

**ALTERNATIVE GREEN FOOD CONSUMER CULTURE IN A RISK  
SOCIETY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this dissertation is to add to existing accounts of the extent to which individuals may associate broad cultural meanings with their consumption of environmentally green foods. I started by doing an inductive thematic review of the literature on environmental risk perception and food consumption patterns. I then initiated a qualitative interview-based research strategy in the symbolic interactionist tradition. Original empirical material was generated from interview data on how informants, who were dedicated to environmentally green food consumption, constructed their worldviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed for 14 theoretically sampled informants. Overall, the worldview of this group of informants forms an alternative subculture, concerned with environmental sustainability and risk, which is at the fringe of mainstream consumer culture. Initially, two significant concepts emerged from the interviews; holism and balance. Then theoretic sampling of the literature was done and other highly relevant concepts from Low (2004) and Prothero, McDonagh and Dobscha (2010), were drawn on and adapted, based on what informants said. I provide conceptual models that reflect informant experience. I then abstract my analysis of the subjectivist informant data to place the experiences of the informants within a broad social context, and conceptualize their environmentally green consumption decisions as social process (Prus, 1987). In these ways, this dissertation contributes to scholarly knowledge.

## **DEDICATION**

**For Trish Murray-Zelmer, Wayne and Lois Zelmer  
and in memory of Anne Elizabeth Walford**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
1.0 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Research Question and Process.....	1
1.2 Two Brief Methodological Notes.....	4
1.3 Defining Concepts.....	6
1.4 Outline of the Dissertation.....	8
2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS ...	10
2.1 Conceptualizing Green Food Culture.....	10
2.2 Situating the Research in a Broader Context.....	11
2.3 Food Choice as Reflection of Cultural Authenticity.....	20
2.4 Responsibility and Status in Second Modernity.....	23
2.5 The Expanding Green Niche and Associated Fluid Social Meanings	32
3.0 RISK THEORY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION.....	38
3.1 Scope and use of the Risk Concept in this Dissertation.....	38
3.2 From Assumed Safety to Assumed Risk.....	41
3.3 Risk Negotiation, Experts, Mass Media, and Acceptable Levels.....	49
3.4 Consumer Risk Perception and Responsibilization.....	56
3.5 Conclusions from Risk and Food Literature Reviews.....	61
4.0 THEORY, DESIGN AND METHODS.....	65
4.1 Theoretical Perspective.....	65
4.2 Research Design.....	69
4.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis.....	81
4.4 Rigor.....	90
4.5 Ethics.....	96
5.0 CLASSIFYING ENVIRONMENTALLY GREEN CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES.....	98

5.1 Introduction.....	98
5.2 Conceptual Analysis of an Informant Green Conscience .....	98
5.3 Context for Conceptual Interpretation of Informant Worldview .....	105
5.4 Classifying Green Engagement.....	110
5.5 Profile of Informants as Green Consumers or Green Citizens .....	115
5.6 Overview of Major Themes for Later Substantive Analysis .....	127
5.7 Chapter Conclusion.....	132
6.0 INFORMANT PERCEPTIONS OF GREENESS RELATED TO FOODWAY CENTRALIZATION .....	133
6.1 Introduction.....	133
6.2 Questioning Greenness in Mainstream Foodways.....	133
6.3 Making Green Choices: Balancing Risk and Pragmatism .....	144
6.4 Chapter Conclusion.....	151
7.0 PRODUCT AUTHENTICITY AND CONSUMER CULTURE .....	152
7.1 Introduction.....	152
7.2 Conceptualizing Environmentally Green Product Authenticity .....	152
7.3 Selling Green Definition .....	157
7.4 Acquiring Authentic Green Products with Limited Economic Means .....	165
7.5 Chapter Conclusion.....	168
8.0 THE ORGANIC DESIGNATION .....	170
8.1 Introduction.....	170
8.2 Historical, Legislative and Marketing Contexts .....	171
8.3 Informant Views on Organic Meaning, Certification and Labelling	175
8.4 Beyond Organic: Other Signifiers of Greenness to Informants.....	177
8.5 Chapter Conclusion.....	181
9.0 GREEN CONSCIENCE AS SOCIAL PROCESS .....	183
9.1 Introduction.....	183
9.2 Green Conscience Conceptual Model for Green Citizen Informants	185
9.3 Holism and Green Citizen Informants .....	191
9.4 Balance and Green Citizen Informants .....	196
9.5 Control and Green Citizen Informants.....	202
9.6 Holism, Balance and Control for Green Consumer Informants .....	209

9.7 Green Conscience as Generic Social Process .....	214
9.8 Chapter Conclusion.....	219
10.0 DISSERTATION CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	221
10.1 Introduction.....	221
10.2 Importance of Subjectivist Research Orientation .....	221
10.3 Dissertation Overview .....	223
10.4 Directions for Future Research .....	224
11.0 REFERENCES .....	228
APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE.....	239
APPENDIX B – SAMPLE COPY OF CONSENT FORM.....	241
CURRICULUM VITAE	

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Informants .....	78
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## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 4.1</i> Possible Affinity Connections to a Green Conscience .....	80
<i>Figure 5.1</i> Diagram from Prothero, McDonagh & Dobscha (2010, p. 153) “Green Commodity Discourse - Green Consumer / Citizen Involvement and Motivation” Used with permission from the authors.....	112
<i>Figure 9.1</i> Model of Green Conscience as Process for Green Citizen Informants .....	186
<i>Figure 9.2</i> Model of Holism and Green Citizen Informants .....	192
<i>Figure 9.3</i> Model of Balance and Green Citizen Informants .....	196
<i>Figure 9.4</i> Model of Control and Green Citizen Informants .....	202
<i>Figure 9.5</i> Model of Worldview on Balance Theme for Green Consumer Informants .....	209

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research Question and Process

This dissertation examines the intersection of two major trends present in the last fifty years: the emergence of environmental concern among the general public and the increased interest in food, both within the general public and, more specifically, as a topic of scholarly interest. Viewing these two broad trends in conjunction leads to an obvious question: Does environmental concern affect food choice? And if so, how?

My interest in this topic arose, in part, as an extension of my Master's thesis research on the link between environmental risk and environmentally green food advertising in Quebec. It was further piqued by a series of conversations I had with members of a community garden in Fredericton where I had a plot. In contrast to my own reasons for being a member of the garden, primarily as a culinary hobby and not related specifically to environmentally green foods, these individuals talked passionately about their perceptions of environmental sustainability and peril as motivating factors in their choice to grow some of their own food.

Using the broad areas of environmental risk perception and food consumption as a starting point for the doctoral research, I did an inductive thematic review of the literature. From this I created an initial conceptual model of a possible green conscience based on apparently connected green-related affinities discussed in the literature.<sup>1</sup> This was an analytic review of the literature rather than solely a descriptive one. Having done

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

this preliminary review of the literature, I initiated a qualitative interview-based research strategy framed by the symbolic interactionist tradition.

My interviews focused on how a small number of informants who were dedicated to environmentally green food consumption, constructed their worldviews. Building on insight from the community garden conversations indicating that environmental concern often served as a motivation to begin growing their own food, criteria for informant participation included having a significant non-mainstream supplement to their green food intake. Stated another way, the informants were purposefully selected in a manner designed to determine whether traditional models of consumer behavior provide a sufficient explanation for their food choices.

Most research on consumer behavior presumes the existence of an array of choices and seeks to determine why the individual prefers one option over another. However, as my conversations at the community garden made evident, there exists a group of people who, for reasons somehow connected to perceptions about sustainability and risk, seem not to fit this model. Rather than simply choose from among the food options provided by the modern capitalist economy, they have sought out other ways to significantly supplement their food choices.

The aim of my research is to understand these individuals and, more specifically, to elucidate the worldview underpinning their actions and to explicate how the food choices they make are linked to that worldview. In addressing this issue, open-ended interview questions on the following topics were developed:

1. How do informants conceptualize environmental greenness in the context of risk and other factors affecting product choice such as price, quality and availability?
2. How do informants go about acquiring environmentally green foods? and
3. How do informants feel about green labelling designations like organic certification?

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed for 14 informants. Two significant concepts emerged from the initial thematic analysis of the interview data: holism and balance. I revisited the literature after conducting interviews to look for conceptual similarities between informant experience and previous research. I discovered a relevant conceptual model from Prothero, McDonough and Dobscha (2010) classifying environmentally green consumption patterns by type of consumer. An important concept from Prothero et al. (2010) was that some consumers of environmentally green foods tended to view their consumption choices as being holistically connected to a variety of other considerations.

With respect to holism, informants did not use that specific word, but the concept was very evident in their worldview. This reinforced the significance of the concept of holism noted by Prothero et al. (2010) in the literature. With respect to the concept of balance, several of the informants used that word explicitly, and most of the others alluded to balance as being very important. Significantly, the concept of balance was not present in the literature that I had examined to this point.

At this stage of the research process, my supervisor Gary Bowden reviewed my work and suggested that I look at Jacqueline Low's (2004) research on individuals who

use alternative health services. He made this suggestion because there were strong parallels between the concepts of holism and balance emerging from the preliminary analysis of my data and those used by Low (2004) to explain the behavior of her informants: holism, balance, and control. Using theoretic sampling of the literature, via the suggestion of my supervisor, I examined Low's (2004) study and realized that there were significant parallels between the experiences of these different informants. Specifically, the group of individuals that Low (2004) studied, were dissatisfied with solutions provided by the biomedical health care system to health problems they had experienced, and sought out alternative forms of healing. Thus, in each case, there exists a group of individuals who find that their needs are not met by the "mainstream" options provided by modern society and actively seek alternative means to satisfy those needs. Based on this insight, I theoretically sampled aspects of Low's conceptual model which I then modified based on what my informants said in their interviews. In doing so, I make a contribution to scholarly knowledge by developing understanding of this alternative green subculture.

## **1.2 Two Brief Methodological Notes**

The above description of my research process raises two methodological issues that deserve clarification at the outset. The first involves the recruitment of informants, the second issue is the role of the literature in inductive research. This dissertation is, in essence, a study of a particular subcultural niche concerned with environmental sustainability and risk that exists at the fringe of mainstream consumer culture. However, in contrast to many such groups, this one is not tied to a particular geographic space. For example, where the individual interested in the subculture of "metalheads" may locate

them at a concert or the researcher interested in evangelical Christians may find them at church, there is no such location for the group I am studying. When the field is not a delimited geographic space, one has to start somewhere (Williams, 1993), and in my case, I started with concepts from the literature and also by speaking with one of the organizers of the community garden where I had a plot. This is known as drawing on insider awareness and it is also an acceptable starting point when there is, in this sense, no “field” (Chavez, 2008).

A second methodological issue involves the role of previous literature. There exists a substantial debate about the relative benefits and liabilities of reading the existing literature before undertaking inductive analysis. Those who hold that one should not review the literature in advance argue that the categories that one internalizes because of the exposure to this literature affect the interpretation of the data by leading the researcher to impose those categories onto the data and, hence, preclude recognition of the ‘real’ themes that could have been inductively identified if the researcher were open to seeing them. Or, to state it more crudely, true inductive analysis is not possible if you have read the literature in advance. I reject this view. No researcher is a *table rasa*. In my case, I have previous knowledge about the topic as a result of my Master’s research, the conversations that I have had with fellow members of community gardens, and a myriad of other personal experiences.

How are the predispositions and categories of thought that emerge from lived experience different in kind from those garnered from the literature? From my perspective, they are not. The issue, for me, is not whether one enters the field having read the existing literature but, rather, whether one is aware that prior knowledge and

ways of thinking may channel the way you view the data. If you have this awareness, you can practice reflectivity, and by distancing yourself from your tacit knowledge you can be open to alternative ways of thinking and conduct true inductive research (McCracken, 1988; Altheide & Johnson, 1994). If lacking such awareness, it is likely that the researcher is imposing an interpretation onto the data, irrespective of whether or not they have read the existing literature.

In this dissertation, important conceptual insights were garnered from both Low (2004) and Prothero et al. (2010). However, in each case, I modified the concepts from the literature based on what informants in my research said about their beliefs and therefore my conceptual models reflect informant beliefs and experiences. To put it another way, I did not make my data fit into these models, but rather modified them in creating my own conceptual model based on what my informants had to say. I then abstracted my analysis of the subjectivist informant data to place the experiences of the informants within a broader social context, and to conceptualize their environmentally green consumption decisions as social process (Prus, 1987).

### **1.3 Defining Concepts**

A number of concepts are used in this dissertation. Here I provide the scope of what I mean by the overarching concepts of *consumer*; *environmentally green food*; *risk* and *foodways*. Other more specialized concepts are introduced and defined in the normal flow of the dissertation.<sup>2</sup>

The use of the term *consumer* is fraught with complexity. On one level, the individuals in my study are straightforwardly consumers. The focus of the study is on

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this dissertation, concepts used are attributed to the relevant scholar, informant, or my own analytical voice.

food and this is something that they, quite literally, consume in the sense that they eat it. On another level, they do explicitly engage with the mainstream economy and make some of their food-related choices based on ‘consumer’ considerations such as price, taste, availability, and so on. But, as articulated above, a key feature of the individuals in this study is their dissatisfaction with mainstream ‘consumer choices’ and the resulting search for alternatives. Thus, in some sense, their behavior is not accurately captured by the label ‘consumer’ and its associated connotations, but, on the other hand, it would be erroneous to suggest that their food choices are unaffected by ‘consumer’ concerns.

Thus, for present purposes, the term ‘consumer’ and its cognates, for example, consumption and consumer behavior, are intended to incorporate both passive consumer behavior such as choice between mainstream options and active consumer behavior such as seeking out non-traditional options. As Blumer argues, “it is inaccurate and misleading to regard dynamic relations as predetermined or controlled by culture or structure” (Blumer, 1988, p. 304). He also notes that:

the organization of a human society is the framework inside of which social action takes place and is not the determinant of that action... Structural features, such as ‘culture,’ ‘social systems,’ ‘social stratification,’ or ‘social roles,’ set conditions for... action but do not determine... action. (Blumer 1969, pp. 87–88)

*Environmentally green food* is, for this dissertation, food which is produced using strategies or production methods specifically designed to make it more environmentally sustainable than it would normally be in mainstream production. How individuals evaluate the authenticity of green labelling claims is a central consideration in this



dissertation. Please note that I use the word “green” interchangeably with the words “environmentally green”.

*Risk* is another important term used in this dissertation. Aspects from various scholarly conceptualizations of risk are studied as specifically relevant to consumer perception of hazard. The focus of the study is not the risk society itself (Beck, 1992), but the food consumption patterns of a specific group of individuals; for whom managing perceived risks is an important part of their decision-making processes (Lupton, 1997).

The notion of a *foodway* can take on slightly different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. I find a definition from Davey (1993) to be highly relevant to this dissertation, where a foodway is “not only what is eaten by a particular group of people but also the variety of customs, beliefs and practices surrounding the production, preparation and presentation of food” (Davey, 1993, p. 182, as cited in Brien, 2009). I considered these factors as context for my analysis of informant perspective in developing an operational definition of the foodway term specifically tailored to this dissertation. Therefore, I define a foodway as the sum of the factors involved in bringing a given food to market, including but not limited to physical, environmental, social and economic system considerations. It is everything that is connected to how a given food item comes into existence, develops, and how it eventually arrives on the consumer’s plate.

#### **1.4 Outline of the Dissertation**

The research questions are answered via a general qualitative approach in the symbolic interactionist tradition. Relevant aspects of risk and food literatures are studied in Chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 4 covers the research design explanation, description of the

methods used, justification for a subjectivist epistemology, notes on rigor, ethics, and other standard methodological considerations.

Substantive data analysis takes place starting in Chapter 5. Therein, three important themes from informant data are identified: perceptions of greenness related to foodway centralization; product authenticity and consumer culture; and the organic designation. Chapter 5 also situates informant green experiences contextually within an established framework classifying forms of environmentally green consumption.

Chapter 6 tackles the first of these discovered themes, exploring various aspects of centralization and decentralization as factors shaping environmentally green consumption. Chapter 7 is a study of the second theme, looking at how product authenticity and perception thereof can be measured, and how it is influenced by an assortment of social, economic, and environmental forces. Chapter 8 studies the organic designation and informant views on it. It looks at organic as a core category of environmentally green foods, and its cultural and regulatory meaning.

Chapter 9 abstracts analysis of themes studied in the preceding chapters, placing the experiences of informants within a broader social context, illustrating how the subjectivist findings studied in this work make a novel and substantive contribution to scholarly knowledge. Chapter 10 serves to conclude the dissertation and offer a direction for future research.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS**

### **2.1 Conceptualizing Green Food Culture**

In the literature studied in Chapters 2 and 3, various factors are noted by scholars who discuss considerations relevant to green food culture from a variety of contexts.

Based on this literature, I provide the following broad conceptual summary of green food culture as relevant to the dissertation, conceptualizing it as meaning that individuals will choose the foods they eat not just coincidentally, but for one or more of the following reasons, the order of which is inconsequential:

1. As cultural expression (for example, Belasco & Scranton, 2002);
2. Risk aversion or fears of environmental contamination of mainstream foods (Beck, 1992);
3. Desire for distinction or status (for example, Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56);
4. Ethical considerations (for example, Singer, 1989, p. 167);
5. As being natural (Pollan, 2006, p. 135);
6. For health (Schuldt & Schwartz, 2010, p. 1);
7. As a way of being more environmentally responsible (Patel, 2009, p. 11);
8. To feel more connected to producers (Kneen, 1990, p. 25); and
9. Reflecting a holistic view of foodways (Prothero et al., 2010).

However, different groups of people may eat green for different reasons and the above broad considerations from the literature may not all carry over to the lived experiences of informants.

## **2.2 Situating the Research in a Broader Context**

The fields encompassing food studies are very well established with many diverse contributing scholarly communities. A brief contextual overview of a broader scholarly study of food is offered below to situate a relatively new body of literature, the sociology of food, especially as relevant to the scope of the subjectivist nature of the dissertation research questions. I acknowledge important aspects and inter-linkages to a broader constellation of scholarly thoughts on food, but do not delve into peripheral nuances. Directly relevant aspects of this backgrounder are then analyzed in depth in the balance of the chapter.

Early scholarly study of food is most prominent outside of sociological thought. Much of that work takes a positivist view of science and the scientific method. Use of quantitative research methods is ubiquitous in the early core of food as a research area. The context of interest in this dissertation is food consumption. Literature from nutritional studies, food chemistry, crop development, and other areas of food or agricultural science is not directly relevant. Although sociological study of food and foodways can certainly be positivist in orientation, a purely sociological orientation is a newer entrant to food studies.

Within the dominant positivist orientation to the exploration of food consumption patterns and foodways as areas of research enquiry, many natural sciences perspectives such as food chemistry, incorporate a cornucopia of scientific advances applied to food into the scholarly memory. Such articles tend to follow a formulaic template for advancing a traditional way of envisioning food studies in the exclusive light of industrial-scientific progress, with a specific new innovation being reviewed; for

example, Flosdorf and Tease (1959) who examine the science of freeze-drying foods for superior quality and storage-ability. This sort of work is important, but if the body of literature were to stay exclusively within a positivist model, it would artificially limit the possible scope of scholarly food inquiry.

Also present in this early epoch of food studies literature are assorted aspects of biochemical inquiry and farming science, virtually all of which are positivist in nature. By way of example, Wetselaar, Jakobsen and Chaplin (1973), engaged in analysis of crop science specifically as related to the effects of nitrogen balancing in soil and effective fertilizer application. Again, the focus of food studies was on scientific advancement, for the industrialized domination of nature. The later emergence of the risk society played an important role in a societal re-envisioning of scientific progress as having a pervasive and often ignored socio-political side, as discussed in the next chapter (see Beck, 1992).

Still largely focused on collecting quantitative data, but more closely aligned with sociological areas of inquiry, is the field of marketing, and the related market research study of consumer behaviour patterns. Market research is well entrenched in the examination of food, although, typically from quantitative perspectives. For example, Sharp and Mott (1956) examined urban food purchasing patterns from an economics and marketing perspective, with a very large sample size of 749 informants, a highly structured interview questionnaire, and the findings derived from positivist statistical tools exclusively. It gave an overview of many consumption types and gender roles. The methodological attributes of that study: quantitative method, rigid statistical data analysis strategy and large sample size reflect an archetype for many such studies. They focus on how the customer interacts with products but are not equipped to consider subjectivist

factors which animate food consumption patterns. To put it another way, studies of this type are designed to show the “how” but have no mechanism for beginning to explore the “why”: they are exploratory, but not explanatory.

The sociology of food adds important scholarly perspective to food research. It is relatively new to this research area. Longstanding sociological interest in the study of culture and social interaction has come, more recently, to include examination of food and foodways as integral to these phenomena. The sociological canon of food studies became established around the study of food as cultural expression. Notable international scholars are: Lewin (1943); Lévi-Strauss (1969); Mead (1964); Peters and Rappoport (1988); Douglas (1992); Belasco and Scranton (2002); and others. Prominent examples of aspects of these works, which are to follow, tend either to advance new sociological food theory based on quantitatively measured expressions of cultural variables, or to conduct examinations at a more abstract, broad based level, sometimes linking existing theories from other fields in a sociological way to the study of food.

For example, Peters and Rappoport, note that “no foods can be defined as such apart from their psychological, social, cultural, and historical meanings” (Peters & Rappoport, 1988, p. 5). Moreover, they trace a strong lineage linking food studies to sociology beginning with Lewin (1943) who was among the first to note that sociological factors profoundly affected nutritional outcomes (Peters & Rappoport, 1988, p. 5). They also note that this correlation was then backed by Mead (1964) in her social examination of food habits; and others (Peters & Rappoport, 1988, p. 5).

A variety of social theorists in the scholarly community have published high-profile works examining the study of food as cultural identity. An example is Levi-

Strauss's (1969): *The Raw and the Cooked*, especially his analysis of binary cultural food terms such as raw-cooked, or fresh-rotten which he abstracted to a broader culinary triangle along which he theorized many cross-cultural food preparation methods may be aligned. Another important theorist, Douglas (1992) is widely cited in the sociology of food, especially on *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory*, which ties together sociological questions, food and risk theories.

A significant contribution to sociological study of food was also made through the work of Belasco and Scranton (2002): *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*. This anthology of food essays is frequently cited and features relevant work from high profile food-in-society researchers such as Belasco, Mintz, and Gabaccia among a number of other prominent writers. Belasco's essay recognizes food studies as an important, emerging scholarly research area; Mintz theorizes a continual threat to individuality in a hyper-consumerist culture; and Gabaccia looks broadly at the reciprocal relationship between food consumption patterns and cultural identification.

Relevant Canadian scholarly thought is shaped by Fieldhouse (1986), whose work on food sociology in *Food and Nutrition: Customs and Culture* was important in its exploration of a constellation of issues surrounding manifestations of food consumption patterns. There are a number of current scholars pushing Canadian sociology of food forward. For example, Beagan and Chapman (2012) look at the effect of demographics on culinary taste, food consumption as expression of social identity, and stakeholder perspectives on healthy eating. Another prominent scholar, Sumner (2012) looks at centralization and sustainability for environmentally green food systems. These works are drawn on in this chapter.

Within a Canadian context, qualitative approaches to food studies are becoming more common, due to a general framing of Canadian food studies as being grounded in furthering the community or public good (Koç et al., 2012, p. 10). Recent interpretative sociological research offers noteworthy additional insight on underlying animating factors which guide consumption patterns, offering another level of understanding. The rise in use of rigorous subjectivist methods within sociology can enable the researcher to find deeper, previously hidden types of factors which underlie the more readily observable patterns gleaned from positivist sociological inquiry.

There is a small but growing body of qualitative research in sociological food studies delivering new, previously difficult to discover insight on subjectivity. Examples in this literature include Connolly and Prothero (2008) who studied consumption of environmentally green products; and Shaw (2004), who used interpretative sociology to study food-related risk perception. Broadly relevant aspects of the food studies literature are scientific progress, consumer culture, environmental hazard, regulation, authenticity, status, quality, and environmental sustainability.

Arbitrating modern food cultures and perceptions of desirability are a handful of transnational corporations that exert tremendous control over the world's food supply and distribution (Albritton, 2012, pp. 93-94; McIntosh, 1996, pp. 90-91). Shelf-stability for packaging, transport, and presentation as being fresh, tends to take precedence over relative nutritional value to similar products, exemplified by the widespread availability of iceberg lettuce, which represents these axioms (Friedman, 2012, p. 20). The industrial food system entices consumers by enhancing the appearance of foods using various additives and preservatives (Knezevic, 2012, p. 252). Also there is a cultural tendency to



view the consumer as responsible for making “good” food choices, and to maintain a lean body image (Johnston & Cappeliez, 2012, p. 49).

The degree of actual, compared with consumer-perceived, choice from within the array of food brands, is an intriguing area for inquiry. With the (pseudo) hyper-individualism of advanced capitalism, the consumer is invited to showcase *who* they are by what kinds of food they buy (Warde, 1997, p. 180; Johnston & Cappeliez, 2012, p. 49). The modern supermarket offers an immense array of food options marketed as unique or individualized, however, the supposed individualism arising from consuming these products is predictable and largely an illusion (Warde, 1997, p. 194).

In this context, it is important to note the theory of “conspicuous consumption” developed by Thorstein Veblen in 1899. He studied an emergent leisure class, which had become enamored with elaborate displays of consumption for the purpose of conveying economic power and distinction:

Conspicuous consumption of valuable goods is a means of reputability to the gentleman of leisure. As wealth accumulates on his hands, his own unaided effort will not avail to sufficiently put his opulence in evidence by this method. (Veblen, 1899/2000, p. 64)

Excessive consumption of superfluous luxury goods was the main avenue for this social display (Veblen, 1899/2000, p. 64). This is highly relevant to the food literature, as much of the ethical and environmentally green designations are more expensive than mainstream options, and therefore open to becoming boutique-style goods for those consumers looking to show status through consumption of such foods as luxury items (Knezevic, 2012, pp. 255-256).

An important related concept in the literature is Bourdieu's (2000) characterization of distinction. He conceptualizes fashions as being linked to cultural context, especially class-status, education background, and family situation. Using statistical analysis, he finds that cultural taste in food and other commodities can invoke hyper-consumerism as people seek to express themselves through their purchases of certain types of products deemed to present an image of increased social status (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56). Consumer perception of making good choices is heavily influenced by marketing (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179), which drives status seeking behaviours on the part of eager consumers looking to set themselves apart from the generic auspices of the mainstream (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56). Bourdieu's distinction theory builds on Veblen (1899/2000), adding the additional dimensions of displays of high social and cultural capital through consumption of trendy products (Bourdieu, 2000).

Environmentally green products have become fashionable for a wide variety of reasons and occupy "complex aesthetic, emotional, and even political dimensions" (Pollan, 2006, p. 134). Green food products may be perceived as being more closely connected to their natural source (Pollan, 2006, p. 135). However, organic and green are absorbed into, and do not refute the corporate food system which largely created a distancing and disconnect of consumer from producer in the first place (Pollan, 2006, p. 139; Kneen, 1990, p. 25). Green labeling designations such as organic and free range paint the living conditions of livestock as being compassionate, safe and pleasant for the animals, and in harmony with nature (Pollan, 2006, p. 135). Though portrayed as pastoral or bucolic, industrial scale and production success "will cost organic its soul" (Pollan,

2006, p. 139). Organic agriculture is still in some ways intensive factory agriculture, relying on ingredients assembled from thousands of kilometers away (Pollan, 2006, p. 139).

Labelling loopholes or manipulation of words designed to entice consumers via the promise of greater environmental sustainability or other benefits is a concern regarding food packaging, especially for products from powerful multi-national corporations (Scrinis, 2015, p. 141). The vastness of corporate messaging and private quality assurance standards on food labels in supermarkets has shown that public policy, through regulation, is not the only or even necessarily the most effective way of communicating food information to consumers (Sumner, 2015, p. 122; Trimmer, 2009, p. 1812).

Because of their multinational presence, economic clout and advertising budgets, large food companies can significantly influence the buying habits of consumers (Scrinis, 2015, pp. 136-137). This is done partly through self-regulated labelling designations implying healthfulness and partly through emphasizing consumers' need to take individual responsibility for their consumption patterns (Scrinis, 2015, p. 138).

Marketing strategies for green food products often include the interlinked concepts of responsabilization and elevated status to tempt consumers (Knezevic, 2012, pp. 255-256). Yet consumer uptake of marketed ideas would be reliant on subjective, individual perceptions of the available products. The concept of subjectivity is drawn from work by Blumer (1969). Individual consumption patterns are also linked to in-flux

consumer identities where a person may have any number of reactions to marketing, including rejection of products perceived to be disingenuously marketed.<sup>3</sup>

Green foods are at the high end of the food-status spectrum and can be seen as chic and exclusive (Jordan, 2007, p. 21). Tension between status, price, quality, authenticity, and scale, as factors in consumer choice is both macro-level (structural) and micro-level (individual). It is from a varied and interwoven context that the sociological literature on food and foodways is hewn. Within the broad literature, there are many relevant aspects to the research questions. Although much of the literature makes macro-level claims, food is also an individualized experience. The most crucial issues in the food literature as related to the dissertation centre on how social meanings become attached to foods; the role of marketing; and the rise of the green food market segment. Each of these areas is accorded a chapter section for analysis and they are grouped around the following precepts:

1. Individuals select, prepare, and consume foods in ways that are culturally meaningful and authentic to them (for example, Belasco, 2002, p. 2);
2. Information campaigns by marketing agents are designed to build on or create cultural capital and drive status seeking behaviour whereby individuals invest themselves through consumption of that product (for example, Warde, 1997, p. 180). However, personal consumption patterns are complicated and individuals elect or reject certain products based on a variety of factors external to marketing on ethics based food choices (for example, Singer, 1989, p. 167); and

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<sup>3</sup> For details please see the dissertation findings in Chapter 9.2.

3. Exponential growth of the environmentally green niche in the last several years has led to diverse and potentially contradictory perceptions of its meaning (for example, Pollan, 2006, pp. 140-141).

### **2.3 Food Choice as Reflection of Cultural Authenticity**

As will be shown in this section, the preparation, consumption, and sharing of food is a deeply cultural experience tied to identity, ethics, social stratification, and a variety of other social indicators. Public notions of food-identity are wrapped up in displays of consumption (Belasco, 2002, p. 2). Individual perceptions of “proper” food rituals are linked to cultural background and class-status (Fieldhouse, 1986, pp. 67-68). They are also linked to a neo-liberal vision of governance and responsibility (Knezevic, 2012, p. 254). While the public may take it for granted, the act of eating has high cultural significance, wherein one’s experience of food is both socializing and entertainment (McIntosh, 1996, p. 1; Warde, 1997, p. 180). Food as a marker of ethnic identity can be used to share culture, but also to delineate boundaries (McIntosh, 1996, p. 58). For example, high class-status individuals tend to view ethnic foods as imparting cultural capital on the eater, a way to establish authenticity with a particular community, but efforts to essentially gentrify ethnic food are viewed with disdain by people who eat it as part of their community traditions or because it is traditionally more economical than mainstream foods (Witt, 2004, p. 87). Relatively unassuming foods such as macaroni-and-cheese are sometimes given gourmet treatment to make them – and therefore the eater – “cool” where the associated class-status indicator of the food is inverted (Beagan, Power & Chapman, 2015, p. 77).

A common perspective on ethnic linked specialty food consumption is that eaters of such foods may become embarrassed by the cooking practices of their kin if these practices are “old-world” or otherwise a marker of foreignness, and lack of cultural integration to the mainstream (Lupton, 1994). However, looking at the popularity of ethnic food and drink events such as Oktoberfest or Saint Patrick’s Day, it is clear that in some cases, foreignness is celebrated and marketed inclusively, where *consumers* of all cultures are welcome. Eating foods which would be traditionally associated as being outside of one’s cultural or class niche can be seen as a form of exploration, conquest, thrill-seeking or sophistication (Beagan et al., 2015, p. 77).

Individuals in general, especially new immigrants, take comfort in familiar foods (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 64). As numerous immigrant communities became established in the United States, cultural entrepreneurs facilitated food-familiarity by cultivating and selling targeted ethnic foods (Gabaccia, 1998, pp. 64-65). Cultural sensitivities and traditions related to liquor are extensions of those values tied to food, and going to culturally themed bars meant different things for different groups of people (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 99). For example, German immigrants found early twentieth century American bars to be culturally pedestrian, and American Protestants found Germans’ family trips to beer gardens to be culturally reprehensible (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 79).

Ethnically themed cookbooks are published as a way to protect the cultural heritage of a particular group from the melting pot (Witt, 2004, p. 13). Yet cookbooks as artifacts of food-culture also offer outsiders the ability to learn both foreign recipes and possibly some significant associated cultural traditions (Brownlie, Hewer, & Horne, 2005, p. 11). McIntosh notes that mainstream food production and consumption, by

contrast, tends to lack cultural significance or meaning (McIntosh, 1996, p. 58).

Strychacz's interpretation is more positive; that macro assimilation of various food-cultures is emblematic of a diverse, open, and modern society (Strychacz, 2010, p. 150). By catering to the tastes of a local audience's perception of status, the addition of foreign flair, such as French, can be extremely profitable – even if the referent ethnic clientele would find the food to be inauthentic (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 96).

There are many examples of this, such as the commonly practiced addition of lettuce to Greek salads in North American mainstream restaurants, as the typical customer's palette is more accustomed to the Americanized version. Also, in a number of such restaurants, one can upgrade to an authentic Greek salad for an extra fee (Yassou Souvlaki and Donair menu, 2004) such as at a Fredericton restaurant called Yassou. It is this potentially contradictory extra fee in exchange for purchased authenticity, identity, and individuality that forms the basis of several key aspects of environmentally green niche food advertising as well (Zelmer, 2008). The broader implications of this illustrate how cultural identity can exist as both an ephemeral individual quality as well as a marketable commodity.

Following a similar process to that of gourmet adaptations of ethnic foods, there are marketing-focused adaptations of environmentally green indicators designed to induce supposed high class status and / or social responsabilization to lure customers (Beagan et al., 2015, p. 77).<sup>4</sup> Yet many of these green-indicated foods can be grown at home or at least self-prepared if one has the time. Also, one may consider that some users of environmentally green foods, such as community gardeners, may not be of high economic means, instead using their gardening abilities to supplement otherwise possibly

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<sup>4</sup> Significant analysis of this is provided in Chapters 7 and 8.

austere dietary options. Environmentally green food consumption as a cultural experience therefore has many dimensions.

The experience of certain types of foodways as culture (for example, Warde, 1997, p. 180), or food as part of symbolic cultural ritual (for example, Beagan et al., 2015), especially as it relates to environmentally green considerations, is a new but important area in the literature. The research conducted in this dissertation contributes to this emerging research area. Informant data is collected from a series of interviews using theoretic sampling. Data is analyzed both as stand-alone, and in the context of the abstract, generalized worldviews from the food literature. As part of this exploration, informants shed light on their cultural and various other reasons for embracing green food. Also analyzed is the extent to which status and conspicuous displays of environmental greenness were important to informants, and how this manifested in their daily lives. In seeking authenticity, informants looked for environmentally green options as part of lifestyle choice, moral imperative, or indicator of something else of symbolic personal meaning.

## **2.4 Responsibility and Status in Second Modernity**

This section explores the business of consumer identity, ethics, status and responsibility for niche food marketing in the era of Beck's (1992) second modernity. Consumer culture has in many ways, appropriated the expression of cultural identity (Kneen, 2009, pp. 29-30); where displays of distinction (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56) are made through conspicuous consumption. This can certainly include the pattern of decisions regarding food consumption choices. Within the context of the (pseudo)hyper-



individualism of advanced capitalism, the consumer is enticed to showcase “who” they are by what kinds of food they buy (Warde, 1997, p. 180).

The concept of status encompasses several dimensions related to food. Industry has been highly successful in portraying individualism and identity as being imbued by products: that one displays their identity through consumption (Warde, 1997, p. 180). The typical modern supermarket offers an immense array of food options marketed as distinctive or individualized: however, this is mostly contrived as a way of entrenching a handful of conglomerates as the backstop against which a veneer of competition and choice thrives (Warde, 1997, p. 194). Messages on food labels tend to be principally about marketing (Warde, 1997, p. 180) even if they look like official certifications or other relatively unbiased information (Scrinis, 2015, p. 138). Environmentally green foods, for example, tend to display a wide variety of labeling symbols, some of which are from government or third party verifiers of recognized authenticity, but many others of which are private designations of questionable meaning and rigor (Friedman, 2012, pp. 23-24).

Branding ties desirable attributes, such as personality, quality, authenticity and trust to products. The personification of goods as if they were being made by an individual the consumer can relate to is a very common enticement tactic: “Aunt Jemima” (pancake mix), “Uncle Ben’s” (rice), “Ronald McDonald” (McDonald’s), and “Grandma’s” (molasses) are well known examples, but there are many others. Marketers do not simply provide a product to satisfy consumer demand; their agents create much of that demand (Kneen, 1990, p. 10). By linking their food products to toys, education, or rewards, marketers have been incredibly successfully at grooming young, uncritical

consumers (Nestle, 2003, p. 185). Food-cigarette company conglomerates, for example, are highly skilled at marketing to children and using charities to better their public image (Nestle, 2003, pp. 22-23).

Also important ingredients for enticing specific consumer behaviours are the interlinked notions of governmentality and responsibility (Foucault, 1991). Closely linked to presentations of status (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56) are those of responsibility; encompassing one's physical appearance, manners, relating to health management and affecting individual consumption pattern choices (McIntosh, 1996, p. 59). Food fashion as a platform for displaying social status is ever changing (Jordan, 2007, pp. 20-21) and significantly shaped by marketing (Warde, 1997, p. 194).

Social status is based on unequal access, both physical and ephemeral, to goods and services (McIntosh, 1996, p. 97). Responsibility to manage risk is shifted to the individual as a consequence of increased corporate power (Patel, 2009, pp. 3-5) and the risk society (Beck, 1992). Responsibility to eat healthily is largely placed on the individual, yet the food industry actively manipulates some nutritional standards to their benefit and uses its influence to keep more meaningful ones out of common usage (Scrinis, 2015, p. 138).

Class status can affect individual perception of nutritional options available (Fieldhouse, 1986, pp. 67-68). High status body images reflect a society increasingly focused on the role of the individual in being a responsible consumer (Johnston & Cappeliez, 2012, p. 49). How individuals project status is not about showing they have access to plenty of food; a historical proxy for power. Instead it is about showing visible restraint; a modern proxy for self-control (Fieldhouse, 1986, p. 206).

Body image plays a central role in the social examination of food, and food consumption decisions (McIntosh, 1996, pp. 156-157). Choice of aesthetic commodities in consumer culture is made with the intention of projecting social status (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56). However, the array of consumer choices is largely mediated by the social engineering activities of marketers (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179).

For example, consumers are encouraged to form images in their minds of their ideal weight and appearance goals which are targeted or created by aggressive, possibly deceptive, marketing campaigns for products claiming to deliver their dreams (McIntosh, 1996, p. 59). Tremendous societal pressure and responsibility is put on youth, especially girls, to have bodies that appear to be fit, which is generally equated with being very thin even though some of these expectations actually lead to ill health in the quest for weight loss to meet an unachievable ideal (Fieldhouse, 1986, p. 206). Therefore, the appearance of good self-governance is not necessarily a good indication of actual, positive, personal health management practices (Fieldhouse, 1986, p. 206).

In looking at available choices of foods, highly processed foods tend to be the cheapest (Pollan, 2006, p. 107) which can concentrate the burden of any associated health problems on the poor. Income is “by far” the most significant factor in nutritional health outcomes (Atkins & Bowler, 2001, p. 208). Meat is considered a prestige food for economically disadvantaged groups, while health-food is for the more affluent (Nestle, 2003, p. 27). Those foods which are high in fat, sugar, meat, and calories are eaten more by the American poor, and obesity rates reflect this (Nestle, 2003, p. 27). Since eating meat is generally associated with being successful (Fieldhouse, 1986, p. 139), the

abundance of cheap fast food, meat-based meals is very attractive to consumers (Nestle, 2003, p. 27).

While lack of access to quality food is a defining component of poverty, purposeful choice of food types consumed is used by some consumers to denote heightened class status (McIntosh, 1996, p. 133). Highly processed foods, those high in fat and sugar are much cheaper than fruits and vegetables, especially when considered on a per calorie basis (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008, pp. 1107-1108). However, dichotomous examination of poor contra wealthy class-linked groups' food consumption patterns is too simplistic and does not properly address food consumption patterns of the middle classes (McIntosh, 1996, p. 134). It also does not consider variables which may be extant in the elected consumption patterns of some types of consumers. For example, consumers with specific health conditions, ethical views such as vegetarians and vegans, food gardens, or farming backgrounds; would interact with foods in a variety of ways beyond those which could be linked necessarily to class-status.

Environmentally green foods, due to their tendency to be higher in cost at mainstream retail, and also a likelihood of being portrayed as being fresher or richer in flavor in advertisements, are often associated with high class status (Jordan, 2007, p. 21). Yet genetically modified foods tend to be viewed as run-of -the-mill, not reflecting gourmet quality or status (Jordan, 2007, p. 21). An interesting feature of exclusivity-driven food cultures is that if they become full-fledged market niches, their processes are made efficient for macro-production, which of course undoes part of what made these foods unique and exclusive (Jordan, 2007, p. 26).

An example of the injury to perceived authenticity of production as it enters the mainstream relates to beer. Craft brewed beers have achieved an ethos of gourmet status and intrigue, especially in the United States. The craft designation is only available to breweries producing under a certain volume annually (Brewers' Association, 2011). Expansion by some notable craft breweries past the maximum production volume prescribed by the regulation, even in response to consumer demand, could lead to a loss of gourmet status, and harm consumer perception of authenticity when the products may no longer be designated as "craft" per labeling rules. This concern also exists for large scale organic producers which run the risk of harming their ability to niche market if they are also, at the same time, successfully marketing to a broader, more mainstream consumer base.<sup>5</sup>

Adding additional dimension to the macro vs. micro production issue is that in different cultural contexts, foods once associated with the poor or working classes are later deemed to be *rare* or delicacies; which in turn became markers of cultural distinction and high class status. The heirloom tomato is one example of this transformation (Jordan, 2007, p. 20). With macro-produced genetically modified tomatoes widely available, heirloom varieties were generally grown by seed-savers for economical, personal use; however, they have come to be sold in luxury food markets at gourmet prices (Jordan, 2007, p. 20). In the high consumption economy, the differing appearances and taste characteristics of heirloom tomatoes provide an elite dining opportunity and platform for conspicuous consumption (Jordan, 2007, pp. 20-21).

While many consumers are attracted to specialty food products based on status implications, others think more holistically about their consumption decisions,

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of such advertising strategy and analysis are provided in Chapter 8.

considering health issues and the processes that go into making the products (McIntosh, 1996, p. 59). Slow food movements reflect a hunt for authentic food experiences through the intentional use of old-fashioned, cumbersome, or exclusive production processes that, due to their limited availability, heightened cost, or significant time requirement, have, to some consumers, become markers of status (Jordan, 2007, p. 33).

Selected personal food choices are seen by consumers as a way of endorsing or boycotting particular food production types due to ethical and other considerations (Belasco, 2002, p. 2). Some consumers are eager to either pay top dollar for foods which they understand to be ethically produced such as those designated as organic, free range or local, or, in some cases, to become vegetarians (Singer, 1989, p. 167). At the same time, the market functions in such a way that most people eat animal products derived from possibly unhealthy or cruel production methods (Singer, 1989, p. 167). Customers who opt for ethically produced foods must trust the producer's claims and the regulatory enforcement thereof to ensure that the niche product was actually produced in a meaningfully better way than the generic equivalents.

A further problem with some implied ethical food production designations is the authentication of marketing claims.<sup>6</sup> In Canada, for example, free range standards and regulation are virtually nonexistent, so the term is more for marketing than for actually distinguishing the production methods. This means that although there is an official sounding and recognizable term in the popular lexicon, free range it is open to liberal interpretation and exploitation by producers. Lack of regulatory power over official-sounding marketing jargon complicates the relationship consumers have with producers (Sundar, 2012, pp. 174-175). It leaves them more vulnerable to having their good

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<sup>6</sup> Chapters 7 and 8 provide detailed analysis thereof.

intentions monetized for little or no actual ethical or environmental gain. This is especially the case for products like fish from multinational entities, where various stages of processing may take place in several countries, but have labels that obscure this and confuse consumers (Sundar, 2012, pp. 174-175). Creative labeling of food to imply desirability, rarity, or sustainability, as enticements to purchase is quite common, and impairs the ability of the consumer to make informed choices (Sundar, 2012, p.175).

While ethics-based food designations are gaining increased social consideration, they remain at the sidelines of consumer culture (McMurtry, 2009, p. 27). For mainstream food products, the primary concern is price (Pollan, 2006, p. 136). If only price is considered, hidden ethical issues may exist. For example, bananas for pennies a pound, may appear innocuous, but belie exploitative labour issues (Cohen, 2009).

Environmental and social costs are generally hidden from the item price that a consumer sees (Patel, 2009, p. 11). The quest for the lowest sticker price leads to a shifting of the true costs of production (Patel, 2009, p. 11). This is particularly evident with the price of fast food (Schlosser, 2001, p. 9). Corporate power in a deregulated marketplace means that costs and risks did not truly go away, but were off-loaded to others (Patel, 2009, pp. 3-5). This was generally to taxpayers through corporate subsidies, to local communities through pollution and strained infrastructure, including health services, or to individuals through labour exploitation. However, hard adherence to this position is neglectful of the trickle-down economic theory which states that the overall economy benefits significantly when proper conditions are in place for corporate success (Aghion & Bolton, 1997, p. 151).

The ability of corporate producers to deliver on promised authenticity as perceived by informants is examined in Chapter 7. Attempts to imbue authenticity are often reliant on labeling designations which may be problematic (Pollan, 2006, p. 139). One ethical production designation, *fair trade*, however, stands out. The ethics of fair trade products are capitalized on by manufacturers and certain consumers, but the term is much more transparent than that of free range, as it is authenticated by a third party, which publishes its criteria for the public to view.<sup>7</sup> Commonly available fair trade items from major grocery stores in Canada are typically limited to coffee, chocolate and a few other goods. The fair trade designation was established in 1988 and has slowly expanded towards the mainstream by selling the idea of ethical production methods (McMurtry, 2009, p. 27). Its success is fairly surprising since in general, consumers have explicitly sought the lowest price and fair trade was organized with no major corporate or governmental backing (McMurtry, 2009, pp. 27-28). However, McMurtry does not address the issue that the high price of fair trade goods could be associated with status, whereby it actually would fit the frame of consumer culture quite well. Some criticize the idea of fair trade since it implies that traditional production mechanisms are unfair, and that it is a subsidy which runs counter to the free market system (McMurtry, 2009, pp. 28-29). However, that is the point.

The fair trade designation is regulated by an international non-governmental organization that encourages customers to buy products that are produced using non-exploitative labour conditions and ecologically sustainable practices (Fair Trade Canada, 2013). Products purporting to be distinguished from the mainstream by being specially

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<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 8 for analysis of this. Please also note that the significance of the organic designation is a focus of that chapter.



labeled or designated as more ethical or environmentally friendly are certainly available to consumers. Even though fair trade products account for a very small percentage of the overall North American food market, their boon to participating companies' images is significant (McMurtry, 2009, p. 29). Participant companies tend to be seen by the public as helping to improve the standard of living in otherwise desperate regions of the world, and this image is a well calculated investment designed to entice consumers (McMurtry, 2009, p. 29).

Although fair trade products tend to be conceptually grouped in with environmental greenness by consumers, the definition is much more narrowly focused, so it may not really be "green" (Knezevic, 2012, pp. 250-251). The relationship between stakeholders in the conventional food retail model is asymmetrical, concentrating private-sector and corporate power that alienates the public from the producer (Kneen, 1990, p. 25; pp. 32-33). It also shifts risk to the public sector wherever possible (Patel, 2009, p. 11).

Examination is made in latter chapters as to how informants perceive environmental sustainability of various producer types such as large-scale organic farms. Themes of ethics and consumer culture, as applied to environmentally green food acquisition, were studied. Environmentally green food choices can involve a holistic set of considerations.

## **2.5 The Expanding Green Niche and Associated Fluid Social Meanings**

As corporate control of mainstream foodways has become increasingly concentrated, the public has become more distanced from the actual production of the foods they eat (Kneen, 1990, p. 25). Mainstream consumer demand is not typically

concerned with the means of production, just the end user price of the products generated (Singer, 1989, pp. 160-162). Environmentally green foods have become an important niche market (Pollan, 2006, p. 135). *Free range* is used to imply an array of ethical benefits such as an animal's freedom to roam instead of being kept indoors (Pollan, 2006, p. 135). The term free range is widely used in Canada but not regulated as such in legislation (Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, 2016). In the public imagination, farming is generally perceived as a nostalgic view of a family-run, sustainable, natural estate, with sprawling outdoor lands for livestock to roam (Singer, 1989, p.160).

The public is alienated from rural contextualization such that foods are seen to be originating from the supermarket, not the farm (Kneen, 1990, p. 25). Many consumers engage in willful ignorance of the mechanisms of animal production in factory farming (Singer, 1989, pp.160-162). The public would generally prefer to imagine a rural paradise when thinking of where their food comes from; but this is a wilful deception by all parties (Singer, 1989, pp. 160-162). Factory farmed animals have a much more austere existence, often where they are processed entirely indoors; hatched - grown - killed - packaged as if production did not involve living beings capable of suffering (Singer, 1989, pp. 160-162).

Food production is distanced from the consumer in a number of ways and "each act of distancing also introduces an opportunity for taking money out of the system and gaining control over it" (Kneen, 1990, pp. 32-33). Industry saw an opportunity to convert the discontentment some groups of consumers expressed regarding production methods, into an environmentally green niche market (Pollan, 2006, p. 134).

Advertising from major Canadian retailers, analyzed in Chapter 8, portrays environmentally green foods as addressing a sense of alienation consumers were experiencing. However, green is still positioned in many ways within the dominant corporate structure (Miller, 2001, p. 138).

The word *organic* is an extremely powerful marketing term (Pollan, 2006, p. 136). Intense marketing of environmentally green food products in the United States has led to a very significant perceived association of organic foods with good health by consumers (Schuldt & Schwarz, 2010, p. 1). Labeling claims on organic products portraying them as small scale, sustainable, and ethical are widely used in Canada.<sup>8</sup> Labeling rules were nationally reformed in 2008 as a response to widespread confusion and misuse of the organic designation (Government of Canada, 2013b). Analysis regarding this labeling legislation reform and a variety of related issues concerning environmentally green food consumption is made in Chapter 5 and especially in Chapter 8.

Environmentally green food products enable the public to consume their way to perceived moral, social, ethical status (Knezevic, 2012, pp. 255-256). This could be seen as actually far more natural to the dominant economic system than attempting to avoid or prohibit certain non-green activities. Enticement to consume as a demonstration of individuality is easy for consumers and further entrenches the dominant paradigm (Warde, 1997, p. 194). This is a consumer-culture adaption of a historical observation by the German philosopher Goethe that “none are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free” (Goethe, 1982, p. 397).

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 8 for examples.

Beginning in the nineteen-sixties as non-capitalist counter cultures; organic food movements were ultimately absorbed and transformed by mainstream corporatization (Pollan, 2006, p. 141). Food certification standards were manipulated by producers such that industrial agricultural techniques continued to be used in organic and free range products, with the letter of the law followed to achieve certification, but not the spirit or intent (Pollan, 2006, p. 140).

Consumer culture would not readily adapt to living with less, or living more carefully, yet North American intensive farming is quite unsustainable based on natural resource consumption and pollution (Patel, 2009, p. 164). Detrimental to the public good, is a general sense of willful public indifference to the conditions under which factory farmed livestock are managed (Singer, 1989, p. 159).

As corporate control of the food system concentrates, the influence of independent farmers decreases (McIntosh, 1996, pp. 94-95). Facilitating this transition was a general merging of corporate interests into governance, to such end that there was a revolving door between the executive levels of the United States civil service; lobbying bodies (Nestle, 2003, p. 99); and corporations where key personnel are frequently shared, either going back and forth or working part time at each; a game the public loses (Patel, 2009, pp. 13-14). This practice occurs in Canada as well. An example is the case of Bernard Prigent, who was in simultaneous executive roles at Canadian Institutes of Health Research and Pfizer, a multi-national pharmaceutical company (Silversides, 2009). Governmental food and nutritional recommendations are fought aggressively by entrenched lobbyists, so to reduce such “interference”, policy makers intentionally use weak language (Nestle, 2003, pp. 3-4).

The public is bombarded with food industry advertising exponentially more than with science-based government nutritional advice, leading to confusion on nutrition issues (Nestle, 2003, p. 29). Food labeling laws tend to be in the corporate interest; for example, in the state of Vermont, it was deemed illegal to force companies to declare the presence of recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone from genetic modification in milk products (Patel, 2009, pp. 166-167). Food safety policy is also at times obfuscated by government itself. For example, in the United States, eggs were regulated by one body and chickens by another; and they were often uncooperative with each other (Schlosser, 2001, p. 264).

As a result of a food messaging overload, and of conflicts of interest in how such messages are handled, organic foods are perceived by many consumers as being healthier than the same foods which are not certified organic, even if the nutrition content is equivalent (Schuldt & Schwarz, 2010, p. 1). Consumers frequently over-estimate the applicability of food product health claim implications to tangential issues, as in the expectation that foods labeled as low cholesterol are perceived as also automatically low in fat (Schuldt & Schwarz, 2010, p. 1). Advertising plays a profound role in shaping consumer understanding of products (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179). As environmentally green designations have gained popularity and profitability, the meaning and contextual boundaries of greenness have evolved (for example, Harrison, 2006, p. 139).

The dissertation interviews were designed to enable informants to shed light on their rationales for embracing green food consumption as an important aspect of their interaction with food and food politics. Later data analysis shows how informants perceive authenticity and sustainability with regard to environmentally green foods.

Informants placed a very high value on their environmentally green practices. Their perceptions of status, risk, and healthfulness were examined in the course of formulating an abstraction-able theory of how explicit, delineated green consumption patterns can be understood more broadly as representations of social process.

### **3.0 RISK THEORY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY GREEN FOOD CONSUMPTION**

#### **3.1 Scope and use of the Risk Concept in this Dissertation**

The ubiquitous word, *risk*, has wide ranging application and significance. Specificity is therefore very important to insure the meaningful and rigorous use of the term in the given context. The operational definition of risk for this dissertation is: *perception of the possibility of harm to consumers*. More specifically, risk discussion is conceptualized for this dissertation within the context of potential environmental hazards generated as an unintentional result of scientific or technological progress as applied to industrial agriculture, per Beck (1992).

Since the emergence of the risk society in the nineteen-eighties, advancement is seen through expert management of the natural, not simply its domination (Beck, 1992, p. 19). Beck conceptualizes risk as “the anticipation of catastrophe” (Beck, 2009, p.188 as cited in Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 20). Institutions or mechanisms of development once venerated such as technology and agriculture have become increasingly suspect in the public eye as being potential sources of frivolous risk (Beck, 1992, p. 61; Shaw, 2004, p. 152). The potential for risk is now seen in all things, even those which were historically considered safe (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). Beck’s assessment of the risk society is drawn upon in this chapter as broad context for understanding risk related self-governance activities engaged in by the public. Environmental risks and consequences, to Beck, “are caused by our industrialized way of life” (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 21).

Public perception of risk as ever-present is propagated by presentations of continual danger in the mass media, and by the confusion that stems from disagreeing and even opposing risk-experts prescribing conflicting courses of action through the media (Beck, 2000, p. 213). Perception of ever present risk is further intensified by public recollection of the inability of science and technology to avert severe past risk events (Beck, 1992, p. 59). Prominent, high-profile examples of societal failures to predict risk in the recent Canadian public memory are the Mad Cow outbreaks, SARS, the American sub-prime mortgage collapse, and various oil spills. These events have harmed the trust relationship between the public and the experts.

While experts often fail to adequately convince the public of impending calamity to affect the requisite course correction, their role remains enshrined within society because the public still must rely on such experts since many risks are complex and unperceivable to them (Beck, 1992, p. 27; Shaw, 2004, p. 152). However, in reality, there can be “no expert on risk” (Beck, 1992, p. 29). Risks are both social and scientific (Beck, 1992, p. 24). Public trust in expert management of the food system is an important consideration regarding acceptable levels of risk, as per Beck’s (1992) discussion of risk.

Officially disseminated acceptable levels of risk are determined based on a series of factors, such as average consumption, yet that which constitutes the average consumer is not clearly defined (Beck, 1992, p. 24). While it is noted that acceptable risk level identification does offer a practical metric for stakeholder risk management (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 256), the benchmark for acceptable risk level may vary between stakeholders, for example, consumers and industry (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 257). The principal risk management stakeholder with respect to food labeling is the regulator and



periodic adjustments in acceptable risk determinations can improve public safety and reduce fear (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 262). Calculations of acceptable risk levels are both scientific; such as exposure threshold in parts per million to a contaminant before adverse human effects, and political; such as stakeholder pressure to consider economics or public fears (Beck, 1992, p. 79).

Modern risk exists in a context of regulation and subjectivity, where people look to experts for guidance on responsible management techniques (Lupton, 1999, pp. 88-89; Power, 2007, p. 7). Consumer trust is won by extensive, expensive corporate marketing campaigns in which purportedly environmentally-green companies portray themselves as responsible stewards of the planet, while shifting risk-blame to others (Beck, 1992, p. 32).

In selling products such as environmentally green foods, corporations must contend with a population that does not necessarily understand scientific complexities behind advertised features, or which has been previously misled. Therefore, when a company is faced with an advertising feature choice, it must carefully weigh the potential media fallout as integral to its strategy even if a scientifically-based decision would have been relatively straightforward (Power, 2007, pp. 128-129).

Consumer risk perception and the actions based upon it, affect consumption patterns. Risk-navigation strategies are highly important to the research questions. Fundamental to contextualizing these questions is the understanding and critical analysis of how risk information is identified through experts (Beck, 1992, p. 27), disseminated via the media (Power, 2007, pp. 128-129), through fact-based information and advertising, and acted on as a result of the creation of public trust (Giddens, 1991, p. 19).

In summary, there are three key aspects of risk conceptualizations formative to the research questions. Each of the following interrelated themes is developed in greater detail in a separate section of this chapter:

1. Everyday things and actions traditionally viewed as safe by scientists, the media, and public are now subject to intense risk-scrutiny (Shaw, 2004, p. 152);
2. Risk controversies, especially those related to acceptable levels, as portrayed in the mass media, have elevated public fears and decreased trust in scientific and regulatory abilities to manage risk (Beck, 2000, p. 218); and
3. Members of the public perceive food risk and safety based on information which comes from corporations, government regulators, and the media. The concept of different stakeholders treating the same risk in different ways is discussed in Madsen et al. (2010, p. 256). This potentially leads to consumer confusion over advertising, such as low-risk claims, versus actual constitution and relative risk of seemingly similar products (Slovic, 1987, p. 280).

Ending each of these themed sections is a brief note linking the theoretical issues raised to pragmatic considerations regarding the research questions and data analyses conducted.

### **3.2 From Assumed Safety to Assumed Risk**

Aspects of risk theory most relevant to this dissertation centre on the transformation in societal perception of the role of nature and environment in the advancement of science and technology. The risk society concept comes out of public reaction to unexpected and unmanaged risks endemic to industrial society (Beck, 1992, p. 19). Industrial society separates itself fundamentally from the natural per Beck's discussion of

risk society, as described in Sorenson and Christiansen (2013, p. 22). While previous societies were focused around agricultural goals and managing the challenges from nature to survive as a society; industrial society, to Beck, is a class-society focused on industrial development and scientific progress (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 24).

Sorensen and Christiansen (2013, p. 22) compactly and authoritatively distill differences in the concept of the natural as seen first in the industrial society and second in Beck's vision of the risk society. They note that in industrial society, nature is seen as a beginning, as a resource to be harnessed for scientific progress. Beyond that, it is not a societal concern (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 22). By contrast, in the risk society, nature is seen as very much as an internal, social construct, and the state of the natural world is seen as a product of past industrial activity or policy (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 22).

To Beck, (Sorenson & Christiansen, 2013), the industrial society views nature as opportunity, as resource, and as subject of conquest. On the other hand; the risk society views nature as side-effect, as risk of hazard, and as something which must be hedged against; but something which cannot be fully understood or prepared for:

The driving force in the class society [also referred to as: industrial society or first modernity in risk theory] can be summarized in the phrase: *I am hungry!*

The movement set in motion by the risk society, on the other hand, is expressed in the statement: *I am afraid!* The *commonality of anxiety* takes the place of the *commonality of need*. The type of the risk society marks in this sense a social epoch in which *solidarity from anxiety* arises and becomes a

political force. (Beck, 1992, p. 49, as cited in Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 20)

The era of the industrial society is referred to by Beck as first modernity (Beck, 1992). It is characterized by nationalism, class structure, self-improvement, satisfaction and status through productive work (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 34). Some of this continues to exist, of course, but it has in some ways been overshadowed by newer concerns, to be described below. In the production of tangible commodities during first modernity, nature is viewed instrumentally, science is the arbitrator of truth, and specialization of skilled workers increases (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 34).

The thrust of the industrial society demands progress above all else (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 22). This is an approach based on the assumed ability to gain control of the natural (Beck, 1992, p. 19). Regulatory interventions are contrary to this vision of development. There was a consumer and political appetite, especially in the United States post 1980's, for massive deregulation of industrial processes as per Power's (2007, p. 37) discussion of enforced self-regulation.

When discussing the risk society, "Beck means a society which is producing a new kind of risks that are different from those produced by industrial society" (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 24). The crux of the risk society is concerned with examining these risks, which take the shape of unintended side-effects of industrialized expansionism as per Beck's discussion of reflexive modernity (Beck, 2000, p. 218) and the analysis thereof by Sorensen and Christiansen (2013, p. 39). Whilst focusing on making bigger, faster and, better, "the risks quietly and swiftly sneaked in, behind the

back of a society that had its attention directed elsewhere”, namely to scientific and industrial hegemony (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 22).

North American public reaction to the exposure of systemic risks, environmental disasters and inequities caused by the industrial first modernity era is noted to have led transformation to second modernity, which is the result of a third industrial revolution (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 34). During the transition to a reflexive second modernity, the core truths of the first modernity were uprooted and re-examined. Its most important societal anchors such as: “the nation-state, predetermined communities (such as class and the nuclear family), the traditional gender divisions of labour, the notion of full employment (work for everybody), work and production in a factory or business setting, science’s monopoly on truth and rationality” and various related factors are questioned with a reflexive swing of a public attitudinal pendulum (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 31).

These changes usher in the era of second modernity, wherein, as noted by Sorensen and Christiansen (2013): the interests of nation-states give way to the interests of multi-nationalism and multi-national corporations; the notions traditional family and gender roles are viewed as constraining and antiquated; job security is replaced with burgeoning part-time work and underemployment; nature becomes an internal societal concept; unregulated, for-profit scientific advancement loses its place on the pedestal; and the structures of society as a whole are redefined (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 34).

Emergence of widely available news and information media for communication of possible risk events to the public has affected how risk is conceived and managed. As

this section illustrates, modern risk theory re-situates the concept of risk so that it is not something to be avoided, but an essential factor in all calculations (Slovic, 1987, p. 283; Beck, 2002, p. 217). Risk has moved inside decision making parameters, instead of its historical role as an external factor (Power, 2007, p. 156). Within the context of the risk society:

The future is the home of all *potential* catastrophes and disasters... whereas industrial society's most pressing matters were often questions of how to deal with the specific, existing problems of the time (such as poverty and need), present-day political and social agendas are largely occupied with matters of the *future*, of prognoses and predictions about possible future catastrophes and accidents. (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 20)

With continuous presentation of natural and human-caused disasters in the media, the public grows disillusioned with, and loses trust in agents of state and corporate control as capable risk-managers or as acting in the public good (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 84).

The potential for risk is now seen in all things, even those which were historically considered safe; such as technology or food (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). Following the demoted status of purely scientific or technological progress-based products (Shaw, 2004, p. 152); other products purported to be more natural and holistic or environmentally green are now aggressively marketed to a risk-saturated public to entice greater consumption by restoring consumer faith in commercial agriculture as safe, natural, and risk-neutral (Zelmer, 2008).

None of the historical holders of socio-political power are given the degree of uncritical faith that the public once held in them (Hinchliffe & Woodward 2000, p. 134). Further inducing reflexivity in public perception of risk is disagreement by corporate, and / or governmental entities, openly and very publicly, on risk assessment and management prescriptions (Beck, 2000, p. 213). Drawing on Hinchcliffe and Woodward's discussion of trust (2000, p. 134) the possibility of conflict-of-interest on the part the experts also increases the politicization of risk.

By its very nature, risk cannot necessarily be predicted, even by experts; therefore, unforeseeable or unanticipated consequences of innovation are a significant factor in the risk society (Beck, 1992, p. 22). However, such a public preoccupation with risk cannot be entirely explained by the evolution of technology, as many of the risks dominating the national media are natural (Luhmann, 1993, p. ix). Public fear of possible negative effects of agri-business policy in second modernity highlights a structural shift in the way risk is seen, from risk as scarcity to risk as undesirable abundance (Beck, 1992, p. 26). Historical struggles tended to be against a visible foe, such as hunger or poverty, whereas modern risks tend to be more ephemeral, such as the hazardous side effects of wealth generation (Beck, 1992, p. 20).

Exposure to the distribution of risk is not equal to everyone (Beck, 1992, p. 23) but modern risks such as pollution are less stratified than socio-economic status (Beck, 1992, p. 36). In some ways Beck is vulnerable to challenge on this point, as although pollution affects all people, including the wealthy in distant communities, pollution-risk is still class-stratified as the wealthy have exclusive choice and precaution abilities (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 21). Yet for ecological disasters brought on by either

industrial negligence or unforeseeable hazard: “we are all, by now, decisively in the same boat” (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 20). Tsunamis, oil spills, and other environmental disasters do not necessarily discriminate based on wealth (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 21).

Massive-scale risks are typically the result of natural or technological consequences combined with political influences (Beck, 1992, p. 79). For example, pollution management such as handling of agricultural run-off; incorporates financial, jurisdictional, environmental, and societal challenges. Agricultural waste and other toxin hazards are new and previously politically uninteresting subjects of risk (Beck, 1992, p. 79). Such concerns have become volatile and high-profile (Beck, 1992, p. 24). An example of this sort of risk is the Fukushima crisis in Japan in 2011, wherein a natural tsunami’s already devastating impact was immeasurably worsened when a nuclear power plant in its path had a toxic spill affecting a densely populated area.

Macro-level risk events, and preoccupation with risk in the public eye, such as that garnered by these high-profile examples, are seen in the transformation from first modernity to second modernity – from presumed safety to presumed risk. Public reaction to risk events, as noted above, occurs reflexively, as they seek to avoid risk through listening to experts and seeking less risky options in their consumption patterns. Industry has used perceptions of risk and safety to encourage specific new forms of environmentally green consumption activities (Zelmer, 2008).

Environmentally green products are typically sold under the auspices of risk reduction through environmental stewardship marketing claims. In a society steeped in



risk-awareness, green niche products are aggressively marketed in an attempt to restore consumer faith in commercial agriculture as safe, natural, and risk-neutral.

An important marketing technique in green food advertisements was the *responsibilization* of the consumer to choose the right product (Zelmer, 2008).

Responsibilization is a term found in *governmentality* literature (for example, Rose, 1999). Foucault's concept of governmentality tends to be interpreted as having slightly different meanings among scholars (Gordon, 1991, p. 2). As relevant for this dissertation, it is the mentality of governance, "about how to govern" (Gordon, 1991, p.7) that is intended. Responsibilization refers to the transfer of responsibility to make good choices from the external societal estates to the individual, and also the individualization of blame if there is a negative result (Rose, 1999).

For example, a major grocery retailer in Canada, Loblaws, portrayed the purchase of specifically organic baby food as the right choice of the conscientious parent (Loblaws, 2008). The consumer-public may be enticed to associate a more expensive product with risk reduction and social responsibility, as per Beck's (1992) discussion on risk and Veblen's (1899/2000) discussion of consumer attitudes.

Arising from the macro-level condition of a risk society is a niche market response to demand more environmentally green foods. This research will shed light on the subjectivist experiences of informants as they delineate their risk-reduction consumption pattern behaviours with respect to environmentally green foods. Informants view themselves as living amid constant risk, caused primarily by the effects of first modernity. The pursuit of risk reduction, especially in foodways, is a core aspect of informants' cultural identities. Examination of how the competing messages of ever-

present risk in foodway systems; but comparative safety of green niche food products as they are perceived by informants, is made in Chapter 6. Analysis of status-seeking behaviour in related consumption activities pertaining to the research questions is provided in Chapters 5 and 7.

### **3.3 Risk Negotiation, Experts, Mass Media, and Acceptable Levels**

Public perception of risk as ever-present is propagated by mass-media presentations of continual danger and the confusion that stems from disagreeing risk-experts prescribing conflicting courses of action through the media (Beck, 2000, p. 213). This perception of risk is further intensified by public recollection of the inability of science and technology to avert severe past risk events (Beck, 1992, p. 59). An important area of risk theory relates to mapping how and why experts and the public differ in terms of risk perception and management frameworks (Douglas, 1992, p. 11).

Scholarly inquiries into public attitudes toward risk perception and risk management during the era of the risk society began with attention to determining why public perceptions tended to misconstrue what was often conceptualized as actual risk (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). However, more recent interpretive research increasingly looks at mapping factors shaping individuals' internal risk-mindsets and assuming that they are rational and reflective from within the perspective of the individual (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). Some risks are "manufactured uncertainties" [sic] shaped by scientific experts as generators, interpreters, and beneficiaries of "risk definitions" (Beck, 2000, p. 216). Manufactured uncertainty leads to controversies surrounding the framing of acceptable levels of risk, which is a key theme in the literature (for example, Beck, 1992; Slovic 1987, p. 281).

Actual risk, in terms of likelihood of grievous sickness or early death (Giddens, 1991, p. 4) was likely far higher in pre-modernity due to scarcity and lack of medical science. Yet perceived risk, from horrific; or horrifically presented events in the mass media, has generated a modern society obsessed with risk (Herman & Chomsky, 2002). While modern society is incredibly concerned with risk; for the most part, day-to day risks are not more intense than they were in the past (Giddens, 1991, p. 3; Hinchliffe & Woodward, 2000, p. 134), or are actually lessened (Giddens, 1991, p. 4; Slovic, 1987, p. 280). Beck's position included the nuance that risk and the public perception thereof are ultimately the same thing, as once something is perceived of as risky, the public will take measured evasive action (Beck, 2000, p. 213). Luhmann's position is slightly different; that the overall cause of the risk society is the explosion of new technical possibilities, and the public attention they garner (Luhmann, 1993, p. 83).

Continuous discussion in the mass media of immediate dangers posed by distant events (Giddens, 1991, pp. 26-27) leads to general consumer anxiety (Giddens, 1991, pp. 182-183), especially in the case of potential catastrophic risk (Beck, 2000, p. 214). This is exploited in green marketing campaigns where food labels and packaging messages are targeted forms of media and advertising used to persuade consumers (Zelmer, 2008). Media presentations and socio-cultural context are two major factors shaping personal assumptions about risk and safety (Slovic, 1987, p. 285).

As a crucial step in risk management strategy, someone must take the blame and accept responsibility for adverse events or outcomes (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). High profile disagreement among experts in the media is not surprising since "risk specialists may call each other's detailed results into question because they start quite sensibly from different

assumptions” (Beck, 2000, p. 217). Risks are both social and scientific (Beck, 1992, p. 24). An expert employed by a private company is an agent of that company, and will frame risk from that perspective, whereas other experts will not. The media’s need to satiate audiences contributes to presentations of risks as inescapable or severe (Beck, 2000, p. 217).

Media criticism of scientific rationality and the inability to guarantee forecasts can cause public panic (Beck, 2000, p. 217). Ratings-driven drama in news media where members of the public are put on panels in opposition to experts, has undermined public trust in the sciences and led to increasing public fear of everyday things (Beck, 2000, p. 213). Trust is discussed regarding acceptable levels of risk. In coming to a perception of what constitutes acceptable risk, the public rely on intuition and their social context in considering risk-benefit balances (Slovic, 1987, p. 281). Since the effects of modern risks tend to be “rare and often delayed” they cannot be managed in the “trial-and-error” manner to which the public is accustomed (Slovic, 1987, p. 280).

The public is not necessarily equipped to understand the science behind the complexities of most high-profile risk-hazards, and therefore must look to experts for guidance (Beck, 1992, p. 27; Shaw, 2004, p. 152). Yet the public increasingly suspects bias or vested interests in expert advice (Hinchliffe & Woodward, 2000, p. 134) so consumers tend to act on reflexive, possibly inaccurate risk-reduction strategies based on personal experience (Beck, 1992, p. 61; Shaw, 2004, p. 152), even when there is substantial scientific evidence supporting a different paradigm (Slovic, 1987, p. 281). Giddens’ position is more positive: that past experiences are a component of the trust

equation, implying a belief in the legitimacy and ability of unseen others to affect risk management on behalf of society (Giddens, 1991, p. 19).

A certain amount of ingested pesticide may not be harmful assuming the person ingests no other toxins, but that does not really mean that ingesting any pesticide is ever safe (Beck, 1992, p. 24) or that the same concentration will affect everyone in the same way. Acceptable levels of risk to Beck, are ultimately “a phony trick” as they are more about calming the public than actually reducing risk (Beck, 1992, p. 64). When a risk is catastrophic, no probability is low enough to make the public content (Beck, 1992, pp. 29-30).

However, other scholars have more faith in scientific techniques as being suitable for accurately measuring what is indeed safe for individuals. Acceptable levels are still the most practical metric for stakeholder risk management (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 256). The setting of thresholds for these levels, however, may vary between societal stakeholders if consumers and industry consider different levels of risk to be acceptable (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 257).

To some in second modernity or risk society, the only acceptable level of risk is zero, but risk management has become so entrenched in society that although segments of the public seek to live in a zero-risk society, it is simply not possible (Beck, 2000, p. 217; Slovic, 1987, p. 283). The source of public risk perceptions is typically from media hype around risk-events and a reactionary individual desire to eliminate risk altogether (Slovic, 1987, p. 280). The attempted banishment of risk is flawed as an idea because it harms economic and political stability by stirring public fear of technological advancement (Slovic, 1987, p. 280).

There is “wisdom as well as error” in both lay and expert constructions of risk (Slovic, 1987, p. 285). While lay people have neither access to, nor understanding of the cutting-edge risk-assessment tools available to experts, lay concerns tend to be broader (Slovic, 1987, p. 285). Experts are highly specialized and knowledgeable only in specific or narrow fields (Beck, 1992, p. 59). To function effectively, risk management policies must have beneficial input from both specialized experts as well as lay public commentary (Slovic, 1987, p. 285). If some media commentators have scientific training; that has the potential to be seen by the public in the risk society as a conflict of interest between the public good and corporate power (Beck, 1992). Yet there is a simultaneous need for expert credibility in the public eye. Increasing public mistrust of science and technology appears to have occurred alongside increasing credentialism.

Mass media stories of risk events, such as those related to food product contamination, make national and sometimes international news, causing something between unease and panic in viewers near and far (Beck, 1992). The resultant dread-fear level depends on whether the contamination is a traceable; meaning containable risk, or on the other end of the spectrum, if it was intentional; meaning terrorism (Douglas, 1992, p. 4). How to determine blame is one of the great questions with which societies should be concerned (Douglas, 1992, p. 4).

In the old politics of risk, those risks or individuals deemed to be a threat to authority, such as witches, tended to be labeled as infectious against the common good (Douglas, 1992, 85). In the interest of stratifying society and consolidating power, one or more segments of any given population in history was targeted as deserving blame for causing disasters (Beck, 1992, p. 75; Douglas, 1992, p. 5). However, the goal of risk

management measures in modern democracies is functionalist; to maintain the institutions of order and sober second-thought in the event of a risk-event or crisis (Power, 2007, p. 6).

Scientific research has the potential to generate unknown future risks (Luhmann, 1993, p. 203), especially if it can be exploited by extremist ideological groups (Virilio, 2007, p. 32). In modernity, risk continues to be a tool of political fear-mongering used to galvanize public debate (Beck, 2000, p. 215). Such debate is generally directed against a common threat, real or imagined (Douglas, 1992, p. 5). Publicly perceived risk of everyday products has taken on a level of fear not previously seen (Shaw, 2004, p. 152). The mass media heavily analyses threats to public safety, increasing the perception of risk and uncertainty, and increasing profit via viewership numbers (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

Risks with immediate effects or fairly straightforward cause-and-effect patterns are not accorded as much apprehension as risks with difficult to trace causality (Shaw, 2004, pp. 155-157) or those where the actual occurrence, the potential of which being indicated by the risk, would lead to severe consequences (Luhmann, 1993, p. ix). To Slovic, the increasing complexity of technology has meant that the public has less ability to understand its workings, and this confusion leads to risk-fear (Slovic, 1987, p. 280). This is disputed by others who assert that communications technology such as the internet enables the public to clarify, and therefore reduce risk in ways that were previously impossible (Wilcock et al., 2004, p. 64). Of course, internet access is not universal and internet sources are not necessarily free of bias. The increased availability

of information of all kinds, increases the difficulty for the consumer in assessing which source of risk-information is most reliable.

In their efforts to reduce risk, dissertation informants had to choose sources of information they could trust in considering marketing claims for environmentally green foods. There are important links between the notion of the zero-risk mentality and the marketing of environmentally green food products. Examining informants' perceptions of food safety and marketing claims is important in understanding their rationale for consuming or avoiding certain products.

The allure of risk minimization is displayed in the marketing of some environmentally green foods in which the packaging is designed to suggest that the product within the clear plastic container is pristine and safe from contamination or dirt that would affect comparable, unpackaged products. This concept arose from the writer's observation of vegetables individually wrapped in plastic at a major grocery store. However, analogous to the application of the zero-risk mentality, the fact that the product is presented as risk-minimized may lead to consumer carelessness and improper handling such as not washing pre-trimmed, packaged salad greens; actions which *increase* risk, underscoring the failure of the zero-risk mentality to reach paradigmatic status.

Risk-reduction strategies practiced by informants include growing or buying local and organic foods, and generally being very mindful of their foodways.<sup>9</sup> As informants holistically seek to keep abreast of continuously developing marketing claims; they distinguish themselves from the mainstream. The latter is far more concerned with price (Pollan, 2006, p. 136).

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<sup>9</sup> For more detail see Chapter 6.3.



### **3.4 Consumer Risk Perception and Responsibilization**

Food risk perception is shaped in a battle of information among stakeholders leading to both consumer responsibilization (Johnston & Cappeliez, 2012, p. 49) and confusion (Beck, 2000, p. 213). In second modernity, management of the population and efforts to promote personal responsibility became the central missions of the state, which changed what risk meant (Lupton, 1999, pp. 5-6). Foucault's (1978) discussion of power as everywhere and in all things is similar to the way in which Beck characterizes risk. Indeed, power and risk overlap in meaning. A combination of risk minimization and personal responsibility directives are used extensively in advertisements for environmentally green food products.<sup>10</sup>

When the consumer exercises their right to choose a product based on their own risk tolerance, corporate producers responsibilize the individual consumer, yet at the same time continue to sell and market products other than those which are environmentally green, as still safe for consumption, by virtue of being well within acceptable risk levels; for examples see Zelmer (2008). This type of advertising strategy exemplifies how elements of governmentality can be manipulated by marketers to motivate consumption of a particular product type.

In consideration of Foucault on governmentality (1991), risk exists at the intersection between individual control or responsibility and structural aspects of modern society. In this context risk is inseparable from decision-making processes, especially in an increasingly medicalized society where people must look to experts to help in the formulation of socially prudent and acceptable courses of action (Lupton, 1999, pp. 88-

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 8 for examples and detailed analysis.

89; Power, 2007, p. 7). Risks are no longer dealt with by individual professionals reacting to local concerns, but through the Leviathan fabric of governmentality (Castel, 1991, pp. 294-295; Power, 2007, p. 4). In second modernity, organizations have moved from risk-management and assessment to a more elaborate system, which can be referred to as risk-governance, where risk itself becomes a category of regulatory practice: risk is not just hedged against, but becomes vital to the functioning of all things (Power, 2007, p. 156).

Due to this undercurrent of risk and responsibility, and apparent consumer feelings of risk-paralysis, an oddity of the risk society is that the public has in some ways adopted an intentional ignorance of where food comes from; a self-denial of risk that unravels during food risk events where mass media attention forces the normally, and possibly willfully, unseen practices of intensive factory farming into uncomfortable, high profile, public view (Hinchliffe & Woodward, 2000, p. 136).

In addition to the wishful risk deniers are excessive risk takers. Stephen Lyng posits that risk takers are not escaping from the risk society, but simply honing their ability to live in a modern stasis of perpetual risk (Lyng, 2005, p. 7). Risk taking may provide only momentary escape from the monotony of over-regulation, but on the other hand, it is such risk-takers who can then provide society with resilient, risk management tools (Lyng, 2005, p. 10). Other theorists assert that risk taking is merely a personality trait (Kusyszyn, 1977, p. 27) rather than an ideological rejection of governance. Various psychological and sociological perspectives conceptualize risk theory in different ways. While this is acknowledged as a part of the risk literature, it is outside the bracketed focus of this research project.

Governance and risk are inherently tied, although governance may be internal to one's self (Foucault, 1991), be corporate, nation-based, or take another form. Discussion of shifting from nation-state regulation to corporate self-governance has been de rigueur since the post 1980's emergence of the risk society, especially in the form of "enforced self-regulation," where the state assigns licenses, and corporations must at least appear to follow risk management standards (Power, 2007, p. 37). Corporations are also responsabilized to set policy guidelines for self-management and self-governance (Power, 2007, pp. 66-67). There is an apparent contradiction in risk management where standards and policies were created or demanded for every possible liability, and yet the public in North America and Europe encouraged ideologically driven deregulation through electing conservative governments.

Enticing consumers to spend on specific products or producers is done through marketing and advertising activities (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179). Through labeling and packaging claims, companies exercise power and may offer the illusion of a regulatory certification process as a way to win consumer confidence (Patel, 2009).

Acceptable levels of risk are used in marketing of consumer products and they can indeed reduce public panic and worry, but are also a vehicle for polluters to do so "a bit;" meaning that acceptable levels are not about absolute avoidance of toxins, but about allowing them in amounts that have not been fully and directly proven to cause harm (Beck, 1992, pp. 64-65). Beck argued that such levels exist to protect corporations from liability with no transparency in the adjudication of these levels (Beck, 1992, p. 66). Yet Madsen et al. argued that the use of acceptable levels is good for both consumer confidence and risk-reduction in general (Madsen et al., 2010, p. 263). Food risk crises

are exemplary of the politics and uncertainty of expert risk handling measures, such as those regarding intensive farming and genetic modification (Shaw, 2004, pp. 151-152).

Policy makers, especially in health and safety fields, need to be sensitive to how and by what criteria the public is likely to make determinations of things as risky or not (Slovic, 1987, p. 280). Whether experts are caught covering up risks or if they announce them to the public; the post-industrial climate of risk-society ensnares them in the trap of acceptable levels, meaning extensive public mistrust is inevitable: if it was safe before, then why not now? (Beck, 2000, p. 218). When policy makers change the threshold for an acceptable level of risk on a pre-existing public concern, the reasons for this are driven by, and tend to cause, socio-political consequences (Beck, 1992, p. 29; Shaw, 2004, p. 152). Casting science as the principle arbitrator of policy risk-decisions is attractive in managerial post-industrialism (Bernstein, 1996, pp. 336-337), but it undermines and hides the importance of the social in calculations of rationality (Beck, 1992, p. 29).

Risk management, by definition, can never be perfect in its delivery since it is an ongoing project which is both theoretical and applied (Beck, 1992, p. 27). Risk assessors seek perfect solutions from imperfect data, which makes risk management an unending project (Giddens, 1991, p. 4). Often, in pollution risk-assessments released to the public, risky areas are shown based on proximity to emitters, erroneously implying that everyone in the target area, regardless of socio-economic status, education, income, or environmental exposures and their general health status will be equally affected (Beck, 1992, p. 26). To Beck, geographical proximity-based risk frames are problematic, and he noted that distribution is unpredictable and global (Beck, 1992, p. 27). Yet others asserted that geographical proximity mapping is still a highly valuable risk assessment and

management tool when used effectively (Croen, Shaw, Sanbonmatsu & Bluffler, 1997, p. 353).

The post-industrial conception of risk is less immediate, less controllable by state and scientific infrastructure, and more global (Beck, 1992, pp. 21-22). The unavoidable, inescapable, and non-immediate nature of risk has created a social attitudinal pendulum which swings from ambivalence to panic (Beck, 1992, pp. 36-37) as the public becomes more critical and reflexive (Beck, 2000, p. 218). In reflexive modernization:

A reflex-like, uncontrolled kind of modernization which is both undesired and unforeseen [arises as]... the modernization of modernity itself... in the shape of the side effects and the unintended consequences of the first simple-linear [science and industry as progress] modernization. (Sorensen & Christiansen, 2013, p. 39)

Scientific and technical progress in the first modernity is the solution to specific risks, but in second modernity it is reframed as the principal manufacturer of new risks (Beck, 1992, p. 61; Shaw, 2004, p. 20). However, it is possible that some professionals in applied scientific fields may continue to position themselves from the vantage point of first-modernity due to their social context.

On reflection, there are intervening structural factors that make the responsabilization experience in second modernity function in an uneven way: wealth and scientific knowledge affect not only personal choices from a selection of options, but also the perception that certain choices exist at all. The perceived level of risk posed by a hazard or threat is inextricably linked to the associated perceived hardship or benefit from

individual uptake of relevant management solutions in which socio-economic status inevitably plays a role.

In the scope of this dissertation, risk and food literatures are very much interlinked. This chapter has endeavored to focus primarily on the risk aspects related to the research questions. The previous chapter examined the literature on food consumption patterns as relevant to the area of study. Informants are asked about their perceptions of food risk and whether they are confident in the relative safety of the foods they eat. Analysis is made of the extent to which informants express critical thought regarding environmentally green food labels and any feelings of a self-governance imperative that they may hold. Cognizant of marketing trends overpromising on the green provenance of products, also referred to as “green-washing”, informants describe their degree of trust in these food labels as indicators of risk reduction, and the effects on their consumption decisions.

### **3.5 Conclusions from Risk and Food Literature Reviews**

Risk perception is a very significant feature in informing the underpinnings of consumer food choices, especially as relevant to this dissertation. The conclusions reached from the review of the food literature in the previous chapter are significantly integrated with the conclusions to be made from the risk literature reviewed in this chapter. Therefore, they are presented as a single conceptual framework in this section.

The findings arising from this dissertation contribute to the developing Canadian sociological food literature through the analysis of lived, subjectivist perceptions that individual consumers in selected groups have in relation to environmentally green food. The extent to which the abstracted worldviews presented in the studied literature may be

evident in informants' subjective perceptions is noted in the research findings. The research questions centre on informant understanding of green-niche food designations, with primary consideration and analysis linked to: organic foods; how informants interpret advertising information; and how greenness is perceived in the context of risk and other product-choice factors, such as price, availability, quality, and broader peripheral considerations.

In the risk and food literature chapters, themes relevant to the research questions were reviewed. From this review, the following conceptual framework can be seen to set the scope and frame the boundaries of enquiry in this dissertation, for the food and risk literature studied prior to conducting interviews:

1. There is a complex constellation of factors linked to individual food consumption choice paradigms (Pollan, 2006, p. 134) which are strongly associated with culture (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 54) and status (Beagan et al., 2015, p.77) considerations beyond the simple provisions of health, taste, and sustenance;
2. In food consumption decisions; risk (Beck, 1992, p. 24), authenticity (Gabaccia, 1998, p. 96), sustainability (Sundar, 2012, p. 175) and status (Jordan, 2007, p. 33) are interlinked and likely central considerations for the selected group of informants, beyond the more pragmatic considerations of price and availability;
3. The macro scale of environmentally green products raises concerns over potential challenges to authenticating their distinction from normal foods (Pollan, 2006, p. 139);

4. One strategy individual consumers may try is to opt-out of risks through consumption choices, but this may be ill-conceived and not pragmatic (Beck, 2000, p. 217). Even if one could opt out of the mainstream food production system, it is not possible to be inoculated from risk entirely. A fundamental aspect of risk is uncertainty and unforeseen consequence (Beck, 2000, p. 216);
5. Risk has come to be an essential factor in all decisions: where risk aversion has failed, risk management has taken centre stage (Slovic, 1987, p. 280; Beck, 1992, pp. 64-65);
6. Perception of relative risk and safety of specific foods is part of a larger equation where advertising and government regulatory messaging may be contradictory and where private interests devote disproportionate sums of money to framing risk to their competitive advantage (Nestle, 2003, p. 29);
7. Mass media is pervasive and sensationalizes food risk events, creating public fear regardless of scientific likelihood of being affected individually by a given risk event (Beck, 1992, p. 213);
8. While many types of risk have decreased significantly in modern times (Giddens, 1991, p. 4), globalized mass media has increased public anxiety about risk (Giddens, 1991, pp. 182-183). If a perceived risk is potentially severe, the public is apprehensive (Luhmann, 1993, p. ix);
9. Members of the public tend not to put a lot of faith in the framing of risk by the experts (Douglas, 1992, p. 11). Individuals make risk assessments in ways that



are rational, based on their own experiences and circumstances (Slovic, 1987, p. 281); and

10. Current society exists in a technological era where expert knowledge is essential and where no individual can become an expert in the plurality of fields required for complete self-sufficiency: in short, everyone must continue to rely on outside advisors and experts even though public trust in scientific, government, and corporate credibility are badly shaken (Beck, 1992, p. 27; Shaw, 2004, p. 152).

Decisions made by members of the public to shape food consumption patterns in the context of perceived risks are partially individual and subjectivist in nature (Slovic, 1987, p. 281), but are also heavily influenced by factors external to themselves, such as corporate advertising, government policy, and a host of socio-economic variables. While the literature is attuned to macro, abstract examination of the experiences of the public with regard to navigation of foodway risk, more research is needed into the subjectivist factors which may underlie individual consumption patterns.

Qualitative Canadian sociological food literature is an emerging area of study. The purpose of this dissertation is to provide new insight into subjectivist experiences of environmentally green food consumption choices by studying a selected group of informants.

## 4.0 THEORY, DESIGN AND METHODS

### 4.1 Theoretical Perspective

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is the primary theoretical perspective that frames my analysis in this dissertation. Herbert Blumer's (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, centered on how meaning was generated, perceived, and attached to social interactions (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). He developed a research process to formalize the use of SI as an academic strategy, based on three core premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

(Blumer, 1969. p. 2)

The underlying sociological assumptions of SI, on which the above are based, are that: individuals are social actors who actively create social structure; their experiences are then shaped by their social context; and that interaction with others allows them to reflect on and interpret their subjectivist experiences including how the individual perceives self within its social reality (Blumer, 1969).

Blumer uses these three assertions as the foundation for his development of six fundamental aspects, which together form the symbolic interactionist tradition's "root images" (Blumer, 1969, p. 6). His blueprint for SI takes the following form:

1. “Human groups or society exists in action and must be seen in terms of action” (Blumer, 1969, p. 6). This differs from previous sociological notions of society, such as structuralism and functionalism because Blumer visualizes society not as a static force, but as a dynamic construct made by groups of individuals that arises from their own social actions;
2. “Society consists of individuals interacting with one another” (Blumer, 1969, p. 7). Social norms, behavioural expectations, and perception of morality are shaped through social interaction. An individual can conceptualize the socialized other, and shape their own actions accordingly;
3. The “*worlds* that exist for human beings and for their groups are composed of *objects* and that these objects are the product of symbolic interaction” (Blumer, 1969, p. 10). Blumer distinguishes objects based on whether they are physical, social, or abstract. The meaning and importance of objects is interpreted by the individual and reciprocally reflected upon the socialized other. Through symbolic interaction, objects are used to facilitate social action;
4. The concept of “the self”. Blumer sees human reaction to stimuli as being motivated not only by linear cause and effect, but, more significantly by an internal dialogue that each thinking individual has with themselves, a conscience or guiding rational framework for understanding the broader consequences of action or pondered action prior to selecting an approach to a situation (Blumer, 1969, pp. 12-13);

5. “Fundamentally, action on the part of a human being consists of taking into account of various things that he notes and forging a line of conduct on the basis of how he interprets them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 15). Blumer asserts that human beings experience social life in terms of fluid symbolic interaction, where the self and the selves of the others are continually adapting to the emergent situation; and
6. “Joint-action – a societal organization of conduct of different acts of diverse participants” (Blumer, 1969, p. 17). Blumer uses the joint-action concept to articulate how organized groups function using an inherent mechanism of abstraction; from the individual level; to the group-of-individuals level; to the institutional level.

When individuals interact as part of an institutional entity; cultural and social joint-action occurs. The day-to-day subjectivist experience and generation of meaning by the individual in navigating institutions and the social world around them is a major facet of the broader symbolic interactionist tradition.

Since I draw on the symbolic interactionist perspective; a qualitative, micro-focused research design is appropriate. This takes the form of a subjectivist epistemology. Much of the existing food consumption pattern research uses quantitative, large scale studies which indicate patterns and trends, but struggle to explain why some of these consumer trends exist. There is a fairly new and developing niche in Canadian qualitative sociological food studies (for example, Koç et al., 2012). A qualitative sociological research approach, with a characteristically small sample size, where depth is sought over breadth, is necessary to fully answer the research questions. Symbolic interactionism is

relevant social science for the study of human interaction, which is not static but has a contextual memory, the experience of which is subjective to the individual.

Blumer argued that “reality exists in the empirical world and not in the methods used to study that world; it is to be discovered in the examination of that world and not in the analysis or elaboration of the methods used to study that world” (Blumer, 1969, p. 27). Symbolic interactionists actively situate their own perspective within their work and both question and justify their approach as part of rigor:

Symbolic interactionism recognizes that the genuine mark of an empirical science is to respect the nature of its empirical world – to fit its problems, its guiding conceptions, its procedures of inquiry, its techniques of study, its concepts, and its theories to that world. (Blumer 1969, p. 48)

Scholars of SI use exploratory examination as a way to maintain rigor where investigation follows:

a flexible procedure in which the scholar shifts from one to another line of inquiry, adopts new points of observation as his study progresses, moves in new directions previously unthought-of, and changes his recognition of what are relevant data as he acquires more information. (Blumer, 1969, p. 40)

SI also functions in explanatory examination for answering “why” questions, and not merely “what” or “how” questions. It is a theoretical perspective that provides strategies for inductive reasoning and empirical research methods relevant to the study of social context. The impact of social context in animating the food consumption patterns of informants was an important aspect of study in this dissertation.

## 4.2 Research Design

Consistent with the SI perspective, I used an interview-based research design. This design is not to be confused with an ethnographic or grounded theory one. While I approached data collection and analysis inductively, I did not conduct a grounded theory project. This is possible because while all grounded theory is inductive, not all inductive analysis is grounded theory. However, I did use several techniques that are associated with grounded theory that are applicable across a wider range of qualitative research designs. These techniques include:

1. Theoretic sampling;
2. The concept-level unit of analysis; and
3. The constant comparative method.

Theoretic sampling means that a researcher looks to theoretical and abstract concepts per Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 9) in qualifying informants, and / or to “a comparable body” of concepts from the literature to be considered for the fine-tuning of data-analysis strategy (Silverman, 1994, p. 169). When one uses a concept-level unit of analysis, “a theorist works with conceptualizations of data, not the actual data per se” to categorize and abstract analysis of documented phenomena (Corbin & Strauss 1990, p. 7). The constant-comparative method means that new data is compared with what has already been documented, reducing researcher bias and increasing specificity as concepts are regrouped and re-evaluated with each new addition (Corbin & Strauss 1990, p. 9).

The purpose of this dissertation was to add to existing literature by providing an in-depth understanding and analysis of the non-mainstream food consumption patterns of

a theoretically sampled group using a qualitative, subjectivist epistemology. The research questions developed to guide the focus of the dissertation are as follows:

1. How do informants conceptualize environmental greenness in the context of risk and other factors affecting product choice such as price, quality and availability?
2. How do informants go about acquiring environmentally green foods? and
3. How do informants feel about green labelling designations like organic certification?

In addressing these questions, I analyzed a group of individuals' green worldviews from which a series of initial themes emerged. Through abstraction and theoretic sampling, these themes led to concepts and then eventually to the development of an explanatory model. To assist in the development of interview questions and prompts, I did a review of the food and environmental risk literatures. By looking at the literature at the start, the researcher is able to take advantage of previous work in the area for enhancing their knowledge (Bryant & Charmaz, 2005, p. 20).

I arrived at my informant selection criteria via conversations with other members of my community garden<sup>11</sup> and contextualized by a broad review of the literature. I was interested in studying the worldviews of individuals for whom environmentally green food consumption was a purposeful and important part of their way of life. As such, I developed the following as criteria for selection: At least 25% of their household food consumption would be environmentally green, and they would have made use of some non-mainstream form of environmentally green food acquisition. By "mainstream" I

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<sup>11</sup> None of the individuals involved in these initial conversations were informants. Two of them were gatekeepers.

mean the ubiquitous retail food options that compete for overall public business. By “non-mainstream” I mean forms of food acquisition that are significantly more specialized, such as food gardening, hunting, fishing, buying from farmers’ markets, CSAs, and any other option largely outside of the dominant corporate retail model. I inferred food gardening as being non-mainstream based on personal experience. The inclusion of the other food acquisition sources as being non-mainstream was based on conversations with other community gardeners.

The analytic focus in this dissertation was the individuals’ internalization of green food marketing claims and other official information sources that they, as members of the public, would have access to in the construction of their subjectivist food identities. In preparing to seek out a pool of potential informants, parameters were set to focus attention on those individuals who considered environmentally green foods to be of such high importance in their lives that they looked for these foods not just in mainstream grocery stores, but also through non-retail sources of food such as gardens, buying directly from producers, and other options. This increased the likelihood of finding individuals actively invested in modes of environmentally green consumption, rather than those with a passive green uptake from simply buying such foods from time to time as part of their normal shopping. The format for interviews was individual, semi-structured, recorded, that averaged approximately 20 minutes in duration. Appendix A contains a list of interview prompts, with an explanation of each.

In the literature studied, there was tension between structural macro-level factors involved in the dissemination of environmentally green marketing information and related micro-level individual experiences and personal consumption decisions. The



theoretically sampled informant group had an enduring interest in environmental issues related to food and sought out non-mainstream sources for environmentally green foods, especially those which were local or regional.

This research project used a concept-level unit of analysis, leading to rich detail around the motivating factors for green consumption for true-believers, thus complementing existing knowledge of green marketing uptake. Using purposeful sampling, deep understanding was gained concerning the narrative of a small, high-value group of informants, allowing for the investigation of their cultural story and experience of environmental greenness.

Interview prompts were used to maximize clarity, continuity, and relevance from interview to interview. The nature of research discovery meant that as themes emerged from interview data, other themes in the literature lost some relevancy to the focus of the dissertation and were adapted or replaced. Concept refinement took place from interview to interview. This technique helps the researcher identify ways to further refine the sensitivity of the data collection strategy, and to explore emergent categories (Mandal & Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 9).

Fourteen individuals were interviewed. For each of them, at least 25% of their total food consumption was constituted of foods labeled as, or otherwise tangibly associated to being environmentally green. Each of them supplemented their mainstream-retail food purchases in one or more of the following ways: gardening for food, whether it be from home or through a community garden; harvesting food available in the wild through hunting, fishing, or foraging; or purchasing food from non-mainstream options

such as organic specialty food stores, farmers' markets, directly from farms, or through Community Supported Agriculture co-operatives.

The decision to keep the scope of research enquiry focused on the ardent green food consumer rather than open it up to more mainstream green consumers and non-green consumers was made for three reasons. First, there is already literature on the more mainstream customer interaction with green products. This enables some broad comparisons to function between those types of consumer and the ones studied in this dissertation without needing to incorporate them into the research project. Second, by having a relatively homogeneous sample, it was possible to examine underlying factors that might animate their interactions with green at greater depth. Third was simply a concern of pragmatism. Additional research could tie in interviews from moderately-green or non-green informants to the findings in this dissertation, but that would be a substantial and stand-alone project outside the scope of this work.

The thematic parameters within which informant recruitment and sampling initially took place were then subject to theoretic sampling, a technique used to ensure that the scope and types of data being sought are as relevant as possible. Following Corbin and Strauss (1990), Goulding (2000, p. 262) states that theoretic sampling "is directed by the emerging theory" and reflective adjustment of sampling parameters is utilized to maximize relevance and sensitivity to the data available.

In the research strategy implemented in this dissertation, insider awareness was used to combine various tools, as appropriate to the research question, to conceptually assemble the segments of data into a dynamic collage of social information, otherwise known as a bricolage (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 2-3). The information produced is

nuanced and of significant depth to facilitate the researchers' generation of thoughtful answers to the research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). In whatever form one construes such a bricolage, the overarching feature to be expressed is that the data is a rich, thick "sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). To connect discrete research observations into a cohesive descriptive project, qualitative researchers adapt a toolbox of techniques to the types of questions and informants studied for relevance and sensitivity (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 85-86).

Techniques such as theoretic sampling and interpretative analysis were highly beneficial to examination of the informant data. Via the process of theoretic sampling, significant similarities were noted in how informants in my research conceptualized core themes, to how another set of informants in work from a different context did (Low, 2004). These concepts were holism, balance, and control which together formed a conceptual model that explained Low's (2004) informants' understanding of an alternative model of health. These three concepts and the interrelationships found between them by Low (2004) also help to understand the experiences of the people who took part in my research. This indicates that the conceptual trio was worth significant exploration as indicative of a possible, underlying generic social process (Prus, 1987).<sup>12</sup> A study of interaction between the holism, balance, and control concepts, with relevant sub-concepts enabled the development of a conceptual model of green conscience as process for informants.<sup>13</sup> My research dealt with informants' perceptions and the

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<sup>12</sup> Conceptually, the relevance of Low's model as being actually part of a larger paradigm is explored in Chapter 9.

<sup>13</sup> For how I conceptualize green conscience, see Figure 4.1 later in this section, as well as Chapter 5.2 and Chapter 9.2.

processes they use. Rather than offering completely new theory, the dissertation findings build on, modify, and extend Low's (2004) theory in new ways.

The sampling strategy used in this dissertation was reflectively adjusted during the interview phase of the project. This was done by tweaking the focus of recruitment criteria to increase or reduce prominence of core considerations when exploring the data available. Adjustments to the following criteria were made: foraging as source of green food was not initially considered, but was added as an option; community gardening for food was conceptually expanded to include home food gardening as well; more emphasis was placed on Community Supported Agriculture, and less emphasis on hunting and fishing than was the case with the original recruitment plan.

Within a purposeful sampling framework, snowball sampling and gatekeeper techniques were used to recruit qualified research participants. Snowball sampling “essentially consists of the cumulative gathering of nominations of persons meeting a standard identification for the characteristic sampled” (Flynn, 1973, p. 61). It helps the researcher gain access to the “universe” of relevant potential informants when researching specific types of communities (Flynn, 1973, p. 63). “This is a technique for finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on” as described by Vogt (2005, p. 300) in the *Dictionary of Statistics and Methodology: A Nontechnical Guide for the Social Sciences* (as cited in Cohen & Arieli, 2011, p. 424). To protect the privacy of the individuals who participated in my research (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2010), instead of asking for contact information, recruitment information was mentioned during

interviews and informants were invited to take an additional copy of the consent form to someone they knew; this functioned as an invitation to research participation.

The gatekeeper technique was used in conjunction with snowball sampling. The role of a gatekeeper is to facilitate the researcher's access to an unseen, inaccessible, or untrusting community of informants where "they support the research process by providing an efficient and expedient conduit for access between researchers and participants" (Clark, 2010, p. 486).

Research was conducted in the relatively small city of Fredericton, which has a high degree of cooperation between several environmentally green-affiliated community organizations. My pre-existing membership in one of these groups facilitated interaction with potential gatekeepers and allowed for preliminary assessment of the state of serious green-aligned community members in the city. Seven of these groups allowed new members or non-member guests, and each was approached in the search for potential informants.

I identified the organizers of these groups via word-of-mouth and their official points of contact for membership inquiries. This entailed reaching out to the groups on their social media accounts, or in person at community events. In doing this I addressed a request to the board of each organization to consider inviting their membership to participate in my research. Two of the groups accepted my request and each of them had someone in a leadership position act as a gatekeeper.<sup>14</sup> This meant that these individuals, while not informants themselves, vouched for me as a sincere and trustworthy researcher to their membership. They were not compensated in any way. They said they forwarded

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<sup>14</sup> I agreed to protect the privacy of gatekeepers by not naming them individually in this dissertation.

my consent form to approximately 75 individuals to invite their participation.<sup>15</sup> Out of this, about 20 people initially expressed an interest in being interviewed, but due to transportation and availability constraints, only those able to meet in Fredericton were interviewed. Fourteen individuals with fervent environmentally green perspectives participated. A profile of informants follows.

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<sup>15</sup> Gatekeepers respected the privacy of their membership by passing along my invitation to participate in the research without sharing membership information with me.

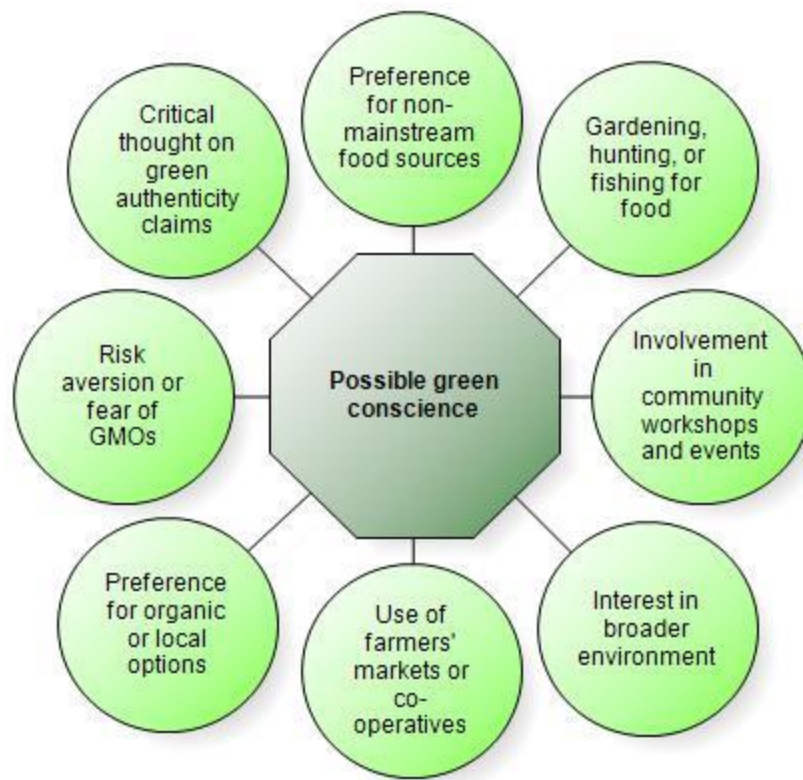
<i>Education</i>	21% graduate degree
	43% degree or certification
	36% some post-secondary or skilled trade
<i>Age ranges</i>	7% 20-30
	21% 30-39
	50% 40-59
	21% 60+
<i>Sex</i>	21% male
	79% female
<i>Current socio-economic status</i>	14% in or near poverty
	36% lower income level
	29% middle income level
	21% upper income level
<i>Non-mainstream food acquisition</i>	93% used co-operatives, farmers' markets, or crop-sharing
	100% participated in gardening, hunting, or fishing for food

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of Informants**

In the literature, various thematic factors appear to be relevant to how green identities are constructed by individuals. Building on this context, as well as my own insider awareness as a starting point for my research, I explored how initially relevant affinities might be conceptualized as a possible green conscience. Later determinants of whether such a conscience could exist and how it would manifest, is done based on analysis of interview data.

From an inductive thematic review of the literature I found the concept of “green consciousness” in Prothero and Connolly (2008). They used this term to refer to broad cultural perception of individual consumption practices as potentially affecting environmental sustainability (Prothero & Connolly, 2008, p. 119). Having awareness of this concept, I continued to review the literature and noticed themes emerge in the consumer affinities that tended to be mentioned as affecting environmentally green consumption choices. I wondered if those affinities were relevant to informant worldview and how they might be structured conceptually. To this end, I adapted the general concept of green consciousness as relevant to this dissertation to study the specific informant worldview(s) and I conceptualized it as a “green conscience”. While the green consciousness (Prothero & Connolly, 2008) was awareness of broader environmental issues by members of the public related to their consumption patterns, I considered the possibility of a possible green conscience existing as more of an explanatory concept that might show what affinities were present and if and how they may be connected. This led me to envision how such connections might occur in informant worldview. This is shown on the following page in Figure 4.1.





**Figure 4.1 Possible Affinity Connections to a Green Conscience**

It is possible that some combination(s) of these affinities might be able to be tied together conceptually during the data analysis phases of the work. This would be useful in order to study the extent to which the key interlinking concept; a possible core affinity to an overarching environmentally green conscience; could be potentially present. These possible interconnections in informants' affinity networks were assessed for their interrelationships with each other; with various themes generated from the literature review; and with other theoretical and thematic considerations in the data analysis.<sup>16</sup> The scope of inquiry is bracketed, being centered on understanding the green food activities of informants, and was not designed to identify the entire range of factors relevant to

<sup>16</sup> In Chapter 9, a series of actual informant affinity maps are provided with accompanying analysis of what linkages exist and their meaning. Also, the notion of a possible green conscience is revisited in Chapter 5.2 where informant perspective is drawn upon.

understanding all their food choices. This dissertation builds on the literature by offering new insight and perspective on environmentally green consumption patterns. It was not designed to discredit, delegitimize or de-emphasize the role of well-established consumerist, cultural food selection factors such as price, status, quality or availability.

#### **4.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Research enquiry was focused on a relatively new area of study: the issues, motivations, and reflective cultural identities that guide consumption decisions for environmentally green foods. Of interest was to understand how informants interpret and act on environmentally green marketing and regulatory information related to products they buy. Considering the prevalence of risk as a concept in scholarly green discourses, it was also important to assess the extent to which informants saw risk as a factor in their green consumption decisions. The way that green information stemming from external sources, such as marketing, legislation, and mass media coverage, is received by individual informants, is a subjective matter. As such, qualitative research tools that are sensitive to subjectivity, such as those from the symbolic interactionist tradition, are appropriate.

Although some valuable insight can be gained from quantitative approaches on a broad scale in tracing green food marketability and consumer satisfaction, qualitative perspectives are also needed. While there are relevant quantitatively measurable food variables such as regulation, cost, nutritional value, and production method; these are absorbed by members of the public in subjective ways which can be analyzed in depth by following qualitative methods and the symbolic interactionist tradition.

Addressed in my analysis were the personal, subjective constructions of meaning that animate consumption patterns for a selected type of consumer identity. Drawing in a complementary way on the often quantitative information in the literature; this qualitative project provides an in-depth vista on the motivations behind the environmentally green consumption patterns of the selected group of informants. Qualitative research is in-depth and multi-dimensional, and by necessity selective: it is used to “illustrate the emergence of the theory, and to point to critical junctures and breakthroughs in terms of theoretical insights” (Goulding, 2000, p. 265). When conducting research on consumer attitudes, understanding of quantitatively measured variables such as “customer satisfaction” can be at a greater depth if subjectivist background considerations are also studied through qualitative research (Mandal & Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 2).

The choice of research method is crucial as each one has different features and limitations. Åge draws on Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994) in articulating that scientific research approaches must be logically designed, well-articulated, and provide useful data (Åge, 2011, p. 1602). These benchmarks are satisfied in qualitative research when an approach suitable to the nature of the data being collected is employed. As Mandal and Bhattacharya (2013, p. 1) note, in research on subjectivist issues, such as their work on customer satisfaction, informant attitudes were in flux and a qualitative approach was important. The dissertation research focused on in-depth background factors guiding consumption patterns.

Within qualitative research, a wide variety of theoretical approaches and methods exist. Dissertation research design follows an interview-based research approach where thematic analysis is conducted using selected inductive techniques, some of which are

associated with grounded theory. Data was collected from informants based on their experiences, within their subculture, as relevant to environmentally green food.

Flexibility built into the interviewing technique provided informants the opportunity to emphasize those aspects which were of significant importance to them (Goulding, 2000, p. 263). This feature was a pragmatic and effective tool in the separation of key themes from tangential ones during later data analysis. Theoretic sampling of interviewees and of the literature was done to target theoretical and abstract ideas per Corbin & Strauss (1990, p. 9). This ensured a highly relevant group of individuals, each with a significant personal stake in a core area of research enquiry.

Relevant techniques used from grounded theory are theoretic sampling,<sup>17</sup> the concept-level unit of analysis and the constant-comparative method. The purpose of informant selection was to seek out the extent to which a cultural group may exist around a core category of thoughtful green consumption behaviours, and to tease out the significance of a series of related categories, initially from the literature, and then from the informant data itself. This allowed for the interview questions to be dynamic such that they could be adapted as new insights emerged, using inductive techniques to draw together the data. The findings are both descriptive and conceptual.

New insights can be generated by elaborating and expanding existing theories and building on already established “sensitizing concepts”<sup>18</sup> (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Using this approach allows for comparison of new findings with pre-existing findings from other contexts, in order to facilitate novel modeling of

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<sup>17</sup> Detailed in Chapter 9, theoretic sampling was used with a social process model from Low (2004) in order to more fully explain the implications of conceptual interconnections in informant experience as social process.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 9.7

generic social process theory (Prus, 1987). For Corbin and Strauss (1990), the concept is the unit of analysis, and they indicate that similar concepts, or concepts closely associated with one another, can be seen as potentially constituting a category. Categories are then used in data analysis. *Category* refers to a realm of inquiry or examination with a specific scope. *Themes* are the most salient groupings of concepts arising out of the categorically delimited vistas of scholarly examination (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 14).

Initial concepts came from background knowledge based on extensive review of the literature and they were refined based on what my informants said about their experiences. Techniques associated with thematic coding were used. Word frequency counters and affinity maps were used to assist in reflective adjustment of categories developing from the data.

Themes and concepts emerging from informant narrative were grouped to form conceptual categories. Important concepts, established as interviews progressed, were explored in subsequent interviews with other informants. In the search for themes and patterns in the data, Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest the following as rough indicators of possibilities: “repetitions... indigenous typologies or categories... metaphors and analogies... transitions... similarities and differences... linguistic connectors... missing data... theory-related material” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 89-94). Themes lurking in data can showcase concepts or perceptual associations of many types (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87). They can be broad or specific depending on the context, and it therefore requires skill to separate theme from noise (Ryan & Bernard 2003, pp. 87-88). There are a variety of tools that can be used to achieve this, and attention to newly-arising apparent groupings of ideas identified during careful transcription of audio tapes, provides a good

basic start (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 89). Rough categories are hewn from a researcher's background knowledge, initial observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 11), and literature reviews (Bryant & Charmaz, 2005, p. 20).

Wide ranging preliminary reading on relevant issues, for example, green food labeling, was done; and key terms and concepts were noted. These then formed themes that were tracked as points of interest for category development. Categories can provide harbors for related concepts so that they can be further developed. Meta-coding was used to develop conceptual models out of the concepts and categories that emerged during inductive data analysis. Ryan and Bernard (2003, p. 99) articulate this strategy as looking at "the relationship among a priori themes to discover potentially new themes and overarching metathemes". In so doing, the relative importance and relational attributes of the themes becomes clear. Meta-coding functioned in the following way in the dissertation: after a wide review of existing trends and boundaries in relevant scholarly thought, key concerns were selected and interlinkages between them studied, especially those of: risk, status, responsibility, and environmental sustainability in the context of food.

When looking for themes in qualitative research, one can look for gaps in informant discussions. Perhaps there are certain things which are taboo or are taken for granted in the discussion. The avoidance or salting of certain concepts in informant responses may be indicative of underlying patterns. In some cases, informants will not make direct statements, but will allude to issues or viewpoints through metaphor; a way of conveniently, yet richly relating information in the vernacular (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 90).

Preliminary themes or categories are established, then grouped or eliminated as needed to make the list practical and relevant for coding, and eventually for theme-based theory development (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 85). The following techniques for assessing data are essential: “cutting and sorting... word lists... key words in context... word co-occurrence... and metacoding” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, pp. 94-100). I also used analytic memos and took detailed notes during the research project.

I used the constant comparative method associated with grounded theory, wherein ongoing comparisons of categories and emerging themes were made until theoretical saturation occurred within the analytical framework. Viewing data collection and analysis as a non-linear path along which new insights in a later interview could be applied to a previous one, memos were developed to record hunches, describe emergent categories and theoretical constructs, and address data collection issues per Strauss and Corbin (1998). Interviews were initially transcribed verbatim, very carefully. On the first analytical pass, all the full transcripts were read sequentially, and apparent core-concepts noted. On the second pass, the responses to each interview question were read in order and additional apparent themes were noted or highlighted as appropriate.

In data analysis, open coding is a first step and it was used to develop and apply codes that closely reflected the information from interviews per Charmaz (2006). As part of the open coding phase, emergent groupings of codes and roughly defined themes were identified. This occurs by fracturing common assumptions about meaning, requiring the researcher’s creativity to come up with conceptual categories, and then grouping observed actions or events as falling into these evolving categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 12-13).

For example, while reading interview transcripts, a researcher would look for clusters of terms that individual informants used to discuss their consumption pattern *actions*. These actions could include things like looking for environmental designations on labels, reading the ingredients, or going to the organic section. One would then examine whether these actions could be grouped together in terms of broader or more abstract *theoretical meanings*, which in the case of the above example, could be classified under the umbrella of *careful* or *thoughtful* consumers of green products.

Once the open coding process has taken place, the researcher can proceed to the axial coding stage. In axial coding, one creates a structure of categories and subcategories to explain how different observed actions would manifest depending on the set(s) of circumstances occurring (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, pp. 13-14). Drawing on the initial set of concepts from open coding and possibly ones discussed in the literature, the axial stage is used to look for meaning and interconnection between codes and for emergence of central or otherwise influential codes. These points of inquiry were used in the search for a set of categories that would be representative of the informants' lived experiences of environmentally green food consumption choices. From there, the newly formed rough categories were used to create groupings of informants' individual direct and indirect associations with these themes. Associations came as broad context within each theme itself, and in the relationship(s) between themes as a series of factors illuminating individual informant perspectives.

For example, from the interview data one could examine the reasons given by informants for eating environmentally green foods *in general*, and compare them with the rationales given for preference of particular sub-category designations of green foods



over other food options such as organic, free range or fair trade. If, for example, an important theme were to be coded as *environmentally green food consumption patterns*, then the axial codes would follow the informant actions and philosophies that led to those patterns, such as the action of organic consumption, and potential ideological standpoints around avoiding genetically modified organisms.

The third major stage of data analysis occurred through examining the context mapping done in the previous stages, but at this juncture, looking at the added dimension of the whole community of informants rather than only at individuals as static response givers. A number of overarching themes, or *selective codes*, representing the lived experiences of informants, became visible.

During the selective coding stage, these codes were examined in the context of the other codes and also in context with the initial codes and informants' thematically grouped sets of quotations. This was done to facilitate a full, rich conceptualization of the data to be made sense of and to be organized into further abstraction-able categories of analysis. The selective coding stage is done after careful data analysis has generated some themes for reference.

Themes emergent from each category were grouped in the context of a *central* category defined by the research questions and data available per Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 14). An example of this stage of the process follows: A few categories that could be woven together into a *central* theme, almost a narrative, would be identified. For example, *x* is the central reason informants identify as meaningful for consuming environmentally green food products; *y* would be the composite of factors that make greenness meaningfully distinct from non-environmentally green food products; and *z*

would be found to be the most significant rationale for green food purchase. In this example, *x*, *y*, and *z* are *selective codes* identified out of the theme generation which took place within relatively discrete pools of data identified in the initial categories. Having the central theme or column in place for each of the pools of data, the other themed codes would be grouped or assembled around the central theme, for each, to facilitate theory development and / or to answer the research questions.

In practice, the major categories generated during the axial coding stage were: authenticity; status; green consumption; risk; decentralization and localization; organic; and sustainability. These categories had some overlap and also intersected with the central category which was *indicators of green identity*. Through this coding strategy, initial, messy data were categorized, organized, catalogued, and abstracted as per Charmaz (2006). Research findings followed this general structure to build understanding in the area of inquiry and contribute to knowledge in various ways, indicated primarily in Chapter 9.

The interviewing phase of my research continued until the data collected was sufficient to generate a robust conceptual model that functioned to explain informant experience of environmental greenness as social process. While the decision to cease collection of data at this point did not mean that there was no additional information discoverable, the data collected to that point conveyed a clear narrative of informant experience. This meets the benchmark set by Mandal and Bhattacharya (2013, p. 8) where “saturation along the dimensional ranges” is reached. In this case, the various factors affecting how informants characterized their food-identities such as; understanding of risks and benefits of different food types; affinity to green sub-cultures;

ideological issues; and other factors are discussed in the findings chapters of this dissertation.

#### **4.4 Rigor**

Credible research must be rigorous. However, the parameters and interpretation of the ubiquitous indicators of rigor – validity; reliability; and generalizability vary depending on the method used. They have particular meanings in the context of the qualitative methods used. Drawing on a thorough series of backgrounders created on relevant issues, the research questions and interview prompts were structured to attain deep reliable data allowing flexibility through a series of broad semi-structured prompts. Informants were encouraged to speak both specifically and generally about their conceptualizations of environmentally green issues. This meant rich data was generated, allowing focus on key issues, but also showing peripheral and tangential themes as context.

The findings from my research are contextualized in other research on the landscape of environmentally green food consumption motivation factors per Silverman, (1994). Analysis of data generated through this research project, while credible as a stand-alone work, is then also able to be viewed as being situated within a wide-ranging context of environmentally green issues. Within the tenets of qualitative sociological research, this dissertation demonstrates a degree of rigor which meets the commonly accepted practices of the scholarly community. Below I discuss how it does this in addressing the validity, reliability, and generalizability of my research.

### ***Validity.***

For qualitative research projects, construct validity is strengthened when analytic conclusions are grounded in the data collected (Kirk & Miller, 1986). My analysis of informant experiences meets this standard for validity where validity is “derived not from the representativeness of its samples, but from the thoroughness of its analysis” (Silverman, 1994, p. 169).

Using analytic induction, the interpretive model was adjusted until it could fully explain all the data available, and therefore the conceptual model that I ultimately developed to explain the informant experience is valid as it is deeply rooted in the data collected. When using these techniques, inductive reasoning “offers a powerful tool through which to overcome the danger of purely ‘anecdotal’ field research” (Silverman, 1994, p. 170).

Drawing on the interview data, a picture of informant intentions was generated in rich detail. Subtle speech cues noted during interviews, and more elaborate themes and categories which emerged through analysis, were given significant attention as sites for yielding data. Assignment of categories to was done with care so as observations would be theoretically and conceptually “consistent with respect to the particular features of interest to the observer,” which is enough for synchronic reliability per Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 42).

In my analysis, conceptual categories were reflectively adjusted over time, as patterns in the data came into focus. During initial stages of drafting the research questions, examination was made of other relevant scholarly research to: determine which approaches were successful; see how methodological challenges were managed;

review the sorts of scholarly criticisms of method and methodology directed at these articles; and get a general sense of themes identified in related studies. For the non-random informant pool, the theoretic sampling used with Low's (2004) work allowed for "a comparable body" of concepts to be considered for fine-tuning the data-analysis strategy (Silverman, 1994, p. 169).

Cronbach and Meehl in *Construct Validity in Psychological Tests* (1955) noted that theoretical validity is achieved because "there is substantial evidence that the theoretical paradigm rightly corresponds to the observations" (as cited in Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 22). Sound qualitative data collection and analysis techniques and robust inductive reasoning were implemented. The findings arising through the context of the symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective function as per the expected conceptual dimensions of an existing, valid social process model.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Reliability.***

Reliability in qualitative research does not rely on replicability because social life is dynamic, not static. This means that a different researcher would never be able to come to the same conclusions because the social context has changed. Instead, qualitative research is reliable in terms of synchronic reliability, which is a term used by Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 42) that "refers to the similarity of observations within the same time period". I followed the guidance of Mays and Pope whereby: "The main ways in which qualitative researchers ensure the retest reliability of their analyses is in maintaining meticulous records of interviews and observations and by documenting the process of analysis in detail" (Mays & Pope, 1995, p. 110).

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 9.

Therefore, I kept a detailed record of observations in a series of paper and electronic files. These were then used in the substantive analysis chapters of the dissertation. The analysis process that that I followed was clearly laid out. Care was taken to ensure reliability so that another researcher looking at the data and methods would be able to see how I came to my conclusions concerning the findings, from my research (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 42).

### ***Generalizability.***

In the context of qualitative research, generalizability is an important aspect of rigor, as it allows meaning of information gathered to transcend the specific realms of a given project, such that the data may be useful in interpretation of other relevant phenomena. As Prus notes, abstract social processes are observable:

denoting parallel sequences of activity across diverse contexts, generic social processes highlight the emergent, interpretive features of association; they focus on the activities involved in the 'doing' or accomplishment of group life. (Prus, 1987, p. 251)

By identifying and analyzing such processes, applied research is abstracted to where theory generation and extrapolation occurs; allowing at this abstracted level, the ability for moderatum generalizability in interpretative research. Rather than statistical or numerical generalizability, moderatum generalizability, is generalizing to theory about everyday life, and it is possible because of “cultural consistency in the social world and it is the same cultural consistency that makes social life possible” (Williams, 2000, p. 220). In other words, a shared web of meaning.

Interpretative research allows the analyst to connect “the particular to the general” (Ikeda, 2009, p. 53). For the symbolic interactionist perspective, its intrinsic notion of cultural consistency is the symbolic order (Williams, 2000, p. 220). Each perspective has its own language or canon of terminology for the “communicative cement... that the interpretivist needs to understand to be able to ‘say something’, understand what they are saying, and then make generalizations about the cultural consistency studied” (Williams, 2000, p. 220). A researcher’s use of their understanding of relevant cultural consistency to make moderatum generalizations is an indicator of having findings that fairly represent informant experience (Williams, 2000, p. 222).

Moderatum generalizations, those which are appropriate for qualitative research, are “the basis of inductive reasoning in what Schutz (1932), in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* called the ‘lifeworld’; they are the generalizations of everyday life” (as cited in Williams, 2000, p. 215). Moderatum generalizability refers to what it is that the researcher is seeking to understand. If this understanding is reached, then it will shed light on the informants’ experiences and their cultural consistency; and then moderatum generalizations are possible within or in reference to that cultural consistency (Williams, 2000, pp. 221-222).

In implementing moderatum generalization, a researcher would say *a* has similarities to *b* or fits the context of “a broader recognizable set of features” relevant to the cultural consistency of *b* (Williams, 2000, p. 215). The moderatum generalizability which can be expressed in interpretative research is sufficient for rigor (Williams, 2000, p. 221). Theory generated from, or built upon qualitative research is explanatory, not just descriptive. The generalizations made in this dissertation are theoretic, not numerical or

statistical. While the actions of informants are a reflection of subjective experience, they are also abstraction-able following the tenets of moderatum generalizability for theoretical explanation of social processes in everyday life per Williams (2000).

For moderatum generalizability to function, it must be contextualized by cultural consistency (Williams, 2000, p. 220; Silverman, 1994, p. 8). Researchers gathering and interpreting data must understand that “all data are mediated by our own reasoning as well as that of participants” (Silverman, 1994, p. 208). Theory arising from the data must take into account the existing thought paradigms arising from informants’ experiences of norms, how intervening forces such as political ideology, mass media, personal affluence, and other factors may affect the informants’ perspectives, and the researcher must acknowledge the bearing of these factors on the research findings (Silverman, 1994, pp. 6-8).

I collected data on the contexts of informant perspectives. Four of the eleven interview prompts were specifically designed to capture important background information used to understand informant perspectives as part of their broader lived experiences.<sup>20</sup> Understanding of cultural consistency was a priority in data analysis where informant behaviour was then examined as a generic social process. The research questions were designed to allow for theoretic moderatum generalizability of findings based on deep understanding of important issues to a very specific, thematically-defined group and how they relate to the broader cultural context.

Finally, I practiced reflectivity from the beginning of my dissertation research; I was aware of my own perceptual vantage point and took appropriate steps to minimize its

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<sup>20</sup> Details on this are provided in Appendix A – Interview Schedule.



encroachment into the research by using a methodologically sound approach with a thorough review of theory and literature.

#### **4.5 Ethics**

The research undertaken in this dissertation complies with the Tri-Council research ethics policy (Canadian Institutes of Health Research & Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010). A synopsis of the ethics management protocol is made in this section. Research procedures were straightforward; non-invasive; minimal-risk; and interviewees were not from vulnerable segments of society. For provision of an appropriate and reasonable level of informant privacy and data security, personal data collected during the research process such as contact information, signatures, and digital audio from interviews was kept private. The data pertaining to each informant was stored in a separate electronic file to facilitate timely deletion of personally identifiable information upon request. Personally-identifiable informant information will otherwise be retained for three years following dissertation completion, and then deleted.

Each informant was a member of one or more local groups concerned with environmentally green foods that were organized around such activities as community gardening, healthy eating, or gourmet food appreciation. The organizers of various relevant community groups were approached as potential gatekeepers and were provided with a summary of the research project, consent form, and an invitation to mention the project to their group. Recruitment criteria and project goals were also communicated at this time. This approach was effective in yielding a suitable pool of interviewees.

Interviews were conducted at locations of mutual safety and convenience. Informants were asked a series of questions designed to unearth the reasons behind their environmentally green food consumption decisions. There is a relatively small population in Fredericton, and still smaller segments that interact with the various organized groups to which informants belonged. As needed to protect privacy, specific informant details were made vague, and pseudonyms were used. The voluntary nature of the interviews was clearly communicated. All informants were advised that they may opt to skip any question. Informants were offered an honorarium of ten dollars as recognition of their time, and that amount was small enough to avoid jeopardizing the voluntariness of participation. No ethical challenges arose during the research process.

## **5.0 CLASSIFYING ENVIRONMENTALLY GREEN CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to facilitate transition from the abstract identification of broadly relevant themes and concepts to their application in the subsequent data analysis chapters of the dissertation. Some aspects of informant worldview are drawn on to introduce major high-level abstract concepts, but substantiation and the main analysis of findings are handled in later chapters.

The content of this chapter is divided into several complementary sections. Section 5.2 draws on informant worldviews to build an operational definition of a green conscience. In Section 5.3, broad contextual considerations from the literature relevant to the interpretation of informant worldview are summarized. Section 5.4 focuses on relevant analytical categories developed by Prothero et al. (2010) that provide a useful lens for thinking about the diverse ways in which the public interacts with environmental greenness. Section 5.5 provides context through a series of brief, potted biographies overviewing the 14 informants' environmentally green motivations and worldviews. Section 5.6 provides a thematic overview of the key issues from interview data. These become the focus of the substantive data analysis chapters. Section 5.7 concludes the chapter.

### **5.2 Conceptual Analysis of an Informant Green Conscience**

Cultural awareness of environmentally green products has grown in the last fifteen years and is tied to social and consumer responsibility (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 148). When the dominant economic paradigm was shaken as the recession of 2008 began,

a previously assumed public ethos of unthinking consumerism as leading to happiness, was re-examined in the mainstream, especially as relevant to uncritical consumption and trust in expert advice (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 148).

In looking at how informants described their understanding of what green meant to them, my conceptual category of a *green conscience* was revisited from Chapter 4.2. Based on the literature, a series of affinities relevant to the consumption of environmentally green products were thought to be possibly linked together. I produced a preliminary conceptual model of how this might manifest and termed it a possible green conscience. From analysis of informant perspective, I confirmed that there are several interconnected affinities and considerations in their worldview. My initial concept of a possible green conscience was broadly relevant but needed to be modified to reflect informant experience. The developmental path of this concept, from where I left it in chapter 4 is studied in this section.

Below is an operational definition of the green conscience as an analytical conceptual category I use that fairly represents informant worldview: *A green conscience is a perception that various production conditions related to risk, environmental sustainability, animal rights, and workers' rights are inherently connected to the meaning of the final product.* This is a holistic vision of production incorporating many factors externalized (Patel, 2009) in mainstream production. For clarity, concepts are attributed to individual informants, or to scholars for the purpose of comparison. Analysis not immediately attributed to another source should be interpreted as coming from my own analytical voice.

One having this green conscience strives to consume in a socially, ethically, and environmentally responsible way. Within the parameters of this conscience, the act of consumption denotes intentional support for the mechanisms of production inherent to the selected products. Awareness of need for care in assessing advertising claims is implicit. Holders of a green conscience are pragmatic and actively encourage the development of new, more suitable foodways. They take action through consumption choices, and by participating in non-mainstream acquisition of their green foods.

For informants, many externalities (Patel, 2009) to industrial food production are seen from a more holistic perspective. For example,

Green lifestyle choice includes... really looking at every single thing you do in your life from morning to night and saying 'is this the way I should be doing this; what impact is this having; and what can I do to lessen the environmental impact for future generations?' It's serious. It's something that you should be doing with every waking moment, really with everything we do. I won't call it a religion, but it's certainly a path, a message. (Melissa)

Melissa described a variety of ethical and environmental issues that she considered to be connected to her food consumption patterns. Several concepts are relevant to contextualizing a green conscience and distinguishing it from the mainstream, for example, conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899/ 2000); and the risk society (Beck, 1992). Unlike the mainstream in reflexive second modernity, consumers of environmentally green foods tend to have some input into, and control over their foodways (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 152). Yet intensive marketing and a public eager for

the next consumption trend was a hallmark of the 1990s in America (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 147).

Informants' perception of food desirability centered on fresh (William), local (Ben), certified organic (Mike) and home-grown (Helen). While gourmet status foods, which are often designated as green, are still highly sought after by the public (Jordan, 2007), several informants such as Allison, Ashley, Ben, Roberta, and Melissa believed that marketing campaigns by national grocery chains had warped the public understanding of green.<sup>21</sup> Corporate delivery of green was far from the only option available (Chris), and was seen to describe green with some misinformation (Allison). For all informants, a component of their decision to eat environmentally green food was a perception of it as being lower risk than other food options.

Environmentally green foods were seen in the context of reduced, but not eliminated risk; "often times even the organic crops are being polluted by nearby farms that do use the chemicals" (Kate). With the risk society came loss of public trust in government, industry, and even science to keep them safe from preceived ever present risk (Beck, 2000, p. 231). Referring to an environmentally green conscience is a way of conceptualizing informant consumption choices as being guided by their holistic understanding of green. This is different from the typical factors guiding public consumption choices such as price (Pollan, 2006, p. 136), quality or status (Jordan, 2007, p. 21).

It became clear from informants (for example, Ben, Allison, Alex, Mike) that risk reduction was a very important factor in their personal motivations for green consumption. There were also many other factors such as ethics (for example, Ben),

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<sup>21</sup> Elaboration on this is found in Chapter 7.

lifestyle (for example, Melissa), and community building (for example, Allison). Broad informant concerns included issues such as risk and truth in advertising (for example, Allison); perception of a public misunderstanding of how green is different from regular foods (David); and calling into question the effectiveness of regulation in protecting the public from misleading advertising (Roberta). Informants were also concerned with the credibility and quality of the available food information (for example, Allison, David). How informants perceived the trustworthiness of green food advertising claims was affected by the consequences of the risk society.

Green regulation was seen as playing catch-up to deceptive marketing practices (for example, Chris, Allison). This concern is also seen at the public level (for example, Sumner, 2015, p. 122). Claims on environmentally green food labels are subject to increased regulation since 2008 (Government of Canada, 2013a) yet informants (for example, Allison) expressed concern with perceived holes in green food regulation because “there is a lot of misinformation” (Allison).

To Melissa, “green lifestyle choice” is a way of living, not unlike spirituality, wherein many tangential considerations, including those which normally remain hidden or otherwise unnoticed, are drawn into view and into question. In practice, this necessitates thoughtful consumption on her part, placing quality and production methods at a much higher level of significance than quantity or price concerns.

For Mike, green is “very important... to live more with our natural environment as opposed to attempting to control every aspect of it, because that tends to backfire after a while” (Mike). This is reminiscent of risk society where risk is constant, inevitable, but lived with or managed rather than avoided (Beck, 1992).

Through participation in community-based or group-based events and workshops, informants such as Ben and Nathalie, built their understanding of what green meant to them. Most informants networked with other local people sharing their interests (for example, Nathalie, Ashley, Ben). Such activities were numerous, including Community Supported Agriculture site tours and initiatives, community gardening, and various workshops on cooking, gardening, preserving foods, and local grassroots food policy forums and food security discussion groups.

In conceptualizing the placement of an informant green conscience within or against a broader context, a number of issues were explored. All informants could be seen as having a green conscience with a shared social experience of thoughtful consumption, risk management and ethics as important principles. It was a goal or ideal toward which informants strove. Helen's sentiment exemplifies this: "I feel in a way that I am not as environmentally green as I would like to be, it may be I'm trying to be a perfectionist; I just do the best I can" (Helen).

Informants certainly had a spectrum of opinion on what green meant to them. Some intentionally distanced themselves from, or eschewed labels such as 'hippie' or 'activist' (for example, David). Fundamentally, the informant's experience of a green conscience was as a subculture, and not a counter culture when assessed in relation to a broader public understanding of environmental greenness in consumer society. This means that informants function within the mainstream as consumers in their acquisition of at least some of their green products, but that they can be seen as a subculture, because they use a different set of criteria from the mainstream in guiding their consumption



patterns. They also use different foodway sources such as community gardening (for example, Nathalie) and CSAs (for example, Chris).

While food acquisition, purposeful eating, and reflective consideration of production methods are central to the lived experiences of informants, it is important to distinguish them from ‘foodies’ which are constituents of another group that focuses on food. I consider myself to be a foodie and conceptualize the term to emphasize having a well-developed palate and a high level of interest in food as a culinary pursuit. Better taste was described by about half of the informants (for example, Alex, Ashley, William) as being linked to environmentally green foods. For other informants (for example, David) greenness did not necessarily affect taste. Also, taste was never the most important consideration for any of the informants. Although David perceived no taste difference between green and other food types, he felt that marketing hype was designed to lead people to believe that expensive green foods would taste better: “I love the study that says if its [labeled] organic people think that it tastes better” (David).

Therefore, while there can be overlap between the food consumption behaviours of ardent environmentally green attuned informants and those of another sub-cultural group with an enhanced interest in food, those who call themselves foodies, these groups are not identical. Indeed, informants themselves were aware of the distinction:

There’s a reason [why the food tastes better], it’s not just because you’re a green foodie, it’s because the food actually tastes better; just because you’ve chosen your ingredients wisely. (Melissa)

The most important distinction relates to a holistic interpretation of environmental greenness by informants. While taste can be important both in the informant and foodie

contexts, informants are concerned with a broad spectrum of additional factors relating to the production methods of foods; such as paying fair wages to farm workers (for example, Ben), minimizing unnecessary environmental harm (for example, William), and utilizing sustainable practices (for example, David).

It is important to ponder how Melissa, as one of the informants for whom taste was an important factor, distinguishes herself from typical foodies. It would be potentially possible to interpret foodies having some tendencies in common with informants. Both groups are purposeful in their personal food consumption patterns, but informants also bring in broad societal, environmental, and ethical concerns specific to their subculture. This dissertation describes the food-related activities of informants. It should not be interpreted to be necessarily describing other groups with heightened interest in food, such as foodies.

### **5.3 Context for Conceptual Interpretation of Informant Worldview**

In this section, work from Prothero et al. (2010) is utilized as a macro-study to assist in interpreting the microcosm of informant views. I note the relate-ability of informants' experiences and worldviews, as a community, to a classification system they developed for a related context. Affinity to an environmentally green lifestyle was an important part of informant selection. Interestingly, and coincidentally, the experiences of all informants lined up with aspects of the Prothero et al. (2010) green consumption pattern classification system. In Chapter 9, an extension of sociological theory is offered characterizing green lifestyle choice by informants as exemplifying a more generic, abstraction-able social process.

Informants had a range of green-linked perspectives and they were very highly motivated to seek out alternative, including non-retail, consumption patterns in the hunt for authentic environmentally green foods. They all discovered alternative ways to get green foods through affiliation with community organizations and word-of-mouth. For the community of informants, the decision to habitually select environmentally green food products was based on a wide variety of interwoven personal and cultural factors which together formed their green conscience.

Informant views, while not necessarily in unison, were indicative of a cohesive, community-based green conscience. While it encouraged green-consumerism, it also, more fundamentally, encouraged reducing consumption. This reduction was not done with an ultimate goal of getting completely away from consumerism, nor to the point of austerity, instead it was done with green-centric, utilitarian principles in mind. An important part of this green conscience included a habit, both as a philosophical gesture and also as a practical one, to reject the strictly retail approach to purchasing food.

There was a general informant sentiment that with the exception of specific targeted green initiatives, the environment had been and continues to be exploited beyond a sustainable level. As part of this, a lack of government environmental oversight (William) and a lack of individual understanding of their personal environmental impact (Ben), has affected the current environmental situation. William commented: “We’ve done a lot of damage, I’ve seen it... I used to hunt and fish a lot, and going hunting, fishing, you could see things changing”. He used to regularly catch several fish, but because of environmental degradation and overuse of resources by members of the

public, the pastime is no longer viable as a food source, he says, because the once plentiful fish in his local rivers are simply gone.

Human-caused, global-scale environmental degradation and contamination of natural ecosystems was of great concern to informants (for example, Ben, William). Present in their reflections was a sense first, that the next generation to be in power would be inheriting a highly damaged environment (for example, William), and second carrying an expression of regret for the amount of environmental damage already present (for example, William, Helen).

William noted that it was no longer prudent or possible for the next generation to continue to ignore environmental degradation, but that they must step forward to fix or begin to alleviate the mistakes of their predecessors through embracing a greener approach to food production and industry in general since “we’ve got the environment so screwed up now”. To William, societal inaction on environmental degradation would be very shortsighted and imperil the sustainability of environmental systems in a drastic and harmful way. Cautious optimism was expressed by most informants (for example, Helen, Ben) that positive change for system-level environmental sustainability could still occur, but that it must occur immediately.

All of the informants were reflective and careful in their consumption practices. They should not be considered to be unthinking consumers. However, several informants (for example, David, Allison) thought the average consumer was unthinking or easily misled about consumption ramifications to the point where they may be dupes of industry marketing campaigns. To informants, there was still real value in green ideals, and some corporatized environmentally green practices were viewed positively as long as

green authenticity was verified in some way (for example, Ben, Chris). This is certainly counter to a Marxian view of all businesses as inherently exploitive. A typical consumer, either through naïveté or willful indifference, may be un-attuned to the true impact of their own consumption choices regarding mainstream green products – and possibly uninterested in digging too deeply into the ethics of the processes leading to their foods for fear that they may be disappointed by what they find (Singer, 1989, pp. 160-162).

Some informants expressed displeasure in encountering green lifestyle enthusiasts proselytizing about eating in a certain way, which was often not well researched, understood, or accurate: “I find a lot of the people who get really activist about food to be misinformed and very emotional; and, I’m not, so I prefer to avoid it” (David). Melissa notes “I get extremely tired of listening to other people telling what they know to other people in maybe a preaching sort of way”. Such proselytizing, to Melissa, reinforced her perception that the general public would likely see people partaking in environmentally green lifestyles as being disingenuous, potentially condescending, and ultimately unthinking consumers.

An informant green conscience was built on critical thinking and questioning of the mainstream accepted green options. It was not about hyper-consumption. Informants were actively looking to increase their knowledge-based decision making abilities through considering many attributes of a green lifestyle, even extending to ethics (for example, Ben) and spirituality (for example, Kate). All the informants also went outside of the typical macro-consumer venues to support co-operatives and a variety of other of

other community-based options. For example, Mike took care to describe what I conceptualize as his environmentally green conscience.<sup>22</sup>

Learning to appreciate our food and where it comes from, having gratitude for it. So being very conscientious about it even when you are eating it is very important... again, the gratitude comes back, because if you just swallow something, eat it down, you're not aware of where it's coming from, then you're not really going to be prone to caring about the farmers, who are providing the food for you... it really makes a difference when you start to think about where it's coming from and how it's even harvested so things like using fertilizers comes into play and then you're going to start to be more interested about 'while I really should look at organic foods' more because of all of these elements, and brings so much more energy and life-force into the food and you're taking that into you, as well as just being much more aware of where it's come from and all the interconnections that come with that. (Mike)

Authentic green experiences can involve mainstream consumer goods, but are not defined by or limited thereto. True environmentally green food, in Ben's view, was "the simplest of food that has traveled the least distance". Nathalie made a similar observation: "green food for me means that I produce the food without using any chemicals, like fertilizer, pesticide... just natural food". Each of the informants had a holistic understanding of the relevant processes involved in food production.

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<sup>22</sup> Please note that "green conscience" is specifically the analyst's concept. Informants were asked what green meant to them, but no mention was made of a green conscience.

Competing narratives were apparent, however, at least on the surface, between the values expressed by the informant group and broader themes relating to the consumption of environmentally green products in the mainstream. For the general public, green awareness tends to be conceptualized as being about individual benefits and status (for example, McIntosh, 1996, pp. 94-94; Jordan, 2007, p. 33). In a green conscience, emphasis is placed on benefits both internal and external to the individual, where they view the foodway as an interconnected system, rather than as a one-way model of producer → retailer → consumer<sup>23</sup>.

All informants, by taking a holistic view of foodways, could be seen to have a standpoint contrary to the externalization trend noted by Patel (2009), where people typically chase the promise of cheap, fast and easy in the products they produce, market, and consume. The necessary price of this approach is being blind to the processes of production, and per Patel's (2009) concerns; capitulation to an industry practice of externalizing as many considerations as possible in bringing foods to market. From the broad worldview of informants, via the environmentally green conscience that I have inferred as being espoused by informants, such practices would be harmful to producers, consumers, workers, and the environment as a whole.

## **5.4 Classifying Green Engagement**

Having done the interviews, I went back to the literature looking for the possibility of relevant concepts that may have been developed in similar research areas that might be useful in the data analysis phase. This section focuses on introducing and providing a synopsis of especially relevant concepts found in Prothero et al. (2010). Their

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<sup>23</sup> As described in Chapter 5.2.

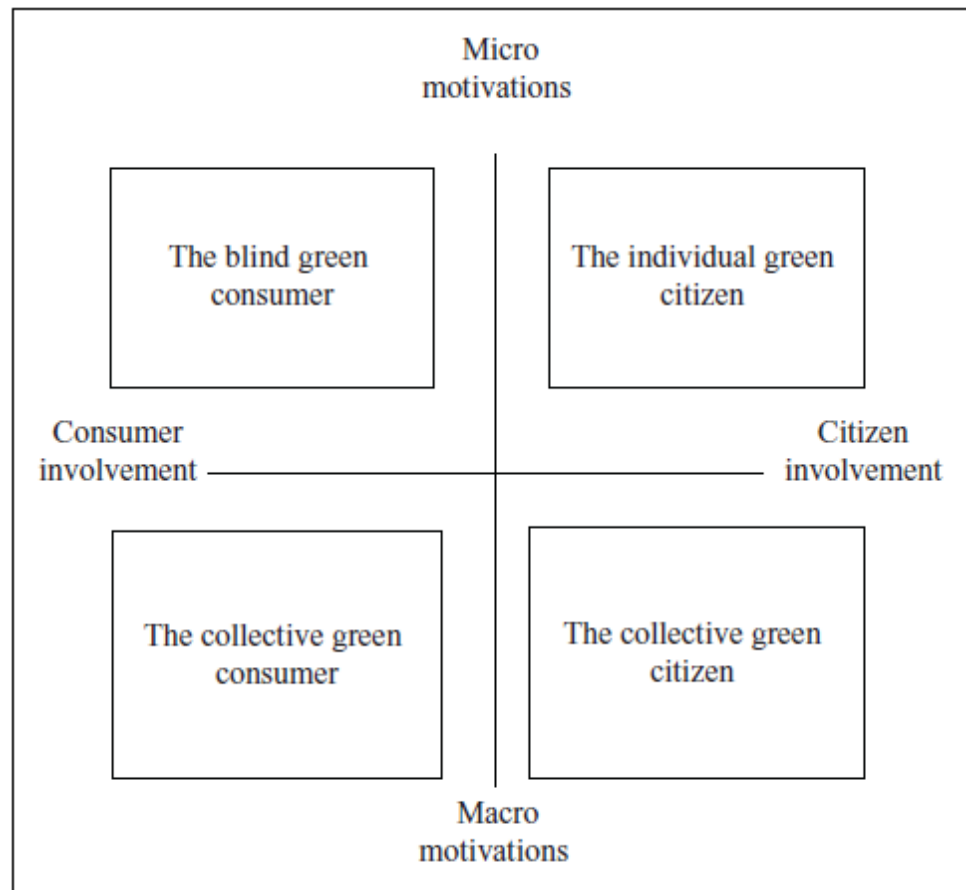
piece was uniquely applicable for classifying informant behaviour and viewpoints. Their theory on specific categories for understanding those engaging in purposeful environmentally green food consumption was drawn on as a tool for mapping informant affinities.

Several factors cemented the legacy of a broad cultural green movement in America, such as: public disillusionment with a status quo of corporate self-regulation; increasing credibility of environmentalists' voices; a series of highly publicized natural disasters; and the entrance of environmentally green production methods as a concept to the wider marketplace (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 149). As an example of the rising profile of environmental issues in the mainstream, calls from a growing number of public figures to address climate change as a product of overconsumption have attained widespread funding and attention in the mass media (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 150). Out of these contextual factors comes the potential environmental citizen who is not an uncritical hyper-consumer, but a thoughtful, reflective citizen who modifies their consumption patterns to the holistic benefit of the environment (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 150).

For Prothero et al. (2010), while there are a broad variety of motivating factors for consumers who chose environmentally green foods over other available types of products, such consumers could generally be grouped into two types (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 152). These were: consumers who had "macro reasons: fair trade, ethical consumption, sustainable consumption; and those who choose green for micro reasons: individualized and localized reasons not necessarily related to sustainability" (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 152).



In the worldviews of dissertation informants, the micro-level and macro-level aspects of a green lifestyle were typically interconnected (for example, Ben and Roberta). In their analysis of consumer green-seeking behaviours, Prothero et al. (2010) posited a conceptual intersection of consumption and reflectivity, where members of the public, as consumers, could be divided into four categories. Prothero et al. used the following diagram to illustrate this concept:



**Figure 5.1** Diagram from Prothero, McDonagh & Dobscha (2010, p. 153) “Green Commodity Discourse – Green Consumer / Citizen Involvement and Motivation” Used with permission from the authors.

The four conceptual categories Prothero et al. (2010) describe are; blind green consumer, individual green citizen, collective green consumer, and collective green

citizen – in order of least to greatest commitment to an environmentally green lifestyle. These categories show a layered, progressively more holistic and reasoned series of niche segments of public attitudes toward environmentally green foods where the concept of environmental greenness is conceptualized in an organized and assessable way. A description of these categories follows.

The *blind green consumer* (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 153) was the least invested in green. This was conceptualized as the individual who purchased environmentally green products for unrelated reasons, and for whom environmental considerations were of little importance. For these consumers, the environmentally beneficial implications of their actions were merely coincidental. An example of this type of consumer is the food gardener who does so out of convenience, taste, or economic necessity, and not for environmental reasons. There is much existing literature on consumers of this type, albeit not specifically named as such (for example, Brownlie et al., 2005; French, 2003; Gabaccia, 1998; Harrison, 2006; Jordan, 2007; Warde, 1997).

Also important to consider, while Prothero et al. (2010) did not directly make this link, is the status-seeking behaviour permeating mainstream consumer culture (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179) and embodied by consumers who buy green options such as organic vegetables which are often more expensive, fragile, or rare. This can be seen as an applied expression of a blind green consumer.

The *individual green citizen*, (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 153) consumed environmentally green products due to perceived environmental and health benefits thought to occur at the individual level. This segment of the green market spectrum was primarily concerned with bettering their own health, economic, or convenience outcomes

through selective consumption patterns. In this case, they were using environmentally green products to improve their own quality of life. This segment of the green attuned populace was not, in any traditional sense, environmentalist. However, they were still accessing an environmentally green niche, but in a way that was comfortable and easy from a mainstream vantage point.

The *collective green consumer* (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 153) was still fundamentally in consumer-mode, but was differentiated as making a significant and meaningful effort to direct personal consumer dollars to existing green niche options that purported to offer a range of environmental, health, and ethical benefits to society, and to sustainable environmental stewardship. These consumers intentionally patronized businesses seen to have increased environmental and ethical standards compared to the mainstream, as a way of implicitly encouraging large, traditional retailers to become more equitable to the workers and communities along the means of production and to reduce environmental waste. This is a relatively passive form of resistance to the mainstream, where constituents hoped to sway market demand toward products they conceptualized as being better from broad environmental, social, and potentially animal rights perspectives. Two of the informants fell clearly into this category: Carly and Allison. A profile of the informants follows in the next section.

To a lesser extent, Nathalie also fit into this category in practice, but her goals for environmentally green consumption would fit into the category of “collective green citizen”. This was the fourth type of green-attuned individual articulated by Prothero et al. (2010). The *collective green citizen* (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 154) was far more purposeful in their actions relating to the acquisition and consumption of environmentally

green products, explicitly seeking or making them available, through such channels as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, for the purpose of effecting real social and environmental change (Prothero et al., 2010, pp. 153-154).

The balance of the informants (Roberta, Alex, Chris, Kate, Ashley, David, Mike, Helen, Ben, William, and Melissa) occupied this space, although they reflectively indicated that at times, due to pragmatic considerations, this is not always attainable on a daily basis. Although the other three categories of green-attuned individuals are also characterizable as to some extent resistant to the dominant system, the collective green citizen is far more active. The collective green citizen is a persistent member of non-mainstream foodways, propping up environmentally green initiatives for their own benefit, but also for the holistic benefit of all involved along the foodway. These are the green aficionados, the die-hards, the true-believers, for whom environmentally green is a way of life. They do not simply shape their consumption within existing options, they facilitate the development and strengthening of new foodways which have production-side values in line with their values.

### **5.5 Profile of Informants as Green Consumers or Green Citizens**

To illustrate informant worldviews such that the reader will have a more global understanding of their backgrounds, the following brief biographies are provided. They are organized via the relevant green conceptual category from Prothero et al. (2010).<sup>24</sup> They fit, by coincidence, into the Prothero et al. (2010) categories; they were not, in any

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<sup>24</sup> In this dissertation informants fell into categories of “collective green consumer” and “collective green citizen”. Since the reader can readily distinguish between these two categories, I drop the word “collective” in referring to these concepts after initial use.

way, manipulated to fit. Also, any opinions, assessments or value judgements contained within these biographies are the voice of that informant.

**Collective green consumers.**

**CARLY** is middle aged, has some post-secondary education and worked in healthcare. She planned to grow a food garden, and used to hunt and fish: “there’s nothing like fishing, cleaning and cooking your fish; right there on an open fire, I love it”. She preferred to shop at the farmers’ market for some products but had very limited financial resources and had to shop carefully and price-consciously. When possible, she opted to support local and small businesses. She also bought local, free range eggs from a friend.

Carly suffered from a chronic health condition which necessitated careful diet-monitoring and reading of food labels, and she said this has made her more mindful and critical of the information on food packaging. Health concerns for her grandson led her to make financial sacrifices in other areas to insure he had fresh, whole, green food. Carly considered environmentally green foods to be desirable from a risk reduction and health perspective, but noted that they could be very expensive. Risks of environmental contamination from intensive agriculture, and the proliferation of cheap junk food, versus expensive healthy foods, were serious worries for her. Drawing on community interaction and consumption of mass media, Carly expressed significant concerns over tangential impacts of foodway side-effects in interrelated ecosystems.

**ALLISON** is in her twenties, vegetarian, and has a community college certificate. She was planning to grow a food garden soon and shopped at the farmers’ market in the

summer and fall. She planned to start going much more often to be more supportive of her local community. She shopped at True Food Organics and Superstore regularly.

Allison liked to read about environmentally green foods and review labeling claims. While she was interested in buying organic foods, she found that green-washing and other labeling issues artificially inflated the costs. To Allison, mainstream grocery stores were less trustworthy for their green claims than small-scale, green-dedicated businesses which were seen as being more directly accountable to their producers and to the communities they served. Even at a heightened cost, authentic green foods, such as certified organic ones were seen as being worthwhile for the maintenance of good health. The small sacrifices needed to buy environmentally green foods led to other healthy choices. Taste-wise, Allison found no difference, although she did find some organic items tended to cook better than their conventional counterparts.

**NATHALIE** is middle aged, has a university degree, and had a plot in a community garden for food. She used CSAs and the local farmers' market for a portion of her food, but most of it came from Superstore, Sobeys, or Victory Meat Market. Superstore had an impressive line of ethnic foods that reminded her of home, as well as the best quality produce of the three main grocery stores. Buying fresh food was very important, and an estimated 60% of her household's food was environmentally green.

Organic food was very expensive, especially with a large family, and sometimes unaffordable for Nathalie. It was preferable, when economically feasible because it was a better, healthier way of eating, and was perceived to lack chemical residue present in conventional foods. She felt much better when eating significant amounts of fresh, local, environmentally green foods. Nathalie envisioned green food as being as close to nature

as feasible, with no chemical fertilizers or pesticides, no industrial residues, just grown as if by a homesteader. Aware of a vibrant local green-linked food and gardening community, she was interested in becoming increasingly involved in community activities, with more free time following her recent university graduation.

### **Collective green citizens.**

**BEN** is in his thirties and has a college education. He gardened and foraged extensively and was deeply invested in his green citizenry. His work, hobbies, and involvement in several community organizations were all directly linked to living and promoting environmentally green outcomes.

Ben's household food intake revolved around what was environmentally green, seasonally fresh, and available from a local, or close to local farmer such as Harvey's, Gagetown Fruit Farm, or Jemseg River Farm. He also shopped regularly at the local farmers' market and at specialty stores such as True Food Organics, Aura Foods, Real Food Connections, and Spearville Mills. Organic, free range, fair trade, or local designations were important as appropriate to the type of food and its source. He did not shop at mainstream grocery stores.

When seasonally ripe, green foods were very affordable. At least 75% of Ben's household's year-round food intake was green. He preserved or froze a lot of produce for winter consumption. For Ben, food which was not locally sourced needed to be certified organic. Green-washing was a major concern and many of the supposedly green products available were seen to have very serious contradictions inherent in their production, storage, transportation, and packaging methods. True green foods, for Ben, were those produced in a sustainable way, with fair compensation for producers, humane treatment

of livestock, no use of hormones or genetic modification, minimal pesticide use, regional sourcing wherever possible, and waste minimization. Reducing his carbon footprint by being vegetarian was important to Ben. Small scale environmentally green producers were seen by Ben to increase biodiversity and reduce risk.

**ROBERTA** identified as middle-aged, has undergraduate and professional university education, and was an enthusiastic community gardener. She had a wide-ranging interest in learning about foodway issues, especially as related to health and risk. Hers was a holistic vision of sustainability, considering many factors in assessing relative greenness of available options.

Roberta found environmentally green foods to be very desirable, but sometimes at an excessively premium price in mainstream grocery stores. She expressed skepticism of mainstream marketed green foods, cautioning that regulation and consumer education are important issues. However, she noted that through careful shopping decisions, green foods were available, usually at a reasonable price. She preferred to do her food shopping at Victory Meat Market because of convenient location, and because it specialized in locally or regionally produced goods. She also frequently shopped at the farmers' market and seasonally available roadside markets.

Roberta strived to buy at least 50% of her food from organic, local, or other green producers. Depending on the season, at minimum, she estimated 35% to 40% of her family's food intake was green. The intensity of farm production, agricultural inputs, and use of product stabilizers made her cautious of mainstream foodway options. When her grandchildren would come to visit, she strove to provide them with fresh, environmentally green, often home-grown, home-made, foods.



**ALEX** is in her thirties, has a university degree, was vegetarian, and had an herb garden. She split her main grocery shopping dollars between seasonal Community Supported Agriculture programs such as the “Box-A-Week,” or “Up” from Jolly Farmer; bulk orders through Spearville Mills, and finally, for convenience, Atlantic Superstore. She also occasionally went to the Fredericton farmers' market.

Alex sought knowledge about environmental and health issues in library books, online articles, community forums, audio books, and participated in two environmentally green food associated community groups. She found green foods, when fresh, local, and in season, to taste much better and be more vibrant than mass produced foods. Environmentally green options, especially when certified organic, were highly desirable. With seasonal variations, an estimated 50% to 80% of her household's food was environmentally green. At times, as in the winter, the mass produced food was so much cheaper, she did buy it over organic, however, to the extent feasible she supported organic and the CSA's. Green foodways were seen by Alex as those which were less centralized than in the mainstream, had fairness for workers and a reasonable price on the consumer side.

**CHRIS** is middle-aged, has a Master's Degree, and was an ardent supporter of environmentally green foods, buying very little prepared food. He grew a food garden and bought much of his household's food for the last several years from CSAs and green-specialty food stores. Any food which was purchased through a more traditional grocery store was from the CO-OP, where he'd been a member for 15 years because it was community owned, and he enjoyed the selection and shopping environment.

Organic, fair trade, CSA, and local foods were very important to Chris, and while more expensive, were a good value if producers were being fairly paid, so sticker price was not as important. He felt that green-washing, and other marketing techniques were designed to trick consumers, so certifications, such as organic, were important. Chris' vision of authentic green focused on minimizing artificial inputs or industrial manipulation of natural processes, and managing the land holistically for better health outcomes and sustainability. Also, as an individual, through gardening, he hoped to learn about and practice greenness through his own actions.

Within the broader community, Chris considered himself to be very knowledgeable, and a lifelong student of environmental sustainability. He sought out and regularly attended various community organization meetings on food gardening, cooking, and food-mindfulness, to learn, to share knowledge, and to “be supportive of the movement”.

**KATE** is middle aged, has a bachelor's degree, was a vegetarian and acquired a substantial amount of food from her own garden as well as seasonally from CSAs. She considered her environmentally green lifestyle choice to be central to her physical and spiritual well-being, and to her identity. If she had kids, she would sacrifice in other areas of her budget to maximize their consumption of organic foods.

Shopping was also done at a variety of traditional grocery stores, as convenient, although she stayed away from packaged, prepared foods. Store-bought organic foods were also very desirable, but could be quite expensive, so she prioritized animal products based on risk and ethical assessments, and bought as much environmentally green food as economically possible overall. Kate carefully read labels, and spent a considerable

amount of time making sure she was getting all her vitamins and minerals, and eating as healthily as possible. Kate also had concerns about risks related to chemical residues on food.

**DAVID** is middle aged, has a graduate degree, grew a food garden, and shopped regularly at the local farmers' market, especially for seasonally fresh products. He bought some things, especially meats, directly from producers. David also shopped at Sobeys for convenience and Superstore for ethnic or specialty items. He estimated that his green consumption would be about 25% of his total diet. When David shopped for green, he looked for markers of authenticity, but not necessarily organic certification. David found mechanisms of large-scale organic production to be unappealing and in many ways, inauthentic. He read a variety of mass media and scholarly articles on healthfulness, nutrient content, taste, and other factors affecting organic and conventional foods. David said that industry had offered the public a bucolic vision of organic, but that it was actually very far from that, and that labeling and marketing strategies were misleading.

While affordability was not a concern for him, he knew many people for whom buying organic on a regular basis was not economically feasible. David said he supported the buy-local movement. He also cautioned that many consumers were overzealous, not considering that on balance; it may be more sustainable to attain certain foods from afar, where they were in natural abundance, rather than force-grow them here. For David, sustainability should be a starting point, and one should ultimately try to restore and revitalize ecological health. "I really like that concept, that food should take time and be an investment" (David).

**ASHLEY** is middle aged, has a university degree, and grew a massive food garden. She bought meat directly from a trusted farmer, participated in a CSA, and used the local farmers' market. She avoided buying prepackaged foods and estimated that her green consumption from the mainstream stores was at minimum 20%, although she aspired to a greater percentage. A much greater percentage of her total household food was green since she ate regularly from her extensive food garden.

Mainstream shopping was done at Sobeys, for convenience, and specific specialty stores to get green, local foods. She looked for labels, such as free range, organic, or fair trade to help guide her green consumption. Local, organic beef was seen as being much more expensive, but tasted better to her. Ashley considered green foodway issues such as transportation, food politics, nutrition and the importance of a holistic foodway framework when assessing whether something labeled as green, or even certified organic was truly sustainable.

**MIKE** is in his thirties, has some university education and practices a skilled trade. He grew a food garden and used CSAs. Superstore was his primary grocery store when local vegetables were not in season; when they were, he bought directly from farms. Mike enjoyed developing and sharing his green awareness, but was careful not to proselytize.

For Mike, nutrient rich, environmentally green foods were very desirable, but they were at times more cumbersome to acquire than mass-produced ones. Organic, fair trade, and free range goods were purchased whenever possible. Organic and free range were preferred in animal products for ethical and potential health reasons, but a difference in taste was not readily apparent. Organic agriculture was strongly preferred as Mike felt it

stopped and may to some extent reverse some of the environmental damage done by conventional agricultural production.

To Mike, environmental greenness was ultimately about living with nature, rather than trying to completely control it. Mike's view of environmental greenness incorporated environmental sustainability, learning to cook and to appreciate food, to respect the workers and animals, and spiritual considerations.

**MELISSA** is a senior citizen, has some post-secondary education, grew a food garden, and shopped quite substantially at the farmers' market. Beyond the farmers' market, she did some shopping at several local green specialty stores for specific items, and occasionally went to mainstream grocery stores, for convenience. She also did bulk-buying from artisan, green specialty producers. The farmers' market was preferred as it provided fresh, local food, at a reasonable price, and convenient access to gourmet items. She estimated that 60% of her food intake was environmentally green.

If one shopped prudently, organic foods were priced very competitively with conventional ones. Melissa strove to buy local or regionally produced foods, and among those, she tried to find organic options. Melissa felt that agricultural runoff, environmental damage, and contaminants from conventional farms likely still had some effect on certified organic foods. However, she also felt that "the whole concept of organic is just so much more appealing in terms of animal production, vegetable production, ethical concepts, and environmental considerations, just everything".

Melissa strove to be green, leading by example in terms of her actions and community involvement. She was careful not to be "preaching" her views as she felt this would undermine the message. She shared green, gourmet meals with those who were

interested and volunteered at a community garden. Melissa noted that sometimes products were advertised as green when they were not. For her, true green was a very fulfilling, spiritual way of life where food is savored, the body becomes healthier, the mind more thoughtful, and the conscience more developed for living sustainably, for the benefit of the community. This was a guiding force in her life.

**HELEN** was also a senior citizen, is a retired health professional and had a food garden for many years. She grew up during the great depression, and to that, she attributed her longstanding resilience and resourcefulness around growing, stretching, preserving, and understanding food. She grew whatever she could and preserved or froze it in large volume for later use. Helen also went to U-picks and preserved fruit in massive quantity when seasonally fresh and economical.

When not eating from her garden, she occasionally shopped at Sobeys, Victory Meat Market, and other places based on quality and price, but her garden was her primary food source. Helen preferred local or home grown foods, and was skeptical of the organic certification process and its relative cost in mainstream grocery stores. She tried to buy only local or regional foods, believing strongly in shopping at small businesses, such as Harvey's Big Potato, to keep community producers in business. Green was about using land and resources sustainably, without excessive chemical inputs, getting away from the use of antibiotics in animal production, minimizing wastes, increasing biodiversity and reducing risk. Helen noted that animals, as living things should not be subject to cruel conditions for the sake of profit.

While her son regularly bought in bulk from CSAs, Helen noted that was a privilege of wealth, and that poor people did not have that option. She was active in the

community by regularly donating food and meals to Social Assistance clients through a community kitchen. Through working with those in need, she tried to stem what she saw as a tragedy of poverty: where the easily available foods were fattening, less nutritious, and ultimately reinforced marginalization of the poor through obesity and related health and social challenges.

**WILLIAM** is in his sixties, recently retired, and has a community college certificate in a culinary field. He had a community garden plot for food and used to hunt and fish, but didn't at the time of interview as he was recovering from a serious injury. He shopped regularly at the local farmer's market as well as bulk-buying from Jolly Farmer, a CSA. He bulk-bought his beef from a local organic farmer, whom he trusted, and the price was at most a secondary consideration. Before his injury, he noticed a collapse of the fish stocks in his local rivers. For mainstream grocery stores, he went to a combination of Sobeys, Superstore, and to a lesser extent, Victory Meat Market or Saint-Mary's, based on quality, convenience, and price.

As a long-term food service professional, William saw a preference among young people for more environmentally green food options. With fresh seasonal produce, the organic foods tasted much better to him. As an administrator and chef for a large institution, he found that when foods came from nearby farms the quality was far higher, but due to cost-cutting, they were forced to switch providers to a pre-packaged wholesaler, with a very negative impact on the quality and healthfulness of the foods. He volunteered extensively in a community organization for children and young mothers, teaching them how to cook, giving them healthy meals and showing them how to shop for healthy, affordable foods. Growing up working in his father's garden, he learned

various strategies to maximize yields through a holistic view of foodway systems. He was very worried that industrial agriculture had pushed the overall ecosystem out of balance, and that it may not be able to recover.

## **5.6 Overview of Major Themes for Later Substantive Analysis**

Looking at informant worldviews on environmentally green foodway issues, their concerns were found to be broadly categorizable into three thematic areas. A cursory overview of these themes is made in this section and then in-depth analysis of each occurs in a dedicated chapter of the dissertation.<sup>25</sup>

### **Theme 1: Informant perceptions of greenness related to foodway centralization.**

The concept of multiple parallel systems for food procurement was something to which all informants became attuned. They actively sought out peripheral foodways such as farmer's cooperatives rather than relying on the heavily centralized foodways of large corporate grocery retailers. Informants (for example, Allison) questioned an assumption that they perceived the public to harbor: specifically, that major supermarket chains would only carry the safest foods, with other venues for food acquisition being less safe. Buying from a roadside vendor with no real local address, and with no brand name to be tarnished if poor quality food was sold, could have been seen as potentially riskier than buying from the supermarket; but this was not the case for informants. They actively sought out these alternative sources believing them to be higher in quality, more authentic producers (for example, Ben) than what they saw as mass-marketed, processed, and transported options available in the supermarket (for example, Ashley).

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<sup>25</sup> To follow in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.



A lack of effective regulation on some types of environmentally green food designations left green consumption at risk of being overtly manipulated (Government of Canada, 2013b). The merging of consumer culture with industrial-scale food processing suggests that the public was, for a long time, conditioned to seek the lowest price or the flashiest status claim on product packaging without even a brief consideration of the many other factors in food processing (Patel 2009).

While there was a significant emphasis from all informants on the benefits of local or small scale production, a number of them also expressed the sentiment that the land, water or air used in the production of foods may well have been tainted by the industrial farming practices of neighbouring farms, industrial areas, or cities (for example, Ben, Kate, William). To have a truly pristine food, health wise, is conceptually challenging. There is some irony in the highly visible display of foods as pristine, by appearance that abound in supermarkets. It is possible that this potentially causes some everyday consumers to be lulled into a false sense of security that the food system is completely safe and without risk.

Conceptually, informants did not ascribe to ‘safe / not safe’ as a binary model, but rather saw a continuum of relative, not absolute safety and risk (for example, Ben, Kate). To understand potential risks, it was important to know how things were categorized and defined by producers: “You have to read the labels... it’s good to know the definition” (Roberta). All things in the informant green conscience relating to food are subject to the spectre of risk; however, green foods bore the least degree of perceived risk due to the holistic approaches taken regarding production. Informants typically sought foods produced in a green way from small scale, local sources rather than mainstream retail.

Their perception of risk and other relevant issues as related to foodway centralization is the focus of Chapter 6.

## **Theme 2: Product authenticity and consumer culture.**

The idea of a blind green consumer in Prothero et al. (2010) is apt. By taking their concept and slightly adapting interpretation of it to the scope of this research project, the blind green consumer category could be seen to include those consumers who bought organic and other environmentally green designated foods when they were readily available or convenient from retail offerings, without paying attention to the veracity of the environmental claims or the regulatory framework behind them.

Additionally, as specifically related to this dissertation, a blind green consumer, might absorb marketing information as the unfettered truth, and possibly seek out green products for a host of reasons that had little bearing on the actual production method of the food product. In that case, they would be coincidental green consumers, who bought green for personal reasons rather than holistic ones.

This type of consumer would typically be complacent regarding risks associated with non-environmentally-green foodways. In such a case, green could be sought for connotations of prestige or even coincidence. Essentially an individual having such a mindset would see consumption choice from the easily available retail options to be the total significance of the green market, which – to them, may be perceived of as a fad (Prothero et al., 2010). The thoughtful consumption by informants was done much more deliberately than that. Informants (for example, Ben) pondered that most consumers did suspect that marketing of conventional and environmentally green foods may be to some

extent inauthentic, but that consumers preferred to be willfully ignorant rather than confront unsettling issues.

Confronting the issues could require a change in behaviour such as not supporting companies engaging in production methods which were problematic from a more green-attuned perspective, and / or requiring greater effort in choosing what to consume.

Becoming committed to environmentally green consumption is about something more significant than personal contentment or consumption as happiness. For example, “I’m maybe too knowledgeable, it makes it difficult to buy things because you end up feeling... guilty” (Ashley).

Effort was seen as necessary and valuable for informants as they strove to eat very healthily and to have a high degree of fresh or home-preserved produce in their diets (for example, Kate, Mike, Ben, William). A few informants (for example, Ben) dramatically altered their diets seasonally per whatever was regionally available. Chris noted: “I don’t even compare the prices... you know, carrots from the CSA with carrots from California” (Chris). When retail options for regionally produced greens were seasonally unavailable, some informants tended to rely on their own abilities to stockpile home-canned or otherwise home-preserved foods (for example, Helen). Informants were willing to put in significant effort to insure the authenticity of their environmentally green foods. A study of the intersection between consumer culture and their environmentally green conscience forms the basis of Chapter 7.

### **Theme 3: The organic designation.**

There was trepidation from several informants over whether by becoming more mainstream, the organic designation may have lost some of its meaning. Allison, Chris,

Ashley, Ben, and Roberta, expressed concern that any food which is not overtly labeled and certified as organic, is likely to be misleading in its green labeling claims, and potentially genetically modified, containing chemical residues or being factory farmed.<sup>26</sup> This is congruent with a trend in consumer perception of conventionally farmed foods as increasingly risky to people and to environmental sustainability in general (Forbes et al., 2011, p. 80). William advised using “organic as much as you can... better for your kids, better for you” (William).

Melissa, Roberta and Chris cautioned that while they saw a public perception of green as meaning healthy and natural, one had to be very careful reading labels, and even then, green was frequently marketed in a way which was disingenuous. In reading and researching labels, for example, “it’s good to know the [regulatory] definition of [the terms] that the package manufacturers are using to market something... what do they mean by that? It may not be what you think it means” (Roberta).

This caution was in line with the Prothero et al. (2010, p. 149) observation that in the wake of convoluted marketing practices around defining green, the public came to demand far more accountability in green marketing than was previously the case. Government regulation was seen by Allison, Chris, Ashley, Ben, and Roberta as a somewhat effective method of protecting the public from misleading advertising, and helping consumers to make informed choices on purchasing goods. A lack of regulation on some green-designated food items was seen as a lack of credibility to Chris. He noted that reliance on unregulated green terms made it easy for marketers to manipulate consumer perception. He instead relied on organic certification specifically. For Alex, green ideally would imply one of the three following situations: fresh and regionally

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<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 8.

sourced; if it was made abroad, that the workers and communities in which it was produced saw fair compensation and environmental protection; or that it was home grown.

Although organic was very important as a concept, it was not seen as a panacea. Organic could be possibly produced on a massive scale from afar and shipped, which would need to be weighed against foods that were local or regional and in season, but lacking any official certifications relating to environmentally green production. These considerations are studied in Chapter 8.

## **5.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter defined the novel concept of a green conscience, provided context for its interpretation, described relevant concepts from Prothero et alia's (2010) classification system as applicable to contextualizing informant perspective, provided informant profiles, and summarized key themes.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 present these core themes for a discussion of interviewee perceptions as compared to the literature. Chapter 9 makes a new contribution to the scholarly literature by showing that the green conscience is abstraction-able and functions as part of a related generic social process. It provides novel and important contributions to scholarly thought that are not currently present in the literature. Chapter 10 concludes the work and offers a direction for future research.

## **6.0 INFORMANT PERCEPTIONS OF GREENNESS RELATED TO FOODWAY CENTRALIZATION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Informants perceived differences in the relative greenness of foods from local, small scale producers compared to those from larger, much more centralized retail outlets. Presentation of their worldviews is organized into two sections. Section 6.2 looks at how informants conceptualize greenness or lack thereof in foodways. Section 6.3 looks at the pragmatics of how they direct their consumption patterns to exercise their green product preferences.

### **6.2 Questioning Greenness in Mainstream Foodways**

Informants (for example, Ashley, Ben) were concerned with the carbon footprint of products which may be labelled as green but which have travelled long distances. Another concern was lack of trust in foreign enforcement of organic certification processes (Ben). Purchasing food directly from small scale local or regional producers was preferred by informants so they could authenticate their green experiences by speaking with the producers: “We go directly to the farms to buy most of our vegetables” (Mike). “I am concerned about sustainable practices... we go to the farmers’ market every week... we have a free range pork producer and chicken producer we use” (David). As a professional food service administrator, William preferred to “use as much on the [nearby] farm as we could... [when it] wasn’t bought from the farm, it was bought from other wholesalers, and I could see a big difference in it” (William).

Allison had concerns over misleading environmental claims regarding green-indicated products, for example, “There are companies that call themselves green, but they sell chemicals in their products” (Allison). David noted “they inject the pork here with saline in the grocery stores, and it drives me nuts... we buy straight from the person who owns the hogs” (David). Ben also preferred to buy directly from micro-scale producers, and otherwise felt: “there are certain things that there’s an emphasis on buying organic, [especially] something not made locally” (Ben). When practical, Ben liked to verify greenness by meeting or speaking with producers through farm visits or by phone. The organic designation was an important indicator of environmental greenness to other informants as well, including Ashley, Melissa, and Chris. Informant preference for organic is discussed in this chapter specifically as it relates to their worldviews on foodway centralization. In-depth analysis of the changing role and meaning of the organic designation occurs in Chapter 8.

Concerns raised by informants about purchasing from non-regional producers were predominantly focused on four interrelated sources of perceived risk. These thematic risk-types gleaned from the interview data are listed below, accompanied by an exemplifying and representative informant concern.<sup>27</sup> These concerns are:

1. inadequate or incoherent regulation: “I don’t trust other countries’ agricultural standards” (Ben);
2. deceptive marketing: “With green labeling there is such a thing as green-washing too, right and we know that can get bandied about” (Chris);

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<sup>27</sup> I have summarized, using analyst's concepts, a representative way to reflect informant perspective. The accompanying quotes are not meant to imply that informant perception is identical, but to provide context.

3. carbon footprint: “I think the first thing that comes to mind is transportation” (Ashley); and
4. food additive or pollution concerns: “I don’t want him [grandson] to be affected by food additives of any kind” (Carly).

Each informant considered a combination of these factors in guiding their consumption decisions. The factor considered most central or important, varied by informant.

Informant consideration of broader factors such as environmental, social, labour and other issues, shaped their consumption patterns much more significantly than would be likely in the mainstream. For example, Roberta would research all green claims on food and ponderously consider tangential factors related to going green:

Our office has recently undertaken paperless meetings, it’s not energy-less, you know when you use a different form of energy you still use the energy, it doesn’t matter if it’s paperless. It’s the same way with organic; I guess I’m more aware of the cost to the environment; if you raise cows for instance, there’s an awful lot of energy that goes into raising that cow [versus a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle], so that even in the end, yes it may be an organic cow, you know there are those considerations. (Roberta)

On carefully researching his foods, David noted “I have an interest in it. I have an interest in organic and all those fun things; and what we do, and how we treat the world: I’m a geek. I have a science background” (David). “I would say I have probably a greater knowledge than a lot of other people I see when I look in the carts of people in front of me and behind me, I think O--kay pretty well everything this person is buying is all packaged” (Ashley).



Of overall household consumption, informants reported consuming a range from at least 25% green products (for example, David), although most were much higher at approximately 50% (for example, Roberta). Ben's environmentally green consumption was the highest at about 75% of food purchased or otherwise acquired. While informants generally went out of their way to buy green, they noted that for some purchases, more mainstream products were a pragmatic option, whether for cost or other considerations. For example, Kate noted that "when you go organic, or environmentally friendly, it does get quite expensive: so, it's making choices, certain things have to be organic and you're willing to make sacrifices on the others to keep the costs down" (Kate).

In navigating which products must be green and which products or types of products were permissible from mainstream farming operations, an overarching fear of hazard due to contamination possibilities in foodways profoundly shaped purchasing activities. Ben, for example, needed meat to be organic, free range and local. Natural, whole foods, when available, were much preferred by informants. Referring to heavily processed foods, William commented: "I wouldn't eat that stuff, and I wouldn't expect any kid of mine to eat it... I cook meat, potatoes, a lot was grown in my own garden and I bought organic stuff" (William).

Truly green foods are those grown "like I would grow it, naturally" (Carly). When eating real environmentally green foods, "you feel better" (Nathalie). To acquire authentic green foods, CSAs and other local or regional businesses, were favored by informants (for example, Nathalie, Alex, Chris, Kate, Ashley, Mike, William). Based on their checking into green claims, Ben and Chris found producers they trusted: "I have faith in the farmers I buy from" (Ben); "When we buy from our CSA, it's one hundred

percent organic; everything in it, whether it's meat, eggs, cheese, vegetables, fruits; it's all organic" (Chris).

Informants (for example, Ben, Allison, Alex) saw the scale of producers as an important factor in the likelihood of a producer to offer authentically green products. Local or regionally produced foods were preferred: "if I could do both [local and organic] together, I would" (Allison). Helen's position was similar: "I check the labels, and first [preference] is New Brunswick, second is Maritimes, but I don't buy the American stuff if I can help it". "Whatever is locally produced, I am interested in it" (Nathalie). "I like to support local products and local farmers" (Allison).

Informants as a group were concerned with misuse of green-related designations by mainstream grocery stores. They looked for some sort of authentication through regulatory indicators such as organic or other certifications. With "green labeling... a lot of people can take advantage of it, so it's really best to look for organic certification" (Chris). Informants preferred products that had organic certification when buying from large retail outlets. However, their proclivity for also direct-buying from farmers at roadside stands and in markets required informants to be willing to trust very small scale producers unlikely to have official organic certification.

Natural foods are desirable to Melissa; "there are times when you don't always condemn a food because it's not labeled 'certified organic', I just take a careful look at the ingredients, and if there's nothing too vile in there and it's not organic I would still consider it" (Melissa). Fresh, natural foods were also important to Kate; "I stay away from pretty much everything that's in a box that has preservatives in it... I try to buy

everything as natural and green as I can” (Kate). CSAs and other types of small-scale producers were also seen as offering green options (for example, Nathalie, Ben, William).

Trust in small-scale farmers was not given idly. Ben, for example, routinely traveled to farms to see their operations, an activity he says was encouraged by some producers as a way to demonstrate authenticity and prove their green claims. Ben would share his opinions about these farms with others through his community networks. In addition to being able to audit green claims, this helped “to keep the money here in my economy and to foster the relationships that I have with farmers” (Ben).

In using these small niche market producers, informants were opting, from their point of view, for products of higher quality and greater environmental accountability. For example, “I find what is sold in Superstore or Sobeys [as green] has a lot of misinformation” (Allison). “I have faith in the farmers that I buy from, so that’s why I buy from them instead of grocery stores” (Ben). “I consider my purchases of organic and from the CSA’s to be a vote for where I want my money to go and where I want people to produce good quality food” (Alex). CSAs were seen as building their livelihoods on authentic green products, with their reputations being vital to their survival, given that other, probably more economical food sources, were readily available (for example, Chris, William, Alex).

Informants supported small-scale producers (for example, Alex, Ben), and criticized green marketing strategies of existing large-scale retailers of food products (for example, Allison, Chris). Thinking about foods that she did not perceive as being environmentally green at mainstream grocery stores, Alex noted “the pesticide stuff depletes the soil and contaminates the water” (Alex). Also: “I think that any

[conventional] food you buy is going to be contaminated with the global contamination of pesticides” (Melissa). Concerns with contamination were not limited to unseen chemicals. Visible additives designed to make foods look more appealing were also viewed as unfortunate adulterations; “it makes me so frustrated to have to scrape wax off apples” (Carly).

Similarly, concern over contamination from industrial production extended to the dispersal effects on water, adjacent crops, livestock, and people. “All the chemical aspects are terrible for the soil; it goes into our water systems” (Mike). “Even the organic crops are being polluted by nearby farms that do use chemical[s]” (Kate). “I’m maybe too knowledgeable [of foodway issues], it makes it difficult to buy things ... everything is so political” (Ashley).

Keeping money in the local community by supporting small businesses was greatly valued by informants. “I want to pay them what I think it’s worth for them to grow that and what they think it’s worth, so there’s fairness there” (Ben); “the whole concept of [regionally produced] organic is just so much more appealing in terms of animal production, vegetable production, ethical concepts, environmental considerations” (Melissa).

By supporting small businesses, in addition to economic and environmental benefits already described, informants tended to associate this with reduced risk and increased resilience. For example,

If you have a diverse farm with many, many varieties of many different foods there’s more security, more food security that garden would offer that community. The reduced amount of pesticides that are used [in a non-

intensive farming operation] are obviously better for our water, they're better for our soil. Crop rotation and what we're giving back to the soil is usually a high emphasis with organics so, to me, that means again, better food security; it's sustainable, meaning that in years to come people will still be able to farm on that soil in the same way and be able to feed themselves.

(Ben)

Most informants expressed concerns over contamination from agricultural chemicals and wastes (for example, Mike, Ben). Informants also saw the public as being disconnected from producers, consuming far more resources than they need, generating more waste and environmental risk: and "it affects people on a much larger scale than, I think, many would realize, or think about" (Mike). "Overuse of pesticides and growth hormones is always a concern" when shopping for conventionally farmed foods (Roberta).

In addition to animal rights concerns with industrial farming, Mike noted that animals living a more peaceful existence by being free range "don't have stress hormones leaching into the food" (Mike). Helen expressed concern that industrial scale production created especially unethical living conditions for animals. "The [industrial] chickens are fed antibiotics, they jam them up, they are just grown for the market, they never see the outdoors, [chicks are maltreated and] I deplore that, I think we have got to make people aware of those things" (Helen). Helen uses her consumer dollars to support smaller-scale, regional and free range producers that she considers to be authentic and ethical.

The treatment of animals and labourers (for example, Helen, Ben), tangential environmental impacts (for example, Mike, Roberta), and building community capital

through outreach to community food organizations (for example, William, Chris), are seen holistically as essential and integrated considerations. Conceptually, a holistic approach to food production includes a balance of many considerations and therefore cannot be centralized to the extent of the presently dominant foodway structure.

Informants were careful in their consumption patterns, looking beyond vague green product claims: “for me that means ethical for the farmers that are growing and harvesting the crops so there's fair pricing there” (Ben). This also included looking for ways a producer would be “kind to the world, to stop abusing... [we] should really be shooting for regeneration” (David). A regenerative perspective on sustainable development was a shared view of most informants, and they tended to emphasize sentiments such as: “we have done a lot of damage” (William). Informants preferred to support non-wasteful consumption practices as well as producers that would use methods of production designed to holistically improve sustainability and resilience of local communities and the environment (for example, William, Ben, Helen).

Local or regional foodways were seen as the most aligned with these preferences: “I think of how much distance your food has to come to get to your table; which is why we are pretty well growing anything that we can” (Ashley). William and Helen also had extensive food gardens.

Although informants preferred their foodways to be decentralized (for example, Ben, Helen, Nathalie, Alex), they were not conceptually against all forms of centralization. The role of government in providing centralized food education was supported. For example, to William, people generally didn't garden or know how to eat well. Ashley also felt that the public did not understand how to eat healthily. William felt

that the government had a responsibility to provide accurate basic food education resources to the public. William lamented the result of a lack of support for young, poor families. “With my background, I’m quite knowledgeable, and I used to be quite active [until] I retired” (William). He had years of experience in proposing and managing healthy food-related community initiatives, partnering with governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations. During this time, something which haunted him, and which he saw over and over, was the undernourishment and ill-health of the children of the working poor whose parents often did not have knowledge of, or access to, healthy foods or reliable nutritional advice. For example,

One young guy, about 10 or 12 years old, he came in, he’d had his [charity] meal, he said ‘can I get seconds?’ I said no problem, we’ve got lots, and when he came back for thirds, I said OK, and then he said ‘I just want to thank you, we don’t have turkey at home, I only get turkey once a year and it’s here... we eat KFC... McDonalds, Burger King, Kraft Dinner, we don’t get any [fresh fruit or vegetables].’ That’s what I’m getting at, someone should [be available through government funding to] sit down with these people, not only give them a basic idea about how to cook [environmentally green and healthy food], but take them to the supermarket and show them how to shop... it should be something being done by Social Development. (William)

Certain types of centralized governmental intervention, as William mentioned, were generally encouraged and none of the informants expressed that this would be inappropriate. However, there were also concerns, especially from Nathalie, about

government slowing down or impeding the ability of small scale producers of environmentally sustainable food products to label their products in ways that would fairly convey the production methods used. Nathalie considered opening her own micro-scale, certified organic farm but encountered what she considered to be sufficient regulatory burden and uncertainty that she and her business partner ended up abandoning their pursuit of certification and ultimately the venture altogether.

Government enforcement of food labelling authenticity and fairness in advertising was important to informants (for example, Chris, Allison). Yet since micro-producers were often recipients of informants' business, many of those same informants also felt that government was at times too rigid on rules for very small green niche producers.

Official government backed certifications of environmental greenness were preferred for foods bought from mainstream producers because certifications were seen as one of the only ways to confirm authenticity of a product label's green claims (for example, Ben, Chris, Ashley, Roberta). Yet much smaller-scale local or near-by producers were seen as accessible, and dependent on word-of-mouth of the people buying green products in their communities to stay in business (for example, Ben, Chris). To Ben and Chris, these small businesses would need to offer greater green authenticity than their larger-scale competitors. The trust in small producers was also based on being able to hold them accountable. This was done through speaking with the owner, the producer, the butcher, and seeing the plot of land on which the food product was grown or raised, or relying on a trusted community member's word-of-mouth (for example, Ben, Chris, Alex). In turn, informants were willing to pay a premium on their green goods as



compared with the prices charged by mainstream providers (for example, William, Chris and Ben).

The informant perceptions described above would seem to support Keen's (1990) observations that for each stage of the food system which is centralized and corporatized, the public loses some degree of accountability or understanding of the production methods (Kneen, 1990, pp. 32-33). Also those production methods may use less desirable tactics when they cannot be seen by the consumer (Kneen, 1990, pp. 32-33). Or, to phrase it another way, the more distant the production process and the less direct access individuals have for verifying the specifics of the production process for themselves, the greater the amount of trust that must be placed in the producer. As a group, the informants in this study were often unwilling to invest such trust in large, distant corporations. Also, their support for centralized, legislated labeling schemes, while viewed as one way of enhancing trust, was not embraced uncritically.

### **6.3 Making Green Choices: Balancing Risk and Pragmatism**

This section looks at how informants make their environmentally green food consumption choices. When deciding what to purchase or consume, many concerns were noted such as wage fairness (for example, Alex, Ben), animal welfare (Helen) and paying as direct-to-producer as possible (David, Ashley) in order to enhance the regional economy (for example, Carly, Allison). Care was needed to avoid accidentally buying a product which misrepresented its greenness (for example, Allison, Ben, Chris).

Informants saw their participation in home or community gardens, farmers' markets, fishing, CSAs, and other alternative food acquisition options as increasing environmental sustainability (for example, William). They also saw it as reducing risk (for example,

Allison), helping their communities (for example, Ben) and benefiting their own health (for example, Nathalie).

Also affecting consumption decisions are considerations of how food was packaged (for example, Ben), transportation-based carbon costs (for example, Ashley), and freshness (for example, David, Nathalie, Melissa). Given this array of considerations, all informants saw a need to look beyond mainstream retail for the acquisition of their foods. All informants used at least one of the following alternative sources to purchase food; farmers markets, rural food stands, direct-buy Community Supported Agriculture programs, such as the Jolly Farmer, and co-operatives. “When things are seasonally ripe, it’s just a matter of me connecting with my local farmers... and going out to their location to get my food” (Ben).

In addition to supporting small-scale producers, informants tended to embrace various avenues of self-production such as foraging (for example, Ben) or fishing (for example, Carly). Almost all of the informants either had a food garden going at the time of the interview or had a plot they were planning to plant in. Carly was the only exception. She expressed a desire to have a garden in the future, but was financially unable to do so at the present.

A personal connection with one’s food was important: “there’s nothing like fishing, cleaning, and cooking your fish right there on an open fire – I love it” (Carly). Mike enjoyed sharing the foods he produced or otherwise acquired with others as a way of enticing them to appreciate environmentally green foods: “I always cook for them and explain what I’m cooking. So, if they can taste how good it is and it’s organic, and free range, and vegetarian; then they might be more prone to trying it themselves” (Mike).

Although Ashley and Melissa preferred to shop for green foods through alternative venues, informants with the exception of Ben, did use mainstream grocery stores for some foods “Superstore, I have to say, has a really good selection of international foods... so now and then if there’s something I need in that line, I go there” (Melissa). Ashley noted that for products such as honey, or others which were too cumbersome to produce on an individual level, she relied on Sobeys.

Conceptually, the centralization of foodways to maximize economies of scale has been the dominant retail model and it is focused on price, size and lean business practices (Starr, 2010, p. 480). Yet this mainstream interpretation of what efficiency means is not shared by informants. From their holistic perspective on foodways, reintegrating the inefficiencies eliminated by macro-retailers, was seen to benefit local economies through greater employment (for example, Ben). It was also seen to improve viability of small businesses (for example, William), the environment (for example, Helen) and importantly, to reduce food-risk in terms of contamination (for example, Allison). To David, the intentional pursuit of these inefficiencies, with the goal of increasing sustainability, should be done pragmatically. Balance was very important to him, for example,

Sometimes it’s better to grow things off someplace else in a mass thing because they’re built for growing it there and we’re not built for growing it here and we use too many inputs here. For me it’s a balance, if I know it’s something we grow well here, I’m more than happy to buy it from a local dude. But if it’s something we’re really bad at growing here then I don’t think

we should be growing it here; and then, I think it's a waste, it's not sustainable, and we shouldn't be doing it. (David)

The organic certification of food was considered a useful way of identifying authentically environmentally green foods (for example, Roberta, Allison, Ashley). However, organic certification was seen as a cumbersome process unless a producer has sufficient scale (for example, Nathalie). Also, green designations in general were seen as potentially being manipulated through marketing to imply benefits that may not be present (for example, Allison, Chris). Ben noted that processes in Canada to regulate agricultural products as a whole were reasonably accountable and meaningful. Chris was adamant about having relevant additional certification as green, saying: "I look for the organic label", rather than a vague green claim as "a lot of people can take advantage of it" (Chris). "I prefer to buy organic" (Alex). "I try to buy as much organic as possible" (Allison).

When dealing with imported foods, organic certification became very important to Ben as well: "I'm not going to buy them unless they are certified organic, because they are being imported. I don't trust other countries' agriculture standards" (Ben). Local foods, some of which might not necessarily have been officially certified organic, were also desirable to informants. For example, William shopped at the farmers' market, a CSA and various small businesses: "it's what's in season... and it's local, it's about quality" (William). "My local food-buying isn't always organic, but it's as much as possible organic and local" (Melissa).

None of the informants viewed dollar cost at checkout as the most important consideration in product choice, within the ranges they considered to be affordable.

Rather than selecting the lowest price, the previously articulated holistic considerations informants had, tended to be much more focused on external considerations of environmental and community benefit (for example, Ben, William) and internal considerations of personal health (for example, Nathalie, Mike).

To Melissa, using the mainstream retail system exclusively would direct food dollars away from regional producers, undermine the strength of the local economy and have “a negative impact, rather than a rippling positive impact” as occurred through the support of these alternative producers (Melissa). Ben said that by looking at local economic benefit and product quality rather than price as the primary decision factor, sustainability is significantly strengthened: “I don’t want to undercut my farmer” (Ben). Chris concurs: “I do believe that we are getting [good] value, that they are really worth it, and I believe in paying farmers for their labour, a decent wage” (Chris). “I would focus more on the little businessman, and try to give my money to them” (Carly).

If people don't really think about their consumption choices, they are more likely to be wasteful (for example, Mike) and less likely to think about external considerations such as animal rights or environmental sustainability (for example, Helen). “I want to [cause] as little environmental impact as possible” (Allison). I’m “concerned about sustainable practices” (David). “Always, green would be the first choice; I think everyone has an obligation to do that; not just buy the cheapest thing” (Melissa).

To spend a premium on environmentally green foods is perceived as a worthwhile activity:

Let’s say you spend a hundred and twenty dollars on conventional foods; you might spend an extra ten to fifteen dollars on these [organic or local] products,

but it's worth it. A lot of people say that they would like to have that 15 dollars extra, to buy beer; go to McDonald's; or go to the movies, but those small sacrifices are good for me. (Allison)

Personal benefits to eating green foods were also noted by some informants; "When we buy the organic meat from the farmer, it's probably triple the price [of Sobeys] but it's definitely worth it, you can taste the difference" (Ashley). "I could see a big difference... they taste better and they are healthier for you" (William).

The holistic approach to food acquisition that informants espouse is a mindset that is not a mainstream type of consumerism, nor is it common in the literature. The literature tends to focus on individual indicators of products such as organic-ness, ethics, local or fresh, and not on connecting these factors together, for example, Jordan (2007); or on theorizing broad cultural associations to food, for example, Lupton (1994) and Gabaccia (1998).

The consideration of multiple factors external to the well-being of the individual as being integrated in a holistic and meaningful way for individuals consuming green products is a relatively new and niche area of the literature at which Prothero et al. (2010) are at the forefront. They argued that the traditional scholarly mechanisms for categorizing socio-environmental movements and trends didn't apply well to the current situation of green which is: "different from the previous incarnations... a green commodity discourse that has begun to move the sustainability discourse away from the bonds of the dominant social paradigm and toward a more holistic and global perspective" (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 147).

Informant perspective certainly reflected in some ways how Prothero et al. (2010) discussed this green commodity discourse above. Mike saw great importance in “being very conscious of your food and where it comes from” (Mike). Kate did as well, explaining that food provides:

Wellness... not just physical, it's mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual... it's the fuel you put in your body to function, and the greener and cleaner that fuel is, the healthier, the better functioning you'll be as a human being; it's of utmost importance. (Kate)

In summary, two central themes emerge from analysis of informants' green purchasing choices:

1. First, they perceive a connection between centralized social structure (large corporate versus local farms); and environmental / health impact; and this perception affects both where and what they purchase; and
2. In contrast to marketing characterizations which typically explain food choice through reference to a small set of factors such as: price, availability, status, and ethnicity; the individuals in this study come across as:
  - a. more diverse in the range of factors they consider including both those traditional concerns as well as others such as the nature of the store / producer, the labelling of the product; and
  - b. more active in the process of how they reach the decision to purchase a particular item. The particular factors taken into account did not deterministically result in a particular food choice but, rather, become elements in a complex balancing equation in which the individual

actively considers elements related to each in making the final determination.

Overall, the group of informants shared knowledge, supported local rural economies, encouraged thoughtful, respectful, and pragmatic consumption patterns in the pursuit of risk reduction, environmental sustainability, health and meaning.

#### **6.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of how informants perceived risk and a variety of other factors as being affected by the degree of foodway centralization. Relevant points of general agreement between informants are summarized below to give voice to their narrative:

1. A clear preference for the highest quality rather than the lowest price (for example William, Nathalie, Melissa);
2. An on-going vigilance regarding labelling claims (for example, Ben, Allison, Chris, Roberta, Ashley, Carly);
3. A belief that the sticker price should incorporate sustainable practices, fair wages and ethical treatment of animals along the supply chain (for example, David, Alex, Helen);
4. A perception that small-scale producers of environmentally green foods are lower risk, and are usually more environmentally green than mainstream retailers (for example, Ben, David, Kate); and
5. A desire to share their experiences and be active in their consumption decisions, but not activist in their interaction with others (for example, Mike, Ben).



## **7.0 PRODUCT AUTHENTICITY AND CONSUMER CULTURE**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes informants' views about product authenticity and consumer culture, and compares those views with concepts from the literature. A focus on price or status is an effective strategy in mainstream marketing. In green niche marketing, cultivating a perception of a given product as being authentic is a primary goal, and tension between consumer culture and authenticity of environmentally green foods was a recurring theme in the literature (for example, Gabaccia, 1998, p. 96; Jordan, 2007, p. 33).

### **7.2 Conceptualizing Environmentally Green Product Authenticity**

Scholars such as McIntosh (1996), Witt (2004), and Gabaccia (1998) suggested that authenticity in consumerist societies was not possible; that marketing-derived messaging had entered the public consciousness with such pervasiveness and subtlety that it was impossible to distance oneself; and that even counter cultures, once they defined themselves, became merely niche markets. Indeed, varied consumer choices are often engineered by marketers feigning new or competitive options (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179). Industry actively promotes unthinking consumerism by enticing consumers to allay their concerns, trust the marketer; and through their purchases, attain instant gratification (Bell, 1976, p. 21). To Bell, consumer culture was simply a manifestation of status seeking behaviour (Bell, 1976, p. 22). Klein (2009) addressed the notion of niche marketing as also detrimental to the meaningfulness of once-distinct options, activities, or cultural events:

This is perhaps branding's crudest irony: most manufacturers and retailers begin by seeking out authentic scenes, important causes and cherished public events so that these things will infuse their brands with meaning... too often however, the expansive nature of the branding process ends up causing the event to be usurped... fans begin to feel a sense of alienation from (if not outright resentment toward) once-cherished cultural events. (Klein, 2009, p. 36)

In these ways, Klein (2009) and Bell (1976) tend to describe consumers as dupes who lack independent ability to reconstruct a separate understanding, or have an inability to function reflectively within a consumerist framework. Klein's conceptual model requires authenticity to be wholly separate from consumer culture. While these accounts may have some validity as descriptions of macro-level change in the volume and ubiquity of advertising, they share a collective deficiency: the presumption that an all-knowing external observer can accurately identify and describe the feelings and experiences of the public. Or, to put it another way, the identification of a product or experience as "authentic" is up to the individual.

In the specific case of environmentally green food options, a number of my informants were explicitly on the look-out for authentic products (for example, Ben, Chris, Roberta). Informants perceived certain products to be more authentic based on their evaluation of product information, their own research, and word-of-mouth from community members. Thus, for the individuals in this study, the issue was not the lack of "authentic" green products, but rather the need to actively distinguish between the "authentic" from the "impostors".

Some indicators of green product authenticity include, for example, environmental sustainability (Kate), animal welfare (Helen), organic certification (Melissa), local foods (David), reducing pollution (Ben), and carbon footprint (Ashley). These were measurable variables, and therefore authenticity of green products could be measurable. Individual informants emphasized certain aspects of environmentally green consumption depending on their own perspective, research, and economic resources; but the set of considerations used to assess environmental sustainability was common across the informant community.

Determination of which products counted as being authentically green differed slightly between individuals depending upon what factors they saw as most relevant or crucial. In other words, the criteria used to assess authenticity were not fixed but, rather, varied depending on how the individual defined what counted as “green”. Some informants defined the concept very broadly. “True green means... to be kind to the world... to stop abusing it” (David). “What impact is this having and what can I do to lessen the environmental impact for future generations” (Melissa). Others emphasized more specific environmental or ecological concerns. “No pesticides, no commercial fertilizer use in growing it; using what nature gave you” (William). For some, greenness was tied as much to social considerations like the scale of production and the nature of modern consumer society as it was to explicitly environmental concerns like pollution. Alex, for example, was mostly interested in supporting local or regional businesses and making sure that any foreign products are fair trade. Helen goes even further, linking the modern production process with a perceived overemphasis on consumption: “I will support our world coming back to small farming, managed farming and trying to live

with less” (Helen). Informants were aware of green-washing (for example, Allison, Chris) and recognized themselves as the object of green marketing. In some cases this led to cynicism about the concept itself: “I don’t even use the term, [green] you know, and I think it’s a term that’s going to get absconded with by big corporations” (Chris). As a result, Chris looks specifically for labelling designations like organic. But all informants found that there were authentic green products available through careful selection.

All the informants, to varying degrees, sought out alternative ways to acquire their foods outside of mainstream retail offerings. The most prevalent ways they did this were: gardening (for example, Roberta, Helen), participation in community supported agriculture programs (for example, Nathalie, Alex), and the staunch support of small businesses specializing in green foods (for example, Allison, Ben). Most of the informants used more than one of these alternative ways of getting food. It is important to note that informants were not anti-consumer, and especially not anti-capitalist: they sought out high-end food markets specializing in green, and were willing to pay a very significant premium for “authentic” green foods, relative to comparable mass-retail goods (for example, William, David).

These diverse alternative approaches to acquiring food illustrate two distinct mechanisms related to the determination of authenticity. On the one hand, the informants engaged in processes of food acquisition in which they were in direct control, for example, gardening, fishing, hunting, foraging. In these cases, the individuals either had direct control over the production process and, hence for example, knew whether fertilizer was used in the garden, or acquired their food directly from “nature”; from a condition that was not obviously “tainted” by human intervention. Secondly, they relied

on small-scale local producers. As was noted previously, the informants expressed a distrust of large-scale corporatized production and marketing. Purchasing from small, local outlets has the function of removing some uncertainty about the production process and shifts the purchasing decision to a format involving ongoing face-to-face relations with specific individuals relative to the anonymity of purchasing at a large-scale retail outlet and, hence, providing a basis for the establishment of trust.

Informants expressed a commitment to environmental sustainability (for example, Ben, Roberta, Chris) but to do so in ways that are practical and feasible (for example, Nathalie, Allison) within their socio-cultural context, and by being active in the community (for example, Helen, William). Environmentally green foods appear to be a unique type of niche market. Although materialism is “inherently antithetical to issues of the environment and sustainability” (Prothero et al., 2010, p. 147); companies sensing profit potential have sought to finesse the opposites of environmental sustainability and increasing conspicuous consumption into a symbiotic whole (Zelmer, 2008).

The motivations expressed by informants for consumption of environmentally green products involved a variety of factors, both internal to the individual such as health (for example, Kate, William, Nathalie), but also external benefits to the environment and to society (for example, Ben, Melissa, Chris). Informants said they invested significant effort to source their green foods from alternative producers due to an insufficient amount of readily available, authentic green products (for example, Chris, Alex, Ben, William, Mike).

Mainstream green offerings are sometimes perceived of as “inauthentic” due to “green-washing” (Chris) and other forms of suggestive marketing (Roberta). It is well

established that marketing an item to the public using status claims is easily done by refining its appearance and giving it an inflated price. Green foods may be associated with status due to their limited availability and sometimes higher price (Jordan, 2007, pp. 20-21). However, informants were very careful in their food consumption decisions, for example, “I put a lot of planning, a lot of time into my nutrition” (Kate); “I really like that concept, that food should take time and be an investment” (David). Informants were methodical in their strategies to purchase or grow authentic green products outside of mainstream offerings. In studying individuals who used alternative ways of attaining green foods, it became apparent that authenticity was far more important to them overall than typical, mainstream product attributes like price, quality or availability.

### **7.3 Selling Green Definition**

Due to the sometimes higher cost of environmentally green products, compared to similar items that are not explicitly marketed as such, many scholars have associated them with status and conspicuous consumption (for example, Harrison, 2006, p. 399). There has also been discussion in the literature concerning green or gourmet as status symbols (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56; Gabaccia, 1998, p. 96; McIntosh, 1996, p. 133). These are interesting findings, but such studies were usually macro in focus. This project, in contrast, examines the subjective perception of these issues. To informants, conspicuous consumption and status were not among the reasons that they chose to consume environmentally green foods.

More recent literature argues there has been a transition away from conspicuous consumption as the core motivator for consuming environmentally green food products. For example, Harrison (2006) notes that some people “buy green, then, they assign value

and meaning... and they hope their actions will have a positive effect on the ways in which they [foodways] are managed” (Harrison, 2006, p. 399). The data from this dissertation was collected at one period in time and, hence, cannot directly address the issue of whether or not there has been a change in motivation through time. It is, however, worth commenting on the logic of Harrison’s (2006) argument; it appears to draw a distinction between the unidentified motivations which account for the behaviour, and the after the fact rationalization, or the “hope” for a “positive effect”, of that behaviour. There is nothing in the data from my informants which would suggest that the reasons they articulate for their food choices are rationalizations rather than sincere reasons.

Informants saw an ethical and social responsibility to choose environmentally sustainable products (for example, Helen, Ben). Reducing consumption of resources was seen as being very important by a number of the informants. For example, Ben would bring his own containers to the market to avoid using Styrofoam packing. Helen would avoid buying non-regional produce due to carbon footprint and other concerns. William would use labour intensive soil maintenance practices for his garden that would nourish the soil from year to year. Allison, Alex and Kate noted that the choice to be vegetarian was in some way motivated by a desire to reduce their environmental impacts.

These decisions to reduce forms of consumption were not done out of austerity, but out of purposeful decisions to increase greenness by reducing waste. Also, it is important to emphasize that this was not an economic decision even though some of the results, especially the decision by a few to avoid meat products, may likely lead to cost saving for the individual. In fact, the use of high-quality or rare ingredients, as long as

they were greenly sourced, was celebrated by informants. For example, the outlay of significant amounts of money was made for artisanal products, beyond what was required to simply purchase a similar item at a mainstream grocery store, especially by David and William. Furthermore, it was seen to be a way of investing in community resilience by Ben and Allison.

Although environmental greenness was important to all informants, a few were financially strained. Carly preferred healthful green foods, but noted “if I was walking around a store, and it said ‘green,’ first of all, my concern would be: can I afford it? But I’m a very curious person, so I would be drawn to it, to find out more; to research, to look”. Informants like Helen and Carly did not have the economic resources to do most of their food shopping at environmentally green specialized stores, but they were still able to draw on stable green food sources through food gardening (Helen) or buying from small community producers (Carly). Informant access to green food was enhanced by sharing community garden plots, freezers, canning equipment and other resources as they sought out affordable, sustainable, and resilient local food options. Conversely, a few informants had significant financial resources and bought acreages or small farms near the city for food gardens and recreation. Of the informants, 93% took part in co-operatives, farmers’ markets, or CSAs.

Informants’ conceptualized their purchasing of green foods in some ways as their vote in the marketplace for more green options: Alex used the word “vote” specifically. The concept of shoppers viewing their consumption decisions as instructing industry about their preferences is something the public is aware of, and also increasingly, industry is responding to green market demand with new options (Starr, 2010, p. 485).



All of the informants went to gourmet aisles, specialty shops or other venues to look for green product indicators such as fair trade, local, regional, organic and free range. In other cases, they grew or traded with a fellow gardener for some of their food (for example, Helen).

To William, acquiring green food was a holistic enterprise. He went through an extensive, year-over-year process to layer the soils in his garden, work them in and slowly build the nutrient content naturally rather than just buying commercial fertilizer. Helen also had a substantial garden. She noted “my son also buys from the farms... they get the box [program at the CSA]... poor people cannot do that” (Helen).

However, the cost of environmentally green products was not a significant consideration for most of the informants.<sup>28</sup> On buying through a trusted CSA: “I know that’s a lot safer” (Kate). William describes his preference for organic, local meats:

I do buy organic meat, once in a while from a fellow down the Hanwell Road... The fellow that owns it actually raises Black Angus and his is all organically raised beef and everything, and it’s local. Once in a while, I’ll go out that way and I’ll stop in to see what’s on special, like last year during barbeque season, I went out there one day and they had rib steaks on. I know the guy who cuts the meat, you know I talk to him once in a while: give me \$80 worth of red meat steaks, I’ll come back tomorrow and pick them up. If they are three-quarters of a pound, or half a pound, or six ounces or whatever, I don’t care, I just think give me \$80 worth, and he gives me \$80 worth of steaks. (William)

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 7.4 for a more detailed discussion of green consumption with limited economic means.

In seeking greener alternatives to mainstream food options, informants saw some foods as having unverifiable labelling claims or over-promising on labels: “You have to read the labels... the definition that the manufacturers are using to market something; you know, what do they mean by that, it may not mean what you think it means” (Roberta). Ben commented that claims of product greenness were sometimes disingenuous: “I think that a lot of companies are using green to their benefit... if you go in and buy supposedly green foods and you’re buying that dozen free run eggs that are in a Styrofoam packaged container [laughs]” (Ben).

To all informants, foods improved in various ways when they were green. This often meant being organic, purchased in season and as close to the source as reasonably possible. As such, meat from nearby butcher shops was strongly preferred: “for my child; I always want his meat to be organic and locally sourced, as well as free range” (Ben). Informants also made a significant effort to avoid purchasing meat from mass-market offerings (for example, David, William).

In the mainstream, standardization and scale of corporate food retailers means that they can sometimes offer better availability or lower prices than small, local green businesses, on foods which are indicated in some way as being green. Local green businesses are therefore likely to be undercut on price. The decision to shop at small, family run stores was in some ways surprising as large-scale retail sources of meat may be significantly less expensive and frequently offer a broader selection and greater shopping convenience. However, as William noted, he would prefer to get meat from a trusted butcher rather than from an unknown source at the grocery store. William and

other informants had a positive perception of the small green niche businesses they patronized.

Larger scale retail grocery businesses were viewed with concern, especially for meat products (for example, David). They were also seen to hinder customer interaction with producers (for example, Allison). Supermarkets' interaction with consumers is primarily about price, not the source of the food products: "There's a book, I can't remember what it's called, it's something like 'The Super Market Tour' or something like that, it actually tells you the way the grocery store [layout] is set up, it kind of draws you in to the centre, more expensive things" (Ashley). William also noted:

Here, and, here [gesturing to portray prime retail space heights] is where you are going to find the most expensive: down here - cheaper. You know, people don't realize; all these grocery stores, if you go in and you'll see a section of food and *Heinz* or whatever has got this section here [points], and they've got these three shelves, and it's all their products. Then you look down, and there're different ones, *Our Compliments*, well, they are getting it up there too, but they're paying for that space. They're paying so much more for that space, and the ideal spots are more expensive than the bottom shelf. (William)

Cost is certainly a factor for Kate: "I'm a vegetarian and I buy a lot of fruits and vegetables. When you go organic, or you know, environmentally friendly, it does get quite expensive; so it's making choices" (Kate). "I'm not so concerned whether it's organic or not, more concerned about sustainable practices; we have a free range pork supplier and chicken supplier that we use" (David). One informant, a vegetarian, noted that "beef and some of the meats require a lot of grain and water and also produce a lot of

greenhouse gas emissions. So, to me, whether that's local or not, that's not the greenest product that I can be investing in" (Ben).

Informants used reasoned, holistic strategies in their food consumption decisions: "I like to think I'm well informed. I do a fair bit of reading and it's certainly a subject that interests me" (Roberta). On their day-to-day food consumption patterns, informants expressed reservations about some foods that were marketed as green or implicitly local without any specifics to back up advertising claims: "I try to buy as much organic as possible, though at Superstore and Sobeys, a lot less, just because I don't know where it comes from" (Allison). Informants tended to research producers and whether the product's green claims could be verified. On choosing authentic products: "I tell people what stores I shop in pertaining to the best way [the foods] are grown" so that they can shop there as well (Carly). Allison comments that:

I know for True Food [Organics], they are very particular about their products, so it would definitely be green. As far as environmental risk, I don't know for Sobeys and Superstore... it's about the information that's given, and I don't know... where it comes from, or how it is produced . (Allison)

Regionally produced items were seen as environmentally preferable because of carbon footprint as well:

The first thing that comes to mind is transportation [interview then briefly interrupted by loud truck struggling to get up a steep hill]; listen to that truck! I'm sure he's bringing in something. I think of how much distance your food has to come to get to your table. (Ashley)

Another aspect of the support for fresh, local foods sold at small businesses was a perception that they taste better in some cases: “The first box we got from Jolly Farmer this winter, it was so much sweeter, everything was sweeter and it had a lot more flavor. I find a lot of the conventional stuff is quite bland” (Alex). “The green foods, organic [are] very desirable” (Ben). “I’ve always found [naturally produced to] taste better” (William). The farmers’ market, the local direct-charge CO-OP store, CSAs, and other small, green-focused local organizations, were seen as sustainable avenues for getting quality, variety, and authenticity in green food products. Food gardening was used as well.

Community garden organizations facilitate connection with the environment for all those interested, including groups of people who may not otherwise have access to land on which to garden or easy access to environmentally green foods. Community garden organizations are also a source of fresh, local, non-retail food: “Everything is done as close to nature as possible and not a lot of intervention; in most cases, none. Just sticking with, you know, clean air, clean water, clean soil for growing vegetables and fruits, and really enriching the soil, and being stewards of the land” (Chris). “I advocate encouraging people to eat locally, encouraging people to garden as a means to combat food insecurity, as a means to educate themselves, to be well, to connect with other people and be social” (Ben).

The authenticity of green foods was seen as straightforward when attained via gardening. When products were attained via purchase, authenticity was still seen by informants as possibly being connected to the products, but this would not be the case for all products marketed as green.

#### **7.4 Acquiring Authentic Green Products with Limited Economic Means**

Foods perceived as authentically green may be sold at a premium or be seen as expensive, especially to someone not experienced in finding them. But informants are not drawn to these products due to status implications or conspicuous consumption since they define green holistically, especially thinking of wage fairness (for example, Ben) and sustainability (for example, Allison).

Green foods, when sourced from non-mainstream sources, may be affordable, even if only in small portions, to a wide variety of people. The informant group had diverse economic means. It is also important to note that the province of New Brunswick in general, has a relatively lower economic strength than some other provinces. Yet those informants who were middle or low-income found access to green foods that they considered to be authentic through a variety of practices, especially community gardening.

Some informants had been gardening, investing themselves in high quality, nutritious foods for decades, and actively facilitated green community development through community gardening initiatives or supporting the food bank to ease access to green food choices for struggling economic groups. Reflecting on her experience, Helen notes:

I grow spinach, Swiss chard, tomatoes, two kinds of beans; I have all kinds of gooseberries; I grow my own onions, carrots, green peppers - they're all up, and broccoli... I grew up quite poor... so I do not buy organic stuff [at retail] because I never could afford it... I've got two freezers, so I freeze [what I grow]. I grow enough to freeze. I've already frozen 50 packages of

rhubarb... I pick about 50 boxes of strawberries every year from the U-picks but I make a big fruit cocktail and I will add some peaches in pear juice or something just to make the strawberries last longer... I've got two kinds of lettuce. (Helen)

When Helen did need to buy food she preferred to shop at specific trusted, small family-owned businesses first, and then generally supported food producers who were as close to local as possible.

A few informants noted that affordability barriers to green foods at retail outlets were significant: "I find them expensive" (Mike). "The problem is [green foods] always seem to be more expensive... you pay more to have them not put stuff in them, or not do things to them" (Carly). However, all informants valued green to such an extent that they would make sacrifices to attain these goods, for example, forgoing entertainment spending (David and Allison). Shopping around was stressed as the very least someone could do to mitigate costs. "I find at the grocery store it's a lot less affordable if you're buying at Superstore than at Victory" (Roberta).

Ultimately, even with very limited economic means, there was a preference for fairness and quality rather than lowest price: "I've actually worked in a lot of grocery stores... I actually want to pay a fair price" (Ben). A mainstream focus on low prices for mass imported goods with unknown foreign labour legislation or environmental rules deeply concerned Ben and other informants. For green foods: "I do believe that we're getting the value that they're really worth and I believe in paying farmers for their labour at a decent wage" (Chris). "In my world they [organic foods] are affordable but for many

people they are not affordable. I work with some people who find buying organic very difficult” (David).

While economic issues posed financial challenges for some informants in obtaining environmentally green foods – the crucial point is that this did not dissuade them from seeking such foods: “I prefer to buy organic when possible” (Alex). “They’re definitely very desirable; affordable is a different story, it does get quite pricy... I try to buy everything natural, green if I can” (Kate). “I guess we go back to my concerns with finances, and in the process of seeing sales [and direct-buy opportunities]. If it’s healthy, if it’s financially feasible and it’s easily accessed I would definitely be a prime candidate for purchasing it” (Carly). “For the organic food, it’s very expensive since I have a large family” (Nathalie). Yet, Nathalie considered environmentally green foods to be of such high importance that they made up a majority of her household’s food.

Authentically green food products, when grown or purchased after thorough background research by informants, were attainable even if informants had limited economic means. Since those factors, which to informants, make a product environmentally green are not necessarily part of the concept of conspicuous consumption, it is possible to attain green foods economically, if one is careful. However, these foods may or may not be certified organic.<sup>29</sup> There was a very high degree of dedication to green in the informant community regardless of economic standing; those with significant resources built elaborate mini-farms on their land and / or bought the most authentic commercially available foods without being too concerned with price (for example, David). Those who had to be very careful with their budgets made sacrifices in other areas of their lives and / or relied significantly on community gardens to source

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<sup>29</sup> More detail on this is found in Chapter 8.



their green foods (for example, Allison). Based on their individual preferences; the options available within their economic reality; and their own relative rankings of the importance of the common factors within their green discourse; informants made a concerted effort to be as green as reasonably possible in each of their situations.

## **7.5 Chapter Conclusion**

Authentically green products are seen as being available and informants used a variety of strategies for acquiring them as noted in this chapter. However, informants expressed that vigilance was needed as “I think that a lot of companies are using green to their benefit... a dozen free run eggs that are in a Styrofoam packaged container misses the broader point” (Ben). Overall, informants perceived responsible food consumption choices to include supplementing their mainstream retail food purchases with alternative foodway options that were more environmentally green.

Food products acquired from alternative sources such as community gardens and local businesses that embraced sustainable practices, were seen to be authentically green. Production methods were harder for informants to trace in mainstream retail. This made it much more difficult for them to know if these foods were really green. One strategy for finding out which foods were more likely to be produced sustainably in the mainstream was to look for external sources of green verification:

There’s also a list out and it’s the ‘Dirty Dozen and the Clean Fifteen’ and so basically that’s a heavily publicized list that comes out annually that lets you know the foods, the produce that you would be eating, that would be most heavily laden with pesticides if you were to buy it non-organically. So those are the vegetables that I make sure that I buy organically. (Ben)

Informants were careful consumers, often with money to shop at the place of their choosing. They put significant effort in to their alternative forms of environmentally green consumption, looking for local or regional producers that would re-integrate many of the factors externalized by macro-producers, such as wage-fairness, pollution minimization, ethical treatment of livestock, and development of community capital. Holistic integration of foodway considerations made product authenticity possible to informants. They used their economic means to buy such foods when they could and supplemented this, often by growing some of their environmentally green food themselves. By engaging in these alternative forms of consumption, informants were able to find authentic environmentally green foods.

## 8.0 THE ORGANIC DESIGNATION

### 8.1 Introduction

As with Chapters 6 and 7, this chapter describes informant experience and contrasts findings with discussions from the literature. Informant preferences and views on organic food were noted in passing in previous chapters. This chapter begins with a backgrounder on the scholarly and policy context behind organic as a widely used designator of environmental greenness. Subsequent sections delve further into the changing influences of the organic designation, both in terms of informant perspectives and relevant existing literature and public policy.

Informants were wary of the increasing corporatization of the organic designation. Specific concerns included labelling claims (Allison); agricultural contamination (Ben); cost (Nathalie); and authenticity of products (David). What organic means has evolved over time (Government of Canada, 2013b). Organic production has been *McDonaldized* in some ways, especially for the mainstream grocery store market. *McDonaldization* is a well-known concept in sociology established by George Ritzer (1983) to refer to the economic, societal, and cultural shifts in globalized late modernity to mimic the lean processing methods and homogeneity of the McDonald's restaurant model.

Ritzer identified four key factors in McDonaldization; efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. I conceptualize organic as having become McDonaldized because its transformation echoes Ritzer's core concepts thereof:

1. It has become part of the mainstream factory-foodway (efficiency);

2. Rapid growth of the organic market has led to emphasis on quantity, availability and marketing (calculability);
3. Corporate branding gave the mainstream organic customer consistency in their menu of organic options and production scale allowed for organic foods to have a common presentation across wide areas (predictability); and
4. Use of proprietary definitions for green production methods allowed large-scale providers to make various claims that may imply third party verification (control).

Regarding green consumption, some informants tended to trust the organic regulatory certification process (for example, Chris, Roberta), while others focused their trust on local providers for the procurement of their environmentally green foods (for example, Allison, David).

## **8.2 Historical, Legislative and Marketing Contexts**

Organic is a widely used term which has specific regulatory meanings and scope which may be different from public perception thereof. To contextualize informant perception of related issues, a synopsis of what the term ‘organic’ means in Canadian public policy is provided in this chapter. Although the word organic had been used extensively before, it did not receive a cohesive national regulatory framework in Canada until December 2008 (Government of Canada 2013b).

For context, I also summarize selected aspects of the findings from my (2008) Quebec study on organic advertising in the 3 major grocery stores. This work was done just prior to the implementation of the Canada Organic designation; it was determined

that marketing made misleading or unverifiable claims about the meaning and implications of organic certification. Relevant findings included that:

1. Organic was marketed as providing a variety of individual health and societal benefits;
2. Each grocery chain provided its own interpretation, and sometimes used private labels for organic certification;
3. Marketing implied more significant regulatory oversight of organic certification than was in place;
4. Individual provinces defined organic in different ways; and
5. Foods imported from other provinces or countries tended to follow organic certification rules for where they were harvested and not necessarily in the location of retail sale (Zelmer, 2008, pp. 41-52).

Loblaws framed organic as fresh, minimally processed, (Loblaws, 2008a); ethical, healthy, traditional (Loblaws, 2008b); following “strict organic standards, having no artificial chemicals”; “help[ing] to protect the environment, preserve natural diversity”; involving “recycling of materials and resources” (Loblaws, 2008c); and providing “attentive care that promotes the health and behavioural needs of livestock” (Loblaws 2008d). Loblaws emphasized organic as a responsible choice for consumers (Zelmer, 2008, p. 123).

IGA’s position was that organic foods were “certified to the highest standards” (IGA Canada, 2008a); containing “no synthetic pesticides, no seeds from GMOs (genetically modified organisms), no artificial colorants, flavors, or additives” (IGA

Canada, 2008b); using “methods which are sustainable and harmonious with the environment” (IGA Canada, 2008c).

Metro’s stance was again different and it was alone in noting that the meaning of organic was defined differently by various stakeholders. Metro's version of organic was expressed as being “free from all pesticides, chemical fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, and growth hormones” (Metro 2008). It was further described as “methods that respect both the animals and the conditions in which they are raised” (Metro 2008).

Prior to December 2008, government standards for organic designation were not available on publically accessible government websites. One had to identify which government body was responsible, telephone them, fill out a form and be emailed each standard, one at a time. Each of Health Canada, the Canadian General Standards Board, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2010) made contributions to the regulation of organic foods, and the boundaries between each were opaque to the public observer (Zelmer, 2008, pp. 41-42).

The 2008 Canada Organic designation brought more rigor and transparency to the organic certification process and this information was made available to the public online, for free. The federal government indicated:

The Canada Organic regime has been developed to:

1. Protect consumers against misleading or deceptive labelling practices;
2. Reduce consumer confusion about the definition of organic;
3. Facilitate the access of Canadian organic products to foreign markets that require regulatory oversight; and

4. Support further development of the domestic market. (Government of Canada, 2013a)

According to the federal government:

The general principles of organic production include the following:

1. Protect the environment, minimize soil degradation and erosion, decrease pollution, optimize biological productivity and promote a sound state of health;
2. Maintain long-term soil fertility by optimizing conditions for biological activity within the soil;
3. Maintain biological diversity within the system;
4. Recycle materials and resources to the greatest extent possible within the enterprise;
5. Provide attentive care that promotes the health and meets the behavioural needs of livestock;
6. Prepare organic products, emphasizing careful processing, and handling methods in order to maintain the organic integrity and vital qualities of the products at all stages of production; and
7. Rely on renewable resources in locally organized agricultural systems.

(Government of Canada, 2013b)

The federal government had used the word ‘holistic’ to describe the implications of organic meaning and certification before launching the 2008 overhaul (Zelmer, 2008).

While the list of seven general principles is essentially the same overview as what existed in 2006; the actual standard at that point was vague. Holistic is difficult to measure;

standards measure specific things. Anything over and above the standard, which would be captured by the meaning of the term holistic – may not actually be needed or enforceable. Therefore the comprehensive amendment to the certified organic regime in late 2008 was by necessity specific, rather than holistic in scope.

Based on this contextual background, the following section describes whether informants place trust in organic certification mechanisms and the extent to which organic certification is important to them in their consumption of environmentally green foods.

### **8.3 Informant Views on Organic Meaning, Certification and Labelling**

Informants offered a variety of rationales as to why organic was highly desirable, although local foods were sometimes seen as preferable (for example, Helen) to foods from elsewhere, even if these foods were certified organic. Also, certification itself was seen as more important when producers were not local (for example, Ben). For local products, if producers were deemed to use small-scale agricultural practices that were environmentally and economically sustainable, without the use of chemical herbicides, pesticides or genetically modified organisms; they were seen as sufficiently organic by informants whether or not they were also certified as such. For example, William viewed the most important indicators of organic as “no pesticides, no commercial fertilizer use in growing it; using what nature gave you” (William).

Mike and Melissa saw organic as having broader ethical and holistic considerations: “the taste, I couldn’t really tell you, but it feels better to eat. I think it’s ethical, spiritual to know the animals were treated with dignity” (Mike). Melissa said: “the whole concept of organic is just so much more appealing in terms of animal



production, vegetable production, ethical concepts, environmental considerations, just everything: so why not” (Melissa). “To me, and my father did the same thing when we were growing up, in our yard, I’ve always found organic to taste better” (William). “I do make a point of checking labels for [organic, local, free range, fair trade] that sort of thing” (Ashley).

Ben’s vision of the implications of organic reflect the general sentiment of informants:

Of course, I see an environmental benefit to organics and green foods in general because I believe them to be safer. I don’t see any negative impacts, only positives for the environment in comparison to conventionally grown foods. What you’re seeing is farms with more diversity, so not just one variety of something. A lot of times now with the mono-crops, we’re mass producing one variety of something and a lot of people don’t realize but if something happens to wipe out that variety, or some kind of bug, or pest, or weather comes in then that whole crop is gone. (Ben)

Products labeled as being certified organic were desirable: “if I’m going to buy something that is not local, I’m not going to buy them unless they’re certified organic... I feel that they are too far removed for me to really place faith in” (Ben). Certified organic was “always a consideration; it’s always the first choice” (Melissa).

Mike and Chris saw organic certification as meaning greenness of products had been authenticated by the regulator. Mike tried to maximize the amount of certified organic products in his diet. For Chris “organic is very important,” especially when certified as such; and for William “fruits and vegetables, I try to get them organic if I

can”. In addition to offering positive health or societal benefits, foods which were certified as organic were seen as being a safer choice than similar non-environmentally green products: “I think they are better because when you see the other producers using the chemicals to produce their food... you feel better that to use the organic food you consume less chemicals” (Nathalie).

Informants in general, especially Allison, Helen and Ben, felt that the way the organic marketplace had grown, sometimes made for difficulties in authenticating the greenness of the available products at mainstream retailers.<sup>30</sup> This finding is congruent with concerns expressed by Klein (2009), that were mentioned in the previous chapter regarding challenges to product authenticity in mainstream consumer culture. Also, as the organic designation became increasingly accessible in the mainstream, it brought choice, reasonable prices, and market viability, but the authenticity of some organic products is being questioned by the public (Pollan, 2006, p.139).

Although organic options were generally viewed favorably by informants, the foods designated as such were not seen as a panacea for facilitating their consumption of environmentally green foods. Therefore, in the next section, I look at other ways that informants exercised environmentally green food consumption choices that were meaningful to them separately from selecting organic options.

#### **8.4 Beyond Organic: Other Signifiers of Greenness to Informants**

Outside of the organic designation, informants also looked to trust relationships with specific providers, local options, CSAs, community gardens, and other designations such as fair trade. If there were products available from a trusted producer or retailer that

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<sup>30</sup> To avoid redundancy, informant quotations expressing this sentiment are not provided again here but can be found in Chapter 7.

were also certified organic, those items were purchased. However, the extent to which informants trusted the sellers of the environmentally green foods they bought, outweighed whether a given product was certified organic or not. David would buy organic-like foods from small-scale producers who followed what he considered to be the spirit of organic or other sustainable production methods, but which were not necessarily certified:

[I'm] not so concerned whether it's organic or not, more concerned about sustainable practices. Because, some of the organic practices are not my favorites; things like 'Rotenone', it's a pesticide that has been banned and has been allowed again for organics. So there's some pesticides and some other practices... that I'm not that big a fan of. (David)

Largely avoiding mainstream corporate retail sources of organic and other types of foods marketed as being environmentally green; informants opted instead for trusted specialty stores or other alternative acquisition strategies. For example, "I like Peter's Meat Market" as a small, local, authentic green food business (Carly); "When we go to the farmers' market... I'm going to Patrick, the goat cheese guy... I will go to a special store to get the eggs that I know are local" (Ashley). For Ben too, it was important to know and trust where his eggs come from: "I know that those eggs are fresh picked from the farm" (Ben).

Products that were verifiably local, or producers that were referred by a trusted intermediary, were seen as being very important. There was an informant preference for local or regional, and micro-scale, rather than macro-produced. For example,

buying our meat from the local butcher. He's not even a butcher, he's a farmer... it was seriously on the side of the road, we pulled off and we were waiting for the drop off and three hundred dollars later... It served us, for months. (Ashley)

"I do a lot of shopping over here in the [farmers'] market on Saturday. I do buy a bit from a place called Jolly Farmer [a CSA]... and it's what's in season" (William). "At the market... One of the farmers is a friend of mine and I do make some orders to him to bring me some organic food" (Nathalie). "I participated in the Winter Box-a-Week Program at Jolly Farmer... their summer program... [and] we've put in a huge bulk order at Spearville for organic, local food" (Alex). "I've been a member of a CSA for the last six years" (Chris). "Most recently in the fall we purchased from a farmer, for meat; and last summer we were purchasing from a farmers' cooperative" (Ashley); and "My local food buying isn't always organic, but it's as much as possible organic and local" (Melissa).

The comparative sustainability of some local sources of food, to ones that were certified organic products made far away, was worth pondering for informants such as Ashley and Ben. Products marked as being in some way environmentally green on mainstream grocery store shelves were not necessarily taken at face value by informants. For example,

I think there's nothing really clear about it in the marketing. I always go for the bananas that are advertised with this green strip around it that says 'organic' but I don't really know if it's organic, they're still coming from a heck of a

distance so there's that whole issue that, okay it might be green [originally] but it's actually having to travel all this distance to get here. (Ashley)

And:

Well, priorities: first should be local... I don't buy organic because I grow a lot of my own stuff; which I call organic, may not be... I do not buy organic stuff because I never could afford it. I might be able to afford it now, but I came from a different world than today. (Helen)

Kate also interpreted true organic as being that which she knew to have had green cultivation and provenance, rather than something officially certified as such. She grew a significant portion of her food in her own garden:

I stay away from everything pretty much that's in a box that has preservatives in it. When you get down to the nitty-gritty of it, organic versus non-organic, I mean, I buy a lot of vegetables, some are organic, and some are not. I try to buy everything natural, green if I can. (Kate)

Ben and other informants, as well as people they knew and trusted had gone to various regional farms, spoken with the producers and seen whether their offerings were produced in environmentally sustainable ways. While this is certainly not feasible for most people, informants also shared this information with those in their circles and gardening groups to enhance knowledge sharing in the relevant community organizations. Organic remained a highly desirable designation; but environmentally green food was seen by informants as having more facets than just organic certification.

## 8.5 Chapter Conclusion

Informants certainly did put some trust into any product marked as certified organic, but organic alone was in some ways surpassed or replaced with a preference for regionality. Local or near-local was a key indicator in consumption decisions by informants seeking environmentally green products. For example, even if it was organic, “I don’t buy the American stuff if I can help it” (Helen). Organic was not the only, nor necessarily the most accurate marker of green product authenticity to informants. Rather, they relied on things that could be checked locally, or at least regionally such as through a farmer they personally knew, someone referred by word-of-mouth, or someone trusted as an environmentally-minded stakeholder in the local or regional economy.

Overall, informants used significant effort and went out of their way to purchase or grow foods that they considered to be environmentally green. While there is convenience with organic being offered in mainstream grocery stores, informants were concerned that on the whole of it, some products designated as organic may be less environmentally sustainable than they would prefer, especially for non-regional products (for example, Helen). Organic certification was seen as still having an important role (for example, Ben); but that it was not the only, or categorically the most important, indicator that a product was environmentally green.

Several factors appear to underpin these comparative assessments. First, the growth in demand for certified organic produce has resulted in the existence of large-scale factory style organic farms. This scale of production appears, to some of the informants, to be inconsistent with sustainable practices (for example, David).

Second, the organic certification does not encompass the entire range of a product's environmental costs. It does not, for example, take into account where the product was produced and how far it has travelled, or the nature of its packaging and potential waste. In other words, there exist other environmentally relevant criteria which are not taken into account by the organic designation, and which the informants found to be more critical, particularly when locally produced alternatives from trusted sources were available.

Third, organic certification appears to carry more necessity and credibility for informants in situations where they see it as reducing uncertainty. An example of this would be the case of a product such as bananas which cannot be grown well locally, especially if they come from a region where there are concerns about a lack of appropriate social and environmental regulations. Overall, informants saw organic certification as being one of several important indicators of environmental greenness in the foods they chose to purchase.

## 9.0 GREEN CONSCIENCE AS SOCIAL PROCESS

### 9.1 Introduction

As described in Chapter 1, I began this dissertation with an interest in a variety of issues and topics related to the choices of a specific subcultural group: those for whom the consumption of environmentally green foods was an important part of their way of life. The previous three chapters documented my major findings about the perceptions of these individuals in relation to three specific topics: foodway centralization, green product authenticity, and the organic designation. In each case, the importance of context and contingent choice became evident. Thus, for example, the organic designation was viewed as an important element in food choice in some situations but not always; for example, when purchasing from a small-scale, trusted local producer. Similarly, informants generally preferred to purchase from small-scale, local producers but still spent a substantial portion of their food budget at large supermarkets.

Thus, as my research unfolded, it became clear that something deeper was occurring. One cannot fully understand the food choices of these individuals through an analysis of their perceptions about specific substantive topics like those discussed in the preceding three chapters. Instead, one needs to understand the overall worldview of these individuals and the process through which they make their food-related choices.

This chapter moves beyond the articulation of informant perceptions on a range of specific substantive topics and explicates that general process. In propositional form, that process involves three interconnected concepts: *holism, balance, and control*:



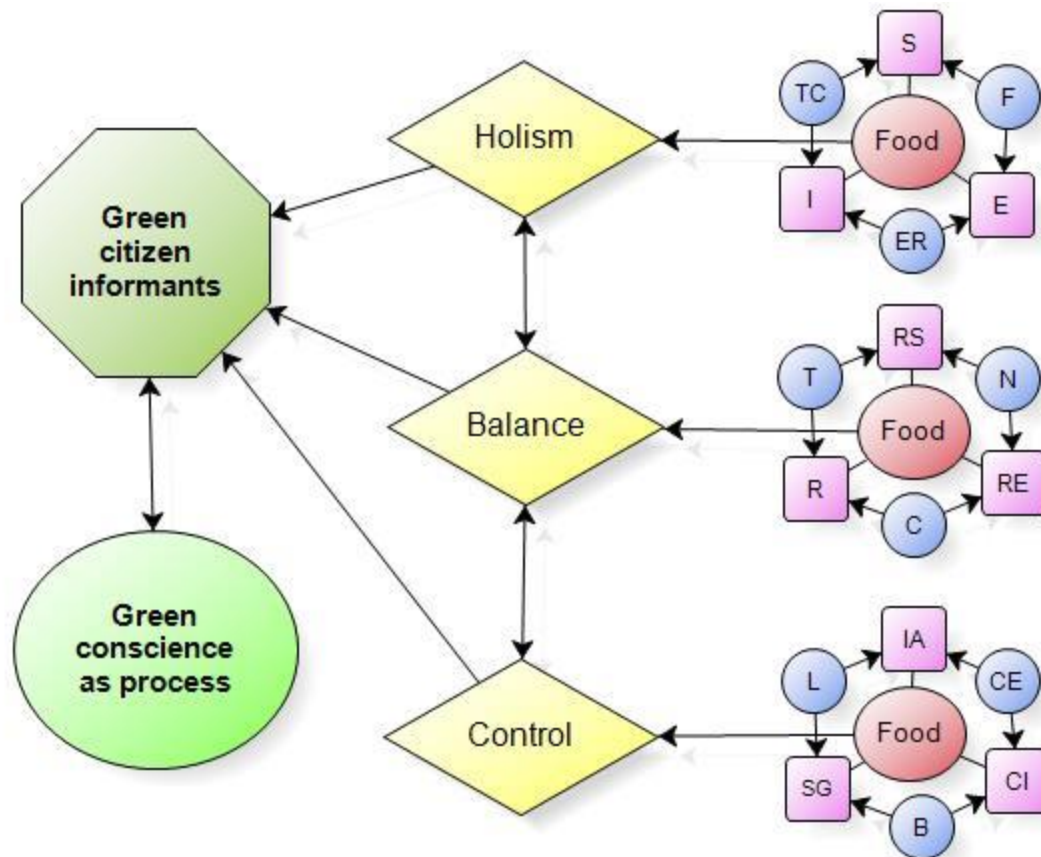
1. The informants displayed a *holistic* worldview integrating considerations of the individual, society, and the natural world. *Food* was seen as a major factor that links together and affects all the major elements of this complex, integrated whole;
2. The informants perceived the complex whole as significantly *out-of-balance*, a condition characterized by *risk* and environmental *unsustainability*, at least partially as a result of practices associated with the production, distribution, and consumption of food. Thus, appropriate food-related purchases were understood as a mechanism that could act to *reduce risk* and move the holistic system back toward *environmental balance* and *sustainability*; and
3. The informants actively *took control* of their situation, particularly in relation to food consumption activities, in an attempt to minimize behaviours they perceived as contributing to the *whole* being *out-of-balance* and, alternatively, make food choice behaviours they perceived as consistent with sustainability and the restoration of a *balanced* whole. But, no matter how much importance was given to the restoration of environmental balance, the informants acted pragmatically, assessing the purchase in the context of *individual balance* that involved the consideration of non-environmentally relevant factors such as price, the desire for a particular food item, and other factors.

Taken together, these factors provide a model of the worldview of this subculture and the manner in which that worldview orients the actions of the informants in a way that explains their food choices. The remainder of this chapter expands on the details of this model. It begins in Section 9.2 with an overview of the explanatory model as a

whole, as developed to account for the worldview and actions of the 11 green citizen informants. Sections 9.3 to 9.5 articulate the concepts of holism, balance and control as they apply to green citizens. Section 9.6 examines the differences between the 11 green citizen informants and the three who are classified as green consumers. The final section, Section 9.7, compares my findings with those of Low (2004) and discusses the implications of the similarities in relation to the concept of generic social process.

## **9.2 Green Conscience Conceptual Model for Green Citizen Informants**

The major conceptual findings of this dissertation are summarized in the conceptual model presented below (Figure 9.1). The first diagram provides an overview of the model as a whole. Subsequent diagrams illuminate key aspects of its structure and significance.



**Figure 9.1 Model of Green Conscience as Process for Green Citizen Informants**

Legend: from top, clockwise;

- Holism: S = society; F = sustainable foodways; E = environment; ER = embodied reflective subjectivity and reciprocity; I = individual; TC = thoughtful consumption
- Balance: RS = risk to society; N = non-retail food options; RE = risk to environment; C = choice; R = risk to self; T = thoughtful research prior to consumption
- Control: IA = individual research and action; CE = consumer spending as endorsement; CI = corporate influence; B = small, green-focused businesses; SG = self-governance; and L = supporting new labelling regulations.

This model represents the worldview of the following informants: Ben, Roberta, Alex, Chris, Kate, David, Ashley, Mike, Melissa, Helen and William.<sup>31</sup> In this conceptual model, the three core concepts of holism, balance, and control are interconnected. Each of these concepts is, in turn, made up of interrelated constituent parts, as listed in the legend which accompanies the diagram. The conceptual model is layered. The large oval shape represents the highest level (6) of abstraction in the model and is identified as “green conscience as process”. The octagonal shape (level 5) represents the focus of the model; the green citizen informants. The diamond shape (level 4) represents the primary sub-concepts of the overarching model. The small oval (level 3) represents the central aspect of each sub-concept in terms of the substantive area of research inquiry. The rounded square (level 2) represents the primary thematic considerations affecting the oval. The circle (level 1) represents the least abstracted set of nodes in the model. These sub-themes involve micro-level processes related to the named consideration and inter-related with the rounded rectangle and small oval level representations.

Taken together, the six levels of the model exemplify the social process that is a green conscience for those green citizen informants who, as the model shows, consider the give-and-take of their foodway interactions and decisions that impact the environment in thoughtful, complex and dedicated ways. Examples of such consideration are: self-reflection by the individual on the environmental impacts of their specific consumption patterns; and of looking more broadly at foodways as also having environmental impacts that can be different depending on the type of foodway and its management.

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<sup>31</sup> Unless specifically attributed to an individual informant, any analysis in this section refers to these 11 informants overall.

In the model, individual actions are connected to societal foodway issues through thoughtful consumption. Foodways are very much shaped by societal practices. Individual informants are situated within a broader social context through their community ties. These informants consider various direct and indirect effects of their environmentally green food consumption choices. They also see these choices as reflecting their values as people rather than simply as consumers. A complex and interconnected set of layered concepts and themes shown in the model mediates the functionality of an environmentally green conscience. For example, Ben describes “encouraging people to eat locally, to garden as a means to combat food insecurity, as a means to educate themselves, to be well, to connect with other people and be social” (Ben).

There were many ways in which analysis of informants’ decisions coalesced into themes, which then came to make up the categories of the conceptual model. Examples of factors involved in informant food decision making processes include such concerns as: human and animal rights; community resilience and food security; support of small businesses; leading or attending food-related events on growing, harvesting, preparing and enjoying or sharing healthy foods; using local farmers’ markets; fishing, gardening, or foraging for some of their food; and giving up a mainstream consumer culture mentality in favour of something more thoughtful as to the impacts of one’s consumption patterns as related to balancing societal, individual and environmental good.

These 11 informants integrate individual concerns of body, mind and spirit, with environment and society involving food as a central factor. They link subjectivist, individual green consumption patterns together as part of an integrative, interconnected

system, via thoughtful consumerism, sustainable foodways, embodied reflective subjectivity and reciprocity. They are also willing to give up or reduce consumption of foods produced in non-green ways. Sacrificing convenience by forgoing or avoiding some products which would represent production methods antithetical to green is an important aspect of this informant green conscience.

Risks to environmental sustainability and to personal health, such as the possibility of ingesting pesticide residue; as well as risk to community resilience from corporate undercutting of local businesses; meant that what they did not buy was as important to them as what they did buy. Their strategies along these lines included forgoing convenience and / or price incentives from corporate retailers in order to support smaller producers, or simply not buying a product at all if it was unavailable from a local producer or not in season.

Informants researched various ways to develop their personal food knowledge. They questioned the veracity of green marketing information especially when coming from corporate sources. The consumption of non-green or non-authentically green products was seen to negatively impact environmental sustainability and the resilience of small scale local or regional producers. Informant foodway choice and decision making was based on a significant investment of time, effort, and capital in developing their knowledge. They felt, as a result, that their personal green food knowledge and interest levels were much more in-depth than would be the case for most consumers of environmentally green foods. Such knowledge development also came from getting involved in community-based green food-related initiatives. These informants navigated between risk minimization and promoting environmental sustainability by thorough

research prior to consumption. By being vigilant when it came to which products, producers, or certification bodies to trust, they also developed strategies to follow up on and verify environmental claims about green foods.

Informants perceived that there was a holistic set of interrelated factors that, when out of balance, would threaten the sustainability of the whole foodway system. These interconnected factors encompassed complex ethical, environmental, labour-relations, health and other considerations. Imbalances in these factors were perceived by informants in a variety of ways. Informants emphasized the relationship between environmentally green food consumption and very broad environmental risk considerations. They also saw a reciprocal link between green consumption and resilience; in terms of individual health, strength of local foodways and environmental sustainability. Their proclivity to avoid macro-producers,<sup>32</sup> and instead support small-scale alternative green food businesses was consistent with related findings in the literature on food consumption patterns concerning environmentally green-attuned consumers (for example, Hinrichs, 2000). The specific strategies they employed, and how they ranked factors as disrupting or restoring balance to the foodway system, varied by informant.

With this summary of their environmentally green consumption approach in mind, the next few sections of this chapter delve into how this takes place for the individual informants in the group of 11 classified as green citizens. After the various parts of the conceptual model are explained, the worldview of the other three informants as a second group is also examined and shown to function within the overall conceptual model, but with some aspects of it modified.

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<sup>32</sup> When green options were available elsewhere and when pragmatic.

### 9.3 Holism and Green Citizen Informants

Holism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “the theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts”. Informants viewed living in an environmentally green way from a holistic viewpoint of foodway issues encompassing health, ethics, sustainability and sometimes spirituality, amongst other factors.

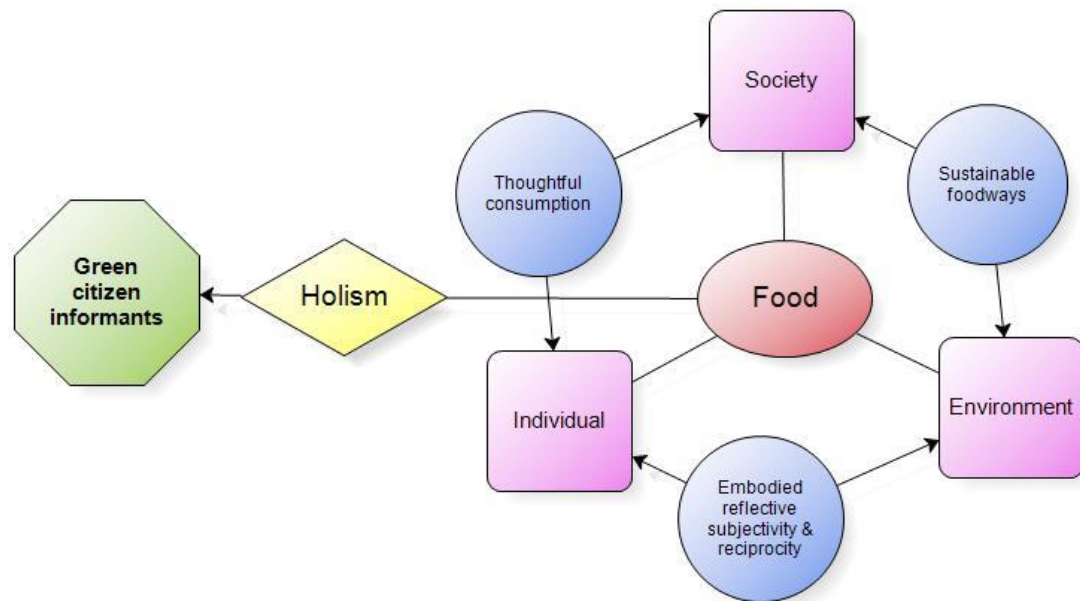
Two characteristics define the way this general orientation manifests itself among the informants in this study and also distinguish the worldview of these individuals from mainstream society. First, the interconnected parts are viewed very broadly, consisting of the natural world, society and a multifaceted notion of the individual that includes body, mind, and spirit. While the breadth of the perceived interconnections and their relative importance differs significantly among the informants, they all saw interconnections with the natural environment as particularly important. Second, in contrast with other members of the public who may have environmental concerns, the informants all perceived food-related interconnections as crucially significant. In doing so, informants considered a much broader set of factors than typically would be seen as relevant to the acquisition and consumption of food.

As noted in Chapter 2, the literature on consumer choice as relevant to food purchase tends to frame public focus as being on key factors such as price (for example, Pollan, 2006, p. 136); or status (for example, Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56). While these



considerations were not irrelevant to the informants in this study,<sup>33</sup> informants also considered a variety of additional issues.

Figure 9.2 shows the interconnections leading to the holism concept for green citizen informants.



**Figure 9.2 Model of Holism and Green Citizen Informants**

The worldview expressed by the 11 informants classified as green citizens links consumption decisions to a much larger societal concern than simply eating for pleasure, cultural expression, or survival. In dominant consumer culture, there is seen to be a simple linear progression from production → retail → consumer, along the way, hiding or distancing the means of production from the end user (Kneen, 1990). Informants did not subscribe to this worldview, as a series of quotations in this section will show. They pondered various ethical, environmental and other concerns in selecting their food

<sup>33</sup> See Chapter 6.3.

products. Ben saw a thoroughly holistic set of connections and implications associated with his consumption choices:

I like it when... I can give my egg producer who I know their face and their name... my old carton for them to reuse; and I know that those eggs are fresh picked from the farm. I can bring in my reusable bags and say 'no thanks, no bag'. I don't need any packaging... I can go to a place and actually, like the market, bring all my containers. (Ben)

As Ben describes it, the act of purchasing eggs directly from the farmer involves a diverse set of interconnections among nature, society and himself. These include:

1. an egg producer he knows and trusts (society);
2. a reused egg carton (natural materials transformed by society);
3. minimized demand for new resources (nature);
4. fresh eggs (food / nature);
5. the support of an alternative food distribution system (society); and
6. minimized carbon footprint (nature).

His egg buying ritual also extended to a broader conceptualization he had of his role in minimizing carbon footprint, supporting small businesses within his community, and getting the best quality food available. Although Ben himself noted his was an extreme degree of action to promote the sustainability of his foodway network activities, he insisted that it was not an all-or-nothing venture. He recognized that others may not have the time or inclination to follow this path to the extent he felt was possible. Ben would sometimes do community-based green mentoring, encouraging people to take

small, incremental steps to a greener lifestyle. He felt satisfaction when he saw people stop – ponder – and re-evaluate their consumption patterns in a greener light.

To Ben, the holistically grounded decision to direct-buy eggs reflected a methodical, multi-pronged strategy to: support small business; benefit the local community; minimize packaging and other waste; acquire fresh, natural food; and minimize environmental risk and impact. Through their holistic worldview, informants saw conceptual interconnectivity between environmental risk, sustainability, society, and nature with their green food activities.

While Ben focused on interconnections between his actions, the structure of society and the nature of environmental degradation, other informants emphasized the interconnections between green food activities and a holistic conception of the individual involving not only the physical body, but also mind and spirit. As Kate put it, green consumption affects all aspects of her body and self:

Wellness, health, and that includes, that's not just physical, it's mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. It just, well, it's the fuel you put in your body to, you know, function, and the greener and cleaner that fuel is, the healthier, the better functioning you'll be as a human being. (Kate)

While the informants view the world in a holistic manner, they do not render the world as an unstructured mass of complex interrelations. Food and the process of eating, that is the interface between the human body and the natural world that it is dependent on for survival, are rendered as a key focal point for organizing their understanding of that holistic world. As Mike puts it:

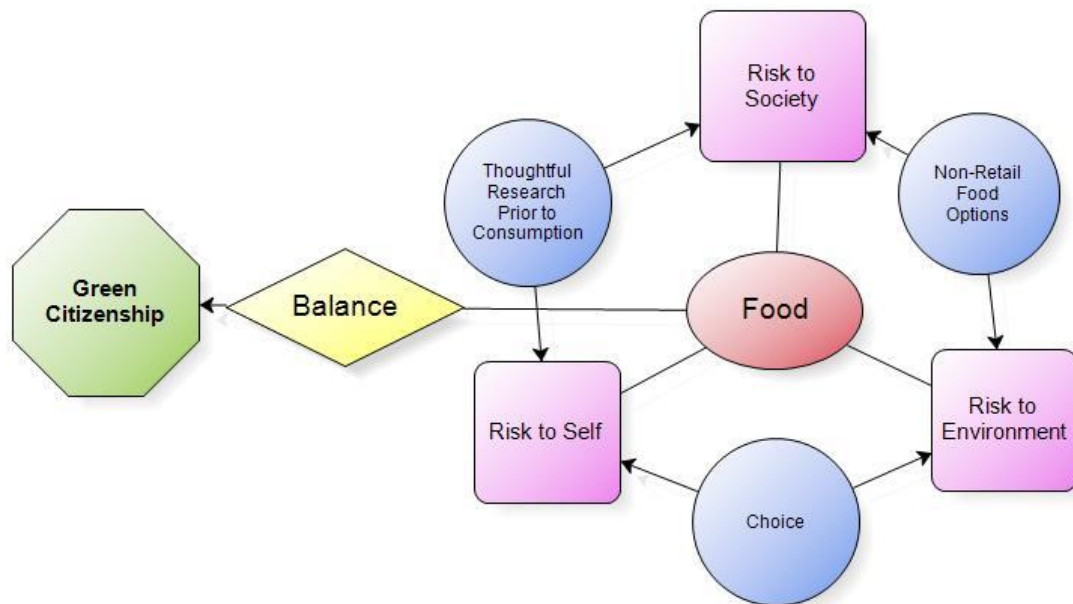
being very conscientious about your food, where it comes from, again the gratitude comes back... and you're taking that into you as well as just being much more aware of where it's coming from and all the interrelations that came with that. It's pretty phenomenal when you start to get into it and you get excited about it, and you're, you know, just meeting the farmers and learning to grow your own carrots as a kid. It's fantastic, so yeah, and you cook it and eat it, and it's delicious. That's it. (Mike)

For Mike, holism means that food's goodness comes full-circle: something that was alive is harvested or killed, and then is acquired or received by the eater who embraces the sustenance and associated symbolic meanings by expressing deep gratitude for the nourishment of body, but also of mind and spirit, as part of their food ritual. Mike perceived that the ethical and morally-influenced decision to use environmentally sustainable practices such as growing food without pesticides, were reciprocated with similar kind actions by nature. This connection between ethereal goodness and qualitative differences in product yield was noted by Mike regarding free range, organic eggs where "nutrient wise, you know if the animal... is happier, then, they don't have stress hormones leeching into the food that they are providing" (Mike).

To summarize, the worldview of the individuals in this study differs from mainstream Canadian society in two fundamental ways. First, rather than viewing the world in an atomistic manner in which nature and society are relatively autonomous, they viewed the world holistically. Second, they conceived food-related issues as a major link among the holistically connected parts of individual, society and environment. As Thomas and Thomas (1928, pp. 571-572) noted, "if men define situations as real, they are

real in their consequences”. Thus, one would expect the way these individuals define the situation to have consequences for how they think and act. The process through which this occurs is developed in the following two sections dealing with the concepts of balance and control.

#### 9.4 Balance and Green Citizen Informants



**Figure 9.3 Model of Balance and Green Citizen Informants**

The previous section documented the component parts of the informants’ holistic worldview (the body, mind and spirit of the individual; society; and the environment). This section examines the informants’ understanding of the relationships among those various parts. Specifically, the informants conceptualize the integrity of the whole as dependent upon maintaining an appropriate *balance* among the various parts. A central element of the worldview of the informants was that system is currently *out-of-balance*,

particularly as a result of current practices in the mainstream production of food. *Risks* emerge when the system is *out-of-balance*.<sup>34</sup>

Within the continuum of green indicators considered by informants, a number of key factors were seen to have a negative impact on balance, such as:

1. Possible environmental risks from intensive agriculture: soil erosion, pollution, or exposure to chemical residues (for example, Melissa, Alex, Chris);
2. Excessive carbon footprint and waste (for example, Ben, Ashley);
3. Concerns associated with safety of mainstream agricultural practices (for example, Kate);
4. Factory farming as ethically problematic due to excessive suffering on the part of the animals (for example, Helen);
5. A disconnect between producers and consumers caused by the mainstream retail model (for example, Mike);
6. Environmental costs of producing meat (for example, Roberta, Ben); and
7. Loss of flavour, freshness or nutritional value due to macro production (for example, Alex, William).

As the above list illustrates, the particular risks and concerns varied among the informants. What they all shared was a sense that the existing process of food production and consumption was, in some way, contributing to a system that was *risky, out-of-balance, and potentially unsustainable*.

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<sup>34</sup> See Figure 9.3.

For Alex, negotiating environmental risk meant broad considerations including green options that were locally grown, ethically produced, healthy, and affordable where authentic green food:

means hopefully it came from close to home; was grown close to home; it didn't harm these small villages out in Indonesia or wherever with their pesticides; it's healthy and easily accessible; and, it's a fair price. You're not charged an arm and a leg to get good food; food that you can grow yourself for free, or the cost of a seed. That would be green. (Alex)

Ben, for his part, also focused on a dense web of tangential interconnections where all food, however sourced, carried risk, cost, and environmental impact. Whether it was organic, local, free range, fair trade, or non-GMO, there were significant considerations for Ben beyond what would be considered by a mainstream consumer:

Always dairy is organic, I want to buy that organic and then the same as my grains and whatnot. I like to buy them locally and it just happens that they are organic as well. So, Spearville Mills; I always buy their products. And meats for my child; I always want his meat to be organic and locally sourced, as well as free range. Coffee is always organic and fair trade. If I'm going to buy soy products I want them to be certified organic because the majority are genetically modified. So, I know if it's non-organic soy, it's likely to be genetically modified; and that's scary to me. (Ben)

Informant sentiment highlighted various interconnected ways in which mainstream industrial agriculture was seen as having negative impacts on consumers and the environment. To informants, a complex and holistic series of interconnections

between the individual, society, nature and food were seen to be blocked, destroyed, or at least hidden in industrial farming practices. Although most informants still ate some meat, they were very concerned with keeping the livestock environment as natural, humane, and stress-free as possible for the animals. This was due to ethical issues as well as a pragmatic stance that food sourced from animals that were releasing stress hormones may be harmed in its quality and nutritional value.

In the worldview of these informants, health fears about industrial agriculture were seen as contrasting with perceived health benefits of environmentally green foods. Contamination risks, especially in mainstream foods, from pollution sources like industrial runoff, were seen as being potentially harmful to health, but in environmentally green foods: “there’s no chemicals and it can have more nutrients in it” (Alex). Melissa added: “nutrition is the number one important thing, if your body’s not nourished properly then everything else just goes to hell... so to speak”. Kate shared that: “It’s the fuel you put in your body to, you know, function, and the greener and cleaner that fuel is, the healthier, the better functioning you’ll be as a human being. It’s of utmost importance”.

In terms of environmental sustainability, green citizen informant perspective held that balance often increases as farming intensity decreases. For example,

The huge difference that I see in conventional and certified organic or conventional industrial farms, and small-scale local hog, poultry, beef, whatever farms, is it is completely comparing apples with oranges. Where in one aspect the animals are allowed to exercise their natural rights, their natural instincts, and things that would come naturally to them, so they live normally



like an animal should live; generally speaking outside with the smaller scale and some of the organic operations and that kind of thing. So the animal lives a more natural life and is outside and is not given growth hormones and antibiotics in their feed. (Ben)

Informants perceived macro-industrial production as being at one end of a continuum and small-scale environmentally green production at the other. In this conceptualization, balance was about being in the middle, making pragmatic, but principled consumption choices to reduce harm and promote sustainability. Where the middle was, and accordingly what constituted a balanced approach, varied by informant. This depended on how they prioritized certain characteristics, such as free range, local, or organic, and other considerations specific to the individual such as economic situation.

To the informants, these factors pushed the mainstream food system out of balance. However, they viewed this lack of balance as having a manageable solution. By directing their consumption dollars selectively to what they identified as preferred types of producers and products, informants endeavored to address perceived imbalances of mainstream industrial agriculture. They also saw exercising their consumption pattern decisions as being a way to reduce risk and to increase the viability of green foods as a niche market. Informants looked at the scale of a producer, its distance from their community, and the authenticity of its products. Informants engaged actively through their consumption decisions. This was their tool for re-asserting balance through selective direction of consumer dollars and also through their alternative means of securing food.

However, in some cases, a given food product is only available in what would be considered a non-green form. It may be something that does not grow locally, or

something that is out of season. What sets these green citizen informants apart from the other group is that they will sometimes sacrifice by not buying a product at all if no environmentally green options are available.<sup>35</sup> As such, they accept inconvenience as worthwhile and necessary as part of their green conscience. For example,

Berries and such are out of season and I am completely out of all of my local organic storage. So, if I'm going to splurge and treat myself and buy pears or bananas or berries, that kind of thing, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, I'm not going to buy them unless they're certified organic. (Ben)

This example illuminates an important practice for informants known as *satisficing*. Satisficing is electing for a compromise between sacrificing and satisfaction. By doing so, foodway alternatives were explored by informants in exercise of their green conscience. This also meant that they sought to make informed choices, to reduce risk and to assert some control over their foodway participation.

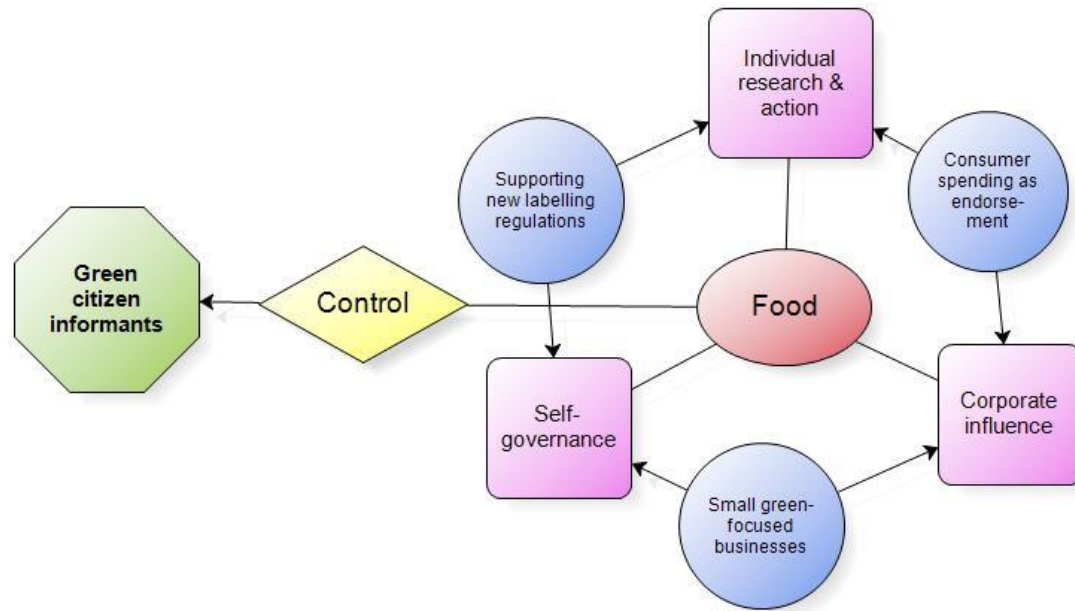
To summarize, the informants viewed the system as being out-of-balance, in no small measure due to current food production processes. In this sense, the informants held a view consistent with Beck's (1992) analysis of the risk society. According to Beck, the hallmark of the shift from modernity to advanced modernity or the risk society, is the way that technologies designed to mitigate naturally occurring risks, for example, drought, or lack of food, have created a new set of manufactured risks. Similarly, in the view of the informants, the processes of industrialized food production, designed to insure a stable food supply for a growing population, have resulted in a variety of unexpected and undesirable consequences that affect the individual, society and the

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<sup>35</sup> The second group, the green consumer informants, also varies in some other ways as described in Chapter 9.6. The extent to which informants will sacrifice varies and analysis of that is provided in Chapter 9.5.

environment such as pollution, climate change, toxic and unhealthy food, and poor wages.

## 9.5 Control and Green Citizen Informants



**Figure 9.4 Model of Control and Green Citizen Informants**

Given their perception of the food system as being out-of-balance, the informants exercised *control* and *self-governance*, using restraint, and careful research into alternative options more suitable to their worldview. By doing so, they saw their food-related choices as restoring balance to the system. These actions took a variety of forms.<sup>36</sup>

Informants like Helen and Ashley sought balance by researching better food options for loved ones with health issues. Their concerns about environmental sustainability, and potential risks to the healthfulness of mainstream food options, led them to use alternative foodways. Due to the holistic ways in which informants

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<sup>36</sup> See Figure 9.4.

conceptualized foodway issues, they, to varying degrees, sought sustainability and therefore balance. This meant that informants took a number of factors into consideration in choosing food products, such as animal welfare; workers' rights; handling of wastes; distance produce travels to market; whether any preservatives, pesticides, or other things function to distance food from its more natural state. Through selection of alternative foodways, informants sought to help shift the system back toward balance.

Informants perceived mainstream agricultural practices as taking control away and increasing risk to the consumer. Informants sought to exercise control through self-governed actions including benefitting green providers in the selective use of their consumer spending power. Wherever reasonably possible, informants did not forfeit control in exchange for convenience. For example, "I consider my purchases of organic and [those at] the CSAs to be a vote for where I want my money to go and where I want people to produce good quality food" (Alex). Informants supported those businesses which offered what they saw as greater foodway balance through a holistic approach to production.

Green citizen informants took action to assert some degree of control over their foodways by promoting a balanced, holistic food production system via their consumer dollar. Control was sought by informants with varying degrees of intensity. Informant perception of ideal greenness was shared by all of them but depending on their particular set of circumstances, the types of control they practiced differed in some ways. To Melissa, her ideal green goal was:

a lifestyle choice. People often look at it as having to give up something but to me it's very enriching. Like I mentioned with the food, your food will taste

better; you'll feel better; you'll have more energy. I won't call it a religion but it's certainly a path. (Melissa)

Informants sought to exert control over their foodway consumption patterns by becoming informed through research and planning. For example,

I've been reading up quite a bit on it. I got a bunch of books from the library, and then I see all these great articles online, like on Facebook, people sharing and on Twitter. I downloaded a bunch of audio books and I listen to those on my way to work, it's a good way to learn. (Alex)

And:

[I'm] always going to anything and everything that is out there that is an opportunity to learn more. I go to all the [local green food] events, the workshops, even if I know how to make salad with maple dressing, it doesn't matter, I'm still going. And, it's just trying to be supportive of the movement. (Chris)

Chris' mention of a green movement was noted or implied by other informants, although they did not necessarily use those specific words. This reinforced the notion that informant experience was a distinct sub-culture.<sup>37</sup> They were not trying to get rid of the existing systems of food production. Instead, they strove to support, to grow, and where possible, to create the option of an alternative system functioning in parallel to the dominant consumer culture model. Informants did embrace selected aspects of the existing dominant system. In doing so, they framed control to include trusting and supporting certain forms of green labelling legislation.

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<sup>37</sup> They experienced a subculture at the fringe of mainstream consumer culture and not a counter-culture. See Chapter 5.2 for details.

While supporting green labelling designations which had some sort of legislative definition, informants also viewed marketing-based green claims and private label designations with suspicion. By trusting food labelling designations that had been certified officially as important indicators of authenticity and safety, informants engaged with the broader system, albeit in a guarded way.

Informants are responsible for their choices via the risk society,<sup>38</sup> where risk is highly individualized and control is exercised through decisions around whether or not to consume foods produced one way over another. Dissertation informants must contend with a possible mainstream conception of them as ideological or as status seekers due to the fact that they will not eat the same foods as most people. Food rituals are, of course, a proxy for social and cultural identity (Warde, 1997, p. 180).

The informants exercised self-governance by consciously reflecting on their food choices and how their food-related choices affect not just themselves but also the fabric of society and the sustainability of the planet. For example, Melissa practiced self-governance by “really looking at every single thing you do in your life from morning to night and saying ‘is this the way I should be doing this; what impact is this having; and what can I do to lessen the environmental impact for future generations?’ It’s serious” (Melissa). As such, their decisions carried a moral component, often associated with feelings of guilt or shame when they strayed from their preferred options. For example, “it makes it difficult to buy things because you end up feeling... guilty because you’re buying something that isn’t local” (Ashley).

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<sup>38</sup> Whenever I refer generically to informants as a group in this section, I mean the 11 informants that I categorized as green citizens.

The issues of self-governance and control have important implications across a variety of scholarly debates, especially concerning the risk society (for example, Beck, 1992) and governmentality (for example, Foucault, 1991).<sup>39</sup> Informants actively and broadly exercised self-governance, both in terms of lifestyle-management, and also in terms of continually looking inward. They used inward reflection in their day-to-day self-assessments of their consumption pattern choices, to live in sustainable, responsible ways, as per their green conscience. And, as noted above, they perceived their choices as having impact on the larger society through the economic support for local, small scale, environmentally friendly producers and distributors.

Although self-governance and responsabilization techniques were used by informants in search of green options,<sup>40</sup> there were limits on the scope of what was perceived as reasonably achievable green consumption thresholds, past which informants would sometimes acquiesce to other options. This would be done, as necessary, or until other, more suitable foodway sources were located. Acts of acquiescence to such foodway limitations or barriers were perceived by informants as having varying degrees of acceptability.<sup>41</sup> For example,

I prefer, and try to buy more organic and fair trade as much as possible.

Sometimes it's not available, what I'm looking for, it's out of season or I can't find it... the priority is definitely high, it's just sometimes we can't find it.

(Mike)

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 2.4.

<sup>40</sup> See the end of Chapter 3.2 for details on responsabilization.

<sup>41</sup> As noted in Chapter 9.4, informants also sometimes chose not to consume a product at all if it was not green.

Ashley noted that sometimes a certain food item was necessary, but that there was a significant time or financial barrier to its non-mainstream acquisition. She mentioned that she would sometimes go to a major retailer, but “make a point of checking labels for [organic, local, free range, fair trade] that sort of thing” (Ashley). Similarly, Melissa was careful to read the ingredient lists on foods prior to making purchase decisions:

There are times when you don’t always condemn a food because it’s not labeled certified organic, I just take a careful look at the ingredients, and if there’s nothing too vile in there and it’s not organic I would still consider it as a possible choice. (Melissa)

This quotation has a couple of important implications as it demonstrates:

1. a thoughtful consumer carefully reading labels and reflecting on their meaning; and
2. the potential decision not to buy if no acceptably green options were present.

Kate also read labels, in her case, as a way to identify the nutritional values of her foods:

“I read it from top to bottom. I try to get all of my vitamins and minerals and nutrients that I need to be as healthy as I can possibly be, so I put a lot of planning, a lot of time into my nutrition” (Kate).

Informants were wary of green marketing claims from mainstream retailers. They were very careful to avoid being enticed by potentially misleading or unverifiable green claims by practicing self-governance techniques such as planning, satisficing and researching. For example, Roberta noted that certain words, such as “light”, were often used to mislead. Chris noted that green-related words tended to “get bandied about”. Part



of their strategy for purposeful consumption included placing trust in government backed certifications like ‘organic’ as authenticators of greenness.

Informants placed trust in official labels and into specific vendors. Through their own research and word of mouth, informants provided business to producers that were in turn reliant on their reputations within the subculture of green citizen informants for their continued business. These producers were seen to authentically provide foods that were holistically green. Purchasing only those products that they could be sure were really green was key to green citizen informants’ exercise of control and self-governance.

Informants sought to carve out alternative foodway options which were authentic to them. This is similar to Bourdieu’s (2000) concept of “distinct consumers”.<sup>42</sup> This is unlike the mainstream consumer culture where control is ubiquitously traded for convenience. That these informants were found to not only seek out alternative options, but also to sacrifice on principle, is a novel finding. This finding represents a new path in the literature on consumption which has typically conceived of the individual as an unthinking consumer; a passive receiver of goods; or one that lacked the desire or ability to perceive complex causal chains necessarily employed to get food from producer to consumer (for example, Kneen, 1989; McIntosh, 1996; Patel, 2009).

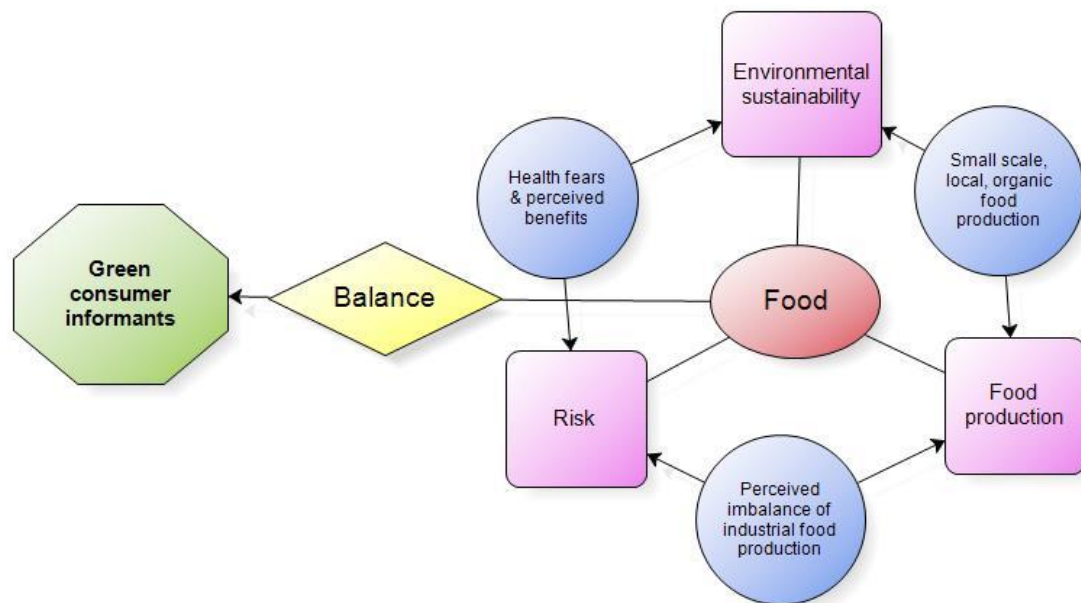
The informants classified as green citizens make their choices around selective consumption and satisficing guided by a generic social process organized around the concepts of holism, balance, and control. As such, they do not conform to the types of behaviour documented in existing sociological literature. However, before elaborating on the way the findings exemplify a generic social process, it is necessary to describe the differences noted in the second group of informants, the three green consumers.

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<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 2.2.

## 9.6 Holism, Balance and Control for Green Consumer Informants

This section documents the differences between the consumption patterns of the 11 green citizens described above and the other three informants referred to as green consumers: Carly, Allison and Nathalie.<sup>43</sup> This second group of informants' green consumption patterns are consistent with the structure and most of the content of the overall green citizen social process model. On its core concepts of holism and control, activities and decision making processes are highly similar between both groups of informants. Any differences relate to the importance placed on, and breadth of consideration of otherwise common issues. However, there are important differences in the way they construe the balance concept as diagrammed below in Figure 9.5:



**Figure 9.5 Model of Worldview on Balance Theme for Green Consumer Informants**

<sup>43</sup> As noted in Chapter 5.5, I label informants as either being “green citizens” or “green consumers,” which are terms from Prothero et al. (2010). By coincidence, these terms happen to accurately characterize informant perspective and were therefore used. In no case was analysis shaped to match these terms from the literature.

The three informants who make up this second group tended to be internally focussed, specifically emphasizing personal health as a basis for their green food consumption, while the other 11 informants tended to consider a broader range of external social and environmental issues in making their consumption decisions. The informants characterized as green consumers did not truly exit the mainstream menu of offerings. Instead, they made their selections at the edge of the mainstream options, without sacrificing or venturing into distinctly alternative spheres for their food acquisition. Analysis of the actions that these informants used to find balance and how they identified it through the context of personal health was documented in Chapter 5.

The green consumer informants also saw themselves as being the target of green marketing claims. Hyper-consumption is part of marketing strategy and this is related to a lack of holism in mainstream culture (for example, Bourdieu, 2000; Prothero et al., 2010). The typical consumer seeks status (Bourdieu, 2000, pp. 55-56) and relies on advertisements and marketing to formulate their decisions (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 179). In that framework, food purchase and consumption decisions made by the public are seen to be independent of production issues or social and environmental considerations. Instead these decisions are made by the typical consumer in consideration of product price, ease of access and marketing.<sup>44</sup> However, this group of green consumer informants assesses the menu of options for green consumption via mainstream retail much more reflectively and critically than would the general public.<sup>45</sup> The social process model previously shown for green citizen informants also explains green consumer informant consumption

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter 2.4.

<sup>45</sup> For summaries of informant worldviews and engagement with environmentally green foods, see Chapter 5.5.

behaviours as being guided by an environmentally green conscience. However, there are some differences in the model's functionality for the green consumer informants, which I describe in this section.

While Allison, Nathalie and Carly were more thoughtful in their consumption choices than the mainstream consumer, they still made purchases and consumption decisions somewhat disassociated from external values and considerations. They are concerned with personal health risks and as such, purposefully choose food products marketed as green. Green consumer informants did notice a higher price associated with eating green but they rationalized it as a way to pay now for better health outcomes in the future. Along these lines, Allison commented that even with relatively limited financial resources, green foods “are affordable; it’s pretty much what you’re willing to buy for health, really... it’s worth it”.

The complex array of interconnections regarding the balance theme of the model, as articulated by the green citizen informants, involved broad conceptual considerations external to the individual. Green consumer informants did not consider these factors or found them to be much less important than their individual health outcomes. For example, Allison’s approach was to place her trust in an intermediary, in this case, a specific green specialty store, as assuring the healthfulness of her foods, rather than to actively look for green options on her own.

Although both groups of informants make decisions around where to shop for environmentally green products, only the green citizen informants would also decide whether to consume particular products at all based on the level of greenness. In seeking

balance, the green consumer informants were also much less likely to go outside of the retail sector to find their foods.<sup>46</sup>

Carly, Allison and Nathalie assessed their green consumption choices in terms of individual health benefits. For example, upon receiving a medical diagnosis that had dietary implications, Carly adopted a:

Natural type of life-style or consumption of any kind... foods that you grow yourself. My health issues, I have congestive heart disease, so since having two stents put in my arteries. I've had to take the salt shaker and put it on my shelf; so, whenever I shop now, I need to look at those packages and read the content of fat, and saturated and trans fat, and the sodium level. I've had to be more creative with the food that I can buy because I can't eat a lot of the things that I used to eat. They teach you in the cardiac rehab what to look for and the best place to go in stores and the places to stay away from. (Carly)

While learning to read food labels in general, Carly also adopted a preference for environmentally green foods, enticed by their presentation as natural and therefore healthy and safe or low-risk. Additionally, she developed an aversion to processed foods due to fears about health risks, especially considering her medical situation. Allison and Nathalie also sought healthier foods, and focused on those which were environmentally green.

Green consumer informants envision a somewhat integrative foodway as part of the dominant commercial model, where personal health risks from environmental

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<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that individual informants express that they had at times felt a greater or lesser extent of commitment to an environmentally green way of life. My description of them as either green consumers or green citizens is based on how they characterized their primary actions and worldview overall.

degradation or other issues are mitigated via consumption of environmentally green foods. Although they are driven primarily by internal health fears related to food, in the course of seeking retail offerings that fit the green niche, they came to consider various other reasons consumers might elect to choose environmentally green products. They bought their green foods from specific grocery or speciality stores that they trusted. These informants perceived a clear dichotomy between natural and unnatural. For example, Nathalie saw green food as pure, having an absence of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Allison shared this view and saw green foods as having “no chemicals, very little environmental impact” (Allison).

Balance was seen as being negatively affected by the impact of non-green foods on their internal well-being. As such, readily available green options such as organic or small-scale market type products were sought by Nathalie, Carly and Allison to re-balance their food-related health situations. These informants are distinct from typical consumers because they put a significant investment of time into monitoring their personal consumption patterns of specific types of products related to food based on a worldview connected to a broader social process.

For balanced foodway options, these informants looked for products that were holistically authentic. They read labels and looked at green marketing claims with a critical eye. As with the first group of informants, the green citizens, this second group, the green consumer informants, would prefer greater regulatory oversight, accountability and farmer-control of a green niche market. All of the informants in both groups were alternative consumers wary of corporate offerings marketed as being environmentally green. Nathalie, Carly and Allison exercised control by selecting those producers they

considered to offer authentic green products. For example, Carly noted: “I like Peter’s Meat Market. I would focus more on the little business man and try to give my money to them”.

Carly, Allison and Nathalie believe that there are good food options present in the current retail foodway system, and that through careful choice of which types of businesses to patronize, that they can balance their sustenance needs with positive individual health outcomes. Through their search for food products that would benefit their health, they embraced environmentally green options. Benefits to individual health via eating foods lower in pesticide and more naturally produced were also seen to apply to broader environmental benefits.

Informant practices relating to balance differed between the green consumer informants who had a narrower and more individualized experience of green as social process than the green citizen informants. But they followed similar patterns. The three green consumer informants’ main motivation was finding balance in their own health. The 11 green citizen informants were seeking to bring balance to the broader environment via the use of environmentally green foodways. Although the green citizen informants experienced their green consumption as social process more broadly; at the fundamental level, the consumption patterns of the two groups of informants are operating by the same underlying forces of holism, balance and control.

## **9.7 Green Conscience as Generic Social Process**

As noted in Chapter 1, a preliminary analysis of the data led to the identification of two of the thematic categories present in the model described in this chapter; holism and balance. Based on the identification of these themes, my supervisor suggested that I

look at Low (2004), a study that explains the health seeking behaviour of individuals using alternative therapies through a model involving the concepts of holism, balance, and control.

Based on that theoretic sampling of the literature, I re-examined my data and found substantial evidence for the existence of the third theme from Low's (2004) analysis, control, in my data, as well as broad similarities in the overall process linking the three concepts between the two studies.<sup>47</sup> However, it is important to emphasize that there exist significant differences in the specific meanings attributed to each of these three concepts in the two studies and that, despite these differences in specifics, there exists a general similarity in the overall process linking the three concepts in both studies. This section begins by documenting the specific differences between the two studies and concludes by arguing that the similarity of process in the two cases is evidence for the operation of a generic social process.

The most obvious difference between my study and Low's (2004) is the substantive focus: food versus health. There are, however, structural similarities in the two situations. Low (2004) examines the health seeking behaviour of individuals engaged in the use of non-mainstream or alternative medicine treatments while this dissertation examines the food-related choices of individuals who access a significant portion of their food from non-mainstream sources. Thus, both situations involve an active and deliberative decision-making process where the result leads to an outcome that is somewhat outside the mainstream. I return to the significance of these parallels after detailing the specific differences in the conceptualization of holism, balance, and control in the two studies.

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<sup>47</sup> The "control" concept from Low (2004) was used as a sensitizing concept per Charmaz (2006).



Both sets of informants displayed a holistic worldview. However, the substantive nature of that worldview differed significantly in the two studies. For Low's (2004) informants, holism focused primarily on the body as an integrated conceptualization of body, mind and spirit. For the informants in this study, holism focused primarily on the external environment and the relations among the individual, society, and the natural world. It would be an overstatement to suggest that there was a total disjunction in the parts seen as constituting the whole in the two cases. Some of Low's (2004) informants included the natural environment in their holistic conception and a number of the informants in this study, particularly those labeled green consumers, displayed a focus on the individual corporeal body and the integration of body, mind, and spirit. Even in these cases, however, the substantive nature of their respective worldviews differed significantly. This difference is particularly evident in relation to society. The individuals in this study viewed the food production processes of modern capitalist agriculture, for example, factory farms, as ethically and environmentally problematic and their economic acts of purchasing from small, local producers as a moral act aimed at supporting a more sustainable food production system. In contrast, Low's (2004) informants expressed dissatisfaction with a particular social institution, the science and the bio-medical model of understanding the body, rather than the structure of capitalist society itself. In addition, their decision to access non-traditional forms of medicine was a pragmatic act focused entirely on themselves in order to improve their health status, rather than as a moral act aimed, at least in part, in supporting an alternative social structure.

Not surprisingly, given these differences in the conceptualization of holism, the two groups also differed significantly in the way they conceived of balance. For Low's

informants, balance referred to balance in the self and body (Low, 2004). Dissertation informants, in contrast, conceptualized balance as being external to the individual and situated in the food production system. This was an environmental, societal, and risk-based framing of balance. The group of dissertation informants who were described as green citizens sought balance of social and environmental systems rather than their bodies or selves. They strived for this balance through their alternative forms of food acquisition.

As described in Section 9.6, the fundamental difference between the 11 informants classified as green citizens and those classified as green consumers involved the concept of balance. The internally-focused green consumer informants displayed a concept of balance more closely aligned with that of Low's informants than with the externally-focused green citizen informants. For Carly, Allison, Nathalie and Low's (2004) informants, finding balance was conceptualized as providing an individual health benefit. In addition, the individuals in this study exemplified a second consideration of balance: the assessment of the food purchase in light of other consumer considerations such as price, availability, or the desire for a particular ingredient, not evident among Low's (2004) informants. While some of Low's (2004) informants did mention the cost of their alternative medicine treatments, none of them viewed cost of other such factors as a consideration to be balanced against whether or not to have the treatment.

Finally, there were significant differences in the dynamics of control. Low's informants sought to maintain balance in their bodies and selves through taking control of their healing processes and by being subject to self-control (Low, 2004, p. 72). Informing themselves about the health challenges they faced was a central aspect of taking control

(Low, 2004, p. 74). Control was also a vital consideration in the case of informants who practiced self-governance in their green food choices, using restraint, and careful research into alternative options more suitable to their worldview. Thus, in both cases, the process associated with assessing the alternatives, such as information gathering, was similar.

However, the dynamics of determining that their actions were subject to self-control differed. In the case of Low's (2004) informants, the decision to seek out alternative treatment typically involved the rejection of a dominant societal authority of doctors and the medical system, and that institution's characterization of their health status. No such process was present among the informants for this study. By taking control over their health, Low's informants were in some ways considered responsible by society for the nature of their health outcomes and also exposed to self-blame arising from rejection of the dominant health care paradigm.

Dissertation informants are responsible for their choices via the risk society, where risk is highly individualized and control is exercised through decisions around whether or not to consume foods produced one way over another. Dissertation informants must contend with a possible mainstream conception of them as ideological or as status seekers due to the fact that they will not unquestioningly eat the same foods as most people. Food rituals are, of course, a proxy for social and cultural identity (Warde, 1997, p. 180).

The importance of self-control noted by Low's group of informants is relevant to the related concept of self-governance for the dissertation informants in conceptualizing how they shaped their consumption activities and habits. For example, Melissa practiced self-governance by "really looking at every single thing you do in your life from morning

to night and saying ‘is this the way I should be doing this; what impact is this having; and what can I do to lessen the environmental impact for future generations?’ It’s serious” (Melissa). Some of Low’s informants noted feelings of guilt when they strayed from their alternative health goals (Low, 2004, p. 79). This was also the case with dissertation informants. For example, “it makes it difficult to buy things because you end up feeling... guilty because you’re buying something that isn’t local” (Ashley). Control and self-control in Low’s (2004) context are similar to the control and self-governance concept that was seen to affect dissertation informant consumption decisions.

It should be evident from the above that the two studies differ both in substantive focus; health versus food, and the specifics associated with the concepts of holism, balance, and control. What they share is a similarity in the way that the concepts of holism, balance, and control are linked together into an explanatory model that provides insight into the behavior of the individuals involved. They are, in other words an example of what Prus (1987, p. 251) calls a generic social process: “abstracted formulations of social behavior [... that denote] parallel sequences of activity across diverse contexts [... that] focus on the activities involved in the “doing” or accomplishment of group life”.

## **9.8 Chapter Conclusion**

Through their actions via the conceptual model outlined in this chapter, informant engagement with foodway systems is indicative of abstractionable social process. The overall conceptual model provided in this dissertation illustrates how informant actions are guided by an environmentally green conscience with interrelated core concepts of holism, balance and control.

Holism reflects the integration of thought and action; where a variety of factors are seen as being interconnected and relevant to food consumption choices. Balance in this model is conceptualized where green food consumption occurs to reduce risk and increase positive outcomes both to individual health and the broader environment. Control incorporates the concepts of responsabilization and autonomy; where one's decisions and actions are mediated through personal research, knowledge acquisition, self-governance, and active support of businesses with aligned green offerings. In exercising control, informants view foodway systems holistically, striving to restore balance therein. The functionality of this conceptual model serves to explain and abstract informant action as being indicative of a broader social process.

In the next chapter I introduce planned post-doctoral work to examine if, or to what extent, the conceptual inter-relationships between holism, balance and control and the social process model itself might function in other contexts relevant to environmental greenness. Specifically I plan to look at the ownership of spaces used for environmentally green community gardening, and how it may influence, renew, or change cultural meanings associated with green activities conducted in those spaces.

## **10.0 DISSERTATION CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **10.1 Introduction**

The substantive and novel contributions to scholarly knowledge made as a result of this dissertation were articulated in the previous chapter. This final chapter serves to conclude the work via three sections: first, a reflection on the subjectivist orientation used; second, a very brief conceptual overview of the dissertation; and third, a possible direction for future research.

### **10.2 Importance of Subjectivist Research Orientation**

The subjectivist approach taken in this dissertation was essential to the successful development of the social process model, which ultimately led to valuable and rigorous contributions to scholarly knowledge. Dissertation research enquiry began with the goal of understanding informant worldview and the extent to which a number of broad sociological factors may have contributed to, or otherwise influenced, their environmentally green consumption patterns. These elements included risk perception (for example, Beck, 1992), consumer culture (for example, Warde, 1997) and environmental sustainability (for example, Patel, 2009). Relevant cultural context includes the documented rise of organic products, increased emphasis on buying local foods, and other elements of green food production and consumption (Statistics Canada, 2008).

High profile research on food choice, perhaps due to its association with research on consumer behaviour and marketing, has tended to emphasize an external, macro-orientation that uses concepts such as price (French, 2003), culture (Kittler et al., 2011)

and income or socio-economic status (McKenzie, 1974) to explain consumer behaviour. In most of the literature, when subjectivist concepts tied to the consumer such as attitudes, values or identity, were discussed, they were most commonly analysts' concepts rather than concepts directly from consumer self-reporting or self-identification (Counihan & Kaplan, 1998).<sup>48</sup> However, there is a newly emerging niche in Canadian food sociology literature which is taking qualitative, subjectivist approaches (for example, Koç et al., 2012).

Findings arising from the qualitative, subjectivist approach used in this dissertation, illustrate informant worldviews in ways which could not have been achieved with a purely quantitative approach. Analytic tendency in much of the studied literature tends to focus on macro-concepts affecting consumption patterns and experiences of food-conscious segments of the population. This has brought essential insight, but typically relied on variables measurable through quantitative methods; to the exclusion of other important factors. The nature of individual interaction with food as expression of cultural identity and many other attributes is inherently, at least in part, also a subjectivist experience. Based on the findings from this dissertation, I make a contribution to growing the qualitative niche in Canadian sociological food literature.

In addition to the direct causality variables visible when employing a quantitative approach such as price, quality, and availability; qualitative intervening factors with indirect causality play a significant role in shaping individuals' consumption patterns.<sup>49</sup> My findings serve to complement sociological knowledge by bringing to light factors which would otherwise be hidden or un-measurable if using quantitative methods.

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<sup>48</sup> This was the case until very recently.

<sup>49</sup> As shown in Chapter 9 for informants.

Using rigorous and established subjectivist approaches, scholarly knowledge was advanced in a variety of ways, most crucially, with the discovery in this dissertation that the actions of informants are not isolated occurrences, but are instead guided by more abstract and complex sociological forces. Their actions are integrated into and abstraction-able through the social process model presented in the previous chapter.

### **10.3 Dissertation Overview**

My initial interest in this general topic area come partly out of my study of environmentally green food advertising in Quebec for my Master's thesis. It also came in part from hearing environmental risk issues being discussed by some members of a community garden in Fredericton where I had a plot. I started looking at environmental risk perception and food consumption as broad research areas and did an inductive thematic review of the literature. From this analytical review of the literature, I explored the possibility of affinity connections to what I termed a possible green conscience and described using an original conceptual model in Chapter 4.2.

After looking at the literature, I designed a qualitative interview-based research project that follows in the symbolic interactionist tradition. I planned semi-structured interviews for a small number of theoretically sampled informants, specifically looking for individuals who would be dedicated to environmentally green food consumption. The qualitative research strategy for consumer culture research used in this dissertation allows me to complement a niche area in the literature that is otherwise largely quantitatively based.

Research questions focused on how informants would conceptualize environmental greenness; what types of green food products they would buy and from



where; and how they felt about green food labelling designations. I recruited gatekeepers from two environmentally green food focused community organizations and through these initial contact points, I found informants qualified and willing to participate.

There were fourteen informants and their overall worldview can be described as an environmentally green alternative subculture. Major concepts from initial analysis of informant data were holism and balance. Then, following my supervisor's guidance, I used theoretic sampling of the literature to study a conceptual model from Low (2004) which had holism, balance and control as core concepts. Also during this phase, I went back to the literature more broadly to look for other analytically relevant concepts and found a conceptual model from Prothero et al. (2010) describing and classifying various types of environmentally green consumption patterns. Concepts were adapted from Low (2004) and Prothero et al. (2010) and modified based on informant data.

Having identified and analyzed major themes of informant perspective, I then presented conceptual models that abstracted my analysis of the subjectivist informant data as functioning within a broader social context. I conceptualize informants' environmentally green food consumption decisions as being part of a social process I refer to as a green conscience. My findings provide new insight on abstract factors which can affect consumption patterns and that go far beyond those typically cited, such as the traditional concepts of price (French, 2003), culture (Kittler et al., 2011), income (McKenzie, 1974), or status-seeking (Bourdieu, 2000).

#### **10.4 Directions for Future Research**

In the course of completing this dissertation, I wondered if the effects of a cultural concept known as the commons (for example, Schiller, 1989) may have been factored

into informant decision-making processes. The data gathered did not allow for this evaluation. However, one could conduct future research into perceptions of the role of the commons for environmentally green food consumers who use community gardening for some of their food.

In this section I provide a conceptual overview of the commons as relevant to this possible future research. I use the concept of the commons to refer to those spaces available to the public such as land and fishing areas, at no or nominal cost, for growing or catching food. Ownership and trust in the management of these venues are important considerations and may be contentious issues for stakeholders. Most dissertation informants were community gardeners, and such venues can be considered a form of commons.

Given the start-up, maintenance, and possible liability costs of establishing and running publicly accessible, environmentally sustainable community gardens; the issue of sponsorship takes centre stage.<sup>50</sup> There are a number of corporate-funded environmentally green initiatives from which community groups can benefit. Typical examples of industry-public arrangements for green ventures have grants from corporations flow through non-profit or charitable associations for green development initiatives. Possible future research could include examination of the extent to which those informants perceive these sorts of public-private partnerships as being mutually beneficial. Such research could also examine policy from municipal and provincial governments related to funding of community organizations as context.

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<sup>50</sup> Here I am drawing on my “insider awareness” (Chavez, 2008) as a past member of two community gardens, the financing of which were dependent, in large part, on grants from community, government and business interests.

The importance of the commons and its tension with privatization and consumer culture was discussed broadly in the literature, and notably by Schiller (1989). Various spaces which present a façade of community use or public ownership are ultimately under private control (Schiller, 1989). Drawing a line between what is public and what is private can be a complex proposition when various types of ownership and use are examined. Community-based food security and gardening groups are faced with the challenge of operating on limited funding and must decide whether to embrace corporate funding and what its consequences may be.

Potential future research in this area could use theoretic sampling with informants who are organizers or volunteers in community gardens and community food security organizations. Examples of possible research questions are as follows:

1. How does the ownership of spaces for community food gardening affect their mandate? and
2. What does “public space” mean for community food security projects?

This possible future work could follow general tenets of qualitative, subjectivist research and the symbolic interactionist tradition. An endeavor could be made to extend sociological knowledge by gaining a more complete understanding of the role and implications of the commons, as applied in this case, to the use of community food spaces. A contribution to sociological knowledge of perceptions of the commons in community food security projects such as community gardens could be made. The extent to which the social process model for dissertation informants could function in the context of the commons becomes a fascinating question.

This possible future research could examine whether there is any conceptual similarity in how its informants engage with public space to how dissertation informants' worldviews were explainable by the social process model. Since the social process model functions in at least two contexts, the question of whether it may function in a third is intriguing.

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## APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This section details the questions that were asked in the semi-structured interviews. It is important to note that there were minor adjustments made to these prompts as appropriate and in keeping with the methods used. Interviews only took place once informants read and signed the consent form. Rationale for including these specific prompts follows each one, in italics. Questions were clustered by focus, and adequate pauses were given between each sub-question in the actual interviews.

### ***General Demographic Questions***

These were designed to provide contextual background in which to situate responses. It was expressed at the time of interviews that brief answers were sought to these, and then more substantive answers sought for the main interview questions.

1. From the following ranges, please tell me your approximate age: 18-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-59, 60+. *It was of interest to examine the extent to which age could be a factor in some green attitudes.*
2. Could you tell me your approximate educational background? *This is a standard demographic question, and therefore is included.*
3. Do you grow a food garden, hunt, or fish for food? *I was curious if participation in any of these alternative food acquisition strategies might be indicative of a preference for other forms of environmentally green food consumption on the part of individual informants.*
4. Do you take part in farming co-operatives, farmers, markets, or direct-buy options from farms? Do you participate in crop sharing or any other non-retail options for acquiring food? *There are various local and regional farming co-operatives that provide a non-grocery store route for people to get their foodstuffs. Of interest is why people take part in co-ops and the other options, and how they perceive the quality, healthfulness, and price of these foods.*

### ***Main Interview Questions***

5. Where do you do most of your grocery shopping? Why? *Insight on this may be useful in contextualizing informants' worldviews.*
6. Please describe how affordable and desirable environmentally green foods are for your household. How much of the food you consume is environmentally green? *Green foods bought from traditional grocery stores may come at a premium price.*



*However, people who use alternative means to purchase their foods may have other experiences with the cost of green foods.*

7. How often and why do you buy or not buy environmentally green foods, like organic? *This is explicitly related to the research questions.*
8. How would you describe your degree of understanding of green foods, like organic? Do you think about environmental impact differences between green and other food types? How significant are environmental or health risks as factors in your food consumption decisions? *This group of questions was intended to prompt informants to speak broadly about how they conceptualized, and why they engage in, environmentally green food consumption.*
9. Do you buy more environmentally green foods, such as organic for people who are in your care, than you would for yourself? *This could provide interesting insight as to the risk perception and economic considerations by individual informants.*
10. How knowledgeable or interested in food issues in general would you consider yourself to be? Are you active in any community organizations related to food? *I was curious how these factors might relate to their green food preferences.*
11. What does green mean to you? *This was the most open-ended of the questions and it was designed to allow informants to speak to any green food consumption issues important to them which had not yet been covered.*

## APPENDIX B – SAMPLE COPY OF CONSENT FORM

Consent form for:

Alternative Green Food Consumer Culture in a Risk Society

Greetings,

You are invited to participate in a research study on food consumption and perceptions of environmentally green food. Research procedures are straightforward and non-invasive. This is a minimal-risk research project which will elicit opinions and knowledge from food purchasing, adult members of society.

My name is Kyle Zelmer and I am a PhD student in Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton. To contact me, you may email y4snr@unb.ca. My supervisor is Professor Gary Bowden who teaches Sociology at the University of New Brunswick. Dr. Bowden can be reached at (506) 452 6217. If you have any concerns about this research and would like to speak with an agent of the University that is independent of the project, please contact Dr. Nancy Nason-Clark, Chairperson of the University of New Brunswick (Fredericton Campus) Sociology department at nasoncla@unb.ca or at phone number (506) 458 7474. This research project has met the ethical guidelines set by UNB and is on file (number # 2011-062) with the Research Ethics Board at UNB.

One-on-one interviews will take place in a neutral location of mutual convenience such as an area in the Harriet Irving Library. You will be asked a series of questions designed to unearth the taken-for-granted rationalities behind food consumption decisions. Data security and privacy protection are taken seriously. Each interview will be recorded on a separate tape or digital file so that it can be quickly destroyed if you rescind permission. As needed to protect privacy, specific demographic details will be made vague in publications. Participation in this research project is voluntary and you may decline to answer questions.

Estimated interview time is 40 minutes. You are welcome to sign up to receive a (blind copied) email of a quarterly executive summary of research progress during the interview. You are also offered a \$10 honorarium for participating in the research. Please take a copy of this consent form if you like. By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read this form, you understand the nature and conditions of the research and you agree to participate in the project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# CURRICULUM VITAE

## Full Name:

Kyle Walford Zelmer

## Universities Attended:

2008-2017 (September to October): PhD Candidate, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Sociology.

- Thesis title: *Alternative Green Food Consumer Culture in a Risk Society*. Supervisor: Gary Bowden. Committee members: Jacqueline Low, Luc Thériault

2006-2008 (October): Master's Degree in Sociology, Concordia University, Montréal

- Thesis title: *Perceptions of Food Risk and Labelling*. Supervisor: Katja Neves. Committee Members: Bill Reimer, Satoshi Ikeda

2004-2006 (May): Bachelor's Degree in Sociology, Concordia University, Montréal

- Graduated with Distinction and on Dean's List

2001-2004 (September-April) Unfinished Bachelor's Degree in Sociology: University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

- Subsequently transferred to Concordia University.

## Conference Presentations:

Bowden, G. & Zelmer, K. (2013, May). *Understanding the food activities of green citizens: A grounded theory analysis*. In Deborah van den Hoonaard (Chair). Qualitatives 2013: Looking Forward: Perspectives, Methodologies, Stabilities, Redefinitions, and Examples. Conference hosted by Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario

Bowden, G. & Zelmer, K. (2013, June). *Understanding the food related activities of green citizens*. In Jen Wrye (Organizer). Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities: @ the edge. Conference hosted by the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia

Zelmer, K. (2011, May to June). *Owning green: Tensions in business and cultural perspectives on environmentally green food products*. In Dr. K. Warriner (Organizer & Chair). Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities: Coasts and Continents: Exploring People and Places. Conference co-hosted by the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick

Zelmer, K. (2009, April). *Media impact on food risk events: Consumer awareness, class status, and public policy*. In Dr. J. Fontdevila (Organizer). Pacific Sociological Association: The Shifting Foundations of Inequality. Conference conducted at University of California, San Diego, United States

Zelmer, K. (2008, May). *Selling green: Class, status, morality, and food labelling*. In Dr. J. Rosenblum (Chair). Qualitatives 2008. Conference Conducted at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton

Zelmer, K. (2008, March). *Perceptions of food politics and labelling: Implications for the social self*. In Dr. S. Z. Reuter (Chair). Hybrid Moments. Conference conducted at Concordia University, Montréal

Zelmer, K. & Donovan, J. (2007, March). *What is the relationship between mental health and unsafe alcohol consumption: Study of depression among men and women in Canada*. In Dr. S. Z. Reuter (Chair), Excursions in Sociology and Anthropology. Conference conducted at Concordia University, Montréal.