.⁶⁰ One such article, entitled ‘Four places to cut your carbon’, recommends; “for the next car you intend to buy [...] make sure it’s fuel efficient and low polluting”, “choose energy-efficient appliances. New refrigerators, for example, use 40 per cent less energy than models made just 10 years ago”, “choose foods that are local, organic and low on the food chain” and “Eat sustainable seafood” (David Suzuki Foundation 2013e). Even this general advice recommends alternatives which tend to cost more than regular goods at time of purchase, though they potentially save money long-term or provide health benefits (Drewnoski, Darmon and Briend 2004:1557-1558; Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman 2006:28). These goods could also be considered luxury items, and because low income families do not have as much disposable income as middle and upper classes, they are less likely to have the capacity to participate in this form of environmentally-friendly behaviour. This demonstrates that the message propagated by yet another influential claim-maker, the premier environmentalist group in Canada, is that consumption is an important and necessary part of environmentalism.

5.2.3 Government of Canada

Like the private sector, the Canadian government has approached environmentalism primarily through an economic perspective, often only preserving the environment when the financial benefits outweigh the costs (Sandilands 1993:46; Schnaiberg cited in Hannigan

⁶⁰ Undated articles that remain unachieved are readily available through the site’s navigation bars, and whose content is only updated periodically.

1995:19; Barry 2007:210, 226; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:885, 891). My analysis indicates that the Canadian government's claim-making techniques primarily focus on economic incentives and convenience in order to encourage environmentally-friendly behaviour among citizens. While financial incentives would seem an ideal means to allow impoverished households to participate in a social movement, the issue remains that even subsidized environmental actions often involve higher upfront or total costs which not all Canadians can afford. For example: "The Region of Peel provides \$60 rebate to residents or property owners who replace inefficient toilets with new Peel-approved water efficient 6-litre toilets. Rebates of \$100 are available for high efficiency toilets of 4.8 litres or less" (Environment Canada 2011a). The cost of Peel approved 6 litre toilets range from \$99-\$3,093 excluding tax, while the cost for the environmentally preferable 4.8 litre toilets range from \$250-\$1,125 (Water Smart Peel 2011). Though the price difference of \$250 plus tax would be reduced to \$150 plus tax once the rebates were applied, the additional upfront and overall costs for a high efficiency toilet may not be a cost low income families can afford. The Government of Canada also ran a Home Energy Audit incentive which, for Ontario, included "financial rebates of 50 per cent off the cost of a home energy audit, up to \$150" (Ministry of Energy 2012). Other initiatives were very similar to the Home Energy Audit such as the ecoEnergy Retrofit and saveONenergy retrofit programs. Participating in any of these programs are expensive elective costs which only provide the consumer with recommendations that encourage further spending on items such as water heaters, doors, and windows (Ministry of Energy 2012; Natural Resources Canada 2011, 2012a). The assessment and ensuing recommendations do not include ways in which citizens can be environmentally-friendly through non-consumptive practices. Furthermore, these government incentives did not subsidize the cost of transporting or installing new appliances, which can inflate the price of these environmentally-friendly actions even farther out of the grasp of low income families.

In December of 2011 the Government of Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol creating controversy amongst the media and the public; the cited reason for leaving the Protocol was due to the expensive fines Canada would incur for not reaching set goals.⁶¹ As Environment Canada explains: “To fulfill its obligations under the Protocol, Canada would have had to purchase a significant and costly amount of international credits using funds that could be invested here, in Canada, on domestic priorities, including the environment” (Environment Canada 2012:5). The connotative meaning this frame of reasoning provides is that if the government is unwilling to spend excess money on sustainable initiatives and products that will limit greenhouse gases then this should not be a main concern of Canadian citizens. The statement goes on to explain:

The Protocol only covers countries responsible for a small, and increasingly smaller, percentage of global emissions and, as a consequence, is not an effective vehicle for addressing the global challenge of climate change. Importantly for Canada, the United States, which is Canada’s biggest economic trading partner and is responsible for nearly 20% of emissions, is not covered by the Kyoto Protocol (Environment Canada 2012:5).

This gives the impression that diffusion of responsibility is an acceptable reason to opt out of participation. These same sentiments were expressed by Peter Kent, the Environment Minister which only reinforced this message (Associated Press 2011; BBC 2011; Curry and McCarthy 2011; Environment Canada 2011b; Kent 2012; Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2012; Wallace 2011). Promoting environmentalism through an economic lens and abandoning sustainability when economic costs outweigh the benefits is a discourse all socioeconomic classes can internalize. Low income families, however, are in a position to truly internalize this discourse as they are already in a difficult position to participate in mainstream environmentalism and will not have the necessary discretionary income to spend on sustainable practices.

By framing environmentalism as an increasingly commercial endeavour, we risk excluding low income families from this social movement unnecessarily, and also stand to lose

⁶¹ Canada’s goal was to reach an average of 6% below 1990 levels of greenhouse gases from 2008 to 2012 (Canada’s Action on Climate Change 2010).

the concept of the environment as an intrinsically valuable concept. Evaluating environmentalism using conventional economic models also encourages the diffusion of responsibility by citizens and organizations. As per representation theory, the marriage of environmentalism and consumerism has detracted from the original values and insights of the environmental movement. Where environmentalism once encompassed the protection of natural resources, the improvement of physical landscapes, and the restoration of natural biomes, it has since abandoned the idea of the environment as an intrinsically valuable entity and become entangled in consumerism, primarily concerning itself with issues of cost reduction and resource management.

5.3 Access to Non-consumable Green Resources

The lack of resources available to low income families is considered a deterrent to green action, not only due to the limitations posed by income and expenses discussed above, but also the restricted access to non-consumable eco-resources⁶² as discussed in Chapter Two. The exclusionary practices already discussed are further exposed when analyzing mainstream environmentalism in regards to non-consumables and socioeconomic status (Burningham and Thrush 2001; Moisander 2007; Wilson and Snell 2010). Low income families often have limited access to essential resources such as food and shelter, and as environmentalism grows, their lack of non-consumable eco-resources will become increasingly apparent (Burningham and Thrush 2001:11; Wilson and Snell 2010). In particular, education could prove to be a barrier as low income groups have acknowledged that they do not have sufficient information or access to education surrounding green issues (Burningham and Thrush 2001:15).

⁶² Non-consumable eco-resources will refer to services like recycling or education—which may still cost money—as opposed to environmentally-friendly goods for sale such as food or appliances.

5.3.1 Toronto Star

Out of all non-consumable green resources, one would imagine that information would be one of the most readily available. Even still, selected articles from the Toronto Star reveal that even green education is more difficult to attain by low income families. Though public education surrounding environmentalism is not mentioned often in my selected articles, one article explains that green education is coming from sports teams and the Air Canada Centre (ACC). The majority of the article explains the ways in which the ACC has improved their facility environmentally and, as a result, how it is an appropriate venue to educate spectators about green issues: ““teams and leagues across North America are implementing meaningful changes and educating tens of millions of fans about environmental stewardship”” (Hamilton 2012d). Tickets to events at the ACC are unarguably considered an unnecessary expense and as a result those living in low income households are unlikely to benefit from this instance of environmental education. This association between consumerism and non-consumable green resources makes sustainable education a by-product of another event, thus diluting the idea of learning about environmentalism for its intrinsic value. Additionally, it adds a cost to what could otherwise be a freely available service. Alternatively, green education could be offered through more accessible community programs. While this practice may already exist, my research suggests that it is not widely publicized by the Toronto Star and low income families have expressed the difficulty in obtaining this information (Burningham and Thrush 2001:15). By only advertising green education through spending, the Toronto Star continues to demonstrate that Canadian mainstream environmentalism is promoted as a consumer-based activity likely to exclude low income families.

My research suggested that consumer-based green activities are not isolated events, but have come to represent the majority of mainstream environmentally-friendly activity. Over a three month period of research, six articles from a weekly column discussed donation centers (Hamilton 2012e; Moorhouse 2012b, c, d, e, f). Low income families are likely to have fewer

things available to donate and many of these donation sites required the donator to cover the cost of pickup which can amount to over \$100. Although tax receipts are available to offset some of the cost of these services,⁶³ the net result may be more than low income families can afford, limiting participation in this service (Hamilton 2012e; Moorhouse 2012b). Donating items can help increase diversion rates from landfills, and since this type of green action is featured so prominently in the Toronto Star green columns it could be perceived by citizens as an integral part of being environmentalist. Low income families could participate in these environmental initiatives as end users, purchasing donated items for their own use; however, these articles primarily stress donating as the environmentalist action: “If a person has, for instance, a set of chairs they no longer need, the idea is they can put them up for sale on GiftIt but make sure the proceeds of any sale instantly go to the charity of choosing. And, of course, they get a tax receipt in return” (Hamilton 2012e), “Recently, I faced a dilemma: How to get rid of a matching couch and loveseat abandoned by tenants. ...The Furniture Bank pick-up works like this: You pay to have the items collected, but you receive a charitable receipt for their value” (Moorhouse 2012b), “Donate them to The Salvation Army... You’ll be doing yourself a big favour” (Moorhouse 2012c), and “Community engagement manager Michelle West-Martin says the centre is always in need of furniture donations” (Moorhouse 2012d). In every case, the articles highlight donating, and not purchasing previously owned goods, as the respectable action. Even though purchasing donated goods reduces landfill use and would allow low income families to participate in this service,⁶⁴ environmentalism continues to be constructed as a consumer-based activity. Instead of suggesting alternatives that would benefit all socioeconomic groups, or trying to discourage wasteful practices, these articles focus on donating and consuming thus creating another exclusionary practice.

⁶³ This does provide an incentive which is a common way of getting people to participate in environmentalism as mentioned in my literature review (McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:859; Wilson and Snell 2010:154)

⁶⁴ And could in fact be a very beneficial and necessary service for low income families

5.3.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

Out of all reviewed articles and documents, the research suggests the David Suzuki Foundation website did not *significantly* limit low income Canadian families from environmentalism based on access to non-consumable resources; however, access to education could create a barrier. While many issues were broken down into short concise articles without technical jargon, some documents suggested supplementary reading which was more technical and could act as a deterrent for low income families to continue their green education. For example, “The Nearshore Natural Capital Valuation report provides the tools needed to begin thinking about an economy that can be sustained for the foreseeable future” (Molnar 2012) and “Federal Minister Peter Kent made a splash this week when his department released a report on Canada’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions trends” (Bryant 2012) where both articles that provided hyperlinks to what could be considered complex reports. This is not to argue that those living in low income households are less intelligent than those living in higher income households, but only that low income families are less likely to have post-secondary education. It is more probable that those with post-secondary education will have the tools needed to readily interpret these types of reports. Those with less than high school education were more likely to be earning at or below “the national median employment income in 2006” than those with higher education (Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010:9). In 2006, 70.1%⁶⁵ of Canadians who did not complete high school earned at or below the median employment income and 55.2% of people who only had high school education earned at or below the median employment income. In contrast to, 48.4% of college educated and 33.9% of university educated people who earned at or below the median employment income (Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010:9). This

⁶⁵ The median employment wage in Ontario in 2006 was \$33,834, the statistics for Ontario were very close to the national statistics (Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010:6). The specific median wage for Canada was not provided. This means that 39.1% of people without high school education are earning below \$16,917 before taxes a year (Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010:7), compared to 28.2% of those who have completed high school, 23.1% of those with college education and 17.9% of those with university education (Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010:9).

means that college and university educated Canadian citizens have a better chance at obtaining higher paying jobs (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada 2008; Zeman, McMullen and de Broucker 2010). Given this, low income individuals will be at a disadvantage when trying to examine this environmentalist information due their increased likelihood of low education.⁶⁶

As a result low income families can be expected to have a higher exclusion rate from mainstream environmentalism, and meaningful political participation, not because of the cost of consumables but as a result of their access to education, another non-consumable.

5.3.3 Government of Canada

Many of the subsidies offered by the government were only offered in certain areas and require participants to own property in order to take advantage of these incentives. One example seeks to reduce the cost of environmental upgrades for Toronto homes: “Homeowners living in Toronto who use natural gas heating can obtain free delivery and installation of up to two low-flow showerheads, aerators for kitchen and bathroom taps, water pipe insulation material. The program is offered in specific locations in the following cities, Markham, St. Catharines, Grimsby, Niagara Falls only” (Environment Canada 2011c). In this case, participants had to be both home owners and live in specific cities. Although low income and high income families both reside in these areas, low income families are less likely than the middle and upper classes to own their dwelling (Rae, MacKay and LeVasseur 2008:10).⁶⁷ By framing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity low income families are excluded in more ways than simply increased costs of green consumables but also as a result of their general socioeconomic status and the precedent of the government placing the economy before the environment.

⁶⁶ For information regarding factors that contribute to low income individuals having less education please refer to Zeman, McMullen and Broucker (2010) and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2008).

⁶⁷ Of those living in the lowest 20% income quintile only 68.4% of low income individuals owned their home as opposed to 92.7% of those in the highest 20% income quintile (Rae, MacKay and LeVasseur 2008:11). Even if property ownership was not a requirement for this incentive, the high cost of eco-friendly appliances, as discussed in the previous section, would continue to be a deterrent to low income family participation.

5.4 Promoting Companies

Both the Toronto Star and the Canadian Government often used the discussion of environmentalism to promote businesses and their products. These green products seemed to address the symptoms of environmental decay while discounting the causes;⁶⁸ thus, the deeper environmentalist issues are effectively ignored and the proposed solutions serve only to address surface level issues while promoting the agendas of businesses (Sandilands 1993:46; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:888). By consistently exploring sustainability in association with industry, the mental representation of environmentalism will become increasingly likely to include consumption, demonstrating through Barthes' myth that even though environmentalism is important, the main cultural concern is the promotion of corporate and economic goals. This suggests that the intent of these articles is to increase patronage through the claim-making technique morality; the company is viewed as altruistic because of its association with environmentalism (King 2006:12; Ramus and Montiel 2005:378).

5.4.1 Toronto Star

Moorhouse and Hamilton heavily discuss industry, promoting companies such as E.D. Smith (Moorhouse 2012f), several different donation centers (Hamilton 2012e; Moorhouse 2012b, c, d, e), the ACC (Hamilton 2012d), Tesla Motors (Hamilton 2012f), Novotera⁶⁹ (Hamilton 2012g), Grey Power (Moorhouse 2012b), and Step Forward Paper (Hamilton 2012b) to name a few. This type of reporting comes across as a glorified advertisement used to convince readers why a particular company is worthy of patronage, while neglecting to critique the companies' production practices. Encouraging environmentalism through companies is not inherently negative, as companies should certainly be an integral part of environmentalism; however, when

⁶⁸ Over production causes significant amounts of waste and air pollution however most business solutions will only address the waste and air pollution issue not over production.

⁶⁹ Novotera is a company that makes a "wood-fuelled cooking stove that addresses many problems associated with traditional indoor wood fires, which is the common way of cooking in many developing countries (Hamilton 2012g).

the chance to explore environmentalist issues is overshadowed in favour of profiling companies and their employees, the privileging of economic issues over environmental values is supported.

Many of the 'environmental' articles in the Toronto Star explain how the profiled company was established, the economic benefits of the company, and a brief biography of the founders or employees. For example, the Toronto Star's weekly environmental columnists Hamilton and Moorhouse consistently devote large portions of their articles to discussing companies and their employees, "The site has attracted 168,000 registered users and continues to do well, but Stewart is already onto his next online venture at the urging of his mother" (Hamilton 2012e), "Warehouse supervisor Joe Di Paolo is an example of just how positive an experience the bank can be, both for those who benefit from the services and those who work there. In 2007, his 25-year-old photography and video business in Vaughan collapsed, forcing him into bankruptcy. He lost his life's work, his house, his network of friends and his self-esteem" (Moorhouse 2012b), and "The charity provides furniture and house wares to people in need, serving about 5,000 a year, for a total of 44,000 since its 1998 beginnings. They are referred by one of the 65 agencies, ranging from the Fred Victor Centre to YWCA shelters" (Moorhouse 2012b). This type of environmental reporting leaves little, if any, space for explaining green issues. Another article which focuses on a thrift store mentions no fewer than eight companies in a span of two pages making it read like a cunning advertisement for a discount home renovation store: "Production companies have donated all kinds of useful things, Taylor says, including brand-new Ikea kitchens, appliances windows and, on one occasion, 1,000 square feet of flooring that was rejected because the colour wasn't right. (It sold for \$1,500 just 20 minutes after it came in.)" (Moorhouse 2012e). However, since this does not go into the importance of reusing items - other than a brief sentence explaining that the thrift store helps divert waste - representation theory would suggest that the focus of this article is to encourage discount shopping. One article suggests a more inclusive form of reusing goods: "They [Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers]

describe the trend as ‘the reinvention of old market behaviors – renting, lending, swapping, bartering, gifting – through technology, take place on a scale and in ways never possible before.’ The technology makes it easy to share with other people in your community for free, or by charging a fee” (Hamilton 2012e). While it is refreshing to see an environmentalist message that empowers all socioeconomic groups to participate in green behaviour, the rest of the article focuses on a company, “GiftIt”.⁷⁰ The economy is once again the primary concern, and in the case of GiftIt, the marginal value of tax receipts and cost of service fees may deter low income families from using the donation site. Interacting with thrift stores may have gained approval as environmentally-friendly behaviour because it feels altruistic while encouraging consumption, an already established and internalized social norm (Jhally 2005:5). This is particularly disappointing as recycling and reusing items were ideal ways for environmentalism to distance itself from consumerism, but instead even these practices have become regulated by businesses.

Some of the Toronto Star’s profiled businesses may be regarded as environmentally-friendly due to their use of key words such as ‘recycling’ and ‘sustainable’, but more research is needed on their products or services in order to reveal their environmental lifecycles. An environmental lifecycle assessment looks at the environmental damage incurred from “raw material acquisition, production, use and disposal” of a product or service (Finneden 2000:229). Greenwashing products with buzzwords have become a common company practice which can cause significant problems within the market and consumer trust (Sandilands 1993:45; Eriksson 2003; Ramus and Montiel 2005:377; Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:17; Moisander 2007:405). Greenwashing can also be accomplished by drawing attention to company and employee history so that less pertinent information will be communicated to readers about the true environmental lifecycle of a company’s practices and products. For example, a plastic recycling company explains that: “Burke pays the food products manufacturer from 2 cents to 6 cents a pound for the

⁷⁰ GiftIt allows a user to put an item online for sale and donate a portion of the proceeds to a charity entitling them to a tax receipt. GiftIt receives a 5 to 9 per cent commission for the sale (Hamilton 2012e).

plastics and fibre he has trucked to his Steeltown⁷¹ space. His company, which employs about 45, already has operations in Moncton, Granby, Que., and North Bay...Burke ended up in the recycling business after a chance conversation back in 1997 with one of his son's high school football coaches. (All three of his boys attended university on football scholarships.)” (Moorhouse 2012f). In this article, there is a greater focus on the founder's biography, than on environmental issues such as the greenhouses gases produced by transporting the waste or even the harm of excess waste. Another article discussed the history of LED light bulbs, and when espousing their long life testers “looked closely at several hundred LED manufacturers, and narrowed down the list to about 100...From there, they chose six products with the best balance of performance and cost, then travelled to the factories that made them – all in China, by the way – and negotiated supply agreements” (Hamilton 2012a). The focus of the article is on LED longevity and the history of the LED while taking into account the environmental cost of shipping from China to Canada is forgotten. Determining and communicating the true environmental lifecycle of goods would be an important step in preventing greenwashing and maintaining the trust of consumers (Pedersen and Neergaard 2006:19). By promoting companies in environmentalist articles while ignoring the environmental impacts of certain company actions or policies, the underlying message communicated to readers is that the economy is more important than the environment.

5.4.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

Admirably, The David Suzuki Foundation website does not resort to heavily promoting external companies when discussing environmental issues. While a few companies are mentioned, such as ‘Pure Energies’, a solar panel manufacturer, they are only referred to in passing as a way for readers to gather more information. While a step in the right direction, the

⁷¹ This is a regional reference to the city of Hamilton, Ontario.

economic benefits of adapting solar panels remained the focus of the website's article (Kadowaki 2012), maintaining the link between environmentalism and consumption.

5.4.3 Government of Canada

Many of the Canadian government's environmental initiatives are managed through private companies, and nearly all of these initiatives are designed to promote consumption. As argued by Hannigan (1995), this is a way for the government to stimulate the economy and appease environmentalists. Examples include \$15 rebates provided by Union Gas to purchasers of programmable thermostats designed to reduce energy use, (Environment Canada 2011d) and account credits given by Horizon Utilities to adopters of the Peaksaver program designed to reduce air conditioner use (Environment Canada 2011e). These examples demonstrate the specific promotion of Union Gas and Horizon Utilities, as only customers of these companies are able to take advantage of these programs. Home owners are more likely to have the option to switch providers while those who rent will not have control over the building's utilities. Low income families have the highest percentage of renters amongst their income bracket (Rae, MacKay and LeVasseur 2008:10) thus face continued exclusion from environmentalist practices. Offering an incentive only if a specific company is used gives the message that the economy is more important than the environment. If the environment was a primary concern, than the government would control this incentive and make it available through a range of companies so that all groups of people could be included.⁷²

5.5 Time Commitments

My analysis suggests that mainstream Canadian environmentalism may require an increased time commitment which could contribute to lower participation rates among low

⁷² Many other examples of the Canadian government favouring the economy and industry can be seen but were not within my allotted analysis. A more recent example is of the current Enbridge Oil controversy (Nature Canada 2013) or the 2012 scandal of Canadian government was accused of muzzling scientists (Ghosh 2012).

income families. While time constraints are an issue for people from all walks of life, it could be argued that in Canada, low income families are more likely to experience factors that limit their available free time. Contributing factors could be that Canadian women are more likely to be lone parents, and are increasingly employed by the service industry (Chung 2004:6, 8; Canadian Women's Foundation 2013:3). Lone parents will inherently have increased demands on their time as they must work to support their family and often times cannot afford child care, and service industry jobs typically require shift work which can require irregular hours that interfere with consistent schedules (Canadian Women's Foundation 2013:3). Domestic tasks have been typically regulated to women, creating the 'double day',⁷³ and although there has been a shift towards increased male household responsibility, women continue to be the primary caretaker (Chung 2004:13; Canadian Women's Foundation 2013:3). It has also been documented that women are more likely to participate in environmentally-friendly actions⁷⁴ (Sandilands 1993; Zelezny, Pho-Pheng and Aldrich 2000; Burningham and Thrush 2001:35). These issues the low income families face, such as being a lone parent, facing increased domestic responsibility, and working in time intensive jobs, come together to create a comparatively busy schedule that does not afford much time for environmentally-friendly actions. The argument here is not that environmentally-friendly actions are not worth the time required by low income families, but only that as long as green behaviour is promoted through consumption, it will often entail a significant time commitment that low income Canadian families do not have the option to afford.

5.5.1 Toronto Star

While environmental recommendations by the Toronto Star focused on consumptive practices with apparent economic costs, even these actions carried with them the hidden costs of

⁷³ The 'double day' refers to women who work full-time jobs and are also responsible for domestic chores (Canadian Women's Foundation 2013)

⁷⁴ Gender may have an important impact on environmentalism. However, time constraints did not allow this issue to be explored, and it remains a topic for future consideration.

added time. Purchasing the Urban Cultivator would require low income families to attend to these gardens, replace soil, plant seeds, harvest the plants, and maintain the device (Sanderson 2012). Although an outdoor garden still requires many of these tasks, nature can often times be self-sufficient while companion planting⁷⁵ can help with pests, and even community gardens could relieve much of the time commitment through division of labour. Outdoor gardens also help eliminate energy consumption, thereby reducing costs in the household. Growing food would still take additional time than simply buying premade meals or even raw ingredients. While less nutritional, premade meals are regarded as more convenient and less expensive (Drewnowski, Darmon and Briend 2004), two features that low income families may find appealing. Another article from the Toronto Star encourages parents to pack their children a ‘boomerang’ or a ‘zero waste lunch’⁷⁶ (Rushowy 2012). One school board suggests: “Rather than buying prepackaged foods like Lunchables or cheese strings, she suggests parents purchase cheese and crackers in bulk and send them in reusable container” (Rushowy 2012). Ensuring that a child’s lunch has no waste by buying in bulk then placing all the items into a reusable container, washing the containers, and monitoring what your child eats would take increased time, especially for a lone parent. The article also conveys the message that in order to have the child agree to forego processed foods, parents should pack them the non-processed lunches they enjoy: “‘I’ve learned...how much to push – and when I push too much then it just comes home again.’ Logan likes leftovers, and will nosh on lasagna or soup; Hadley loves muffins, so they’ll make carrot muffins and send along cheese cubes” (Rushowy 2012) and “Rather than sending whole fruit (‘kids take two bites out of apple and stop eating it’), cut it up and send it in a container; a little lemon juice will keep apples from going brown. He recommends simple salads, fruit salads, Greek yogurt with fruit for dipping and, for energy, likes vegetable proteins such as beans and

⁷⁵ Companion planting is a type of gardening developed so that when certain plants are grown together help to naturally create pest control and crop productivity (West Coast Seeds 2013).

⁷⁶ This is when, respectively, all waste and uneaten food returns home with the student or their lunch contains zero waste by packaging all food and drinks in reusable containers (Rushowy 2012).

quinoa” (Rushowy 2012). It would take additional time to pack and prepare lunches according to specific children’s tastes, not to mention that the suggested foods - such as Greek yogurt and quinoa - can be more expensive and may only be available in shops not likely to be located in low income residential areas (Morland et al. 2002; Baker, Schootman and Barnidge 2006). As opposed to purchasing premade lunch kits or individually wrapped snacks that a parent can easily give their child, the environmentally-friendly boomerang or zero waste lunch will require excess time, yet another resource low income families can ill afford.

5.5.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

Several David Suzuki Foundation articles suggested green behaviour that required excess time on the part of the individual. In order to decrease food waste, readers were instructed to plan an entire week’s worth of meals ahead of time and to account for leftovers. Planning a menu may save time in the long run, but low income families may not have the immediate time cost available (Paglaro 2012c). Other articles require excess time through maintenance of environmentally-friendly goods, such as washing a reusable hanky or commuter mug (Paglaro 2012d). One article promotes the use of reusable cloth diapers, the use of which would take longer than throwing out disposable diapers due to the need to first dispose of the excrement and then wash the cloth (Paglaro 2012b). Another article suggests taking the time to read external resources to learn about sustainable fish and memorizing or carrying a list to the super market to ensure that these guidelines are followed (David Suzuki Foundation 2013f). Other time intensive suggestions included alternative transportation methods like biking or walking, and alternative food disposal methods such as composting or special storage (David Suzuki Foundation 2013e; Paglaro 2012c). Like many of the websites suggestions that require greater time commitments, buying sustainable fish or cloth diapers would potentially increase the environmentalist’s economic costs as well, compounding the difficulties facing low income families who wished to adopt these practices.

5.5.3 Government of Canada

Many of the eco-incentive programs offered by the Canadian government require excess time for the installation and transportation of new appliances or renovations (Environmental Canada 2011a, c, d, e; Ministry of Energy 2012; Natural Resources Canada 2011, 2012a, b). Typically professional installation and delivery is done during business hours, so if the potential environmentalist cannot or will not take time off of work, they must perform these tasks themselves. As low income families, often live paycheque to paycheque they may suffer more from a lost day of work and may not have vacation time to use; they are also more likely to face the increased time commitments that come with forgoing professional help.

5.6 Exceptions

From each of my three source categories, I came across unexpected articles and documents which did not fit into any of the above themes or did not seem to exclude low income families. Though these types of pieces were few and far between, their discovery was a positive sign for environmentalist issues. Still, their infrequency during my research period demonstrates that the attitudes, actions, and income barriers limiting low income participation in environmentalism within Canada still need to be addressed.

5.6.1 Toronto Star

I hypothesized that the Toronto Star would almost exclusively contain articles that support my thesis and I primarily found these supporting articles. Unexpectedly, there were articles that critiqued the government's and industry actions. One article argued that hybrid car subsidies will cost tax-payers and those receiving the subsidies are likely to be the middle and upper class who can already afford the increased cost of a hybrid car (Gorrie 2012a). This article supports my argument of mainstream environmentalism being promoted as a consumer-based activity but not as I hypothesized. My research found five articles written by Hamilton and two by Moorhouse that critiqued the government's approach to energy and environmentalism

(Hamilton 2012h, i, j, k, l; Moorhouse 2012g, h). For example, Hamilton discussed the need to reform Ontario's climate plan and argue that not enough action is being taken by the government to prevent climate change (Hamilton 2012h). The direct critique of government action was unexpected, but may be attributed to the fact that Hamilton is both a columnist and author with a demonstrably deep understanding of environmental issues (Toronto Star 2013b). The specialty obtained by writing about green issues may encourage Hamilton to write about deeper political issues that critique current practices, though many of his articles continue to promote consumption and industry. Like Hamilton, Moorhouse and Gorrie also have a background in environmentalism which could explain their willingness to go into greater detail concerning environmental issues (Toronto Star 2013a, d). For the most part, though, Toronto Star authors who specialize in other subjects⁷⁷ and write pieces that include environmentalism tend to focus more on consumption and exclude low income families.

5.6.2 David Suzuki Foundation Website

It is worth reiterating that even though the David Suzuki Foundation website promotes exclusionary practices it also has many facets which often challenge the treadmill of production, government policy, and the capitalist status quo around the world. The promotion of consumerism found within this research may be publicized in order to appeal to individuals who have internalized the consumerist paradigm as discussed in Chapter Two; nevertheless this tactic serves to exclude low income families. Because the foundation is a non-profit organization that was specifically founded to research and provide solutions to the complex issue of eco-sustainability a more encompassing form of environmentally-friendly solutions is a logical result.

The David Suzuki Foundation website encouraged environmentally-friendly practices that could benefit every socioeconomic level. For example, one article suggested using less paper; it addressed the problem of over production rather than excess waste (Paglarao 2012d).

⁷⁷An example is Kristin Rushowy (2012) who reports on education and childhood development.

This serves to address environmentalism not through consumption but by trying to alter perspectives surrounding consumption (Paglarao 2012d). David Suzuki also offered some non-consumable, convenient environmentally-friendly practices such as a “Toxic-free ways to lose head lice” (Paglaro 2012e). Straightforward ways to contact politicians with prewritten emails regarding specific environmentalist issues to protests are also readily provided (David Suzuki 2013a). Regardless, the David Suzuki Foundation website still published a substantial number of articles that encouraged consumption, high cost items, required education, and required excess time that would exclude low income families.

5.6.3 Government of Canada

The Government of Canada, while having many faults and lagging behind in many important environmentalist issues does have redeemable resources and policies. Despite controversy over the many 2012-2013 environment scandals throughout Canada, which include Enbridge oil (Nature Canada 2013), muzzling scientists (Ghosh 2012), withdrawing from the United Nations Desertification Treaty (BBC 2013), and retracting the plastic bag bylaw in Toronto (City of Toronto 2012), Government of Canada’s websites potentially provide a useful resource for the public to engage in environmentalism in a way that is equally accessible for people of all income levels.⁷⁸

5.7 Summary

Overall, my analysis has identified four areas through which low income families are excluded from mainstream environmentalism in Canada by the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government. These areas of exclusion were: 1) the promotion of green consumables and their associated high costs, 2) the level of access to non-consumable green resources, 3) the shaping of environmental problems as economic issues by

⁷⁸ These website were not analyzed for my thesis as explained in Chapter Three.

focusing on corporations, and 4) the time commitment required to participate in environmentalism.

I am not arguing that the challenges facing low income families make the adoption of environmentally-friendly behaviour impossible, but only that the *current iteration* of environmentalism – namely, consumer-based environmentalism – systematically excludes this group. I believe there is a sufficient amount of environmentally-friendly behaviour that is not rooted in consumerism, and therefore does not require increased time commitments, economic costs, or access to non-consumable resources that could be incorporated into mainstream environmentalism, thereby making it accessible for people of all economic statuses. The next chapter will summarize my research, discuss its limitations, and possible areas of future research.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Using qualitative research, this study has argued that Canadian mainstream environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity that fundamentally excludes those living in low income households. Chapter Two attempted to provide support for this argument by referencing existing academic literature. Specifically, the literature suggested that low income families face unique barriers to environmentally-friendly participation that the middle and upper class families typically do not encounter. This suggests that income is an important requirement for environmentally-friendly behaviour. The literature has also demonstrated that Western society has laid the foundation, through its historical relationship with the environment, for the seamless transition of environmentalism into a consumer-based activity. In order to explore how environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer activity within Canadian culture and whether it excludes low income families, I analyzed three prominent claim-makers: the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government. I selected documents from these sources and used terms of reference in order to explore the relationship between environmentalism and class.

This analysis identified four ways that low income families are excluded from Canadian mainstream environmentalism: 1) the promotion of green consumables and their associated high costs, 2) the level of access to non-consumable green resources, 3) the shaping of environmental problems as economic issues by focusing on corporations, and 4) the time commitment required to participate in environmentalism. This current chapter will summarize these findings and how they relate to my literature and theoretical discourse. I will then provide a brief review of possible external factors that have contributed to environmentalism being constructed as a consumer-based activity as found in Chapter Two. The remainder of this chapter will explain the

limitations of this research and identify possible areas for future studies that have been raised during the course of this dissertation.

6.1 Green Consumables and Cost

My analysis suggests that within Canada, environmentalism is constructed and encouraged prominently through the use of consumerism; there were many instances of products being advertised for environmentally-friendly purposes within my selected documents and articles. In this way, low income families are excluded because they do not have as much income to spend on expendable products as higher income families, and this issue only becomes more apparent due to the generally increased cost of environmentally-friendly goods.

The literature suggests that by framing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity, only surface level problems are addressed. By approaching environmentalism this way, claim-makers are able to avoid upsetting the status quo while promoting a dominant norm within society - consumption (Hannigan 1995:67; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:885; King 2006:38). Evidence of this desire to maintain the status quo was found within my analysis, as problems involving the environment were often regulated to only a few sentences and the articles rarely discussed cost-free alternatives. The main focus of these documents was clearly the promotion of products. Binary opposition would explain that by ignoring cost-free alternatives than consumption based practices become the primary message. Using the premise of Barthes' myth I was able to accept that on the denotative level these documents discuss certain environmentally-friendly products, but on the connotative level, the documents can be interpreted as promoting consumption. Consumerism could thus become the underlying meaning that is being represented through the language of environmentalism. In this way, a new code could be constructed so that when the conceptual system of environmentalism is thought of and acted upon, consumerism is naturally invoked.

This construction was also consistent with the literature found in Chapter Two, as promoting products over cost-free alternatives allows companies and policy-makers to continue making revenue and bolster the economy while being perceived as environmentally responsible (Sandilands 1993:47; Hannigan 1995:20; Cudworth 1993:82-83; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007). Social constructionism argues that certain sources hold more claim making power (Loseke 2003:36) and the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government fall under this category. Although this consumer-based construction of environmentalism is less likely to be the primary type of environmentalism promoted by the David Suzuki Foundation as it is a qualitatively different source compared to the Toronto Star and the Canadian Government as discussed in Chapter Three.

Not only does constructing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity serve to address surface level issues and condone the social norms that are responsible for these problems, but products with eco-labels generally cost more than generic brands (Burningham and Thrush 2001, 2003; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:24,25). Low income families typically do not have disposable income, as a greater portion of their earnings goes towards basic needs such as food, clothing, and heat, than the middle and upper class, resulting in greater difficulty participating in mainstream environmentally-friendly behaviour. All three claim-makers promoted comparatively expensive products that were considered environmentally-friendly, but while doing so, the claim-makers did not significantly discuss environmental degradation, cost-free alternatives, or potential greenwashing. The increased costs of these products were also dismissed as being insignificant.

Environmentalism as a consumer-based activity was encouraged using claim-making techniques such as morality, constructing victims, and describing economic incentives. This was consistent with Chapter Four, which argues that certain techniques are better at constructing claims and solutions in a way that audiences are more willing to accept (Loseke 2003:26-27).

The claims and needs of low income citizens are typically ignored (Loseke 2003:36). Because of these techniques, audiences more readily accept the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity, despite the increased cost.

Canada's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol due to economic pressures presents the discourse and connotative meaning that the environment is not worth economic cost. This is consistent with the literature in Chapter Two that describes the environment's value as dependent on its economic benefit (Barry 2007:225). Although this discourse will influence all citizens, low income families are in a position to particularly internalize this message since they do not have an abundance of disposable income; this mentality allows them to relieve any tension they may feel by opting out of participation due to economic constraints.

6.2 Access to Non-consumable Green Resources

Secondly, Canadian mainstream environmentalism could exclude low income family participation because of their limited access to non-consumable green resources. While the cost of environmentally-friendly goods continued to be a consideration, the main focus of this section was to analyze how mainstream environmentalism in Canada requires access to certain resources that low income families typically do not have. The Toronto Star had one instance of excluding low income families from sustainable education as it was only available as a by-product another costly event. The Toronto Star also had a number of articles that promoted donating to thrift stores. Framing environmentalism as a donation based activity limits participation for those living in low income households, as they will not have as many products to donate. Conversely, the use of these donations centres as locations to purchase goods was not heavily promoted. This also serves to advance the consumerist discourse because promoting consumption at a thrift shop, even if this does prevent items from ending up in landfills and can be purchased at a reduced cost, serves to ignore non-consumer activities such as reducing waste altogether or reusing items within your own home. Again, binary opposition would imply that by excluding non-consumer-

based activities the consumer message becomes more prominent. By promoting thrift store shopping, environmentalism continues to be based in consumption, just a different kind of consumption that is perceived as eco-friendly.

The David Suzuki Foundation on the other hand did not *significantly* exclude low income families by limiting access to non-consumable resources, though because education is less likely to be available for low income households it could prove to be a barrier to utilizing some of their content. This would particularly be an issue if readers wanted to look at supplementary reading and documentation for these original articles.

The Canadian Government did limit low income participation by restricting participation in governmental initiatives, as the subsidies offered by the Canadian Government were predominantly directed towards home owners. Low income families are less likely to own their homes (Rae, MacKay and LeVasseur 2008:10) and as a result are excluded from these subsidies that are dependent on socioeconomic status.

Chapter Two identified many factors that either persuade or dissuade individuals from participating in mainstream environmentalism. Individual behaviour most frequently aligns with environmentalism when the necessary action is convenient, cost effective, or there is easy access to resources, although there are a number of other important factors (Sandilands 1993; Bratt 1999; Burningham and Thrush 2001; Mertig and Dunlap 2001; McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002; Eriksson 2003; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006; Dobson 2007; Moisander 2007; Singer 2010; Wilson and Snell 2010; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011). Low income families are disproportionately excluded or affected by these factors. Additionally, low income families faced barriers to environmentally-friendly behaviour, such as limited access to recycling, garbage bins, education, and public transportation, which are not as frequently experienced by the middle and upper classes (Burningham and Thrush 2001; Wilson and Snell 2010). This suggests

that it would be more difficult for low income families to participate in environmentalism because of their limited access to certain non-consumable resources.

6.3 Promoting Companies

A number of my selected articles and documents seemed to promote businesses in a similar way that green goods were presented. Information about how the company was founded and employee biographies were extensively described leaving little room to address environmental problems. This resulted in many of the articles reading like glorified advertisements while environmentalist issues and possible instances of greenwashing were ignored. This was a significant problem amongst Toronto Star articles, as the Toronto Star most readily constructed environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. Because these articles can be interpreted as focusing on company and employee history, the connotative meaning could be that environmentalism must include business involvement. Given this, environmentalism can be understood as a conceptual system and can be coded in a way so that whenever the concept of environmentalism is thought of or represented through language, consumerism is constructed as part of its meaning. As a result, environmentalism could gain a meaning that has been constructed to include consumerism.

Government subsidies were frequently offered through specific companies, thereby serving to construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity as described in the preceding paragraph. Because low income families are less likely to be home owners, they have less control over their residences' utility companies; thus low income families are unable to participate in environmentalism in this manner. The David Suzuki Foundation website did not significantly exclude low income families in this section. Even though consumable goods were heavily promoted, specific companies were only briefly mentioned so that the reader could do additional research into purchasing these consumables.

6.4 Time Commitments

Lastly, environmentalism that denoted consumption could be associated with an increased time commitment. This area of exclusion was not prominently mentioned in the literature, although convenience, and whether a product would save time, were factors that contributed to environmentally-friendly participation (Mohai 1984; Jones, Halvadakis and Sophoulis 2011; Bratt 1999:635, McMakin, Malone and Lundgren 2002:850; Ottman, Stafford and Hartman 2006:27; Wilson and Snell 2010:160). Given this, time could be identified as an exclusionary factor that could warrant further study. All three claim-makers encouraged environmentalist practices that would require increased time commitments in addition to green consumables. As a result, low income families are more likely to be excluded as they are less likely to have the resources or support needed to compensate for the increased time commitments that many of these environmentally-friendly practices require. Again, the Toronto Star, David Suzuki Foundation website, and the Canadian Government act as convincing claim-makers, resulting in environmentalism through consumerism - which requires increased cost and time - being more readily accepted by audiences as the constructed solution to environmental degradation.

6.5 External Factors that Support the Construction of Environmentalism as a Consumer-Based Activity Found in the Literature

The environment has suffered such immense damage because it has been constructed as a resource and has only been perceived as important insofar as it can provide economic benefit; valuing the environment based on its intrinsic worth has all but disappeared in mainstream society (Hannigan 1995:114; Barry 2007:223-224; Singer 2010:131). Historically, production and resource depletion has often been left unquestioned because within Western culture economic growth is considered incontrovertibly important (Barry 2010:207; Singer 2010:131-132). Even though environmentalist groups have had success in defending the environment, their arguments

have had to become increasingly framed through a cost-benefit lens in order to sway policy makers. This success is somewhat of a pyrrhic victory as this type of argument continues to devalue the intrinsic worth of the environment (Barry 2007:223-224; Hart 2011:4). This was consistent with the way the David Suzuki Foundation website often framed environmentalism; as a desirable act that would offer economic benefits to those who participated. Since the David Suzuki Foundation is such a prominent claim-maker this claim would contribute to the construction of environmentalism as a consumer-based activity.

Mainstream society has also facilitated this destruction because the ability to consume has become epitomized as the standard for success in Western society which has resulted in individuals defining themselves through the material and guiding their lives in a way that will optimise their consumptive ability (Cudworth 2003:106; Jhally 2005:10). This single-minded concentration on promoting the economy and personal consumption has inevitably led to the destruction of the environment (Barry 2007:207; Lynas 2011; Singer 2011:133). In this way, many of the claim-making techniques used to promote participation in environmentalism were structured so that convenient and long-term cost savings were highlighted rather than the environmental benefit. Using representation theory to analyze my Canadian sources, it becomes clear that the connotative meaning here is that consumption still holds a prominent position, even in the face of environmental destruction.

Given this, environmentalism only becomes an important consideration when it is either mandated or aligns with capitalist ideals. Environmentalism has evolved into a practice which involves consumerism because it allows consumers to resolve their cognitive dissonance and governments to acknowledge citizen's concerns (Sandilands 1993:46; Hannigan 1995:20; Cudworth 2003:82; King 2006:43-44; Kilbourne and Pickette 2007:891; Hart 2011:69-72). Environmentally-friendly consumption gives the impression that it simultaneously solves environmental degradation and perpetuates the continued growth of the economy. The majority

of documents that I analyzed recognized the need for environmentally-friendly action, albeit barely and only in a way that promoted consumption. This attempts to resolve the tension between the need to consume and environmental concerns. However, in my selected documents, promoting consumer behaviour far outweighed any discussion about the environment or cost-free alternatives to environmentally-friendly behaviour. Analyzing these articles through social constructionism and representation theory, it can be argued that while the environment holds some importance, the Canadian capitalist economy is still more important.

6.6 The Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation Website, and the Government of Canada Summary

In general the Toronto Star and the Canadian Government did not focus heavily on environmental degradation or attempt to alter the underlying social norms that have significantly contributed to these environmental problems. The David Suzuki Foundation website was the most inclusive source, as it did suggest the most non-consumptive based activities, explained environmentalist issues, and critiqued social norms to a greater extent than either the Toronto Star or the Canadian Government; however, it still had instances of social exclusion in three of the four identified ways. This aligns with common sense as the David Suzuki Foundation is a non-profit organization whose objective is eco-sustainability. Still, amongst all three sources free and eco-friendly suggestions have been mostly ignored and replaced by consumptive practices as this is an already established social norm that audiences readily accept. This constructs consumerism as a part of mainstream environmentalism that excludes low income families.

6.7 Limitations

I believe this research provided an important step in understanding the way environmentalism has been constructed within Canadian society. The results of this research aim to contribute to a sense of awareness regarding the social construction of environmentalism. Understanding how current practices are constructed will hopefully expand current forums that

seek to promote different forms of environmentalism. However, this research has a number of limitations that will need to be addressed. Due to time and length constraints, this dissertation was unable to look at how current constructions of mainstream environmentalism impact low income families though any other factors other than income, such as education, occupation, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, or region. This research would also benefit from a wider analysis of claim-makers and claims surrounding how environmentalism is constructed; a more inclusive study will be able to more accurately depict how environmentalism is constructed within mainstream Canadian society. I was also unable to determine the environmental lifecycle of the products promoted, and by extension, whether or not these products were greenwashed. As a result, this research cannot be widely generalized to all claim-makers or to all forms of environmentalism within mainstream Canadian society.

This research would have also benefited from analyzing two or more Canadian newspapers. Toronto Star was originally chosen because it has the highest readership in Canada (Pigg 2011). In retrospect, the tendency for other Canadian newspapers to offer different perspectives would have allowed for a better understanding of how Canadian newspapers construct environmentalism as a whole. As a result, I cannot generalize my results to all Canadian newspapers.

6.8 Future Research

Constructing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity may be beneficial to governments and corporations, as it addresses their economic needs, but it neglects the fact that the impoverished often struggle to afford necessities at current prices (Burningham and Thrush 2001:28). Future research could examine whether constructing environmentalism as a consumer-based activity excludes different groups within the low income status such as across gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and region. Additionally, future research could divide low income families based on whether they have other social capital factors, such as education or

occupation, and whether this will affect participation. Understanding how increased time commitments associated with products or the availability of free time created by personal lifestyle affects environmentally-friendly participation amongst these different groups could also be beneficial. By dividing low income into different categories a more detailed understanding of how consumer practices impact low income families and possibly better ways to address this issue could be determined. Studying different claim-makers, specifically sources found exclusively on the internet, could also provide an interesting area of study.

The exclusionary practices associated with environmentalism being constructed as a consumer-based activity could potentially worsen the stigma associated with the income gap. As environmentalism becomes an increasingly accepted social norm and necessity, stigma for non-participants will be an important area of study. Another study could also analyze whether non-conventional private forms of environmentally-friendly participation, such as reusing items, helps compensate for any stigma associated with decreased levels of participation in more obvious or public forms of environmentalism, such as consumption.

The ways in which environmentalism has been constructed as a consumer-based activity will also have implications for international affairs. In order to combat environmental destruction, globalization and cooperation among countries will be an important step. Many nations have a significant percentage of citizens living in poverty, and if environmentalism continues to be constructed as a consumer-based activity, it may create barriers and resistance amongst other nations.

Environmentalism as a consumer-based activity also places a heavy burden on the individual. If constructing environmentalism through consumerism persists, it will be important to understand whether it creates compliancy regarding other environmentally-friendly practices and how effective of a method it is in combating environmental degradation as excluding a whole class of people means a smaller environmentalist impact as a whole.

6.9 Concluding Comments

This thesis has attempted to explore how environmentalism has been socially constructed as a consumer-based activity in Canadian society by the Toronto Star, the David Suzuki Foundation, and the Canadian Government and whether this construction serves to exclude low income families. My theoretical discourse allowed me to select prominent claim-makers and explore how the claims and institutionalized norms served to construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity. Representation theory allowed me to read these articles and documents through a different context; using both denotative and connotative concepts I could accept the surface level meaning of these documents and understand how they also promote the underlying cultural script of environmentalism. Using a qualitative analysis I was able to identify four areas of exclusion that are promoted by these claim makers: 1) the promotion of green consumables and their associated high costs, 2) the level of access to non-consumable green resources, 3) the shaping of environmental problems as economic issues by focusing on corporations, and 4) the time commitment required to participate in environmentalism. The environment's relationship to the economy should be re-evaluated so that the green movement does not marginalize low income families by relegating them to a position that limits participation in environmentally-friendly activities. Altering the focus of Canadian mainstream environmentalism so that it does not only involve consumerism could potentially be a more effective way of dealing with environmental degradation.

There will be no easy solution to the problems we face, though I believe that politicians, governments, and citizens alike must band together in order to effectively combat this downward spiral of destruction. The ways in which we normalize the environment as simply a resource to be exploited and the way we construct environmentalism as a consumer-based activity must be altered if we want to continue enjoying the benefits of this world. Although making this change will be a difficult journey, I believe it is one we must embark upon, and sooner rather than later.

Appendix A

Toronto Star Articles Organized by Author, Title, and Date

Author	Article Title	Date of Publication and In-Text Reference
Bleakney, Peter	“Better late than never for Bimmer.”	November 17, 2012
Di Napoli, Albelle	“Iron Lady gets ‘green’ makeover.”	September 22, 2012
Gorrie, Peter	“Electric subsidy a money waster.”	September 29, 2012a
Gorrie, Peter	“Road to greener cars may be paved in plastic.”	November 17, 2012b
Hamilton, Tyler	“How to separate the bright LED lights from the dim bulbs.”	October 12, 2012a
Hamilton, Tyler	“Woody Harrelson and his question for ‘tree-free’ paper.”	October 25, 2012b
Hamilton, Tyler	“Kathleen Wynne fills gap in Ontario energy policy.”	November 9, 2012c
Hamilton, Tyler	“Maple Leafs and Raptors recognized for green streak.”	September 7, 2012d
Hamilton, Tyler	“Online project turns your old stuff into charity donations.”	September 14, 2012e
Hamilton, Tyler	“Overestimated, maybe, but plug-in vehicles shouldn’t be underestimated.”	November 16, 2012f
Hamilton, Tyler	“Clean energy shows it has mass appeal.”	September 1, 2012g
Hamilton, Tyler	“Ontario’s climate plan remains off track.”	November 23, 2012h
Hamilton, Tyler	“Ontario teaches world how not to run a FIT program.”	October 5, 2012i
Hamilton, Tyler	“Power plants major water hogs.”	September 22, 2012j
Hamilton, Tyler	“District energy a powerful opportunity for Toronto.”	September 28, 2012k
Hamilton, Tyler	“Fiscal, Climate cliffs lead to the same place.”	November 30, 2012l
Hamilton, Tyler	“Toronto start-up gives plastic waste the wax treatment.”	November 2, 2012m
Hamilton, Tyler	“Climate crisis could use star power.”	October 20, 2012n
Moorhouse, Ellen	“Durham Region targets Guinness record.”	November 29, 2012a
Moorhouse, Ellen	“Do your old couch a favour.”	September 7, 2012b
Moorhouse, Ellen	“Don’t throw those worn-out clothes in the garbage.”	October 9, 2012c

Author	Article Title	Date of Publication and In-Text Reference
Moorhouse, Ellen	“More furniture pick-up options.”	October 12, 2012d
Moorhouse, Ellen	“Where showbiz meets home décor.”	November 2, 2012e
Moorhouse, Ellen	“On the road to recovery...of recyclables that is.”	October 19, 2012f
Moorhouse, Ellen	“A quick lesson in pop culture.”	September 1, 2012g
Moorhouse, Ellen	“Anti-litter veterans take on the province.”	November 16, 2012h
Rushowy, Kristin	“Does this lunch make the grade?”	September 1, 2012
Sanderson, Vicky	“Welcome to the zero-mile diet.”	November 17, 2012
Scallan, Niamh	“Why your recycled glass often heads to landfills.”	September 28, 2012
Spears, John	“Nuclear waste seeks a home.”	September 2, 2012
Toronto Star	“Ten Vital Signs.”	October 2, 2013c

Appendix B

David Suzuki Foundation Articles Organized by Author, Title, and Date

Author	Article Title	Date of Publication and In-Text Reference
Bryant, Tyler	“Something for nothing, and the credit’s for free – the federal government’s attempt to take credit for emissions reductions.”	August 10, 2012
Coulter, Lindsay	“What makes a “good” home cleaner label?”	September 24, 2012a
Coulter, Lindsay	“The benefits of car-sharing.”	October 7, 2012b
David Suzuki Foundation	“Four places to cut your carbon.”	2013e
David Suzuki Foundation	“Eat sustainable seafood.”	2013f
Kadowaki, Ryan	“Ontario embracing solar energy’s bright future.”	May 1, 2012
Molnar, Michelle	“What is water worth?”	November 28, 2012
Paglaro, Tovah	“Fair trade, organic chocolate is the sweetest deal.”	December 2, 2012a
Paglaro, Tovah	“Green baby bums: Diapers for eco-parents.”	November 13, 2012b
Paglaro, Tovah	“Reduce food waste with a billion dollar meal plan.”	October 23, 2012c
Paglaro, Tovah	“Recycle less paper.”	November 20, 2012d
Paglaro, Tovah	“Toxic-free ways to lose head lice.”	November 28, 2012e

Appendix C
Government of Canada Incentive Documents Organized by
Department, Title, and Date

Author	Article Title	Date and In-Text Reference
Environment Canada	“Region of Peel Toilet Replacement Program.”	2011a
Environment Canada	“TAPS Program.”	2011c
Environment Canada	“Union Gas programmable thermostat credit.”	2011d
Environment Canada	“Horizon Utilities Corporation Peak Saver Program.”	2011e
Environment Canada	“City of Hamilton Subsidized Composters.”	2011f
Environment Canada	“Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Mortgage Loan Insurance Refund.”	2011g
Ministry of Energy	“Home Energy Audit.”	2012
Natural Resources Canada	“Archived-ecoEnergy Retrofit-Homes Program.”	2011
Natural Resources Canada	“SaveONenergy Retrofit Program.”	2012a
Natural Resources Canada	“SaveONenergy Heating & Cooling Program.”	2012b

Appendix D

Kyoto Media and Government Reports: Canada's Withdrawal Organized by Author, Title, Date, and Source

Author	Article Title	Date and In-Text Reference	Source
Associated Press	"Canada Pulls out of Kyoto Protocol."	December 12, 2011	CBC News
BBC	"Canada to withdraw from Kyoto Protocol."	December 13, 2011	BBC News
Curry, Bill and Shawn McCarthy	"Canada formally abandons Kyoto Protocol on climate change."	December 12, 2011	The Globe and Mail
Environment Canada	"Statement by Minister Kent."	December 12, 2011b	Government of Canada
Environment Canada	"A Climate Change Plan for the Purposes of the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act."	May 28, 2012	Government of Canada
Kent, Peter	"Canada's post-Kyoto plan"	January 25, 2012	Peter Kent's website
Office of the Auditor General of Canada	"Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development's Opening Statement."	May 8, 2012	Government of Canada
Wallace, Kenyon	"Canada feels global heat over Kyoto: Move could break domestic law, critics say, as world slams decision."	December 14, 2011	Toronto Star

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