



People and the Planet 2013 Conference Proceedings

This article was first presented at the *People and the Planet 2013 Conference: Transforming the Future*, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, 2-4 July.

All articles published in this collection have been peer reviewed.

Title: Cultural Responses to Climate Change: Cultivating Lifestyle Activism through Alternative Knowledge Productions
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Publisher: Global Cities Research Institute, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
Year: 2013
Editor(s): Paul James, Chris Hudson, Sam Carroll-Bell, Alyssa Taing

Series URL:

<http://global-cities.info/news-events/conferences-forums/conferences-proceedings>



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Cultural Responses to Climate Change: Cultivating Lifestyle Activism through Alternative Knowledge Productions

MARK DEAN

Abstract: The neoliberal environmental policies of Australian governments often posit individual citizen-consumers as primary agents for change. The consumption-based behaviours cultivated are most often driven by rational economic motives, rather than any intrinsic and collective-based desire to protect the environment. I consider the possibilities of alternative knowledges, subjugated by the dominant neoliberal knowledge framework, to offer a potential basis for empowering alternative pro-environmental behavioural changes that more deeply politicize consumption and augment collective social action. To investigate what motivates and influences individuals to alternative forms of pro-environmental behavioural change, I conducted qualitative interviews with 12 ‘knowers’—highly engaged pro-environmental individuals. I interpret their knowledges to empower various pro-environmental lifestyle behavioural changes and cultivate various forms of knowledge-based lifestyle activism. I subsequently conducted an online survey of environmental behaviours, completed by 222 participants that indicated most individuals rarely act in ways that go beyond the objective of government policy. I suggest that ‘knowers’ are strategically positioned to translate their subjective interpretations of alternative knowledges into broader and more familiar socio-cultural discourses. This may help to strengthen pro-environmental behaviours and make lifestyle activism more culturally appealing, increasing social and economic pressure on governments to develop stronger environmental policy aims.

Keywords: Environment, behaviour, consumption, knowledge, neoliberalism, policy.

1. Introduction

In contemporary Australian society, government policies commonly seek to mitigate environmental issues in a political economic context of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy proposing that ‘... human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey 2005, p. 2). This often means that policies are made with the assumption that individuals possess the ability to behave in pro-environmental ways as economically rational decision makers. Effectively, individuals are encouraged to solve environmental problems as citizen-consumers by using their purchasing power. By way of example, we are led to believe

that in consciously choosing an environmentally friendly product, we are doing our individual part for the environment, even if we actually change no other part of our lifestyle to be in any other way consciously environmental (Maniates 2001). So alongside the small and easily accessible lifestyle adjustments individuals often make to do their part for the environment, high levels of cheap air travel, private transport to and from work, and unsustainable behaviour while on holiday (Barr, Shaw and Coles 2011, Barr *et al.* 2010, Musti, Kortum and Kockelman 2011) are among the common outcomes of an individualization of responsibility for environmental problem-solving. Neoliberal environmental policies shape social participation in a way that leads individuals to believe that being eco-savvy at the supermarket justifies damaging patterns of consumption found elsewhere in their lifestyle. This is largely due to the way that such policies largely overlook considerations of justice and freedom, except in terms of the economic freedom consumers are granted in being able to choose between products and make decisions with their money (Ilmonen 2011). Lifestyles are thus cultivated in a context where environmental actions are not always socially or environmentally focused. Though the short-term goals of economic policies don't necessarily rule out environmental responsibilities, they are clearly marginalized by the importance of economic growth (Galbraith 1992). Environmental protection often becomes a secondary concern in policy-making, influencing our behaviours so that they most commonly fall short of effective social mobilization to action. Social discourse is subsequently dominated by a political economy that holds consumption-based policies as solutions to environmental issues. This means ecologists and environmental activists must argue that the natural world is more than simply a resource, whereas free market capitalists that pollute the environment are less pressured to explain why greater conservation efforts are not in the interests of social, environmental and economic sustainability (Dobson 2007).

1.1 Limitations of empowering the pro-environmental consumer

A great reliance on policy that aims to influence peoples' consumption habits—in a way that achieves pro-environmental outcomes—is problematic. The nature of consumption-based government policies means they often fail to address the inertia that largely occupies the role of the citizen-consumer (Jacobsen and Dulsrud 2007). Concepts of effective change often refer to the small behaviours that can contribute to reducing emissions without affecting an individual's quality of life, but which permit individuals to still exhibit some positive traits of sustainable lifestyles (Halady and Rao 2010). Such behaviour is prevalent because pro-environmental consumption has not yet become the norm in a broader societal sense. It remains unattainable for many people who simply can't afford to make more aspects of their lifestyles pro-environmental in nature. This means they are often more likely to recycle than to consume sustainably (Bartels and Hoogendam 2011). Such opportunities are advocated in government policies, but are still not available to all individuals.

1.2 Making consumption more cultural and more pro-environmental

Although consumption should not be the focus for bringing about meaningful change, it may still play a role in effectively changing behaviours. Sustainable consumption has been theoretically interpreted as a positive transformative instrument that socializes the citizen-consumer through governmental policy to mitigate environmental problems (Spaargaren 2003). The transformative power of citizen-consumer values can be persuasive if more broadly applied. Consumption is considered social and collective because it follows specific patterns—evident in the intelligibility of fashion or the cultural patterns of eating—and as

such is argued as a necessary component for change (Willis and Schor 2012). For example, a Plastic Bag Ban was implemented in South Australia in 2008 to reduce the impact of plastic bag waste on the environment. In the first six months of its implementation (October 2008-March 2009), in-store bag usage dropped from 18 per cent to 1 per cent (Ehrenburg Bass Institute for Marketing Science 2009). This broadly socialized consumer-based initiative has cultivated the use of re-usable bags as a socially accepted environmental behavioural practice in the state that continues to date. It is evident that consumption-based policies can be effective, but they must become more politicized and emphasize collective environmental action to steer the focus of policy in a more deeply environmental direction. In cultural settings where lifestyles are more thoroughly politicized, pro-environmental consumption becomes the norm. In this way, individual consumption behaviours are adapted and centred on socially and politically driven motivations to behave in pro-environmental ways. Where consumption socializes citizens to collective action, environmentally and socially driven behavioural change may help bridge the persisting value-action gap most individuals experience. It is therefore necessary to understand how knowledge can motivate lifestyle-based environmental behaviours, and also translate latent values into more comprehensively pro-environmental consumption-based behaviours.

In order to achieve outcomes that reflect pro-environmental behavioural change on a deeper level, we must consider how motivations to act environmentally—that are not based purely in consumption—can be more widely introduced to mainstream social discourse. Knowledge that contributes to politicizing consumption on broader social scales may work if deployed in cohesion with social movements and the non-economic solutions that are offered by alternative knowledges (Kim 2012, Micheletti and Stolle 2012, Willis and Schor 2012). The aim of this study is to investigate how we can change the meaning of participation so it more deeply reflects action on a socio-cultural level, rather than just in economic terms. This may help to counteract policies that embed consumer choice in environmental solutions, and pressure the institutions that sustain this type of policymaking (Maniates 2001). Investigating how new forms of knowledge can bridge commonly shared attitudes and values to create new forms of action is important to improve the environmental situation. But to my understanding, the impact of knowledge has not yet been investigated extensively or exclusively in the realm of pro-environmental behavioural change, except in terms of how neoliberal knowledge forms the citizen-consumer as the key agent for achieving goals of environmental wellbeing.

2. Theoretical concept

The overwhelming focus of pro-environmental behaviours and characterizations that punctuate the literature, such as ‘green consumerism’ (Wolf, Brown and Conway 2009), ‘ethical consumerism’ (Clarke *et al.* 2007, Jacobsen and Dulsrud 2007) and ‘sustainable lifestyles’ (Barr, Shaw and Gilg 2011) has meant that the development of knowledge amongst individuals acting in alternative sub-cultural ways has not been properly addressed. The role that knowledge plays in influencing individuals toward behavioural change opens the way to an exploration of possible alternatives to the neoliberal-focused policies of government. I suggest that individualistic pro-environmental behavioural change is the most common outcome of neoliberal environmental policies, and that there are more effective lifestyle-based actions to be found in the daily behaviours of individuals influenced by alternative forms of knowledge. Here, information may promote both individual and social pro-environmental behavioural change driven by more than just consumption. Therefore, I

ask, are there alternatives to consumer-focused behaviours that might cultivate more socio-cultural and lifestyle-based pro-environmental behavioural changes?

2.1 Alternative knowledge for pro-environmental behavioural change

Alternative formations of knowledge represent a major component in developing awareness of how consumer-based pro-environmental behavioural change can be minimized, and more socially and culturally driven participation in pro-environmental lifestyles maximized. Alternative knowledge may help to shed light on observed resistance to the neoliberal policy-based campaigns of government (Kenis and Mathijs 2012) that encourage environmentally friendly consumption but do not consider alternatives that can augment consumer-based behaviours. Moving forward, my study attempts to interpret and understand alternative motivations for behavioural change and what a pursuit of alternatives implies for how we craft a stronger culture of pro-environmental behavioural change in Australian society.

2.2 Knowledge as power for change

Before moving further, it is important to clarify the theoretical foundation of this research, which is influenced by Foucauldian theory. The late French ‘historian of ideas’, Michel Foucault (1978), theorized knowledge as a form of power. Knowledge as a discursive deployment of power exists in various interactions and exchanges between individuals and between individuals and institutions. In this way, government may exercise knowledge as power over a politically objectified civil society (Foucault 1978), and such knowledge becomes ‘truth’. I consider a series of knowledge—what I refer to as *knowledge subjectivities*—to emerge from the discursive effect of neoliberal environmental policies that cultivate subjects as individual citizen-consumers. But whether these individuals act on the basis of neoliberal knowledge, or alternative discursive effects, depends upon the individual’s interpretation of this knowledge, which is *subjective*. Thus, power is not exercised as an exterior mechanism—it is not possessed by any individual, class or group or as a centralized tool of the law, economy or state. The neoliberal shaping of truth encourages subjects to become environmentally concerned and responsible. Moreover, its aims are achieved in the way individuals discipline themselves into consumer-based behaviours (Weidner 2009), and more specifically, sustainable consumption behaviours. The development of these behaviours moves individuals to develop a sense of belonging and a shared understanding of imagined collective identities, though they may act only in individualistic ways. This sets in motion processes of influence that may lead individuals further away from active social participation (Bramston, Pretty and Zammit 2010, Subašić *et al.* 2012). But the subjective nature of power exercised in this way, also means the ‘truth effect’ (Foucault 1982) of neoliberal knowledge subjectivities is not resistant to contesting subjectivities. Power can exist beyond the state and outside of the dominant neoliberal paradigm, such as in local settings. These subjugated locales hold great importance for understanding the powerfully subjective nature of knowledge.

2.3 The importance of local and subjugated knowledges

Beyond the economic aims of neoliberal government policy, alternative discourses—such as those in environmental activist groups and grassroots political or social movements—may hold environmental protection as central. In this way, particular discursive positions—*alternative* knowledge subjectivities—are created as new formations of truth. These knowledge subjectivities may motivate individuals to behave in ways beyond the mainstream

consumption approach, and as such, their discursive effects are relatively marginalized by the truth of neoliberal discourse. But alternative knowledge subjectivities represent fertile ground for interpreting the production of alternative truths for alternative pro-environmental outcomes.

3. Methodology

To explore the possible alternative knowledge subjectivities that exist beyond the dominant neoliberal knowledge regime, I interviewed 12 highly engaged pro-environmental individuals, six female and six male, aged between 19 and 30 years. These individuals were identified by their demonstrated commitment to environmental behaviours in a variety of daily practices, including: environmentally ethical employment, climate change activism and deeply ecological lifestyles (that operate discursively in subjugated settings). It was hoped these alternative subjective positions would provide insight on discursive effects reminiscent of ‘knowers’. Knowers are those possessing subjective forms of knowledge that ‘... emerge through the experiences, practices and circumstances that are specific to [them]’ (Lang 2011, p. 88). Knowers are poised for the potential sharing of knowledge at collective levels. The importance of knowledges situated at the local level lies in the way that each individual ‘knower’ is able to construct different cultural and social contextual spaces in which their unique personal experiences, commitments and subjective creativities can be shared in a broader process of assembling knowledge (Leino and Peltomaa 2012, p. 161). The unlimited possibility of knowledge subjectivities created at this personal level provides a solid foundation for collaborative and participatory political action to occur on broader social scales. Unlocking this potential is a key component to building on the legitimacy of alternative knowledges found at local and individual levels.

I also conducted an online survey of the pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours of Australian citizens, facilitated by SurveyMonkey. Within this sample it could be expected that a range of knowledges would influence individuals to some form of pro-environmental behavioural change, but perhaps not to the extent of individuals leading dedicated pro-environmental lifestyles. Initially, a Facebook ‘event invitation’ was sent to approximately 500 Australian citizens and permanent residents on my ‘friends list’ containing relevant information as well as a link to the survey. These individuals were encouraged upon completion to ‘share’ the event with people from their own list of ‘friends’. Considering the limitations inherent to the method of survey delivery—via my personal Facebook account—it is important to note that potential remains for biases to exist in the sample. However, I expected that individuals not participating would ignore the invitation or decline to participate by indicating this on the event page in a way that is easily interpretable through social media. This would exclude them and increase the probability that a large portion of the sample was comprised of participants unknown to me as the survey went on to be shared throughout the extended networks of my contacts. Whilst this hasn’t significantly restricted the value of responses received about pro-environmental behaviour, it is an indication of participants’ potential deviation from a representative sample of Australians. This must be considered when interpreting the results.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Online survey

There were a total of 222 respondents to the online survey—110 were female, 110 were male and two were intersex. Respondents aged 18–29 accounted for 70 per cent of participants, 40 per cent of respondents reported middle-class status, while 23 per cent reported working-class and 14 per cent full-time students. University undergraduate degrees were held by 37 per cent; while almost 20 per cent had completed a post-graduate degree and 18.5 per cent held other tertiary qualifications. 51 per cent of respondents indicated Greens as their main voting preference, with 21 per cent Labor and 15 per cent Coalition. Overall, 97 per cent of individuals who completed the survey considered themselves to be concerned about the environment in some capacity. Commitment to making a difference in personal impact on the environment influenced 41 per cent of participants to behave in pro-environmental ways, with nearly 28 per cent influenced by knowledge of climate change. Almost 69 per cent of survey participants thought humans were part of a larger ecosystem, and the economic structure of society contributed to environmental problems. Over 70 per cent of survey respondents considered current patterns of consumption to be both unsustainable and damaging to the environment.

Interesting findings also emerged when a gender analysis was applied to the survey. In previous studies, women had been found to be more likely to consider environmentally concerns in decision making, whereas men favoured economic growth (Tranter 2011). This point was confirmed by the survey data which showed that 73 per cent of female respondents considered current patterns of consumption to be damaging to the environment, whereas only 67 per cent of males felt the same. The literature has also previously identified that females were more likely to think that climate change is caused by human activity (Leviston et al. 2011). Again, this was reflected in the survey data which found that 78 per cent of females thought human activity contributed to climate change, whereas only 69 per cent of males agreed. In addition, seven per cent of males thought humans were not the cause of climate change, compared to only one per cent of females; and three per cent of males considered climate change to be a myth, whereas only one per cent of females were dismissive of the human impact on climate.

Despite an overwhelming majority of survey participants indicating a concern for the environment, and an acceptance of the negative impact of human activity on climate change, 93 per cent of respondents reported individualistic actions as their most common form of pro-environmental behaviour. This was characterized most frequently by recycling, turning off lights when not in use, reusing items like grocery bags, and conserving water. Moreover, there was a high response rate from pro-environmental individuals appearing left-leaning on environmental issues, and even amongst the highly educated and socially aware, indicating that pro-environmental behavioural change appears to be deeply embedded in the individualistic consumption practices cultivated by neoliberal policies. In addition, a very low proportion of survey respondents described participation in any collective social action, with only ten per cent of the 18–29 age group and 23 per cent of the 30–44 age group indicating participation in forms of public protest and activism—with the majority of each age group participating in online actions or making donations to interest groups.

Behaviours amongst the majority of survey respondents reflect the impact of neoliberal policies and the institutions that sustain consumption practices, and a full 27 per cent of

survey respondents directly cited the influence of government and government policy on their environmental behaviour. The policy mechanisms employed by these institutions cultivate a response to environmental problems amongst the public that will ensure economic growth is a primary outcome. Despite the majority of participants indicating individual behavioural change as their most common form of pro-environmental behaviour, only 12 per cent considered it to be the most effective solution to environmental problems. In comparison, 70 per cent of respondents considered a mixture of individual action, collective action, government policies and private investment in renewable energy to be the most effective solution to environmental issues. However, the data makes clear that even amongst environmentally conscious and highly educated individuals; action outside of normal everyday consumption-based behaviours remains a remote occurrence. A perceived lack of accountability for environmental problems also exists amongst the majority of individuals surveyed. Individualistic pro-environmental behavioural change is enacted despite most people believing it has little or no impact on solving problems, and in-lieu of taking up collective forms of action to bring about structural change. These trends are seen even amongst individuals possessing levels of knowledge that are translatable into action that truly reflects their core beliefs, values and attitudes.

Although the group surveyed may not represent an accurate portrayal of wider Australian society, it can be inferred, that many individuals find themselves in a neoliberal political framework that limits behavioural options to forms of consumption-based pro-environmentalism. But it is possible that individuals could be empowered by alternative formations of knowledge found at subjugated levels of social and cultural interaction. Combining alternatives with existing environmental discourses presents an opportunity for developing new knowledge subjectivities that empower action free of the major barriers to pro-environmental behavioural change that are evident. At this juncture the role of ‘knowers’ behaving on the basis of alternative knowledge subjectivities takes focus.

4.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with climate change activists, ethical business employees, consumers and campaigners, as well as individuals with ecologically based lifestyles. These interviews revealed a variety of perspectives on the concept of knowledge as power. The position of individuals with ‘deep ecology’ convictions are particularly unique, as they possess deeper nature-based lifestyles (than other interviewees) by embodying a concern for the Earth (and its ecosystems) that extends beyond the pollution and resource depletion concerns of typical environmentalists (Dobson 2007). They described holistic and synergistic approaches to resource and energy use (see *Text boxes 1* and *2* below for examples). However, interviews demonstrated that even though some participants portrayed consumer-based narratives, their alternative knowledge subjectivities were not entirely dissimilar to those of deep ecologists. In fact, across the spectrum of pro-environmental individuals interviewed, most demonstrated that elements of their lifestyles were characterized by alternative knowledge subjectivities like ‘permaculture’ (King 2008), ‘seed tribes’ (Purdue 2000); ‘community gardens’ (Holland 2004); ‘ecovillages’ (Cooks, L 2009); and ‘dumpster diving’ (Edwards and Mercer 2007). These were alternative lifestyles that encapsulated the main alternative knowledge subjectivities of deeply ecological individuals. Interviewees from contrasting environmental backgrounds highlighted their participation in environmental initiatives like community gardens, cultural and environmental knowledge sharing amongst family and social groups, and even in employment settings with a strong emphasis on environmental responsibility (see *Text boxes 3, 4* and *5* below for examples). It is evident that

behaviours are simply enacted within the socio-cultural capacities of each individual. Varying social conditions mean they are applied and disseminated differently (Campbell and Fonow 2009), which often means at more culturally visible levels. These subjectivities exist in parallel and are complementary to those of individuals portraying deeper ecological lifestyles. Directing alternative knowledges through a broader range of social conditions beyond local subjugated knowledges is a strategy for building alternative pro-environmental behaviours at both individual and collective levels. These and other alternative subjectivities often build resilience and resistance to the mechanisms of neoliberal market-based systems by promoting genuine participation, inclusion, resource mobilization and the sharing of knowledge (King 2008).

‘ ... behaving in a sustainable way that isn’t going to affect your own land base from being able to keep reproducing itself; living in a way that allows future generations to enjoy the same quality of life that we’ve had; and living simply so that others can simply live.’

Permaculturalist, 28, male

Text box 1: A deep ecologist’s definition of leading a pro-environmental lifestyle.

‘ ... growing our own food, getting our own eggs, recycling obviously anything we can... looking at everything as a resource and not rubbish that can be thrown away; and being a bit more conscious when we spend money and what we spend money on.’

Permaculturalist, 27, female

Text box 2: A deep ecologist’s description of their typical pro-environmental behaviours.

‘I believe that humans are a part of this planet ... We’ve become the dominant species, but we’re still a part of the planet and therefore we should be stewards of the environment rather than, I guess, managers of the environment.’

Fair Trade campaigner, 22, female

Text box 3: Example of how an interviewee is influenced by more than just pro-environmental behavioural changes based in consumption patterns.

‘We’ve hosted a community vegetable garden for quite a number of years... it did create, for quite a number of years, quite a strong community.’

Activist, 19, male

Text box 4: Example of a social movement activist’s participation in behaviours at the local level based on alternative knowledges subjectivities.

‘I think working in such a strong environmental and ethical company has really impacted a lot on my life, and I think in a way I’ve never actually thought of before. Probably my father as well, he’s part of the Greens and he was an environmental consultant... Also peers around me and discussion groups.’

Pro-environmental company employee, 23, female

Text box 5: An interviewee’s description of various socio-cultural motivations to pro-environmental behaviour.

The radical political position of deep ecologists often places them on the fringe of socio-cultural dynamics. But as interviews revealed, their principles are not necessarily always marginalized to the fringes of social discourse, and, in fact, thrive amongst the more visible and structured practices of activists and environmentally-conscious consumers. The common behaviours of activists, such as protests and petitions, are familiar and institutionalized (Buechler 2000). They inhabit the neoliberal political landscape and primarily contest policy-making. Individual pro-environmental consumers also function within this paradigm, basing their actions on consumption choices. The organizational and structural focus of these behaviours, positions them within broader mainstream socio-cultural dynamics. Indeed, what the interview process made apparent was that the behavioural change of individual activists operating in social movements, and other pro-environmental individuals behaving within the consumption framework, are still influenced by, or related to, the cultural practices found at subjugated levels. Furthermore, the broader application of subjugated and localized alternatives is already occurring and holds potential for influencing pro-environmental behavioural change throughout wider society, where knowers are positioned to make alternatives visible throughout a variety of social settings (see *Text box 6* and *7* below).

‘ ... education awareness is a big way to increase collective action ... and then by showing how an action can be made to make something more environmental, whether that’s an individual action that collective people can do, or whether it’s an action that needs to be taken at a top level that individuals as a collective need to influence that change.’

Fair Trade campaigner, 22, female

Text box 6: Example of how the position of knowers can make alternatives more socially visible.

‘... by living a lifestyle of lifestyle activism, making it look attractive to other people.’

Permaculturalist, 28, male

Text box 7: How knowers can set examples by making lifestyle change more appealing to broader communities.

4.3 Alternative knowledge productions for socio-cultural change

Despite the cultural barriers faced by more traditional forms of pro-environmental behavioural change, strong commonalities exist between the varieties of subjective positions depicted by all interviewees. Aspects of ecological awareness and holistic lifestyle choices amongst interviewees are not limited to only the views of permaculturalists or individuals participating in environmental cooperatives. Eco-centric attitudes are apparent in other lifestyles. Even those campaigning or working largely on the basis of pro-environmental consumption principles share similar notions in the knowledge that informs their decision-making. These individuals exhibit actions based in part, on alternative subjectivities, and these knowledges represent what is becoming a new emphasis on local responses to ecological and economic threats (Barr and Wright 2012). Pro-environmental individuals active in more visible socio-cultural locales—whether consumption-based, movement-based, in highly public/celebrity positions or otherwise—are strategically positioned to translate subjugated knowledges into mainstream behavioural dynamics. As catalysts for deeper pro-environmental behavioural change, these knowers can influence individuals to deeper pro-environmental behaviours. This may create ground for knowledge of how collective action occurs more frequently alongside consumption-based behaviours (or create impetus for such collective action to occur) and lead to deeper ecological behaviours.

As knowers of alternatives, social movement activists are well placed to connect deeper ecological perspectives to more accessible and well-established channels of action. This could make deeper environmental behaviours compatible with the forms of pro-environmental behavioural change more familiar or accessible to wider communities, where not all aspects of life can be easily politicized on a broad scale. Beginning with informing small actions through alternatives means other aspects of lifestyles become more accessible for behavioural change (Kim 2012). Such a strategy may make it possible to avoid the ramifications of drastic lifestyle adjustments, making deeper ecological change more

appealing in the process. Society's fragmentation into multiple subjective positions makes it unwise to advocate a complete move away from consumption. Because contemporary society is oriented around consumerism, solutions to achieving sustainable lifestyle practices lie in a stronger emphasis on value systems from outside of the modern capitalist marketplace that reflect deeper ecological understanding and awareness (Holt 2012). These values can be conveyed through alternative knowledges existing at local levels, and gradually applied to broader communities and modes of consumption. The knowers of alternative subjectivities are positioned to become archetypical examples, by embodying lifestyle activism as an everyday practice and aiming to make it look attractive to other people throughout society. Activists and pro-environmental consumers are positioned to merge their perspectives with these notions, and further utilize them to influence behaviour in broader social spheres. The cultural focus that develops from such holistic lifestyles adds a deeper dimension to the organizational and structural focuses of movements and actions occupying the more visible levels of environmental engagement.

Conclusion

Pro-environmental individuals across the spectrum of high pro-environmental engagement are empowered by multiple subjectivities that include aspects of subjugated knowledges. This permits them to act in ways that reflect deeper ecological values in both individual and collective capacities. But the consumption basis of neoliberal policy encourages a social form of action, primarily in, an individual consumer capacity, which is evident in the most common behaviours that characterize actions in the broader sample group. Consumption is, however, also social and collective. People share understandings of, motivations for and conduct of consumption, meaning it inhabits culture (Willis and Schor 2012). A bottom-up approach that introduces alternative knowledge subjectivities into the discourse of everyday consumption may shift its patterns to become more thoroughly pro-environmental. Channelling new alternative discourses to broader social settings can build action from diffuse materialistic pro-environmental behaviours into holistic pro-environmental behavioural changes.

Are the problems faced by consumption together with the resultant environmental changes too entrenched and too complicated to reverse? The dominant neoliberal political economy's shaping of truth gives loudest voice to discursive effects that suppress the potential for many individuals to become active subjects for greater pro-environmental change. With knowledge, we can create alternative positions that challenge mainstream assumptions about participation, and reinvigorate social citizenship to mean more than just taking greater responsibility for what we place in our shopping cart. There is value in furthering investigations into how the cultural connections, and overlaps, between the lifestyles of knowers in various settings, can further interact to produce new discursive effects. These may encourage more actively pro-environmental citizenship in social settings that are harder to reach on a political level. Observations suggest that attitudes and values are shared amongst engaged pro-environmental individuals and that their actions are simply deployed in different capacities and in different social dynamics relevant to their subjective positions. This means the nature-based deep ecologist—readily dismissed as a 'hippie'—has much in common with the inner-city bike-riding 'hipster' aiming to lessen their negative impact on the environment by changing lifestyle behaviours where possible. Key to bridging the perceived gap between different socio-cultural settings such as these is the role of knowers of alternatives. Their subjective positions can make others aware of how lifestyle-based behavioural change can be

more reflective of environmental aims, and can make these behavioural changes look appealing by leading from example. Such processes are already taking shape as communities plan sustainable futures at a local cultural level through collaborative and deliberative decision-making processes. These entail the sharing of knowledge for developing community-based resilience to neoliberal political tactics and enables knowers to build cultural interest in community gardens, co-ops, ecovillages and local currencies (Cooks 2009, Merritt and Stubbs 2012, Pacione 1997, Seyfang 2004). The socio-cultural foundations of these alternatives means they produce broad social and environmental benefits (Hobson and Niemeyer 2011). Therefore, developing more knowledge-intensive communities across diverse socio-cultural settings, to combat environmental problems, can be fruitful where individuals share their expertise in alternative knowledges to produce wider social empowerment and cultivate lifestyle activism.

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