CONNECTING WITH THE GLOBAL GARMENT INDUSTRY:
CAN ETHICAL CONSUMPTION PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY?

by

Rachel Alexander

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Rachel Alexander (2010)
CONNECTING WITH THE GLOBAL GARMENT INDUSTRY:
CAN ETHICAL CONSUMPTION PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY?

Master of Arts 2010

Rachel Alexander

Adult Education and Counselling Psychology

University of Toronto

Abstract

In the globalized garment industry (GGI) most clothing is involved in complex networks that exploit both people and the environment. This system is unsustainable yet supported by Canadian consumers, who have become disconnected from their clothing’s production and disposal processes as a result of the development of increasingly complex social and technological systems since the Industrial Revolution. Canadians currently learn about the industry from public portrayals in which the dominant messages are designed by corporations promoting consumption. Nevertheless, growing numbers of consumers are realizing that this system is unsustainable and attempting to take action. This study uses methods based on institutional ethnography to explore the challenges faced by Canadians trying to engage in ethical consumption. Promoting sustainability is seen as requiring broad structural change, which can be supported by individual Canadians seeking to learn about the industry and working with its global stakeholders to build the civil commons.
Acknowledgements

As the long process of writing this thesis has come to an end, I would like to express my appreciation to those who have helped me along the way. I am grateful to Kate Bowers and Jiayi Zhou for reading preliminary drafts, asking challenging questions and helping me to shape my ideas. Mary Willcox’s editing and suggestions were instrumental in completing the finishing touches. I would like to thank Roxana Ng for encouraging me to write a thesis and providing invaluable guidance throughout the process. I would also like to thank Jennifer Sumner for her constructive advice and for creating the model which I use to assess the basis of sustainability in this work. I owe my deepest gratitude to my mother, Shirley Ander, who has spent countless hours reading and discussing my work and giving me feedback as I progressed. Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the volunteers who participated in this study by sharing their personal experiences to help create a picture of how Canadians experience the global garment industry.
# Table of Contents

Foreword ............................................................................................................................. x
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... xii
Chapter One: Research Design and Theoretical Framework .............................................. 1
   Perspective and Purpose ................................................................................................. 1
       Fashion ........................................................................................................................ 1
       Ecosocialism / Ecofeminism ....................................................................................... 2
       Sustainability ............................................................................................................. 4
       Radical research ........................................................................................................ 8
   Summary of the Problem .............................................................................................. 11
Methodology ..................................................................................................................... 12
   Institutional Ethnography as a Method of Inquiry .................................................... 13
   Literature Review ...................................................................................................... 18
   Working with Informants ........................................................................................ 19
       Interviews ............................................................................................................. 21
       Research participants ........................................................................................... 24
Further Research and Analysis ....................................................................................... 27
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 28

Chapter Two: The Nature of Canada’s Role in the Global Garment Industry ................. 29
   Canada’s Early Garment Industries (Pre-19th Century) ............................................ 30
   Canada’s Industrial Revolution (19th Century) ........................................................ 31
       Technological Developments ............................................................................... 33
       Changing Social Relations and Fragmentation .................................................... 35
       The Development of Consumer Culture ............................................................... 39
   Canada’s Industrialized Garment Industry (Early 20th Century) ............................. 41
       Industry Restructuring and Worker Resistance .................................................... 42
       Consumer-Worker Collaboration ........................................................................ 45
       Labour Laws ........................................................................................................... 47
   The Depression (1930s) ............................................................................................ 48
       Changing Government Role .................................................................................. 48
       Antichain Protests ................................................................................................. 50
   The Rise of the Middle Class (Mid-20th Century) ...................................................... 50
       The Age of Synthetics ........................................................................................... 51
       Production and Underlying Tensions .................................................................... 52
   The Growth of Neoliberalism and Trade Liberalization (Late 20th Century) .......... 53
Discount Stores ................................................................. 54
Synthetic Fabrics Rise to Dominance ......................................................... 56
The Globalized Garment Industry and Post-Fordist Production ......................... 57
Worker Organizing in the Late 20th Century ..................................................... 59
Opening Truly Global Markets (End of the 20th Century and Early 21st Century) ...... 63
Technological Developments .............................................................................. 65
International Trade and Decreased Government Protection ................................. 66
Fast Fashion and Corporate Control ..................................................................... 68
Sweatshop-Free and Environmentally Friendly Clothing ......................................... 69
Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 70
Chapter Three: Public Portrayals and the Disconnect between Canadians and the GGI .. 72
Corporate Public Portrayals .................................................................................. 73
Mass Media ............................................................................................................ 74
Scandals in the media .......................................................................................... 76
Fashion and image in news and advertising ......................................................... 79
Retail Setting .......................................................................................................... 81
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Codes of Conduct .................. 82
Branding .................................................................................................................... 86
Sweatshop-Free marketing ..................................................................................... 87
“Green” clothing .................................................................................................... 88
Formal Education .................................................................................................... 90
Sewing Classes ....................................................................................................... 91
Environmental Education ....................................................................................... 92
Providing Education that Promotes Awareness of Systemic Injustice ....................... 92
Governmental Public Portrayals .............................................................................. 93
The American Response to Public Concern with Sweatshops ................................. 93
The Canadian Government’s Response ................................................................... 96
Labels ....................................................................................................................... 97
Nongovernmental Organizations and Activist Actions .............................................. 99
Unions ..................................................................................................................... 99
Student Activists .................................................................................................... 100
Canadian NGOs ..................................................................................................... 101
Ethical Labelling Initiatives .................................................................................... 102
Publications ............................................................................................................ 104
Victims .................................................................................................................... 105
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Sustainable Garment Industry</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Can Ethical Consumption Create Sustainable Change?</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Consumption and Sustainability</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing Life Values</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary ethics and economic democracy</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical branding to meet consumer demand</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption and the environment</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating Change that Does Not Reproduce Hegemonic Power Structures</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-Culture</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power and hierarchy</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical consumption as a new social movement (NSM)</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging dialogue</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication between corporations and consumers</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Canadians in Promoting a Sustainable Garment Industry</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning for Sustainability</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking Down Barriers and Building Global Connections</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production facilities</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative and policy actions</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots organizing</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1. Sumner’s Theoretical Framework (2007) 6

Figure 2. Summary information about the participants. 25

Figure 3. Instances of the word “sweatshop” and “sweat shop” in the Globe and Mail from 1844 to November 2009 ("The Globe and Mail: Canada's Heritage from 1844," 2002; ProQuest," 2009) 76
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster ................................................................. 211
Appendix B: Guiding Topics for Group Interviews ...................................... 212
Appendix C: Questions for Individual Interviews ........................................ 213
Foreword

As a teenager in the mid-1990s, when the Kathy Lee Gifford scandal\(^1\) was in the public spotlight, I thought that it was an isolated incident and was shocked. After that, I heard about various companies that were publicly associated with sweatshops and I passed judgements on those companies. This judgement was mainly expressed by not buying clothing with labels of these “tainted” brands. I assumed that other companies were following some sort of regulated standards and that these cases were exceptions.

While in a university environment, I became more aware of global issues and began to look at the world more critically. After finishing my Bachelor degree in fashion design, I worked in the garment industry for two years, with companies that used both international and local production. During these experiences, I gained insight into how global production systems actually function. I became conscious of the complexity of production chains and the processes by which networks of relations promote the continuation of the injustice which characterizes the current system. Recognizing the pervasive nature of exploitative systems made me realize that my previous efforts at ethical consumption were misinformed.

Learning about the industry from the inside showed me a perspective that most Canadians do not see. For this thesis I chose to look at how Canadians who do not work in the garment industry interact with it as consumers. In conducting this research I sought to understand the experiences of Canadians who are attempting to bridge the disconnection created by the global divisions between production, use and disposal of garments and are forming a growing population of individuals attempting to be ethical consumers.

While I no longer work in the garment industry, I have remained concerned with its global effects. I consider myself as someone who consciously seeks to buy garments which meet my ethical standards and as such, I am a member of the group that I worked with in this study. I have many similar experiences to the ones shared in this thesis but I have kept the examples focused on those of the participants. As Charmaz and Mitchell suggest for the social researcher, I will seek to “[remain] in the background and [become]\(^1\) To read a description of this issue, see page 77.
embedded in the narrative rather than acting in the scenes” (as quoted in Naples, 2003, p. 32).

Millions of people around the world, most of whom are women, work in the garment industry in a wide range of occupations. All of the individuals working in this industry are constrained by its institutional systems. Although I chose to leave the garment industry, I admire those who carry on despite its difficult jobs with long hours and often low pay. I enjoy fashion and think that it plays an important role in a vibrant and healthy society. Through the joint efforts of the many people who are working to improve this industry, I hope that in the future all Canadians will be able to participate in and promote a sustainable global garment industry.
Introduction

As economic globalization becomes a progressively more powerful force, the impacts of global garment production and disposal have become increasingly detrimental to the health of our planet and its people. This industry is plagued with problems from cases such as Kil-Soo Lee keeping garment workers locked in a factory compound in American Samoa while withholding food and authorizing violent treatment (Free the Slaves & The Human Rights Center of the University of California, 2005); to factories dumping dye into waterways causing contamination with lead, mercury, cadmium, and selenium that can damage crops and lead to soil infertility (Glausiusz, 2008).

Unfortunately, garments sold in Canada are often produced under conditions that do not meet Canadian labour or environmental standards. After their use, the majority of these garments are discarded to landfills or donated to organizations that export used clothing to sell in developing countries, which in turn degrades local garment industries. As consumers living in Canada, we contribute consciously or unconsciously to the continued existence of an unsustainable global garment industry (GGI). However, our integral role in the complex networks of unsustainable global systems is becoming a problem for many Canadians.

The purpose of this study is to explore the networks of relations which shape the GGI, focusing on the challenges faced by Canadian consumers who try to be ethical with their consumption. The GGI will be examined from an ecosocialist/ecofeminist perspective by emphasizing the connections between the exploitation of the industry’s mostly female workers and the environment. The current GGI will be shown to be unsustainable and the need for systemic change will be stressed.

Canadian society will be viewed as part of a hegemonic consumer culture, in which powerful institutions shape the learning of Canadians by mediating the information presented to the public. Through this system commodities are idealized and detached from the consequences of their existence from production to use to disposal, leading to situations where garments in stores are virtually indistinguishable based on their methods of production and potential methods of disposal. For consumers who do not wish to be
part of this system, the onus is on them to learn and take action. In this thesis, I will be looking at some of the ways in which Canadians can attempt to confront this challenge.

In the title of this thesis I use the word “connection”. Canadians are currently disconnected from the GGI. Social and technological developments have facilitated the creation of a complex and globally distributed industry, largely separating producers and production from consumers and consumption, with all the people and processes distinct from disposal. Rebuilding connections between garments with the people and environmental processes involved in the items’ lifecycles is crucial to the process of promoting a sustainable garment industry.

Although the dominant public portrayals of the GGI promoted by corporate interests minimize the connection between consumers and the production and disposal of their products, some consumers are looking beyond corporate messages. A significant proportion of consumers in several studies have indicated that they are willing to pay more for ethically made goods (Hertel, Scruggs, & Heidkamp, 2007), yet the actual purchases of consumers do not reflect these results. It has been estimated that ethically produced goods often make up less than 1% of the market share across a variety of industries (Pelsmacker, Janssens, & Mielants, 2005). While this market is growing in some sectors such as Fair Trade Certified products, which have had a remarkable growth rate in Canada\(^2\), actual purchasing levels are significantly lower than the apparent levels of consumer preference. This study aims to uncover and understand the challenges faced by individuals who would like to purchase garments that meet their ethical standards. I hope that my research will add to the growing body of knowledge related to ethical consumption and the garment industry by providing insight into the experiences of individuals attempting to engage in ethical consumption and the role of ethical consumption in systemic reform. Furthermore, I will discuss the potential for ethical consumption to promote sustainable change and the broader actions that individuals can take to promote a sustainable GGI.

\(^2\) From 1997 to 2008, the number of TransFair Canada Operators has increased from 5 to 264. Additionally, since the introduction of Fair Trade Certified cotton to the Canadian market in 2006, annual t-shirt sales have increased from 330 to 22,657 in 2008 ("TransFair Canada," 2009).
While I have conducted this study in a metropolitan Canadian city, many of the situations described are applicable in other areas. As our world becomes globalized, experiences are becoming more universal; that is not to say that the world is becoming homogenized. Cornwell and Drennen (2004) write about the dual forces of globalization and fragmentation. Forces of globalization include transnational organizations, mass media, the Internet, and the World Trade Organization, which interact with forces of fragmentation including regionalization, grassroots initiatives, regional trade blocks, and some activist groups. These competing forces are creating a world where challenges are global and complex based on both local and global foundations. Despite the forces leading to fragmentation, a significant effect of growing globalization is the spread of consumer culture. Ger and Belk outline four pressures towards the creation of a global consumer culture,

(1) the proliferation of transnational corporations that have built up enormous power to influence the lives of consumers; (2) the rise of global capitalism that transpired with the demise of Communism in 1989; (3) the widespread aspiration for material possessions, or “globalized consumption ethic,” as the availability and production of goods increase; and (4) the homogenization of global consumption. (as cited in Cornwell & Drennan, 2004, p. 110)

Through these processes consumer culture is becoming a leading element in communities all over the world. Stretching across the globe, the GGI affects the earth and its people. From a farmer growing cotton to a teenager buying the latest style of jeans, billions of people interact with this industry every day. Consequently, learning about the GGI is important for everyone in our global community.

This study will outline changes in the GGI since the Industrial Revolution and examine systems and events which have separated consumers from production and disposal processes. The role that public portrayals of the GGI play in reproducing the current system of garment consumption and instigating consumer responses is examined with the purposes of understanding consumers' actions, deriving methods for increasing individual conscientization of our roles in the currently flawed system and facilitating actions which could promote change.
Using strategies based in institutional ethnography, I will examine challenges faced by consumers seeking to find and promote an alternative system. In attempting to answer a component of the question, “why are more clothes not passing through ethical channels?”, I will look at the ruling relations that organize Canadians’ lives, guided by Smith’s (2005) conception of the coordination of the social. While institutional ethnographic studies usually focus on marginalized peoples (Campbell & Gregor, 2002), this study will take the standpoint of Canadian consumers who, by virtue of living in a global capitalist system, participate in socially and environmentally exploitative processes. Following the process of institutional ethnography, which focuses on one area of the social world, my problematic will be “How do Canadians who would like to be ethical consumers interact with the global garment market?”

The lived experiences of self-identified ethical consumers will be explored to better understand how systemic structures and socialization have shaped their interactions. As part of this thesis, I worked with six informants who shared their experiences in attempting to engage in ethical consumption. These experiences provide insight into problems with current institutional systems, which limit the ability of many Canadians to engage in consumption which they consider ethical. While questioning the structure of the current system, this thesis will suggest ways to decrease potential barriers for Canadians who wish to play a part in reforming the garment industry. The limited role of consumption based actions in creating systemic change will also be explored, showing the need for increased learning, community building and global cooperation to tackle this global challenge.

This thesis will problematize current institutional structures, while focusing on a vision of a more sustainable garment industry. I will begin by explaining the design of this research project in Chapter One. This chapter will include a description of the methods used and a brief discussion of the research traditions which have shaped this project. Additionally, the problems that I have examined will be elaborated upon to provide a framework of reference for the rest of this thesis.

Chapter Two will provide a historical description of how the growth of the globalized capitalist model, based on the division of production and consumption, has led
to a garment industry that has increasingly relied on commodity chains involving long and complex technological and social processes. This chapter will show how these processes have distanced consumers from the production and disposal conditions of their own garments. Major developments with both social and environmental impacts will be discussed beginning with the Industrial Revolution.

Chapter Three will discuss how public portrayals of the garment industry shape the learning of consumers. The nature of the communication will be discussed along with the content of the messages. The dominant communicators in the messages examined are corporations but other sources of information will be looked at as well.

Chapter Four will depict the outcome of the historical processes described in Chapters Two and Three. In this depiction, the unsustainable nature of the GGI will be made clear. By examining the harmful impacts of the GGI the need for Canadians to take action will become apparent.

Many Canadians actively object to current industry norms and Chapter Five will discuss the experiences of Canadians who are expressing their objections by attempting to engage in consumption which meets their ethical requirements. Challenges that these Canadians experience will be explored to further understand how systemic structures shape the choices that can be made by consumers. Also, to understand what these individuals are trying to achieve with their actions, the chapter will discuss the participants’ visions of an ethical garment industry.

As reforming the garment industry is a monumental challenge, finding paths to change is a difficult process. Chapter Six will assess the potential of relying on ethical consumption as a catalyst for change. The limited effectiveness of individual consumer actions will be examined in the face of the need to reform the complex systems which shape the GGI. This chapter will also synthesize the research findings and provide recommendations for actions Canadians can take to create a stronger challenge to current processes and promote the creation of a sustainable system.
Chapter One:
Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The global garment industry (GGI) is founded on unsustainable systems. This study was designed to explore the systems which enable and perpetuate the current structure of the GGI and the role that Canadian consumers can play in challenging these systems. To provide a context for the rest of this thesis, this chapter will outline my research process. I will explain my perspective and the research traditions that I have drawn upon in designing this study. Based on this theoretical backdrop, I will depict the problem that I have addressed and then describe the methods I used to conduct the research.

Perspective and Purpose

Fashion

For thousands of years and throughout various cultures, humans have designed and created garments for protection from the elements, to signify social standing, as a form of communication (Barnard, 2002), for religious purposes and for personal adornment. While the current GGI is based on unsustainable processes, which I discuss in this study, I believe that fashion has important roles to play in modern Canadian society. Despite its potential for creating societal benefits, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, fashion has a dual nature.

From one side, the profile looks attractive and seductive. Newsagents’ shelves groan under the weight of style and fashion magazines, which offer glossy advice . . . From the other side, however, the profile looks much less attractive and although still seductive, it is so in quite a different sense. The glamorous stores, television and magazine ads are tarnished by the knowledge that Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Nike and the rest depend upon exploiting sweated child labour in developing countries. (Barnard, 2002, pp. 1-2)

Although the current system of apparel and textile production, which relies on mass production exploiting both people and the environment, renders many garments as unsustainable industrial products, fashion design has the potential to be wearable art benefiting both the producer and consumer. While this study questions the current
structure of the clothing and textile industries, fashion is a field that has the potential to provide fulfilling jobs to people in the industry and a variety of services to everyone else.

**Ecosocialism / Ecofeminism**

My perspectives of the GGI are based on an understanding that it exists within global networks of relations which limit the rights of people and are destructive towards the environment. The institutions that shape this global industry maintain unsustainable systems while allowing companies to extract capital. Most of the people who work in the garment industry are women, who are often underpaid and overworked. Additionally, the processes that are used to produce textiles and garments often have harmful effects on the environment through both extraction and pollution. These areas of concern are addressed by the complementary theories of ecosocialism and ecofeminism.

Ecosocialism may be defined as a “mode of production in which freely associated labour chooses ecocentric values to heal the earth and make it flourish once again” (Kovel, 2007, p. 24). Many of the decisions made in the current GGI focus on financial objectives without considering the well-being of the people involved or the natural environment. An ecosocialist critique of the capitalist model entails a shift from defining wealth based on production for exchange to production for use (Kovel, 2007).

Ecosocialism’s most radical demand is precisely that restoration of nature’s integrity requires the empowerment of labour. Although Ecosocialism firmly supports appropriate technologies and direct intervention at sites of ecological degradation, primary focus is on the ways human beings are shaped to live within nature and transform nature through labour. (Kovel, 2007, p. 24)

To realize this objective, the GGI must be recreated. Garments should no longer be created by underpaid labourers using environmentally damaging processes for the profit of capital interests, but should be made by skilled artisans, earning liveable incomes, who create items for members of their communities, using environmentally friendly materials and processes focusing on quality over quantity. A problem exhibited by First Epoch socialism was that it sought to redistribute the products of industrial production but did not challenge the process of industrial production (Kovel, 2007). Ecosocialism broadens this critique and calls into question the environmental consequences of industrialization.
William Morris, who has been considered one of the world’s first ecosocialist thinkers, believed that art, beauty and nature are an important part of human life and that capitalist production systems minimize the ability of the labouring classes to enjoy aesthetic pleasures (Macdonald, 2004). As Morris (2004) noted more than a century ago in 1884,

The wonderful machines which in the hands of just and foreseeing men would have been used to minimize repulsive labour and to give pleasure—or in other words added life—to the human race, have been so used on the contrary that they have driven all men into mere frantic haste and hurry, thereby destroying pleasure, that is life, on all hands: they have instead of lightening the labour of the workmen, intensified it, and thereby added more weariness yet to the burden which the poor have to carry. (p. 2)

Morris wrote that the capitalist

aims primarily at producing, by means of the labour he has stolen from others, not goods but profits, that is, the “wealth” that is produced over and above the livelihood of his workmen, and the wear and tear of his machinery. (as qtd in Macdonald, 2004, p. 297)

The current garment industry relies on people working all over the world in tedious repetitive jobs using processes that are environmentally damaging. Morris said that people’s work should “earn for [them] all due necessaries of mind and body”. He proposed three “necessaries for a good citizen”:

honourable and fitting work which . . . must be worth doing and pleasant to do; . . . decency of surroundings, including (a) good lodging, (b) ample space, (c) general order and beauty; . . . [and] leisure . . . all [people] must work for some portion of the day . . . [but] they have a positive right to claim a respite from that work: the leisure they have right to claim, must be ample enough to allow them full rest of mind and body; a [person] must have time for serious individual thought, for imagination – for dreaming even. (Morris, 2004, p. 17)

The GGI does not provide these “necessaries” for those who work in the industry, which contributes to its unsustainability.

While ecosocialism focuses on the effects of the current system on class relations and the environment, ecofeminism broadens this critique to look at how in the current system hierarchical power structures affect all relationships with emphasis on those that are gender-based. Ecofeminist theory draws connections between processes which lead to
humans exploiting the environment with processes that promote the exploitation of women (Molyneux & Steinberg, 1995). Both forces are seen as based on a paradigm that functions through dominant groups subordinating others. This study looks at these relationships as they are exhibited in the global garment industry.

Another contribution that ecofeminist theory has had in this study is the way that it combines the liberal focus on individual agency with a leftist critical perspective (Birkeland, 1993). From this point of view, individuals living in unjust systems are seen as subjects that can potentially promote change. In this thesis I explore the lived experiences of individuals trying to challenge current norms that exploit both people and the environment.

Both ecosocialism and ecofeminism see the capitalist system as harmful to the natural environment (Birkeland, 1993; Kovel, 2005, 2007; Macdonald, 2004; Mellor, 2006). Joel Kovel (2005) writes about the intersection of ecofeminism and ecosocialism.

As ecofeminism requires a socialist development if it is to break free of the fetters binding bourgeois feminism, then this means that it needs to take place as an ecosocialism, which avoids the errors of first-epoch socialism . . . an ecosocialist outcome needs to also be ecofeminist, for this is predicated on overcoming the estrangement between gender and nature, freeing both in the process. Thus the two mutually recognize each other. (p. 6)

These complementary perspectives shape how I have looked at the garment industry and the depictions presented in this thesis.

**Sustainability**

A fundamental aspect of an ecosocialist/ecofeminist approach is seeking to develop a sustainable society. According to Shearman (1990), “An important problem that currently haunts some students of sustainability is in determining exactly what is meant by the term. Hence, if sustainability eludes definition, then how can it serve as a basis for formulating appropriate . . . policy?” (p. 1). A concrete definition of sustainability can help in understanding the current system and developing ways to move forward.
For the last 200 years the world has generally experienced rapid economic and technological growth. While this process has led many to believe in the idea of unlimited growth, the 1972 report *Limits to Growth* challenged this notion. By using new computer modelling technologies to predict fixed limits to growth based on industrial output, resource depletion, pollution, food production and population growth, this report brought environmental issues to the public eye but did not generate broad public concern (Sumner, 2007). It was not until the publication of *Our Common Future*, popularly known as the Brundtland Report, written by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 that sustainability really became a focal point of public attention (Sumner, 2007). The perspective in the Brundtland Report appealed to economically powerful elites because it promoted a vision of sustainable development that involves increased economic growth that does not degrade the environment. In the years since the publication of the Brundtland Report, the world has experienced growing inequality and continued environmental degradation.

Since the publication of the *Limits to Growth* and the Brundtland Report, many authors have used different definitions of sustainability. The development and choice of a meaning for this word is a political process (Carter, 2007, p. 213). Kovel (2007) writes about an ecosocialist future involving a shift from focusing on commodities to focusing on developing human ecosystems. For sustainability all elements of this human ecosystem must work together.

Sumner (2007) provides a theoretical framework which can be used to measure the building blocks of sustainability – life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue. Her work does not just look at the environment but provides a broader definition of sustainability. She proposes that sustainability should involve “a set of structures and processes that build the civil commons” (p. 93), with the civil commons defined as “any cooperative human construct that enables the access of all members of a community to life goods” (McMurtry as qtd in Sumner, 2007, p. 12).

I will look at the GGI as it fits into Sumner's theoretical framework (see Figure 1), consisting of three criteria which question whether a system promotes money values or life values; hegemony or counter-hegemony; and one-way communication or dialogue.
This framework can be used to analyse whether a system has the foundation for sustainability. This can be measured by rating a concept according to where it fits in between each scale, with sustainability existing in the shaded region of Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Sumner's Theoretical Framework (2007)](image)

The first criterion that the theoretical framework measures is whether the system supports money values or life values. Sumner based this criterion on McMurtry’s concepts of the money code of value and the life code of value. Money code of values are seen as prioritizing economic objectives; whereas life code of values are seen as prioritizing human and environmental health.

Choosing for life values emphasizes human and planetary life first and foremost – every other decision must be subsumed under, and conform to, this primary one. Choosing for money values emphasizes money and accumulation first and foremost – every other decision must be subsumed under, and conform to, that primary one. (Sumner, 2007, p. 68)
This criterion examines whether the planet can physically support the system in question. When money values are prioritized over life values a system cannot be sustainable.

The second criterion in the theoretical framework is whether the system creates hegemony or provides a way to escape existing hegemony. Sumner (2007) bases her definitions on Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as

the “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; the consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (as cited in Sumner, 2007, p. 61)

In addition to spontaneous consent, this process is also based on coercion and the threat of force through various means, including violence and/or legal action. Through hegemonic control, members of a society may propagate systems that are not in their best interests. People live with an underlying acceptance of a system which benefits powerful members of society and limits the rights of the majority. Hegemony does not lead to sustainability because oppressed groups will eventually fight for their own rights.

The third and final criterion of the theoretical framework is communicative action. For this criterion, Sumner (2007) draws from Habermas, who developed a model of rationality. Habermas wrote about two types of rationality – instrumental rationality and communicative rationality. Instrumental rationality is based on reaching end goals and producing “the vision of an administered, totally reified world in which means-ends rationality and domination are merged” (Habermas as qtd in Sumner, 2007, p. 64). Communicative rationality is defined by mutual understanding and cooperation. Habermas uses these forms of rationality to define two types of action. The first is ends-oriented action made up of two parts called instrumental action and strategic action, which are based in instrumental rationality. Instrumental action is intended to influence the external world and strategic action is intended to influence other people. Both types of actions are based on one-way communication. The second type of action is communicative in which action is taken based upon mutually agreed upon and not coerced decisions. This type of action is based on dialogue and promotes sustainability.
The three building blocks of life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue form the foundation or groundwork for sustainability, which emerges through the civil commons.

**Radical research**

It is important to envision a better world in order to create one. This study looks at how to promote a sustainable garment industry from an ecosocialist/eco-feminist perspective. In an ideal world, humans should be able to live in harmony with each other and other life on earth. Developing an alternative vision requires what Arnold and Hartman (2003) refer to as moral imagination.

It is imagination that allows for the creation of possible worlds, at least some of which may be made real through action. Moral imagination is the subset of imagination that has as its subject explicitly moral constructions. It is moral imagination that permits us to create possible worlds that are either morally better or worse than the world as we find it. (p. 427)

This thesis shares the participants’ visions of an ethical garment industry.

While imagining an ethical alternative is a critical first step, it is not enough to create change, one must also take action. This research has been conducted with the purpose of looking for ways to create change by exposing structural problems within the current garment industry and exploring ways that some Canadians are trying to promote change. Based on the findings, the concluding chapter presents ideas and recommendations for taking actions aimed at creating a sustainable GGI.

The processes used in this thesis could be considered feminist research. Marjorie DeVault (1999) describes feminist research methodology as providing an “alternative to the distanced, distorting, and dispassionately objective procedures of much social research” (p. 32). She expresses the difficulty of defining feminist methods as a clean-cut package. As DeVault (1999) writes about feminist methods making the lives of women visible, this study aims to shed light on the connections between Canadian consumers and the GGI, a mostly female industry. To accomplish this purpose, methods based on institutional ethnography are used to explore the ways that networks of relations shape the experiences of consciously ethical Canadian consumers.
According to Taylor (1998), the core of a feminist methodology includes “a focus on gender and gender inequality, a spotlight on the everyday experiences of women, reflexivity as a source of insight, an emphasis on participatory methods, and a policy or action component” (p. 360). This study realizes these ideas. A major topic of concern is the fact that women are disproportionately affected by exploitative practices in the GGI; the interviews explore the daily experiences of both women and men through participatory interview methods; and the study has a social purpose providing broad recommendations for action to change the exploitative and unsustainable nature of the GGI. Feminist inquiry looks at intersecting oppressions because one cannot question gender issues without exposing other forms of marginalization, oppression and privilege.

Institutional ethnography can be considered a feminist methodology. Campbell and Gregor (2002) write that “the claim for institutional ethnography is that it offers a knowledge resource for people who want to work towards a more equitable society. Its politics are built into its mode of inquiry. It requires taking sides” (p. 103). The participants in this study are attempting to take the side of garment workers and/or the environment. Correspondingly, this study seeks to stand beside garment workers and the environment, both of which are frequently located far from Canadian consciously ethical consumers. This distance is a difficult barrier to overcome and will be discussed later in this thesis.

According to DeVault (1999), “research, like any human activity, is socially organized and shaped by the institutional context in which it occurs” (p. 2). Within a recognized structure of academic research, my involvement with this project has been based on a desire for a more equitable GGI. For this study my role has been to learn and share information about areas where Canadians can impact the GGI. DeVault (1999) describes that

the institutional ethnographic approach to social change assumes a division of labour between scholars and activists – or at least a distinction between moments of inquiry and activism. Dorothy Smith suggests that researchers need relatively specialized skills and must devote more sustained attention to any investigation than is usually practical for front-line activists. Conversely, using research results effectively to promote change through more daily participation in front-line work than most
researchers can manage . . . the idea is to make room for various kinds of partnerships. (p. 53)

Institutional ethnography helps to promote an activist agenda by “providing an assessment of how power operates in local practices of ruling and where activist interventions might be most successful” (Naples, 2003, p. 30). It also helps to clarify how people’s lives are organized outside of their own knowledge and control, making them susceptible to domination and subordination. By drawing connections between local and global processes, I hope that the findings of this research will be helpful to individuals attempting to engage in ethical consumption along with both the people who are impacted by the GGI and the natural environment.

While one study cannot possibly create change in a complex global system, I hope that my work will add to the body of work and the efforts of the others around the globe to bring attention to systemic injustice and the potential for change in the GGI. Dorothy Smith reminds the researcher that “a method of inquiry is not magic” (as qtd in Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 125). Campbell and Gregor (2002) explain that “she means that knowledge is not transformative in and of itself. Rather, she instructs that ‘connections have to be made such that we who are doing the technical work of research and explication are responsible in what we write to those for whom we write” (p. 125).

In this piece I intend to follow the guideline proposed by Campbell and Gregor (2002) that writing based on institutional ethnographic methods should not only attempt to present objective facts. The research should help the subject to better understand the conditions of her/his lived experiences. Smith (2005) identifies a challenge for institutional ethnographers as being able to make their research more accessible. She believes that although academic writing has limits, it is able to reach other researchers and has potential to filter into classroom settings. Another method of dissemination she suggests is presenting the research in “the language of the everyday world so that institutional participants can integrate it into their everyday work knowledge” (Smith, 2005, p. 221). I hope to share this research with those who may be interested in learning more about their place in the GGI and those who seek to improve the effectiveness of their activist endeavours.
Summary of the Problem

While viewing the current system through an ecosocialist/ecofeminist lens, I sought to understand how the GGI propagates its current hegemonic structure. The GGI is made up of production and commodity chains interacting all over the globe. Because of this globally distributed nature of the GGI, people interacting with it in its various forms do not have direct communication. Individuals involved range from farmers growing cotton in Burkina Faso to people sewing garments in factories in China to retail staff in Canadian malls. Their interactions are generally limited by their positions in the industry. Large retailers contract factories to produce their garments and these factories buy materials from around the world and sub-contract various elements involved in putting together a complete garment. Each contact creates a distinct connection shaped by the forms of communication and nature of the relationship, leaving many people at different ends of the chain without direct contact.

As a result of its globalized nature, the GGI is affected by many stakeholders, which include individual Canadians making purchasing decisions, people working in the industry, companies, governments and nongovernmental organizations. While the actions of all these groups have significant effects on each other, there is very little communication between them. As manufacturing systems have divided the various stages of production, use and disposal, communication between stakeholders in the industry has decreased while a widespread focus on capital accumulation has led to the subordination of social and environmental concerns. Problems such as these affect not only the GGI but the majority of industrialized production in the current global economic model.

In this complex system, the main way that Canadian consumers learn about the garment industry is through messages in public portrayals, which make up the main communication channel bridging the divisions inherent in the industry. In this thesis, public portrayals will be seen as any civic venue through which the Canadian public may learn about production processes in the garment industry, including corporate media (both news and marketing), activist campaigns, formal education, alternative news sources, academic research, books, and websites. While all of these venues carry messages about the GGI, the one that Canadians are exposed to most frequently is
corporate media, and as such, this type of public portrayal is the main focus of examination in this study. I will look at how the messages in corporate public portrayals generally reflect the financial interests of powerful players in the GGI and distort the information available to Canadian consumers.

Despite the predominance of corporate-led messages, which exclude the “unpleasant” parts of the GGI, a growing number of Canadian consumers are learning about social and environmental problems associated with the garment industry and seeking to buy products that do not contribute to harmful processes. In this study, I am looking at the relations which shape choices made by Canadian garment consumers and how consumers are navigating through the challenges they experience. These choices are limited by the structure of the GGI and shaped by the information available.

While the participants in this research may make active decisions with good intentions, the effects of their actions may not create the type of changes they desire. This study also looks at how attempts at ethical consumption affect the GGI and the reactions of companies in the face of the growing demand for ethical products. Exploring the processes that have shaped the GGI provides insight into how consumers can take action to promote change.

In this thesis ethical consumption will be seen as consumption performed with a conscious attempt at meeting a consumers own ethical requirements. Each person may have a different definition of ethical and may wish to see the industry changed in different ways. The need for reform in the GGI is seen as necessary because of the industry’s unsustainable nature. Attempts at ethical consumption will be assessed based on their ability to promote sustainability and thus mitigate the negative impact the GGI currently has on people and the environment.

Methodology

As has been stated, in conducting this study, institutional ethnography shaped my method of inquiry as I focused on understanding the networks of relations which shape the choices available to Canadian consumers. I reviewed relevant literature to learn about the history of the GGI; the way it has been portrayed to the Canadian public; and also
worked with informants to deepen my understanding of how Canadians interact with the GGI in their daily lives. In forming the arguments to be conveyed in this thesis I reviewed the information and analyzed the relationships that became apparent. During this process, I used Sumner’s sustainability framework to assess the current GGI and the potential for change created by ethical consumption.

**Institutional Ethnography as a Method of Inquiry**

In an effort to understand the challenges faced by consumers who would like to buy ethical garments, I drew on insights from institutional ethnography. Conducting an institutional ethnography involves exploring how social relations organize people’s lived experiences. This method was developed by Dorothy Smith (2005), who states that institutional ethnography’s

modest proposal is to work from what people are doing or what they can tell us about what they and others do and to find out how the forms of coordinating their activities “produce” institutional processes, as they actually work. (p. 60)

Campbell and Gregor (2002) convey that institutional ethnography proposes that, “the world is organized as it is for some purpose. Understanding what is happening makes a difference to someone. As people talk about their lives, the researcher begins to identify to whom it makes a difference and why” (p. 48). As mentioned above, many stakeholders are involved in the garment industry, all of whom are affected by it. In this study I talked to people who are involved with the GGI as consumers living in Canada.

While institutional ethnography entails working with people involved in the situation of focus, Smith (2005) says that “No institutional ethnography is a case study; each is an investigation of the ruling relations explored from a given angle, under a given aspect, and as it is brought into being in people’s everyday work lives” (p. 219). When conducting an institutional ethnography, the researcher talks to people to learn about their experiences with an institutional process.

This is not a sample of a population. The ethnographer isn’t studying the people she or he talks to. She or he is establishing a standpoint as the starting point of investigation of the institutional process. She or he may not interview very many people at all. It depends on the range of different experiences needed to avoid an overly narrow focus. (Smith, 2005, p. 207)
With this understanding I worked with six Canadians to learn about their experiences trying to consume ethically in the GGI and how their attempts were mediated by larger networks of relations. Through this process, I sought to deepen my understanding of how Canadians are linked in to the global networks of the GGI.

In institutional ethnography, institutions are considered as the observable aspects of ruling relations and are explored only as they are relevant to those who are involved with them (Smith, 2005). Smith states, “Actuality isn’t bounded by institutional categories; in the real world, the social realisations that are significant in organizing people’s ordinary participation do not conform to what can be represented institutionally” (p. 68). This insight informs the adaptable nature of an institutional ethnographic investigation. The researcher will look in at any area that becomes relevant as the investigation proceeds and is not limited by focusing on one particular place.

What institutional ethnography seeks to do is explicate how apparently outside networks of relations shape the work of the group in the investigation. Smith (2005) defines work as “intentional, it is done in some actual place under definite conditions and with definite resources, and it takes time. The merit of this kind of a conception of work is that it keeps you in touch with what people need to do their work as well as with what they are doing” (p. 154). She goes on to say that the concept of work include[s] the actual doings that go in to making institutions happen, whether they are recognized in institutional discourse or not. For the institutional ethnographer the craftsman’s morning walk to his smithy and the child’s getting water for his experiment are as much part of the work as those that are recognized and become accountable within institutional discourse. (p. 157)

Following Smith’s conception of work, in this study the work of ethical consumption includes the activities that the participants engage in to facilitate their consumption choices, such as conducting research into a brand’s production practices.

Institutional ethnographers often look at how diverse people’s work influences a situation. This study did not involve examining anyone’s work outside of the six participants involved, who interact with the GGI as Canadian consumers attempting to engage in ethical consumption. A more in depth study looking at the work processes of
other people who are connected with the GGI on different levels would yield beneficial results because it would shed more light on the relationships that shape the nature of the GGI.

Research in institutional ethnography is designed to produce knowledge for people. “The inquiry is always about circumstances located in the world of the subject, even if it is outside the subject’s experience and knowledge” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 59). The research is designed to look at not only the lived experiences of those attempting to be ethical consumers, but also at the institutional networks that are unseen and yet help to shape the individual’s experiences. Along with talking to informants, to better understand these networks, I also conducted research into the history of the Canadian garment industry and how the GGI is portrayed to the Canadian public.

In doing an institutional ethnographic piece of research, the researcher is required to take a standpoint. Institutional ethnography is seen as a research method in which

starting from the standpoint of a particular group of people . . . the institutional relations that create problems in people’s everyday/everynight worlds are interrogated. Institutional ethnography strives to develop a critical analysis of how these institutional relations are organized so they can be transformed. (Frampton, Kinsman, & Tilleczek, 2006, p. 32)

In this study, I am taking the standpoint of Canadian consumers who seek to buy clothing that meets their ethical requirements. As global citizens, Canadian consumers are part of the global community and are currently, often unintentionally, contributing to the exploitation of people and the environment. This research explores the barriers preventing Canadians from living in a more just system.

Institutional ethnography looks from a marginalized standpoint and seeks to look inward to the centers of power to understand how they affect the setting in question (DeVault, 1999). While as a group, Canadian consumers are not marginalized, within the larger GGI they exist as a spoke with few direct connections to the networks of relations which regulate this industry. They live in a situation where their interactions with the GGI are shaped by networks of relations that leave little choice – pushing Canadians into the role of consumers in a global market. These relations also shape the experiences of
people working in the industry and the relationship of the industry to the natural environment.

From the standpoint of Canadians who are trying to make ethical purchasing decisions, it is important to understand how individual actions impact the GGI. Smith (2005) describes the connection that institutional ethnography has with lived reality. She states that institutional ethnography doesn’t begin in theory but in the actualities of people’s lives with a focus of investigation that comes from how they participate in or are hooked up into institutional relations. This is what I call the problematic of a given study. It translates the more general notion of the everyday world as problematic into an orientation specific to a given study. (p. 207)

To focus my inquiry, my problematic, as stated in the introduction was, “How do Canadians who would like to be ethical consumers interact with the global garment market?” In this study, I chose to focus on learning about the systems which shape consumers’ experiences with the GGI. I have talked to my participants about their daily experiences while trying to be ethical consumers. As DeVault (1999) articulates, institutional ethnography uses explication “not as a matter of exposing a grand structure of oppression, but of making visible the dailiness of practice within that structure, and the people’s various attempts to navigate through regimes of control” (p. 52). This study brings forward the individual experiences of Canadians trying to be conscious of their relations with the GGI.

Following the focus of institutional ethnography of looking at disjunctures, I sought to understand how Canadians became disconnected from their clothing. Campbell and Gregor (2002) write that “The issue of disjuncture is between different versions of reality – knowing something from a ruling versus an experiential perspective . . . Different people in a situation will have different experiences of it” (p. 48). I looked at the development of global structures that have distanced Canadians from the production and disposal of their garments.

A sign of the disjunctures existing in the GGI is the fact that Canadians’ main contact with the GGI is through public portrayals. To understand the way that Canadians learn about the GGI, I focused on the role of public portrayals in mediating Canadians’
access to knowledge. Examining public portrayals in the context of historical development allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of consciously ethical consumers. Looking at the history of the GGI helped to shape my understanding of the content of public portrayals and their often skewed messages.

In conducting an institutional ethnography, it is important to understand how texts contribute to organizing relationships (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). When consciously ethical consumers interact with the garment industry, it is often at the retail level. These activities are mediated through texts. Institutional ethnography sees texts as having the “power to coordinate and concert – to hold people to acting in particular ways” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 32). Texts which shape consciously ethical consumers experiences are generally created both by the corporate media and other stakeholders. Some of these texts are easily accessible, often displayed in retail settings or public advertisements, while others are found through active research processes.

Texts in themselves do not shape the industry but they do affect people’s actions. Social changes are driven by people, not abstract ideas (Smith, 2005). According to Smith,

The ruling relations are a complex and massive coordinating of people’s work. Intentions, desires, opportunities, impediments, blockages, and powerlessness arise within them. The texts that constitute and regulate establish agency, that is, textually specified capacities to control and mobilize the work of others. Textually sanctioned agency produces a power that is generated by the concerting and mobilization of people’s work. It is specific. It has limits, and it would be a mistake to conceive such forms of power as mobilized simply within a single formal organization, such as a business corporation. Corporations exist within the ruling relations of their interconnectedness—financial markets, banks, legal systems, mass media, government departments and agencies at all levels, and so on. (p. 183)

Public portrayals are texts which shape consumers' experiences. In conducting an institutional ethnography, it is important to understand how texts contribute to organizing relationships (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Institutional ethnography sees texts as having the "power to coordinate and concert - to hold people to acting in particular ways" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 32). This understanding elucidates the power of the different actors in the GGI and how they are involved in shaping its structure. Within this
structure, there are stakeholders with more or less powerful positions but all have the potential to create change.

According to Smith (2005), during an investigation based on institutional ethnography, the researcher should try to focus on the actualities of people’s lives as they are experienced, looking past any political concerns which may have motivated the research.

Institutional ethnography is essentially a work of inquiry and discovery; it must move beyond what the ethnographer already knows or thinks she or he knows, and the ethnographer must be prepared for and open to finding out that matters are not as she or he may have envisaged them. (p. 208)

As I had personal experience in the garment industry before beginning this study, I came into it with preconceptions. While I could not separate myself from my past experiences, I sought to look at the information that I found with an open mind and let the data guide my conclusions.

**Literature Review**

In order to understand the current GGI, I looked at its history in Canada. Learning about the processes which have led to the present situation helped to illuminate the areas in which disjunctures have developed. The history of the GGI presented in this thesis shows the paths which have led to its destructive aspects and gives insight into why the current structure is in place. As DeVault (1999) notes, looking at history is important for understanding the present.

The analyst considers how the settings of interest have emerged from a specific history – how it has happened that things are organized this way rather than some other. . . In this approach, settings cannot be treated as just ‘there.’ Rather, the social relations we find in a particular place represent moments that are created through the unfolding of social relations in time. (pp. 48-49).

Examining the history of the GGI helped to inform the rest of the study and how the current system is structured.

To understand the historical developments of the GGI, I conducted a literature review focusing on research dealing with social and technological changes. I looked at books, articles and government records which clarified some of the history of the
development of this complex industry. The historical processes uncovered show how the industry reached its current unsustainable state.

As I learned about the rich and varied past of the GGI, I began to question how information about this industry has been conveyed to the general public, since most people do not have direct contact with its production and disposal processes. One thing I came across in my research was that in the second half of the twentieth century, as people began to have less contact with production, as production jobs have been increasingly exported, public support for unions declined (R. J. S. Ross, 2006). This change highlights the effects of the distance that has developed between consumers and their products. As I learned, I began to question how other Canadians have learned about the GGI and how their experiences with connecting to this industry have looked.

To gain knowledge about how Canadians are learning about the GGI, I began to look at messages in public portrayals. In comparing the history I learned through academic and historical documents to the content of public portrayals, I found two different pictures. These contradictions are present as Canadian consumers learn about the industry.

Working with Informants

The research for this thesis involved working with self-identified consciously ethical consumers to identify challenges faced by individuals seeking to make ethical purchasing decisions and looking for methods to overcome these challenges. To understand the role of Canadian consumers within the larger GGI, I have focused on consumers who themselves have been conscious of their own interactions. While institutional ethnographies usually deal with people’s everyday experiences, this study looks at a part of people’s lives that does not occur regularly but is a conscious choice. The participants are trying to hook in with the wider GGI and learn about it in their own ways. The inquiry of the participants in their activism parallels the methods of institutional ethnography. This study seeks to dive deeper into the information uncovered by the participants during their attempts at consuming ethically.

In working with informants who consciously attempt to consume ethically, I sought to share my research questions with them and learn from their personal
experiences. While the conversations that I had during the research process were based on a rough list of questions, the discussions were open to allow for what DeVault (1999) calls “topic construction.” Smith (2005) provides insight in the researcher’s relationship with her/his informants.

There is always much more to learn from people’s experiences than the researcher can cope with. The asymmetries of power attributed to the researcher-respondent relationship emphasize the relations in which the researcher engages informants, however transitorily. . . For the institutional ethnographer, however, what she or he does not know and what the informant can teach her or him is central to the research project. The controlling interest in the ethnographer does not disappear but is balanced by the institutional ethnographer’s deference to the informant’s experiential authority and by a commitment to discovery. (pp. 141-142)

Data collection is always a collaborative project. What becomes researched information is gleaned from the experiences of people’s lives as the people themselves interpret these experiences (Smith, 2005). According to Smith (2005) “The ethnographer’s role is that of an acute, thoughtful, and probing listener who is learning from the informant or observational setting” (p. 138). She writes that,

Yes, it is the ethnographer who initiates the encounter, and it is she or he who imposes the topic and, to some degree, provides its direction. On the other hand, she or he depends on the informant to make available what becomes material for further stages of the researcher’s work (p. 138).

While a research project is designed by a researcher, (s)he is like a student who learns from her/his informants.

The informants in this study contributed their experiences to help bring institutional processes to life. In my research, I tried to reconcile the experiences of the participants with the information gathered from other sources. Using all of the information garnered in this study, I have developed a portrait of the nature of the relationship between Canadian consumers and the GGI.

This research sought to uncover the entire process of trying to consume ethically – not just the decision process when standing in a store. Institutional ethnographic research connects personal experiences with wider structures seeking to explain the ruling relations that affect individuals’ lives.
Translocal and discursively-organized relations permeate informants’ understandings, talk, and activities. An institutional ethnography must therefore include research into those elements of social organization that connect the local setting and local experiences to sites outside the experiential setting. Analysis in institutional ethnography is directed to explication that builds back into the analytic account what the researcher discovers about the workings of such translocal ruling practices (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 90).

This study focuses on ethical consumption and explores the external systems which shape the choices available to the participants.

**Interviews.**

The purpose of using interviews in this study was to better understand the lived experiences of Canadian consumers who attempt to engage in ethical garment consumption. Throughout the interviews, I questioned participants on ideas and conclusions that seemed to be emerging through the process. During the discussions the topics were guided by my initial ideas along with the participants’ interests and insights. While I facilitated the group discussions using some guiding questions, the participants were free to explore common and differing challenges and experiences.

For this study, informants were recruited through voluntary responses to a poster (see Appendix A). These posters were displayed in public places around downtown Toronto. When potential participants contacted me, I explained the study and sent them an ethical consent form via email. After reading a description of the project and their potential role within it, they decided whether they would like to participate. A total of six people participated in the interviews. The interviews were used to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by those attempting to be ethical consumers. As Smith (2005) suggests, a small number of participants can provide an entry point into understanding larger networks of relations.

The participants initially met with me in two separate groups of three, during which time we had a small group discussion about our experiences trying to consume ethically. These group interviews were open format and addressed a list of guiding topics (see Appendix B). Approximately a week after each discussion group, individual interviews were conducted with participants. These interviews allowed for further
exploration of the topics discussed in the group interview and enabled participants to share more information about their personal experiences. The individual interviews combined a set list of questions (see Appendix C) and open-format discussions.

Both group and individual interviews were used with the purpose of generating a more complete picture of the experience of attempting to engage in ethical consumption. Both types of interviews have benefits and drawbacks. Researchers often cite the benefits of combining the breadth of group interviews with the depth of individual interviews (Crabtree et al. as cited in D. L. Morgan, 1996). Using group interviews followed by individual interviews allowed the participants to be able to further question ideas generated and topics discussed in their groups. While group interviews have the potential to generate wide-ranging ideas, there is also the potential for individual opinions to be stifled. Having a temporal space between the group interview and the individual interview allowed the informants to reflect on the group discussions. Participating in one-on-one interviews gave the participants an opportunity to share their personal insights and experiences drawing on and respecting their knowledge and reflexive ability.

Although the participants have had different life experiences, they all interact with the same global system. Small groups were used to enable participants to interact and participate more than in a larger group as well as building stronger connections between each other and the researcher. During these discussions, they found commonality with each other’s perspectives.

Frey and Fontana (1991) write that group interviews can also help to bring forward participants memories and encourage elaboration. As the purpose of working with participants was to understand their experiences, having a setting which encourages memory recall was beneficial for learning the most about the participants’ experiences. According to Blumer (as cited in Frey & Fontana, 1991), working with a knowledgeable group in the preliminary stages of a research project can help to develop a researchers understanding of the situation under investigation.

Another benefit of group discussions is that they allow the researcher to see where the participants disagree (D. L. Morgan, 1996). The group format allowed participants to interact and collaboratively develop ideas. Separate group interviews were conducted
because during a group interview the dynamics of the group can modify the results (Knodel as cited in D. L. Morgan, 1996) and having two groups allowed for some comparison and the development of diverse ideas. Using group interviews allowed for a polyphonic story to be told. To bring this story alive, quotes from the participants are used in this thesis.

Conducting follow-up individual interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of each participant’s experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used which according to Taylor (1998) help in allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own terms, facilitate the development of more egalitarian relationships and allow the participants to contribute new research questions. These individual interviews allowed me and the participants to discuss topics that had seemed interesting from the first discussions and seemed to warrant further exploration.

While using interviews as a method to learn about a topic provides many advantages, the process also entails some potential problems. One of the challenges that can occur during group interviews is that participants may modify their answers in order to match expected norms (Frey & Fontana, 1991; D. L. Morgan, 1996). During individual interviews, participants may also feel that they want to give the answers that the researcher wants to hear. During the interviews for this research, there were times that participants appeared to give expected answers within both the group and individual interviews. To minimize this problem, I tried to clearly express that I understood that attempting to engage in ethical consumption can be difficult to allow the participants to feel free to express their experiences, including personal challenges.

Another challenge that can arise during group interviews is the researcher interrupting the group’s discussion to ask questions (D. L. Morgan, 1996). During the interviews I tried to minimize my involvement and only asked questions when the participants were finished with their discussion. While I sought to minimize my contributions, when I did participate I expressed my own opinions. Following feminist methodology, the interviews were more like conversations in which, I, as the interviewer, actively participated and shared my experiences to help construct answers to the questions I set out to explore.
To analyse the data from this study, the interviews were transcribed and elements of the conversations were organized into themes and common experiences using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. I focused on looking at how the participants defined ethical consumption, common challenges and stories that they had shared. During this analysis, I sought to understand how their experiences and choices have been shaped by networks of relations within the GGI.

**Research participants.**

At this point, I would like to introduce my participants. These informants can be seen as my co-researchers who helped me to understand how Canadian consumers connect to the larger GGI. The people that I worked with were\(^3\) Gary, Claire, Mark, Anne, Vikram and Amy. A summary of their personal information can be seen in Figure 2.

Gary is an actor in his fifties who lives in Toronto. He spent some time living in the United States during and after university. Claire works for a nongovernmental organization. As a child she moved around a lot and lived in Europe and North America. After studying at a Canadian university, she spent a year in Nepal before returning to Canada to work. Mark is a Buddhist and is studying world religions. Prior to starting university, he spent some time living in China. Anne was born and raised in Canada. After a successful corporate career, she has returned to school to complete a Masters degree. Throughout her life, Anne has been conscious of environmental and social justice issues. Vikram is an engineering consultant, who recently finished his undergraduate degree. He was born in Kenya and moved to Canada as a young child. Amy is a high school language teacher and is actively involved with her church community. While the interviews were being conducted, she was on maternity leave and spending time taking care of her two young children. While the other five participants participated in a group interview and an individual follow-up interview, Amy was unable to participate in a follow up interview because of the demands of taking care of her children.

\(^3\) Names and details have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Participation in Social Justice Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>NGO Worker</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Undergraduate Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Graduate Student</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vikram</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Engineering Consultant</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>30-40</td>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Summary information about the participants.

Overall the participant group was highly educated. All participants were attending or had attended post-secondary education and four were attending or had completed graduate level education. An issue that this raises is the potential class bias for self-identification as an ethical consumer. An explanation may be that attending university increases awareness of these issues. All of the participants noted being exposed to social justice issues at university. Other studies involving ethical consumption have mirrored this finding and shown that those who attempt to be ethical consumers usually have a relatively high income, education and social status (Pelsmacker, et al., 2005; Shim, 1995).

All of the participants demonstrated an interest in wider ethical issues other than just the garment industry and had participated in some form of social justice activity outside of their consumption choices. Some of the participants referred to being part of social groups that are generally aware of social justice issues. “I think community is a good word for it. I think a lot of news that I find out is from hanging out with and talking to people, like-minded people” (Gary).

Two of the six participants spent time living in Asia and knew or had met people who worked in garment production. The first-hand knowledge of these participants has
probably deepened their understanding of the global processes involved in garment production.

I lived in China for a year and a half... I lived in Shanghai... There are millions and millions – I mean half the population of Shanghai were migrant workers from some of the poorest provinces in China... the people who are making the clothes that – I may be being harsh here a little bit but – that are making the clothes for the Old Navy commercials [with] attractive [people] jumping around on screen. It’s an illusion – a very, very great illusion that’s going on here. (Mark)

I went to Nepal... Seventy percent of Nepalese make less than a dollar a day and ninety percent of them are illiterate. I went and I visited some sweatshops and I visited some co-ops and some women’s groups when I was there. I lived with families and it was one of those things that was like, “how can I turn my back on these people? (Claire)

All of the participants had learned about the GGI through different processes. Two of them mentioned living through the 1960s and the effect that this period of greater public awareness on social issues had on them. Several of the participants mentioned learning about the garment industry through documentaries, alternative news media and the internet. Additionally, some participants spoke about being raised in families that are socially conscious and being taught to consider global justice.

The people who were interviewed for this study consciously seek to find ethical garments. As the sampling method involved self-selection, the group represents people who probably have more interest in the GGI and place more effort to consume ethically than average. Learning about the challenges that this group faces gives insight into the difficulty of being an ethical consumer in Canada. Information gathered during the interviews guided the research towards global processes involved in maintaining the current GGI. In institutional ethnography, it is essential to understand that while an individual’s lived experiences are central, these experiences exist in relation to the activities of others (Smith, 2005).
There is a balance between telling the story of individuals and the telling the story of social processes. Smith (2005) states that,

Institutional ethnography needs a solution that neither dispenses with individual subjects, their activities, and experience nor adopts the alternative reification of the social as system or structure or some ingenious combination of the two. For institutional ethnography, the social is the focus for study is to be located in how people’s activities or practices are coordinated. Individuals are there; they are in their bodies; they are active; and what they’re doing is coordinated with the doings of others. That is the four-part package that is foundation to the institutional ethnographic project. Coordination isn’t isolated as a phenomenon that can be differentiated from people’s activities; it is not reified as “social structure” nor as “rules”; it is not conceived to be a specialized form of action in itself. For institutional ethnography, the social, as the focus of sociological inquiry is specified as people’s activities as they are coordinated with those of others. . . . The focus of research is never the individual, but the individual does not disappear; indeed, she or he is an essential presence. Her or his doings, however, are to be taken up relationally. (p. 59).

To understand the ruling relations which regulate the garment industry, it is important to look at the various structures and relationships that are involved. This research draws from the participants’ experiences to create a broader picture of the GGI.

**Further Research and Analysis**

The conversations with participants could be considered as entry level data, which Campbell and Gregor (2002) propose is useful for learning “about the local setting, the individuals that interact there and their experiences” (p. 60). They define the research goal as explicating the entry level data and see entry level data as offering “methodologically important clues for the researcher to follow towards the collection of data useful for explication. The researcher will recognize useful data when they illuminate her original story” (pp. 60-61). In the research that I have conducted since my interviews, I have sought to understand the global processes which have shaped the participants’ experiences.

Guided by the experiences and ideas shared by my participants, I continued to read about the GGI and look for more information about the systems which have shaped the challenges they have experienced. Areas that were explored in this further research
included texts that regulate the global garment industry, such as advertising and promotional materials associated with ethical garment consumption; trade regulations that shape global production and disposal processes; and labelling regulations. To control the scope of this project, secondary resources were the main source of information about these topics.

Conclusion

Underlying this research is a belief that the garment industry has an important role to play in Canadian society. In examining the GGI, I have used an ecosocialist/ecoactivist critique to assess its historical development, how it is portrayed to the Canadian public and the experiences of Canadians attempting to engage in ethical consumption. This study was designed with the purpose of strengthening efforts at systemic reform. The results are based on vision of a sustainable garment industry and the possibility of realizing this vision.

As garment production and disposal occurs globally with social and geographic divisions between stages of production at all levels, Canadian consumers generally rely on public portrayals to shape their understanding of the GGI. This thesis describes the historical development of systems which distance consumers from production and disposal while becoming increasingly dependent of the exploitation of people and the environment. The research involved examining how some Canadians are navigating their way through this complex international system in the face of sometimes conflicting, confusing and misleading public portrayals. Challenges identified by the participants are explored to understand the ruling relations that have shaped the participants’ lived experiences of attempting to consume ethically. Choices that are being made by Canadian consumers and the way the effects of these choices interact with actions of others are also investigated to begin to understand the steps necessary for fostering systemic reform and promoting sustainable change.
Chapter Two:
The Nature of Canada’s Role in the Global Garment Industry

This chapter will discuss the development of production methods initiated during the Industrial Revolution and the development of global production chains, which led to the creation of the current GGI. As a result of the interacting influences of policy reform, technological development and changing social relations at both domestic and international levels, the Canadian garment industry has undergone dramatic changes in the last two centuries. These changes have forged a divide between Canadians and the life-cycles of their clothing.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, people had closer connections with the production and disposal of their garments. However, efforts to increase economic efficiency have created an industry that drains human and natural resources. Increased efficiency has involved decreased personal involvement; a change that can be seen by the fact that in the current GGI individuals are usually not responsible for creating individual garments. Now teams of people work to create mass-manufactured garments often for distant consumers. Globally divided production and increasingly complex technical developments have made it very difficult for consumers to understand the history and future of their garments. In this history of the Canadian garment industry the major processes that have led to these changes will be highlighted.

Since the development of industrialization in England, other countries have followed similar patterns and experienced rapid economic growth accompanied by the development of garment industries based on sweatshop labour. As a result of the base economic principles that this industry has been founded upon, with workers selling their labour to companies that in turn sell the manufactured products to distant consumers, the development of the GGI has led to growing levels of global inequality. In response to the consequences of attempts at separating economic values from social values, social groups have fought back throughout the global spread of this industrial model (see Polanyi, 2001).

Accompanying the social injustice that has developed in the GGI have been growing levels of environmental damage. Although environmental problems such as land
degradation, deforestation and soil erosion have existed for centuries, the Industrial Revolution led to the creation of the problems that are of paramount concern to the health of the planet by intensifying resource consumption, urban development and pollution. The effects of these processes are beginning to be experienced worldwide.

In the 21st century, the garment industry is a truly global industry. When Canadians buy clothing they are interacting with systems that involve people and natural resources from around the world. In the current global economy, many of the processes involved in the GGI do not occur in Canada, yet their consequences affect all global citizens.

To understand the manufacturing processes involved in the garment industry, it is important to make a distinction between the textile and clothing industries4. The textile industry includes threads, filaments, felts, carpets, blankets, diapers, hygiene products, fire hoses, ropes and parachutes (Wyman, 2005). Many of the environmental impacts of garments are based on the actions of this industry. The clothing industry includes menswear, womenswear, childrenswear, furs, foundation garments, hosiery, gloves, sweaters and occupational clothing (Wyman, 2005). The clothing industry is labour intensive, relying on a large and low paid workforce. Whereas the textile industry is capital intensive and more geographically stable, relying on technological infrastructure and chemical inputs, clothing production is easily relocated based on the availability of cheap labour.

**Canada’s Early Garment Industries (Pre-19th Century)**5

Prior to colonization, Native Canadians made clothing from locally available materials such as the inner bark of the cedar, mountain goat wool and dog hair ("Treasures gallery: Clothing and adornment," 2006). From Dene women sewing animal hides to the NLaka'pamux weaving cotton, there were many types of textiles and clothing

---

4 These definitions refer to two separate industries. When I refer to the garment industry I include both of these industries and all related industries and processes involved in garment production, consumption and disposal.

5 The dates in the sub-headings in this chapter are meant as a guide to the reader and are not intended to imply strict timelines for the events described.
made in Canada ("Treasures gallery: Clothing and adornment," 2006). All of the items used renewable materials in small scale craft-based production.

From the 16th to 17th centuries, Europeans began to trade for Native furs. The fur trade changed the nature of Canada’s garment industry as furs were collected and transported long distances, promoting economies of scale (Balakrishnan, Eliasson, & Sweet, 2007). While fur was Canada’s leading export, its demand in Europe was unpredictable, changing based on fashion trends (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). In this system, changes in European demand affected the lives of Canadians involved in the fur trade. With this early involvement with the European garment industry, Canada was participating in intercontinental processes which would not regain prominence until the late 20th century.

Canada’s Industrial Revolution (19th Century)

As Europeans began to move to North America, big textile mills in the U.K. and New England provided most fabric for early Canadian settlers. With a growing immigrant population, demand for European textiles became high enough to develop domestic production. To meet this demand in the early 19th century, weaving took place in homes or at the village level in different parts of the country (Craig, Rygiel, & Turcotte, 1931). At this time, most rural families owned spinning wheels and many had looms. Rural families made about half of their own fabrics while those living in growing urban areas continued to rely on imported fabrics (McCullough, 1992). Craig et al. (1931) posit that the North American industrial revolution was different than the European experience for four main reasons: abundance of land; lack of a large landless rural proletariat; farmers were slower to specialize and abandon non-market farming; and families were not solely reliant on farming and engaged in other activities while continuing to farm. Because of these reasons, there was a shortage of people to work as wage labourers as most people needed to work on their family farms. According to Balakrishnan et al. (2007), major factors affecting industrialization in Canada include the development of the railway; electric power; and direct foreign investment, mostly from
the United States. Affected by these various factors, while Canada started to industrialize in the early 19th century, the process did not reach its apex until the early 20th century.

Textile mills were founded in North America in the 1820s and 1830s leading to a reduction in home-based production of woollen cloth (Craig, et al., 1931). As rural women spent less time making cloth, they were able to engage in other activities that generated income such as being involved in dairy, eggs, poultry or fruits and vegetables as urban markets began to develop in the middle of the 19th century (Craig, et al., 1931). This change brought more income to homes and was part of the introduction of Canadian women to the market economy.

Early industrialized processes involved small-scale millers setting up operations, mainly in western Ontario, who would produce wool to be spun in homes (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). These mills were located in areas suitable to grazing sheep. In 1851, the first company transitioned from milling to manufacturing and hired 15 people (Bliss as cite in Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). After this other mill owners expanded their businesses to include spinning and weaving. The mills also began to incorporate more sophisticated technology and some Canadian woollen mills were also reported to have power looms in the 1840s to 1880s (McCullough, 1992).

Wool was the major textile produced in Canada during the 1800s (McCullough, 1992). Initially attempts were made at cotton production as well but since the unprocessed cotton had to be imported from the United States, it was expensive and not very successful (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). This changed when the American Civil War broke out in 1861, resulting in an increased demand for Canadian made cotton fabric (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007).

By 1851 homespun cloth was on the decline in Ontario and by the 1870s factories accounted for about 53% of all cloth produced in Canada (McCullough, 1992). By 1871 the average woollen mill employed 16 people and the average cotton mill employed 93 people (McCullough, 1992). The Canadian textile industry changed from a cottage-system based industry into a factory based industry by the 1880s (McCullough, 1992). One of the catalysts for this change was technological innovation that made mass production possible.
In eastern Canada, farm households continued to produce their own cloth later than other areas. Craig et al. (1931) write that while other Canadian social and economic historians explain this trend by saying that these families could not afford to buy factory-made cloth, they propose that this was because locally made cloth was sturdier and was actually a valuable product to produce for sale. Homespun fabric met the needs of 19th century wearer as it was sturdy and warm. “Homespun was the denim of the 19th century” (Craig, et al., 1931, p. 166). Craig et al. go on to note that when manufacturers eventually set up woollen mills in New Brunswick, they attempted to produce a material of a similar quality to homespun. This shows that local producers were familiar with local needs. The direct contact of women weaving fabric for men in their communities doing laborious outdoor work facilitated the creation of appropriate fabric.

As for transforming fabric into clothing, sewing machines became available in Canada in the 1840s, although most households could not afford one (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). Women continued to sew some of their families’ clothes by hand, but by the 1850s, more complicated items were being made at large-scale clothing manufacturing facilities, the majority of which were in Montreal (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007).

Early clothing was imported or made in homes and did not contribute to Canada’s GNP of which only 18% was based on manufacturing in 1850 (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). This began to change and by 1871, Canada’s top six industries included boot and shoe manufacturing, leather tanning (to make boots and shoes) and wool spinning (McDiarmid as cited in Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). By 1880, 13.8% of the manufacturing based census value added was a result of the clothing and textile industries with 13.4% of all manufacturing businesses producing clothing and textiles (Sawyer, 1983). Manufacturing became more important to Canada’s economy and by 1900 constituted about 21% of the GNP (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007).

**Technological Developments**

In the process of becoming industrialized, the fundamental way that Canadians dealt with their natural environment changed. Textile and garment production began to involve machines and chemicals that improved the economics of garment production and
the quality of garments products while causing damage to the environment and creating a class of factory labourers. These changes prioritized money values over life values.

Early technological developments include chemical processing of fabrics and fibres. Around 1800, chlorine and lime bleach began to be used to whiten fabrics. This process worked faster on cotton than linen contributing to the ascension of cotton as the world's most popular clothing fibre (Schoeser, 2003). This development has had long term negative impacts on the planet as cotton production exploded based on growing and processing techniques that have had increasingly damaging effects on the environment.

When Canada began to develop its textile industry after 1850, it was able to import the most modern industrial technology from Britain and the United States and most machinery was imported (McCullough, 1992). Three important technological developments happened during the second half of the 19th century: the replacement of mule spinning of wool to ring spinning, the development of the automatic loom in the 1890s, and the introduction of the long-draft spinning and roving (McCullough, 1992). After this, technology spread quickly. While in 1914, 47% of all Canadian looms were automatic, by 1935 96% of all Canadian looms were automatic (McCullough, 1992). Automatic looms spun continuously and at higher speeds. Using less skilled workers they had higher outputs and could produce harder and stronger yarn. Other developments included the flat roller card in the 1880s, one-process picking in the 1920s and high speed spooling and warping in the 1930s. These technological advances would result in ten times greater output of cloth (McCullough, 1992).

The 1860s cotton famine created by the American civil war led to efforts aimed at creating fabrics from waste. These attempts resulted in the creation of viscose (rayon) in the 1890s, made from cellulose, derived from wood pulp or cotton linters, caustic soda and acid (Schoeser, 2003). The development of viscose could be considered as a first step in the process of developing true synthetics in the 20th century.

In the 19th century technological developments were often viewed as progress without any regard to environmental or social concerns. While many of these technological developments resulting in improved fabric quality and increased outputs, they also had environmental impacts and created harsh working conditions based on
repetitive manual processes. Through the development of new products, production methods and machinery, the garment industry “went from an industry reliant on the work of skilled artisans . . . to one requiring less skill, with an oppressive emphasis on speed” (Steedman, 1997, p. 23). Chemicals began to be used without a sufficient understanding or even exploration into their side effects and large scale fabric production shifted the way that fibres were produced leading to farming techniques that were not compatible with the long-term maintenance of land.

**Changing Social Relations and Fragmentation**

In the second half of the 19th century, the early phase of Canadian industrial development brought changes for many working-class men and women. With the growth of industrialization, people who had previously supported themselves through farming began to sell their labour for money to buy consumer goods. By the 1881 census, 51.9% of the working population worked in non-agricultural jobs (Denton, 1983).

While women were used to working in their homes and doing similar work in other people’s homes, with increasing urbanization women began to find new ways to make money, such as taking on boarders, washing or making clothing (Steedman, 1997). At the end of the 19th century, many women were working both inside and outside the home at jobs that were deemed appropriate. An 1891 list produced by the Canadian Department of Labour showed the ten most common paid occupations for women as servant, dressmaker, seamstress, tailoress, saleswoman, teacher, farmer, housekeeper, laundress, and milliner (Connelly as cited in Steedman, 1997, p. 13).

With a growing population of immigrants, the Canadian market for ready-made clothing expanded in the 19th century. To meet this increased demand, custom tailors began to outsource various elements of garment construction. After cutting the material they would send it to a contractor, who would in turn parcel out the work to other sewers. Contracts were given to smaller scale production facilities and to individual women working out of their homes. With this system in place, manufacturers could avoid being responsible for the wages or conditions under which the construction work was performed (Steedman, 1997).
The term “sweating” was first used in the 19th century to refer to “the taking home of work by skilled tailors seeking to cope with falling prices, but it soon came to encompass a range of abuses including poor working conditions, irregular work and seasonal layoffs” (McIntosh, 1993, p. 111). With growing changes to the structure of the industry, the term came to mean a system of subcontracting out garment production orders to small contractors who “sweated” as much labour as they could out of immigrant workers (A Ross, 2004). This process was possible with garment production because of its division of labour into separate stages based on artisanal production and labour-intensive processes. Artisanal processes included designing, marking and cutting whereas the labour-intensive processes were sewing and finishing. In this industry the different shops responsible for each element of production were not responsible for one another’s conduct and all that was required for starting a garment production business was a small capital investment and access to a pool of immigrant labour (A Ross, 2004).

During the early transition towards deskilling labour, tailors regulated which products could be made by less skilled workers.

In the clothing industry the essence of craft control did not disappear as quickly as might have been expected. The semblance of artisanship remained long after the real craft skill had all but disappeared. There remained a sense of control, of legitimacy, in the workplace. . . As the job was broken down into its component parts, the tailor retained the right to make the jacket, but the pants and vests were given out to less ‘skilled’ workers. (Steedman, 1997, p. 24)

To resist the changes to the industry, tailors developed unions in Montreal in 1823, Toronto in 1845 and Hamilton in 1854 (McIntosh, 1993). While tailors initially retained control over production processes, their power was eventually eroded by the pressures of capital interests seeking to increase production and reduce costs.

In the middle of the 19th century large manufacturers of ready-made clothing were established. According to McIntosh (1993), while many of these large-scale manufacturers “had no experience in artisanal production of clothing, they possessed the capital to profit by expanding markets for ready-made clothing” (p. 109). This was one of the pivotal changes in the levels of communication in the garment industry. With this
change, people making decisions that directly affected the industry did not have firsthand experience with its processes.

Whereas people making garments had previously been involved in both the creative and technical processes of garment creation, the new system left the majority of people in the “unskilled jobs.” In these jobs the workers had to follow the direction of a superior and had little to no input in the design process. This can be seen by the fact that in 1871, 2,594 businesses were operating in the Canadian clothing industry with an average of six to seven employees; by 1900 there were 11,589 businesses with an average of four employees; and by 1905 the number of business dropped to 1,811 but employed an average of 24 to 25 people (Sawyer, 1983). An area which clearly shows this trend is the production of menswear. In 1901 custom tailoring was the dominant area of Canadian men’s clothing but by 1905 over 80% of men’s clothing was factory-made (Steedman, 1997).

In the industrializing garment industry, social relations shaped workplace hierarchies, leaving many people working under unfair conditions. For the growing numbers of women working in the garment industry, job prospects were not very good and pay was relatively low. Women usually worked in workshops, factories or from their homes and faced poor working conditions with little pay. “Rife with sweating by the close of the 19th century, the garment trades exhibited some of the most deplorable working conditions faced by any worker” (McIntosh, 1993, p. 106).

For woman without dependents, Ontario’s Bureau of Industry estimated in 1889, the cost of living in Toronto was approximately $4.00 weekly. Homeworkers earned nowhere near that amount. Women working in contract shops also routinely fell short of a living wage. (McIntosh, 1993, pp. 116-117)

In addition to the low wages, working conditions were also strenuous with long hours and often crowded and unsanitary conditions (McIntosh, 1993). Children as young as five also worked in the industry, both inside and outside of family settings.

Hiring homeworkers was a way to keep wages down because of the large labour supply and the companies would be able to outsource expenses such as thread, scissors, 

6 These statistics include knitting mills.
lighting and fuel (Steedman, 1997). Eileen Boris (as cited in Steedman, 1997) wrote that this helped to protect the manufactures in the uncertain economy of the 1870s and that this work also “built upon the preference among some Jewish immigrants to work at home and took advantage of social and cultural constraints in the labor of married women with dependents” (as qtd on p. 27). Through the creation of the homework system, women continued to make clothes in their homes as they had for centuries, but the people they made the clothes for were no longer in their households or even people they knew. These clothes were made to fill orders that would be sold as anonymously made goods to unknown buyers.

Industrialized garment production was associated with a variety of health problems.

Eye strain produced headaches, giddiness, fainting, hysteria, and occasionally even total blindness. The bent posture in which they labored, and their lack of exercise, often led to chronic indigestion, ulcers, dysmenorrhea, and distortion of the spine. The foul, dusty, and fluff filled atmosphere of the workroom was linked with a variety of lung complaints, including tuberculosis. Sewing machines produced a further set of problems: physical exhaustion, back and shoulder pains, pain in the legs from use of the treadle, deteriorating vision, and ‘the tremble’, caused by the vibration of the machine. (McIntosh, 1993, p. 121)

The struggles of garment workers were not hidden at this time. According to McIntosh (1993),

Hungry-looking people, struggling under heavy loads, were commonplace in urban centres. “Every one has seen,” reported one journalist in 1895, “the large numbers of women and children winding their way up or down Bay street, carrying bundles in their arms or on perambulators.” (p. 125)

The poor working conditions in the Canadian garment industry were apparent, yet the class and gender of the workers minimized public concern.

In the 1890s, prior to being Canada’s Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, participated in a study on the clothing production process and noted that, “By far the great majority of workers in the clothing industry are women and girls . . . Female labour has, in this industry at least, never received anything like the compensation which has been given to male labour, however inadequate this labour may appear” (as quoted in
Steedman, 1997, p. 14). Women’s work was valued less than that of men and women were often underpaid and overworked.

By the 1920s, the system of contracting and subcontracting was firmly in place and has remained in existence until today, with the majority of production workers being women. Within this system, manufacturers have claimed ignorance of the working conditions of their contractors and subcontractors. “Under this system the worker became a ‘subproletarian’ because her employer, the contractor, was himself a worker” (Steedman, 1997, pp. 29-30). This was the beginning of the development of increasingly complex chains of production, which have made it progressively difficult for consumers to know how their garments are made.

**The Development of Consumer Culture**

While production processes became more complex, the processes through which consumers interacted with the industry changed. Consumers began to interact with brands and retail stores instead of producers. Through the development of the modern fashion industry starting with the founder of haute couture Charles Worth in the end of the 19th century, brands have been associated with fashion icons, designers and lifestyles. When machine-based production came to prominence, brands were used to help distinguish between the products of different companies (Heath & Potter, 2004). As industrialization progressed and consumers were buying products from large manufacturers, brands provided a feeling of security (Frieden, 2006; Heath & Potter, 2004). This type of relationship minimized the connection between the producer and the consumer while creating a feeling of connection between the brand and the consumer. Through these changes, community members went from being customers, with relationships to craftspeople and store owners to consumers who purchased items passing through complex distribution networks (Strasser, 2006). They began to learn about their products “not from the people who made or sold them, but from advertisements created by specialists in persuasion” (Strasser, 2006, pp. 34-35).

With the development of brands, department stores started springing up in the 19th century and became destinations in themselves. These new stores changed urban life in Canadian cities. The opening of Simpson’s and Eaton’s department stores on Toronto’s
Yonge Street at the end of the 19th century made the world’s longest street become Toronto’s main street ("Yonge Street," 2009).

As manufacturers began to make branded products designed to be sold in chain stores, they were worried about the prices of their products. Some manufacturers worked with small retailers to support a policy called retail price maintenance (also known as resale price maintenance or vertical price maintenance), involving manufacturers setting the wholesale and retail prices, sometimes printing the retail price on the package (Strasser, 2006).

Small-scale merchants, found it difficult to compete with the development of large retailers. In the 1880s and 1890s, opponents to large retailers sought unsuccessfully to have taxes or laws created that would limit the number of lines of merchandise a store could carry (Strasser, 2006). Later there were further protests against mail-order and chain stores, which called on small town customers to remain loyal to local stores (Strasser, 2006).

Many of the developing large department stores treated their sales staff like selling machines (Strasser, 2006).

Department stores saleswomen earned low wages in comparison with other jobs available to them; they spend many hours on their feet; they were strictly disciplined with inspections, fines, and dismissals; and their employers based this treatment on the widespread assumption that women workers only worked temporarily. (Strasser, 2006, p. 38)

The New York City Consumers’ League (NYCCL) was created to draw attention to this issue in 1890. A year later it published a White List of department stores that provided decent wages, hours and physical conditions without using child labour (Strasser, 2006). In the face of actions by the NYCCL and other organizations concerned with the working conditions in department stores such as the Women’s Trade Union League and the Young Women’s Christian Association, some store executives instituted new policies that provided training and decent treatment, lunchrooms, and various kinds of bonuses and incentives (Strasser, 2006).

While facing tough working conditions themselves, the growing retail sales force facilitated the person-to-person contacts that used to exist between producers and
consumers. Brands began to provide personal stories through which consumers became passive recipients of messages from advertisements and retail environments. Through all of these processes an increased number of people became involved with the life-cycle of single garments, with very little direct communication taking place between all those involved.

**Canada’s Industrialized Garment Industry (Early 20th Century)**

In 1897 Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier said that,

I do not want to see that system of white slavery (sweating) prevail in Canada. . . If we have a duty to perform it is that we should make an effort to stamp out that sweating system in our own country. (as qtd in J. G. Brooks, 1900)

Despite the pervasive injustices increasingly involved in the garment industry, as the 19th century ended, Canada’s textile industry experienced rapid growth. This growth has been attributed to the protective tariff introduced in 1879 by the McDonald government (McCullough, 1992). Both the growth of the Canadian market and the availability of financing were important factors that helped to stimulate industrial development at the turn of the century (McCullough, 1992).

As the industry grew and became more dependent on technology, technical education of the Canadian workforce did not match the need for technically skilled workers (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). Consequently, skilled workers were brought in from Britain and the United States for management positions at textile mills (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). The machinery used was British but American integrated processes were adapted for Canadian needs. Canadian firms tended to use few types of low grades of cloth (cotton primarily from the southern U.S. or locally produced wool) and required low skill level workers (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007). Overall, the garment industry remained largely unmechanized until the 1920s, when the growth of retail markets and a restructuring of the production process ushered the industrial age for Canada’s garment industry (Steedman, 1997).
Many factories began to be organized to increase efficiency based on the models promoted by Frederick Winslow Taylor\(^7\) and Henry Ford\(^8\) (Strasser, 2006). Large corporations began selling goods over long distances and decisions were increasingly guided by marketing over production (Strasser, 2006). This contrasted with 19\(^{th}\) century mills which had tended to concentrate on production with little attention paid towards marketing (McCullough, 1992). In the old system, mills had sold their products on consignment to mill agents who did not sell to retailers or the public, but sold to dry-goods wholesalers, who in most cases were importers. Wholesalers would sell to retailers, tailors and small-scale manufacturers. With the development of ready-made clothing, large scale clothing manufacturers began to deal directly with the mills (McCullough, 1992). This meant the role of the wholesaler was weakened. Technical management of mills also became increasingly separated from financial management and ownership (McCullough, 1992).

While the social structures of production were being fragmented into long chains with low levels of social accountability, production processes were becoming more technically complex. The 1920s saw the introduction of the first human-made fibres to the Canadian garment landscape, which began to increase the textile industry’s environmental impact. The first viscose rayon plant built in Canada was in 1925 followed by an acetate yarn plant in 1926 (Davidson, 2009). While viscose, which was often called artificial silk (Davidson, 2009), had gained popularity and was used for a wide variety of products by the 1930s (Schoeser, 2003), new true synthetics were in the process of being developed. Between 1900 and 1940, the number of people employed in the cotton, woollen, knitting goods/hosiery and silk/synthetic sectors of the textile industry increased 218% (McCullough, 1992).

**Industry Restructuring and Worker Resistance**

As Canada’s garment industry developed with poor working conditions, those working in the industry tried to defend their rights. According to Palmer (1987),

\(^7\) Taylorism involved separating production into distinct procedures, creating a separation between planning activities and performing them (Huys, Sels, Van Hootegem, Bundervoet, & Henderickx, 1999).

\(^8\) Ford’s production processes showed the benefits of divided labour while using mass standardization to realize an efficient flow-oriented manufacturing process (Huys, et al., 1999).
Before there were workers with any level of consciousness of themselves as part of a collectivity – labour – there were social tension and confrontations. Before there were unions, there were strikes. Protest, then, is the prior phenomenon, preceding the organization that would eventually be associated with it. And the most elementary collective form of protest in nineteenth-century Canada was riot. (p. 62)

As Canadians began to get jobs as wage labourers, workers began to organize.

Early unions of skilled male tailors had not represented the needs of female garment workers.

By the end of the 19th century the Journeymen Tailors’ Union (JTU) and the United Garment Workers (UGW) were the principal unions of clothing workers in North America. They had a precarious foothold in the custom sector, and among skilled workers in readymade manufacture.129 Their commitment to organizing women was uncertain; their interest in – or even knowledge of – the sweated trades was questionable. Bernard Rose, head of the Montreal Journeyman Tailors, testified to the ignorance or indifference of the skilled custom tailors when, in 1901, he “emphatically assert[ed] no form of sweating, at least in the clothing industry of Montreal, at the present time.”130 (McIntosh, 1993, p. 126)

While the Knights of Labour and the Journeymen tailors engaged in some attempts to organize female needleworkers at the end of the 19th century, they were unsuccessful (McIntosh, 1993). With little support for their toils, Canada’s female garment workers began to work together to form unions. Women formally became part of unions with the establishment of the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Certainly, collective organization on the part of sweated workers was difficult. Physically isolated, homeworkers were not necessarily acquainted with each other, even those working for the same employer. Homework pit worker against worker, as they bid against each other for work. The sweating system also held out the lure of status as an employer, which discouraged the growth of a collective sense of grievance. In contract shops, ethnic differences divided needleworkers, particularly after the turn of [the twentieth] century when Jewish presence in the needle trades increased rapidly in Toronto and Montreal. The regular seasonal downturns in the clothing trades also hampered organization. Often needle workers were so destitute that a strike immediately meant hunger. Their low level of skill (or rather, their possession of commonly held skills) meant that any strike would be followed by an invasion of replacements.
Women faced special challenges in juggling union activity with domestic responsibilities. (McIntosh, 1993, p. 127)

Due to this variety of challenges, it was difficult for women to form unions. Despite these obstacles, growing numbers of women began to join the movement participating in industry-wide strikes.

Overall, Canadian labour relations progressed differently than those in the America. Gunderson et al. (as cited in Balakrishnan, et al., 2007) propose that the reasons include having a more decentralized government, Canada’s French heritage and ongoing connections with the U.K. These differences have continued and Canada remains more unionized than America (Balakrishnan, et al., 2007).

In the early 1890s most garment workers were Canadian born. This changed as Canada’s open door immigration policy from 1900 to 1920 led to an influx of European immigrants. Many of these people found jobs through family and cultural networks. As a result, a growing number of Jewish immigrants joined the garment industry. As production was fragmented into many smaller tasks, hierarchies between positions developed. The hegemonic structure that occurred in other industries existed in the garment industry as well with white males holding the highest status positions. Lower status positions were reserved for women or specific ethnic groups.

According to Steedman (1997), the division between skilled and unskilled work was largely arbitrary. It was heavily influenced by the age and ethnicity of the worker doing the job as well as by gender. When a job was done by English-speaking white males it ended up carrying a higher status and being considered skilled. At the same time, both men and women commonly accepted that skilled jobs should be done by older men. If the work was done by older Italian immigrant women, it was by definition less skilled. Occupational opportunities were shaped by notions of rightful place for women and men within the factory system. The exclusion of women, or specific ethnic groups, from particular occupations was justified on cultural or social grounds. Certain jobs became male preserves, or the preserves of English speaking workers. (pp. 51-52)

While initially these distinctions only existed at the workplace they became more significant as industry job statuses became more formalized. Steedman writes that “When
collective agreements and later government legislation tried to take these unwritten laws and formulize their practices, the social meaning of words such as ‘skill’ became political dynamite” (p. 52).

In the newly forming structure, working conditions were not good for most people in the industry and were particularly harsh for women who were beginning to play a larger role in industrialized garment production. The gender balance continued to shift and by 1920 the majority of people working in the Canadian garment industry were women (Steedman, 1997) many of whom were immigrants.

Just as gender roles were defined in workshops, unions also functioned with gendered positions. Men provided leadership and organization, negotiating collective agreements and meeting with managers and government officials. “Women remained subjects of the discussion, rarely active participants” (Steedman, 1997, p. 5). An issue of concern to labour unions was the working conditions of women and children. The two main areas of concern were protecting women and children from exploitation and preventing the cheap labour they provided from undercutting men’s place in the labour market (Steedman, 1997).

The hierarchies that developed in the growing Canadian garment industry led to conditions where people in lower levels could be exploited by those at the top through a series of intermediaries. The distance left people working in the industry without direct connections to people who were responsible for their poor working conditions. Instead the system became shaped by a series of relationships with no one actor on which to place blame. Despite their precarious place in the production chain, garment workers have steadily fought for their own rights.

Consumer-Worker Collaboration

Throughout the 20th century there was an ongoing tension between consumers having access to affordable goods and the ethical treatment of labourers. Beginning in 1898, the National Consumers League (NLC) in the United States ran a “White” label campaign in which special labels were placed on garments made in factories that complied with a list of stipulations:
1. That all provisions of the State factory law are to be complied with;

2. That the label is to be used only on goods manufactured by said manufacturer on said premises;

3. That no child under the age of sixteen years shall be employed or permitted or suffered to work on such premises;

4. That no person shall be employed, or suffered or permitted to work in said factory longer than ten hours in anyone day or sixty hours in anyone week; or after nine o'clock at night, or before six o'clock in the morning, excepting only the night watchman;

Also to allow the duly accredited representatives of said League to inspect said factory at any and all reasonable times, and to comply with all reasonable requests made by said League for improving conditions; otherwise to discontinue the use of the label forthwith, and for failure to comply with this demand the manufacturer to pay as liquidated damages to said League the sum of one hundred dollars. (J. G. Brooks, 1900, p. 254)

These labels were developed from the White List used by the NYCCCL (Strasser, 2006).

While the purpose of the White Labels was to support worker rights, the labelling system did not require union involvement or a minimum wage (R. J. S. Ross, 2006). Concurrently, the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) was trying to get the union label recognized as symbolizing ethical production. While both groups were attempting to improve working conditions, their strategies were discordant, which led to conflict. Eventually the White Label campaign initiative ended after almost 20 years due to disagreements with the growing union movement (R. J. S. Ross, 2006).

Canadian middle-class women did not react to unjust conditions in the garment industry in the same way. In 1901 the National Council of Women of Canada, which was dedicated to the advancement of women, said, “Canada has little or no trouble with this irregular system of manufacture” (as qtd in McIntosh, 1993). The poor conditions in the garment industry were not publically acknowledged. For middle-class Canadians the lives of garment workers were not a direct concern. They bought their clothes in stores and did have to face the reality of where their clothes came from.

After several failed attempts at organizing an anti-sweatshop movement, with the development of the Social Gospel movement in the early 1900s, Canadian middle class
organizations began to address the need for social reforms (McIntosh, 1993). Canadian consumers did not take large-scale action until the fear of contamination of garment with disease became a perceived threat. “Infected clothing was known to spread contagious disease, including scarlatina, diphtheria, and most ominously, smallpox” (McIntosh, 1993, p. 129). McIntosh (1993) writes that those who sought to draw attention to the plight of garment workers played on these fears.

**Labour Laws**

While many Canadians did not acknowledge problems in the garment industry, in 1896 Alexander Whyte Wright was appointed by the federal government to examine the “sweating system” in Canada (Steedman, 1997). The government began to establish labour laws to protect workers, an early example of the civil commons. In 1907, labour legislation established minimum age of entrance into the workplace at 14 and limited the work week to 60 hours for women and children, with some exceptions (Steedman, 1997). While in 1919 and 1920 Quebec and Ontario passed minimum wage laws, the clothing industry was not actually regulated by the government until 1922 in Ontario and 1930 in Quebec (Steedman, 1997).

Minimum wage boards were set up to enforce these laws in Ontario and Quebec in the 1920s but these boards did not meet the needs of garment workers who steadily put forth complaints (Steedman, 1997). The boards had no control over hours and some employers increased their hours to keep marginal costs down. In the 1920s, a framework was developed for negotiations with trade unions and to recognize collective agreements, yet the private rights of employers remained untouched and employers were free to hire and fire workers at their own discretion without interference from unions or the government (Steedman, 1997). In most provinces, separate statutes were developed to cover “labour laws” that govern collective bargaining relations between employers and unions distinct from “employment laws” concerns individual employment relationships (Proctor, 2006).

McIntosh (1993) identified three limitations to Canada’s minimum wage acts. The first was that they did not apply to homeworkers. Second, there were numerous loopholes with categories of female workers not included. Third, responsibility sat with the worker,
who must file for a complaint her/himself. Due to these factors, the new laws did not have significant impact on the industry.

**The Depression (1930s)**

The garment industry, like other industries, was impacted by the Depression. As consumers had less money to spend, garment prices dropped, along with the wages paid to garment workers, which fell by more than 50% from the late 1920s to 1933 (Steedman, 1997). The economic challenges that resulted from the Depression led garment manufactures to look at how they could reduce their costs, which often led to conditions in factories becoming more exploitative. A 1934 survey of clothing firms identified the perceived “most outstanding evils in the trade” as

- lack of control and lack of standardization of wages and hours of labour;
- disparity between the costs of production union and non-union shops and between cities;
- price-cutting; and
- overproduction and dumping of goods on the market, which served to lower prices in the industry. (Steedman, 1997, pp. 152-153)

Many Ontario-based manufacturers decided to move their production to Quebec where workers were paid lower wages. This prompted some unionized manufacturing firms to push for tougher government legislation to equalize wages between the two provinces (Steedman, 1997). This foreshadowed the structural changes that would begin decades later, as companies began to move production offshore to save money leaving former employees without jobs.

In the early 1930s, manufacturers’ unions were developed, which although never powerful, were able to negotiate with trade unions (Steedman, 1997). While the creation of an employer-based group had potential to facilitate mutually beneficial collective agreements, the outcomes were not sufficiently productive. The lack of power of both the manufacturers and trade unions contributed to the need for government intervention to regulate labour relations (Steedman, 1997).

**Changing Government Role**

As working conditions and job security deteriorated, the Canadian government stepped in. Stimulated by the Roosevelt era in the United States, Canada’s government
began to play a new role as arbitrator of industrial relations, institutionalizing relations within the garment industry (Steedman, 1997). This was a critical turning point in the development of industrialized production in Canada. With government involvement labour unions were able to get support in their struggle to improve working conditions.

Prior to the 1930s, because of bureaucratic difficulties and power struggles between the federal and provincial government, garment workers were not being sufficiently supported (Steedman, 1997). At this time, Canadian provinces began passing industrial labour agreement acts, starting with Quebec in 1934, followed by Ontario (1935), Alberta (1935), Nova Scotia (1936), Saskatchewan (1937) and New Brunswick (1939) (Steedman, 1997).

While the newly developed legislation had many benefits, it did not address gender issues in the garment industry. Women continued to be relegated to the periphery during union negotiations with men negotiating on their behalf. The 1930s brought continued exploitation of women with 50-60 hour work weeks during the rush season (Steedman, 1997). The gender imbalance has continued through to the present structure of the Canadian garment industry. In the 1930s, Canadian society began to move away from the belief in a totally free-market economy. With calls for change coming from many Canadians, the government getting involved was a relief.

Calls for minimum-wage laws for men and for unemployment insurance plans came from diverse sectors of Canadian society: labour unions, the recently formed Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, government officials such as H.H. Stevens, churches, women’s organizations, and even some sectors of the business community. Despite its weak enforcement, the Minimum Wage Board legislation did alter the perspective that market conditions should remain free of state restrictions. The gradual shift in attitude away from unhampered trade conditions in the needle trades towards judicial regulation of wages and hours of work opened the door to further judicial regulation in the industry (Steedman, 1997, p. 206).

During the depression the government began to play a more active role in building and protecting the civil commons. The turmoil in this period stimulated fundamental changes in the government’s involvement with industrial production. These changes helped to initiate improvements in working conditions that lasted until the final decades of the 20th century.
Antichain Protests

Until the Depression, chain stores did not dominate the urban retail environment but when faced by economic pressures consumers began to buy cheaper products from chains. As chain stores developed, many people from immigrant communities stayed loyal to ethnic business where they had face-to-face relationships and perks such as credit and delivery (Strasser, 2006). While chains where growing in popularity, during the 1920s and 1930s they also faced opposition.

As critics charged, chains had access to . . . financing. And like Sears, the biggest chains integrated backward into manufacturing. . . . such financial advantages enabled chains to offer better prices than independent merchants on branded, nationally advertised products, threatening manufacturers’ power and alarming small retailers forced to sell identical goods at higher prices. (Strasser, 2006, pp. 47-48)

Although many consumers opposed chains, when faced with a choice between supporting their community or saving money, due to economic pressures, consumers began to buy from chain stores, engaging in a process which continues to this day. This shows how the capitalist system places consumers in positions where they cannot act in ways that support sustainability. Even with conscious attempts at supporting sustainable processes, the position that consumers have in a capitalist market limits their choice of actions. Consumers are often in situations where they must, or feel that they must, prioritize money values over life values to survive in the current system.

The Rise of the Middle Class (Mid-20th Century)

Canadians began to spend more on goods and services after the end of the World War II. A large portion of the increase was based on purchases of durable consumer goods such as automobiles, home furnishings and accessories (Bédard & Grignon, 2000). Canadians had increased buying power due to personal savings accumulated during the war and growing revenues with personal income being supplemented by payments from the government in the form of new social security benefits, allowances to veterans and refunds from the compulsory savings portion of income tax (Bédard & Grignon, 2000). After the war, America emerged as a world super-power, dominating international trade and pushing to for trade liberalization (Rosen, 2002). This was a time of optimism and
many believed that industrial capitalist society had reached a high point with improved living standards and many opportunities for all.

**The Age of Synthetics**

During the 1950s, synthetic fabrics became very popular. Their increased use was a result of rapidly improving technology. After 12 years in development, nylon became available in the United States in 1939 (Schoeser, 2003) and the first nylon plant was built in Canada in 1942 (Davidson, 2009). Although, during World War II nylon was not sold in Canada for domestic use, it became available as hosiery yarn after the war.

By 1950, viscose was cheaper than cotton (Schoeser, 2003). Polyester was not introduced into Canada until the 1950s (Davidson, 2009). While being suited for knitting, early synthetics were difficult to print or dye. The development of polyester brought new options for the use of synthetics. The advent of polyester was quickly followed by acrylics (Schoeser, 2003). All of these synthetic fabrics rapidly gained popularity. By the end of the decade synthetic rubber (elastane/spandex) also became available (Schoeser, 2003).

In the 1950s, synthetics manufacturers took over from dye companies as the leading applied organic chemists and promoted not only new fibres but also new dyes (Schoeser, 2003, p. 190). By this time many dyes used and most finishes used in the treatment of clothing were not bio-degradable (Jones, 1973). From this time on, the use of synthetic fibres, polymers and finishes increased rapidly.

The popularity of synthetic fabrics led to a dramatic shift in the nature of textile production. This shift was harmful to the natural environment and the effects of industrial effluents attracted the government’s attention. In the 1950s, the RA58 committee was formed to examine stream pollution resulting from wet textile processing (*Textile Industry and the Environment* 1973, 1973). While the consequences of industrial pollution became a topic of concern to some people, at this time the industry continued to perpetuate and develop processes that required abundant levels of natural resources and created high levels of pollution.
Production and Underlying Tensions

While levels of optimism were high after WWII, underlying problems were near the surface.

Commentators across the political spectrum hailed the emergence of a supposedly classless society based on rising wages, attainable middle-class purchasing power, and unionized industries. Often identified with the 1950 collective bargaining agreement between GM and the United Auto Workers – the so-called Treaty of Detroit – this era of rising living standard and growing consumption was seen by many to be an indication of the triumph of Fordist capitalism. But there were always cracks in the front of American Fordism. Despite much rhetoric about the end of class conflict, business began a massive assault on the power of organized labor. (Adams, 2006, p. 214)

At this time unions were under increasing scrutiny from anti-communist government officials. According to Marcuse (1988),

The Cold War in Canada had a profound impact on the Canadian trade union movement. The anti-communist purges of the 1940s and 1950s resulted in the expulsions of many of the communists and radical union leaders who had played instrumental roles in organizing and leading many of Canada's largest and most successful unions. The anti-communist campaign in the trade unions was also significant because the unions were the principal battleground for the anti-communists in Canada. (p. 199)

While it was not illegal to be in the Labour Progressive Party in Canada, anti-communist purges were led by international union leaders.

There were, of course, many willing supporters for the purges among Canadian social democrats who were anxious to displace the influential communist leaders and demonstrate that the labour movement and the left in general was free of the taint of communism. (Marcuse, 1988, p. 200)

These actions resulted in a decline in the strength of some unions but overall the industry remained more regulated than it had been during the early development of industrialized production.

Due to the passing of the Industrial Standards Act and the efforts of organized labour, sweatshops were for the most part eliminated in Canada (McIntosh, 1993). Workers’ rights legislation led to garment workers being able to enjoy stable jobs with benefits for several decades in the mid-20th century. Consumers began to trust that most
items they bought were made in unionized domestic factories with fair working conditions. The trust that developed was in a situation where many Canadians worked in production jobs themselves or knew people who did. This could be seen as the apex of the history of Canada’s industrialized garment production.

**The Growth of Neoliberalism and Trade Liberalization (Late 20th Century)**

In the decades after WWII as markets appeared to be flourishing, the increased role of government that had developed during the economic and social turbulence of the Depression started to come into question. As capital markets based on money values seemed to be functioning, people seeking increased profits began to see government involvement as a hindrance. People looking to make more money began to buy wholesale products made in non-unionized factories.

Since the end of the ‘long boom’ of the post-World War II period . . . First the U.S economy began a process of what Barry Bluestone and other have termed de-industrialization, or the growth of the rust belt. Manufacturers replaced the domestic strategy of moving industry from the unionized North to the non-union South with an international strategy of moving some elements of production overseas, taking advantage of cheaper labor, anti-union policies, and the establishment of export processing or free trade zones. This strategy was particularly dramatic in the case of the electronics and textiles industries, where female labor was preferred. (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 489)

These changes were the beginning of the globalized garment industry and led to a degradation of industry working conditions.

In the 1960s countries such as Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan became major manufacturers. In the global market, these countries had a competitive advantage because of low start-up costs and abundant labour and Canadians began to buy larger amounts of imported clothing (Wyman, 2006). Sending large shipments of clothing overseas was facilitated by the growing popularity of containerization in the 1960s, which continues to be the main method of transporting garments (Bonacich & Hardie, 2006). Containers packed in overseas factories and attached to trucks or rail could be delivered to ports then shipped by boat and reattached to trucks to be driven to a
warehouse or distribution centre. Giant ships were developed to carry more containers and dock work has been made simpler because the containers are not opened.

Facing increased competition from imports, Canada and other major importers negotiated trade agreements to limit imports of clothing with a quota system, resulting in the creation of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) by 1974 (Wyman, 2006). This system was refined and changed up to 1986. Despite the increased imports, Canadian-made products continued to supply about 70% of domestic demand until the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 1989 (Wyman, 2005).

A major change that occurred during the last decades of the 20th century is the shift of control from manufacturers to large retailers, accompanied by the increased presence of transnational retail chains in the Canadian market (Ng, 2007). These large retailers work across borders to ensure high profits. Through these structural changes to the garment industry, those who control the industry have less direct connections with production processes. In the new system, decisions that have global impacts are increasingly made with purely financial objectives by people who do not directly experience or interact with people who do experience the consequences.

**Discount Stores**

Following the recommendations of the MacQuarrie Commission in 1951, price maintenance became a criminal offence, making it “illegal for any person engaged in a business to try to ‘influence upward or discourage the reduction’ of the price at which someone else engaged in a business sells the product by ‘any agreement, threat, promise or like means’” (Whelan, 2000, para. 3). While the new laws made this practice strictly illegal, they did not rule out more subtle forms of pressure. “Requests, discussions, moral suasion, or suggestions to this end are considered to be much the same as setting a suggested list price and are permissible” (Whelan, 2000, para. 3). While manufacturers still had some impact on setting retail prices, this change allowed for the creation of discount stores in Canada.

As discount stores emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, they were distinguished from traditional retail stores by four characteristics: lower price mark-ups, fast turnover, self-service, and large and non-traditional locations such as “big-box” style
warehouses and former mills (Adams, 2006). By 1965, discount stores surpassed department stores in total sales volumes (Adams, 2006). As discount stores increased in popularity, they have had increasing levels of power in the GGI. These stores have created pressure for lowering manufacturing costs and have been at the forefront of relocating jobs from local unionized manufacturing facilities to low-paying factories in the developing world (Adams, 2006).

Previously goods had been sold through the “push” system, in which large manufacturers worked with economies of scale and pushed inventory out to the retail market. At this time, retailing began to change and move towards the “pull” system, tracking consumer behaviour and producing products based on consumer demand. In this system, suppliers are pressured to have quick lead times, making more frequent deliveries of smaller shipments based on what has already been sold (Bonacich & Hardie, 2006). This system has been described as just-in-time. The pull system has been facilitated through the development of the bar codes allowing retailers to easily track sales. This change, which put more power in the hands of retailers who look to manufacturers to meet their needs quickly and cheaply, was headed by Wal-Mart (Bonacich & Hardie, 2006). The development of bar codes can be seen as the culmination of the transition from a garment being the creation of an artisan to being just a number as a mass manufactured product.

As companies began to import higher levels of goods, fewer manufacturing jobs were available in Canada. More people began to work in the service industry, including at discount stores.

Dramatic evidence of [the loss of ‘middle-wage’ jobs in light of the decline of the ‘smokestack’ jobs] comes from the transformation of the department store industry. Traditional department stores benefitted from a consumer boom, peaking in the 1960s and 1970s, but discount stores began to undersell them with reduced levels of service and automated checkout counters. The discount stores doubled the size of their (mainly male) managerial hierarchy, but also multiplied the number of ‘low-wage, high turnover, part-time jobs’ – going primarily to women. (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 499)

People working in discount stores are often not unionized and are unable to fight for their rights.
The most infamous discount store is Wal-Mart.

With sales over $300 billion a year, Wal-Mart has revenues larger than those of Switzerland. In selling general merchandise, Wal-Mart has no true rival . . . It employs more than 1.5 million workers around the globe, making Wal-Mart the largest private employer in Mexico, Canada, and the United States. It imports more goods from China than either the United Kingdom or Russia” (Lichtenstein, 2006, p. 3)

While being a large employer with a poorly paid workforce, Wal-Mart has continually fought against the formation of unions, making global headlines when it closed its location in Jonquière, Quebec after it became the first unionized Wal-Mart in North America (Bianco, 2006). Dominating global markets, Wal-Mart has been responsible for pressuring other discount store and retailers to decrease their prices.

The actions of Wal-Mart and other discount stores clearly demonstrate the importance of money values in the GGI. Discount stores market themselves as places where consumers can go to save money. Marketing campaigns do not draw attention to the fact the money is saved through decreasing incomes of both production and retail workers.

*Synthetic Fabrics Rise to Dominance*

During the 1970s microfibers were developed in Japan (Schoeser, 2003). In the face of rapidly developing synthetic technology, natural fibres declined in popularity and by the mid-1980s, only one quarter of fibres used were cotton (Schoeser, 2003). While changing technologies provided apparent benefits for consumers, textile production continued to cause damage to the natural environment and the health of production workers. In the 1970s the major types of pollutants included: solids, biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), chemical oxygen demand (COD), nitrogen and phosphate, toxic chemicals such as phenols, chromium, and heavy metals, pH, alkalinity, acidity, oils and grease, sulphides and coliform bacteria (Cooper, 1978).

As studies were conducted looking at the cost to the textile industry of using pollution controls, the issue of whether those countries that enacted, implemented and enforced environmental controls would be at a competitive disadvantage relative to countries which had less or no emphasis on environmental protection became a topic for
research (Cooper, 1978; Jones, 1973). Harming the environment was compared to economic objectives. Those prioritizing money values thought that it was too expensive to take measures to preserve the natural environment and mitigate risks to human health.

However, during the 1970s and 1980s, Canada began to make strides in reducing the impact of the textile industry on the environment. In the 1980s surveys were carried out on textile mills finding that most mills met Environment Canada’s 1978 Proposed Guidelines, though very few mills had installed control devices for solvent vapours, oil mists and odour (Chen, 1989). As Canada set in place laws to protect the natural environment, these actions were mitigated by increasing levels of imported textiles made in countries with lower environmental regulations.

**The Globalized Garment Industry and Post-Fordist Production**

Through increased world trade in clothing and textiles, the industry changed from one that was based in nation states with some international trade to a global industry in which parts of production for individual items are done all over the world. This new economic system has been called post-Fordism. This system, which started in the 1970s, can be defined as being “characterized by the globalization of production, extreme capital mobility, and high levels of employment insecurity and stratification” (Karjanen, 2006, p. 147). Powers have shifted both upwards and downwards from national governments, with increased control by regional and global powers, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as by local decision makers (Bergene, 2007). All of these developments have provided a climate ripe for the development of unethical practices both in terms of labour and the environment.

As North American cities lost their central manufacturing facilities, affluent residents moved to the suburbs. In this way, the Fordist city – one with a set of main shopping streets surrounded by manufacturing plants – declined and cities have shifted toward a more spatially polarized urbanism (Karjanen, 2006, p. 147) characterized by more service industry jobs.

There is a major structural shift toward post-industrial employment and the attendant expansion of the lower-wage service sector. This structural shift is primarily seen in the move from manufacturing employment toward service sector employment, which produces an ‘hourglass’
economy wherein high-wage information technology jobs grow rapidly, middle-income occupations contract violently, and most new employment growth occurs at the bottom of the wage scale, where retail and other service sector jobs proliferate. (Karjanen, 2006, p. 147-148)

Through these changes, more Canadians began working in retail jobs as production jobs began to take place in countries with lower wages. While wages and working conditions declined, companies began to experience the advantages associated with outsourcing apparel production, which according to Arnold and Hartman (2003) include: high production flexibility; the ability to make diverse products through working with multiple specialized contractors; low production costs due to lower salaries and decreased expenses for environmental protection; and the ability to experiment with new products at the cost of the factories bidding on the orders.

The structural shift in global garment production can be seen as an element of the growing prevalence of neoliberal ideology.

Among [Neoliberalism’s] principal elements [has] been deregulation . . . and privatization. . . Accompanying these shifts has been a rise in what is sometimes favourable termed flexible production, and more critically called precarization, . . . Firms have been contracting out more of their functions, and employing contractors and workers on an as-needed basis. The result has been a decline of large, centralized factories with stable, secure, fairly well-paid, union jobs with decent benefits, and an increase in various forms of non-standard work. (Bonacich, 2008, p. 1)

These changes have increasingly put workers in situations with little job security or recourse to defend their rights. As international trade restrictions began to be lifted during the late 1970s and 1980s and manufacturing became increasingly globalized the situation worsened. Growing competition led to the re-emergence of sweatshops in North American cities and their ‘discovery’ in the developing world (Rosen, 2002). In Canada, secure union jobs were increasingly replaced by contract or part-time jobs and growing levels of piece work and homesewing (Ng & Mirchandani, 2008). New jobs were created in the developing world often causing rural women to migrate to growing industrial centres. In the globalized system, companies began to search for the cheapest labour regardless of the working conditions. As much work in the garment industry is subcontracted, retailers who market themselves by their brands further distanced
themselves from production and have often denied their involvement in perpetuating unjust working conditions.

As new countries entered the GGI, their actions were guided by the demands of large retailers.

Since the 1970s, a new international division of labour has allowed poor countries to enter the export market by competing at the low end of the production chain. Yet their participation in the global market and their capacity to attract capital are governed ultimately by the demands of those who control the retail markets in high-wage countries and who take the lion’s share of the profit from the garment trade. Structurally, U.S. retail giants who command the world’s largest internal market are in a position to call the shots globally. It is under their price pressures and concerns about their inventory risk that local contractors and suppliers are forced to pursue ever tighter profit margins in the enterprise zones and assembly platforms of the developing world. (A Ross, 2004, pp. 19-20)

Production facilities must compete on a global market to have the lowest costs. While participating in globally competitive markets, governments of industrializing countries now fight to have the most favourable investment climates.

“Lured by government advertisements for the ‘nimble fingers’ of their women workers,” corporations moved their production to locations far from their retail sites (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 504). To improve their business environments for foreign companies, countries have developed export processing and free trade zones in which companies can operate virtually free of any labour or environmental laws.

In the export-processing and free trade zones of low-wage, developing countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America [and] most recently, new apparel sweatshops have emerged in Eastern Europe, China, and sub-Saharan Africa. . . child labor, indentured servitude, sexual harassment, environmental hazards, and employment-generated health problems have become the norm” (Rosen, 2002, p. 3)

Through the rise of neoliberal ideology, the corporate fight to lower prices regardless of social or environmental implications intensified.

**Worker Organizing in the Late 20th Century**

Historically, people employed in the garment industry in North America have tended to be recent immigrants. These immigrant workers, most of whom are women,
have been organizing to fight for their rights for over a century. As manufacturing has become less important to Canada’s economy unions have declined in prominence. However, this decline has been far less than other countries. Union membership and density actually increased during the 1980s and has stayed relatively stable (Kumar & Murray, 2002).

The overall trend of a decreasing presence of unions has been seen to be caused by various factors, including the growth of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism can be seen as a form of “class struggle” waged by the capitalist class to weaken the working class. Pushing for free markets translates into the elimination of worker organizations that fight for the setting of standards and limits on competition. Neoliberals see unions as obstacles to free, flexible markets; their absence also increases the exploitability of workers, which is part of the capitalist plan. Consequently, the discrepancy in wealth between business owners/managers and members of the working class (including workers and the unemployed) has grown over the past 30 years. (Bonacich, 2008, p. 2)

The Canadian union movement is often cited as an exception to the global trend (ILO as cited in Kumar & Murray, 2002). To survive, Canadian unions have moved away from traditional forms of narrow business unionism towards a wider social-unionism orientation. This entails emphasis on new organizing, greater rank-and-file activism, alternative agenda on work organization, internal structures that reflect new labor-market and social identities, extended research and education, coalition building with social groups, and a range of other innovative practices. . . In absolute terms, this might seem to be a disappointing result; in relative terms, by international standards, it is quite remarkable. (Kumar & Murray, 2002, p. 2)

In the current system, in which corporate interests have high levels of power, workers’ groups face immense challenges.

As manufacturing levels in Canada have decreased, production workers have become less visible to the public. While local activism still takes place, it has not drawn the wide levels of attention garnered to garment worker protests in the early 20th century. Many garment jobs are so unstable that it is hard to create a union. Workers who are producing for several retailers sometimes are not sure of the identity of their employers
(Collins, 2007). In the light of this problem, community-based unionism developed. These unions have members from several factories and are able to support community members even when they are not employed. This approach was pioneered in the 1960s and 1970s by garment workers along the US–Mexico border and has spread throughout Mexico and Central America as well as other parts of the world (Collins, 2007).

Worker centers have been seen as a powerful alternative to unions in the fight for improving labour conditions (Sullivan, 2005). In the U.S., there are at least 137 worker centers in 32 states (Fine, Doan, & Werberg, 2005). These organizations provide places for workers to meet, learn about their rights and get support.

As a result of global pressures, people worldwide have had to move in search of better opportunities. Many people have left their countries and moved to North America to seek a better life.

Illegal migrants are used to supply industrialized countries, such as Canada and the United States, with a cheap labour source, thus creating a new category of workers called “undocumented workers.” Frequently, undocumented workers and illegal migrants are seen as a Third World phenomenon arising out of the appalling economic, social, and political conditions of southern countries. In reality, it is precisely the demand for cheap and docile labour in the developed and industrialized countries that creates the impetus and incentive for illegal migration and for people to act as intermediaries in this activity. (Ng, 2007, pp. 201-202)

People working in Canada without official permission to work are more vulnerable to exploitation as they may be hesitant to complain due to fear of deportation. These people are part of the domestic garment workforce that is hidden from many Canadians.

While garment workers in North America face a variety of challenges, some of them are taking actions to change the current system. Commenting on a book that she compiled about the experiences of activist, immigrant women working in the U.S. garment industry Louie (2001) wrote,

By the very act of speaking their mind, these women workers have challenged multiple layers of oppression stretching all the way from corporate boardrooms to labor union halls, media outlets, churches, community gatherings, and cramped living spaces of their homes inside inner-city barrios and ghettos. (p. 13)
Women garment workers are acting all over the world to assert their own rights.

An example of a worker group that has been very successful in improving working conditions in the GGI is La Mujer Obrera (LMO). LMO is an American workers’ union focused on improving the standard of living for women workers and their families in El Paso, Texas for over 25 years. In 1990, members of LMO chained themselves to their sewing machines and staged a hunger strike. These actions were intended to bring attention to the sweatshop system existing in the U.S. The union also organized a nine-month strike, which won broad support from labour, community, church groups and politicians. As a result, all five of El Paso’s state legislators drafted, lobbied for, and won a bill that established criminal penalties, including imprisonment, for non-payment of wages (Louie, 2001). Additionally, the work of LMO’s convinced Texas’ Attorney General to prosecute various subcontractors leading to the recovery of over $200,000 in back wages owed to female garment workers. A major achievement of LMO was persuading the El Paso government to invest almost $400,000 to expand child-care services and economic opportunities for low-income women workers (Louie, 2001).

In the current Canadian garment industry, some people work in factories while others work from their homes. While the levels of home sewing had decreased after World War II, the practice became more common in the wake of increased international wage competition as trade barriers decreased. According to Ng, Wong and Choi (1999), although homeworking seems to provide both the homeworker and the employer/client more flexibility, and certainly reduces overhead costs for the employer, specific conditions of homeworking vary across occupational sectors and from individual to individual. They are shaped by factors such as the occupational strata, education, class, gender, and above all family responsibilities of the homeworker. (p. 2)

In this study, the homeworkers interviewed were paid per piece and on average made the minimum wage but as their skill and speed increased the piece rate would drop, keeping their income stagnant. Twenty-eight out of thirty homesewers interviewed were not given labels to sew on the garments. In the 1993 survey, Jan Borowy found that labels were given to homeworkers routinely. We speculate that this is a strategic change made by subcontractors, manufacturers, and retailers to keep workers ignorant. With the labels, it would be easy for the workers and those working with them (such as UNITE) to trace the
manufacturers and retailers, to keep track of those violating employment standards. Now, it is impossible to do so, thereby substantially weakening homeworkers’ organizing capacity and bargaining power. (Ng, et al., 1999)

This disconnect between the producers and the companies they are producing for is a part of the larger rift that has developed between all parts of the clothing production process.

As an increasing number of people working in the garment industry began to work at home, employment in Canadian factory settings diminished and correspondingly membership in the ILGWU diminished by 50% between the 1970s and 1990s (Tufts, 1998). To help provide broader support to their members, the ILGWU partnered with other community organizations. In 1991, the Coalition for Fair Wages and Working Conditions for Homeworkers was founded as an alliance of both labour and non-labour community organizations, including religious groups and women’s rights activists. The Homeworkers’ Association was established by the ILGWU in Canada and in 1992 it was formally incorporated into the union. Collaborating with homeworkers, who had previously not been involved with a formal union, was a step in attempting to recreate community connections which had diminished over decades of development that resulted in fragmented production processes (Tufts, 1998).

**Opening Truly Global Markets (End of the 20th Century and Early 21st Century)**

In 1989, the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed, leading to increased trade between the two countries. In the decade following the FTA, Canada’s exports of clothing to the United States increased dramatically and up until 1998, the United States produced most of Canada’s imported clothing (Wyman, 2006). This changed as trade restrictions with other countries, such as Taiwan and India were decreased. From 1995 to 2002 following the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC)\(^9\), WTO organization members lifted their quotas, facilitating increased international trade. As a result of these changing regulations, Canada began to source

---

\(^9\) The ATC was an agreement to remove all trade quotas in the textile and clothing industries in four stages between 1995 and 2005.
more clothing from developing countries and American imports dropped (Wyman, 2005). This shift in trade patterns led to increasingly distant sources for Canadians’ clothing.

In addition to industry-specific factors, the textile and clothing industries are affected by global business cycles (Bloskie, 2005). These industries were negatively impacted by the 1982 recession; the Canadian dollars’ increasing value in the late 1980s; the recessions in the early 1990s; and our current economic situation. As Canada’s garment industry has become an entrenched part of the GGI, Canadians have become increasingly affected by international factors.

When China became a member of the WTO in December of 2001 and began to participate in the benefits of decreased trade restrictions in 2002, it had major impacts on Canada’s textile and clothing markets (Wyman, 2005). Consumers began to experience the benefits of these changes in 2002 when after decades of clothing prices increasing, including an increase of 20% from 1989 to 1999, prices began to drop and have continued to decrease as a result of the increased presence of low cost imports. This change can be seen by the fact that consumer prices were 5.8% lower in 2005 than they were in 2001 (Wyman, 2006). As the prices of garments decreased, sales grew.

On January 1, 2003, Canada extended unrestricted access to some least developed countries. This access provided these countries with a definite advantage as other countries still faced quotas and high tariffs. As a result of this advantage, Bangladeshi imports to Canada increased threefold between 2002 and 2005, surpassing the United States as Canada’s number two source of imports after China (Wyman, 2006).

While a lot of Canadians have felt the drop in prices as a benefit, it has been accompanied by a decrease in domestic clothing production, resulting in job losses for many. While clothing manufacturing peaked in 2001 at 94,459, it fell to about 60,000 in 2005 (Wyman, 2006). As manufacturing jobs have moved out of Canada, more Canadians are working in service jobs. While in 1951 47% of employment was in service industries, in 1976 66% of employment was in services and currently 73% of Canadian employment is in the service industry (Correctional Service of Canada, 2009). With more Canadians working in service jobs, Canadians are having less contact with the processes involved in industrial production.
The changing structure of the garment industry has been beneficial to Canada’s economy. Canadians can now purchase cheaper clothing. Yet, the growing levels of Canadian clothes that are being imported from countries with low levels of labour and environmental regulations have led to increased global exploitation of workers and the environment. As connections in the industry have been diminished, the effects of the structural changes are experienced differently by stakeholders around the world.

**Technological Developments**

While there have been great improvements to the environmental impacts of textile production that remains in Canada, problems still exist. As of 1999 most wet processing mills in Canada (96%) discharged their waste to municipal wastewater collection systems of which 99% had some form of wastewater treatment. Overall, there has been a reduction in toxicity of wastewater discharges with an increased intensity of treatment (Priority substances assessment report: Textile mill effluents, 2001). However, even at these low levels it was concluded that “textile mill effluents are entering the environment in a quantity or concentration or under conditions that have or may have an immediate or long-term harmful effect on the environment or its biological diversity” (Priority substances assessment report: Textile mill effluents, 2001).

In 2001, Environment Canada recommended that environmental risk be examined on a site-specific basis and that pollution-prevention opportunities and control technologies to manage wastewater should be identified and evaluated. It was suggested material inputs should be reduced, processes should be re-engineered to reuse by-products, process management practices should be improved and less polluting chemicals should be used. Special attention was to be paid to the release of nonylphenol and its ethoxylates from textile mills, as high concentrations of these substances, exceeding toxic levels, were found in untreated or primary–treated wastewaters (Priority substances assessment report: Textile mill effluents, 2001).

Technology in the GGI has made great strides from finding ways to reduce pollution to creating new high-tech fabrics. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, new technological breakthroughs included the genetic engineering of wool (Schoeser, 2003) and cotton (Bennett, Ismael, Kambhampati, & Morse, 2005); and advanced laser printing
techniques (Schoeser, 2003). Increasingly complex technology is currently being developed in the textile and clothing industries from 3D imaging software to take soldiers’ uniform measurements (Staples, 2004) to clothes with integrated circuits which can illuminate a garment or change its colour (King, 2006).

The increasing complexity of technological development makes it difficult for consumers to understand the environmental impacts of their clothing. Consumers receive the benefits of technological development they can see or feel, such as high performance fabrics that can wick away sweat but often do not experience the effects of the toxic by-products of textile production. Companies seeking to increase profits focus on developing technologies that will generate increased sales and often do not focus on trying to reduce their environmental impact.

Even though enforcement of environmental laws can be questioned in Canada there is a sharp contrast between environmental protection in Canada versus the lack of environmental regulations in China and Bangladesh, Canada’s main sources of garment imports. The growth of international trade without environmental restrictions is allowing the textile industry to continue to be a major source of global pollution despite the development of technologies that can produce textiles with less waste. With the absence of global environmental laws, in many cases production decisions are made with a priority on money values over life values.

**International Trade and Decreased Government Protection**

On January 1, 2005, the World Trade Organization removed all remaining quotas restricting trade in the garment industry. Without regulation, global garment production has the freedom to shift dramatically and this has put increased pressure on producers to lower their rates. A major change resulting from the end of the quota system was that companies were allowed to freely import from China resulting in Chinese imports to Canada doubling from their 2002 level and reaching $3.0 billion in 2005 - nearly $2.5 billion higher than imports from the United States or Bangladesh (Wyman, 2006).

---

10 In contrast to Canada’s open borders, the United States invoked safeguard restraints at the end of 2005 allowing them to maintain quotas on China’s clothing exports. The restraints left US clothing prices stable in 2006 while Canadian clothing prices fell (Wyman, 2006).
An often overlooked aspect of the growth of Chinese imports is that it has decreased imports from other suppliers (Wyman, 2006). In 2005, Canada’s overall imports increased by only 7% yet imports from China increased by 47%. While some countries such as India, Mexico, and Bangladesh maintained their share in providing Canada’s clothing (Wyman, 2006) other countries such as the Asian Tigers\(^\text{11}\) and the United States saw their exports to Canada drastically decline.

In 2001, Canadian-made clothing made up just less than half of the Canadian clothing market and by 2005 domestic production accounted for only 32% of the Canadian market (Wyman, 2006). Canadian production in clothing fell from $7.9 billion in 2000 to $5 billion in 2005 (Wyman, 2006). In addition to the removal of the quota system, tariffs also declined. In 1995, average tariffs on clothing were 21.5% and by 2005 they had declined to 14.7% (Wyman, 2006).

As international trade has been increasingly deregulated, Canadian companies have faced growing pressures to reduce their costs. Whereas during the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century, the Canadian government developed laws to protect workers, in recent years these laws have been changed in ways that leave workers more vulnerable to exploitation. Ng (2007) writes that provincial legislation and policies have included

> involving cutbacks or the privatization of social provisions, deregulation of industries and services, and liberalization of employment standards. For example, in spite of the increasing prevalence of home-based work, the Ontario government has consistently resisted reforming labour legislation to enable home-based workers, such as domestic and garment workers, to unionize across work sites\(^\text{26}\). Furthermore, in Ontario the legal working hours for the work week have been extended to sixty, effectively lengthening the work week of workers without giving them protection against possible employer exploitation. In Quebec, the Decree system, which offered sector-wide rather than plant-by-plant protection to garment workers, has been lifted, thereby weakening the workers’ ability to bargain on a sectoral basis\(^\text{27}\). These measures have served to destabilize the sense of security enjoyed by Canadians\(^\text{28}\). (p. 200)

Additionally, Canada’s immigration policies have restricted the family class category “producing and reinforcing a workforce that meets the short-term need of industries and businesses” (Ng, 2007, p. 201).

\(^{11}\) The Asian Tigers include Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan.
Through all of these changes, those working in the garment industry have become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. Retailers pressure suppliers to continuously lower costs thus increasing the profit for the retailers and decreasing the wages of garment workers. In the face of these changes, many companies cannot afford to continue to produce garments in Canada, leaving Canadian garment workers without jobs and leaving many Canadians with no contact to garment production processes.

**Fast Fashion and Corporate Control**

A growing trend, which has been called “fast fashion”, is affecting the way retail stores function as chain stores increasingly adopt vertically integrated business models and the just-in-time manufacturing philosophy (L. R. Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). This practice has resulted in the availability of increasingly cheap clothing. A poignant example expressed by Menkes (2008) is that, “If you look at the price of a dress at Primark, in London's Oxford Street - and then cross the road to a Selfridges café - you pay the same £6.50, or $11.90, for breakfast and for the frock” (para. 8). Under the fast fashion system, designs from the runways are quickly copied and sent to stores all over the world. Large retailers, like Zara and H&M, are shortening the time from design to retail and designing ever-increasing numbers of garments.

High-end brands market themselves as luxury products made by artisans using the finest materials. The idea of these carefully made designer items is in stark contrast with items produced as fast fashion. These two ends of the fashion market coexist with opposite pressures. Luxury brands are becoming more elaborate and expensive while increased pressure is being felt by mid-market chain stores to reduce prices and speed up production time to compete in a global market.

A small number of large corporations shape the international fashion industry. While production is contracted out to thousands of smaller factories, the large fashion retailers have been merging to form transnational conglomerates that dictate standards to the rest of the industry. “The increasing concentration of ownership of the garment industry has ironically led to a more fragmented production process, organized through layers of contracting and sub-contracting, with retailers and large manufacturers at the top of the pyramid” (Ng, 2005, p. 205).
In this globalized industry, companies conduct global searches for the cheapest ways to produce their garments. Based on economic objectives, many of their decisions do not consider social and environmental factors other than how to avoid the cost of working in countries with “expensive” social and environmental regulation.

It is impossible to separate the home front from what happens in offshore locations. The impact of economic globalization has meant that the lot of workers in L.A. is intimately connected to the fortunes of workers in China, Vietnam, El Salvador, and Turkey. (A. Ross, 2004, p. 8)

“Fashion brands, like fashion trends, do not allow borders to get in their way” (Tungate, 2005, p. 3).

Sweatshop-Free and Environmentally Friendly Clothing

In response to growing levels of exploitation accompanying globalization in the garment industry, companies have been created to actively promote social and environmental justice. These businesses counteract industry norms and have the potential to play a role in reducing the harmful effects of the behaviour of large corporate retailers. Notable among businesses that were founded with the explicit purpose of trying to address exploitation of workers in the GGI were No Sweat in 2002, SweatX in 2001 and American Apparel in 1997. Companies have also been developed that specialize in environmentally friendly garments and textiles. Alternative fabrics that are purported to have a lower environmental impact have been used to produce textiles, such as hemp and soy. Additionally, technology to create fabrics from recycled materials has been developed, with companies like Patagonia making new fleece from recycled fleece garments.

In addition to the large-scale trends described in this chapter, small independent stores and boutiques have continued to exist among large corporate retailers. These smaller stores have more connections to their local neighbourhoods. Some of these stores carry products made through artisanal craft processes and some carry items that have been mass-produced. The environmental practices of small fashion businesses vary dramatically from causing high levels of environmental impact to specialty stores focused on minimizing environmental impact.
Businesses selling garments which actively seek to have fair labour standards and low environmental impact are able to counteract some of the trends discussed in the rest of this chapter. At the present time these businesses are becoming more popular and the marketing images created by these companies will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three. Despite the existence of these alternative business models, the GGI is still dominated by large corporate retailers using practices that are both socially and environmentally exploitative.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the gradual change from clothing and textile production being done by members of communities to the globalized industry that it is today. While this chapter has described overarching trends, the Canadian garment industry is diverse within itself. Ng (2007) writes about different challenges in each subsector. These variations make it very difficult for Canadians to understand the industry.

Due to the disconnected nature of the GGI which minimizes personal connections, most Canadians do not directly experience the industry’s detrimental effects. Through the development of long and fragmented production chains and increasingly complex technological developments, Canadians only interact with the retail face of the GGI. In this system, most Canadians do not see the exploitation of both people and the environment on which the industry depends.

Not only have the changes to the industry made it more difficult for consumers to connect but in the current GGI workers have little access to those who shape their working conditions. In the early stages of industrialization unions could negotiate with factory owners and their activities were visible to the consuming public. As production became globalized involving more complex production chains, garment workers often do not know what brands they are sewing for and worker struggles have become less visible to Canadian consumers. Additionally in the face of worker unrest, companies can now easily move their production to another site or country.
As the GGI has developed, human labour and environmental resources have become tools for those who control manufacturing processes. The use of more sophisticated technology has made it easier to produce cheaper textiles and clothing. Mass production through industrialized processes has led to large-scale environmental impacts while cost pressures have led to decreased wages and working conditions for many garment workers. As Canadians have entered the capital economy, the growth of money values has increased demand for cheaply made mass produced garments over more expensive craft production.

Along with production systems, in the modern GGI fashion trends are also beginning to globalize. Youth in developing countries are exposed to Western media and trends and are starting to seek the luxury goods that are popular in the West. “The worst manifestations of the global sweatshop are all the more tragic when adolescents in poor countries are toiling to meet the style demands of their age peers in the North who are fortunate enough to have disposable income” (A Ross, 2004, p. 25). The fashion industry seems to epitomize what Green politics views as unnecessary consumption stimulated by “the creation of artificial wants, through advertising, fashion and peer pressure” (Carter, 2007, p. 48). To address the currently unsustainable situation, new perspectives must be developed to create change.

In recent years, the rapid growth of the Chinese economy based on manufacturing seems to point to the possibility of countries growing out of poverty by expanding their manufacturing base. This is not a sustainable solution because the growing consumer demands of the populations of countries with emerging economies will lead to the need for a further increase in the production of consumer goods. This will not be possible due to environmental constraints. According to a report by the World Wildlife Fund (Living planet report 2008, 2008) per capita demand on the biosphere rose by 76 % in high-income countries from1961 to 2005. The report states, “With the world already in ecological overshoot, continued growth in population and per person footprint is clearly not a sustainable path” (Living planet report 2008, p. 27). Additionally, the current system is dependent on having continued access to a global pool of cheap labour. Overall, the way GGI has been developing is unsustainable. The nature of this unsustainability will be discussed in Chapter Four.
Chapter Three:
Public Portrayals and the Disconnect between Canadians and the GGI

As was shown in the previous chapter, the modern industrialized garment industry has been fraught with exploitation since its inception. As Canadians became increasingly distanced from the industry, popular learning and understanding has become more reliant on public portrayals. This chapter will look at how the actions and reactions of stakeholders in the GGI are communicated through public portrayals. I will explore a range of processes by which consumers learn about the different aspects of the garment industry and the ways that these processes contribute to reproducing or changing the current system.

Looking at the content of various public portrayals, it is clear that there is a gap between the messages portrayed and the realities described in the previous chapter. This chapter provides a general overview of the main messages sent to Canadian consumers and how the communicators are interacting with each other in the public domain. The messages Canadians receive about the GGI often contain conflicting meanings and originate from sources with different levels of authority. Although Canadians are exposed to diverse messages, the most pervasive are designed by corporations.

While structures have developed that limit the knowledge of stakeholders at all levels of the GGI, corporate public portrayals create simplified messages that provide an overview of the industry without elucidating the injustices that are embedded in its global production chains. News stories that purportedly address injustice in the industry are often narrow without questioning wider structural issues and stories about fashion and style are generally broad and superficial. Some of the messages tell consumers that they can buy products that have environmental or social benefits that may not actually exist. Many of these corporate messages cover up or distract the Canadian public’s attention from ongoing global problems. Through these messages the GGI continues to function based on processes that increase profit for powerful stakeholders while draining resources from the environment and human labour.

Other types of public portrayals present more revealing information, yet they are not as prevalent as corporate messages. Formal education, nongovernmental
organizations, activist groups and the government all have the potential to shape Canadians’ learning related to the GGI. Their messages may contain counterpoints to the messages in corporate public portrayals but they do not have the same reach. While Canadians learn about the GGI from a variety of sources, in the current system the dominant source is corporate media. As a result of the imbalanced nature of these communications, unsustainable processes are propagated while corporations enjoy growing profits.

**Corporate Public Portrayals**

By presenting images and telling stories which present garments as cultural symbols that can enhance individual’s lifestyles, the corporate media gives an impression that the garment industry exists in a branded world for consumers to make purchasing choices. These portrayals suppress the complex nature of the global production and disposal chains that Canadians do not see in their day-to-day lives. It is important to examine the ways that the mass media contribute to the continued erosion of the kind of democratic public sphere necessary for the very possibility of an emancipatory democracy and we need to understand the relations of contemporary media to everyday life; its ubiquitous presence as the source for the iconography of our . . . lives. Foregrounded, here, is the nature of media as themselves *pedagogical machines*, which function in the defining of what counts as legitimate knowledge. (Sholle, 1995, p. 145)

Many people view the corporate-shaped messages of the GGI and just accept what is portrayed uncritically. Messages from corporate sources become part of people’s life education in Canadian society.

Corporations present messages to the public through the media, retail settings, publically declared policies and a variety of forms of branding. The messages in these communications distance consumers from the origins of their products by giving companies personal characteristics based on marketing objectives. When Canadians interact with these messages they are interacting with images that marketers have created.
**Mass Media**

In the book *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, Herman and Chomsky (1988) provide a strong argument that shows how the views of the dominant groups in society pervade through popular media. They describe five filters which mediate what will be communicated in a news story. Four of those filters are relevant for the media’s portrayal of the GGI, namely: “the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms;” “advertising as the primary income source of the mass media;” “the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power;” and, “‘flak’ as a means of disciplining the media” (p. 2). Through these filters the interests of those that stand to gain from the continuation of the GGI shape the messages that Canadians see in the media.

One way that the media controls access to knowledge is through the priority different news stories are given.

That the media provides some facts about an issue, however, proves absolutely nothing about the adequacy or accuracy of that coverage. The mass media do, in fact, literally suppress a great deal . . . But even more important in this context is the question of the attention given to a fact – its placement, tone, and repetitions, the framework of analysis within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning (or preclude understanding). (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, pp. xiv-xv)

By controlling news stories in this way, the media can shape the perceived importance of an issue.

While in theory the news may be intended to inform the general public on current events, corporate-led news sources control what stories are included and how they are portrayed. Herman and Chomsky (1988) write about the beginnings of the dominance of capital interests in producing newspapers in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the century there were low barriers to entry for developing newspapers and papers were produced that expressed the opinions of many groups, but the development of printing technology increased the costs. The cost of establishing a national weekly newspaper in 1837 Britain was under a thousand pounds, but by 1867 the start-up costs had risen to
50,000 pounds due to technological improvements along with the increased goal of reaching larger audiences (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). As the costs mounted, newspaper publishers needed to be able to afford to invest in expensive technology. This change made publishers become reliant on advertising revenues and thus made newspapers which appealed to capitalist interests more viable than the newspapers that critiqued the growing dominance of the emerging industrial capitalist society.

The need for news publishers to make money has continued into present times. In order to attract readers, listeners and viewers, news producers seek to have stories with broad public appeal, choosing from a pool of stories that are in the best interests of advertisers and others who shape corporate media. With these constraints, news media does not tend to focus on the stories of marginalized people.

Depictions of life in the social margins as told by those who live it are not common media fare. The tendency for ‘experts’ who regularly appear on the network news programs to blame the victims of injustice is only one of the plethora of TV manifestations of dominant cultural hegemony. . . In their white and upper-middle class-centered assessments of the world, they consistently ignore the social, political, and economic conditions that produce hopelessness among the dispossessed and its accompanying pathologies. (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1995, p. 4)

The stories that are chosen appeal to audiences that enjoy the benefits of global production processes. The media has a lot of power in shaping what Canadians learn about global issues. By avoiding discussion of the exploitation involved in industrial production and disposal, the media leaves their audiences ready to continue to purchase mass manufactured products resulting in more profit for transnational corporations.

When portraying the garment industry there appears to be two main messages in corporate media: scandal and fashion. Stories about scandal get people’s attention, and stories about fashion encourage readers to buy new clothes. Stories that focus on systemic exploitation in the garment industry are minimized as they may make the readers uncomfortable and discourage them from buying new consumer goods.
Throughout the history of the industrialized garment industry the media has tended to present injustice when a scandal occurs. While sweatshops were developing for decades and workers had been organizing to support their own rights, it took a disaster to draw the public’s attention. In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire claimed the lives of nearly 150 women in New York and brought the issue of unjust working conditions involved in garment production into the media spotlight. Writing about the impact the fire had on government regulations, McEvoy (1995) describes that

The fire epitomizes the hardship of turn-of-the-century immigrant life, the brutality of worker exploitation, and the law’s indifference to that brutality. Because it was so dramatic, and because it occurred at a time when workplace accidents were the focus of strenuous political debate, the Triangle fire triggered a fundamental change in public perception of the causes of such injuries and, consequently, a corresponding demand for change in government's approach to the problem. Crucial to its impact was the fact that the Triangle disaster was an exceedingly public\textsuperscript{12} one. (p. 627)

The media focus on the tragic outcome of this industrial accident lead to increased public concern and government action.

During the Depression, worker rights became a topic of public concern, which is reflected in the increased occurrence of the word ‘sweatshop’ in Canadian newspaper articles in the 1930s (see Figure 3). As discussed in Chapter Two, after the Depression, worker rights generally improved and the use of sweatshops decreased until global trade

\textsuperscript{12} The italics are from the original quote.
began to become less restricted in the last few decades of the twentieth century and global competition for the cheapest wages began. Consequently, the news media including the word sweatshop was very minimal from 1940 to 1980. As the use of sweatshop labour re-emerged in the 1980s the number of articles containing the word increased. As activist campaigns brought attention to working conditions in the garment industry starting in the early 1990s, the coverage increased further and continued to climb, spiking at the end of the decade. As the majority of production moved out of Canada, public attention to the issue dissipated and the coverage began to drop. While no concrete changes have been made to the conditions under which garment production takes place, the processes increasingly occur out of sight for the majority of Canadians and are discussed less frequently in the media.

While the sweatshop issue was given growing attention by the media starting in the early 1990s, including a 1993 piece on Dateline NBC about child labour in Bangladesh, these stories did not have the impact that the Gifford scandal generated. In 1996, the National Labor Committee publicly exposed the involvement of sweated labour in factories in Honduras and New York City in the production of clothing for the Kathie Lee Gifford line, sold exclusively at Wal-Mart. The line was owned by Kathie Lee Gifford, the host of a popular morning talk show. When the public heard about this issue, it attracted a lot of attention. According to Brooks (2007), “The summer of 1996 was marked in New York City tabloids as the summer of the sweatshop, with immigrant workers, labor violations, and poor working conditions in New York’s garment industry featured on front pages for several months” (p. 55).

In addition to being shocked at her involvement, the American public also sympathized with Gifford’s lack of knowledge as she claimed ignorance of the conditions. Her family hired a prominent New York public relations firm to restore their image and she began to publicly act to improve the conditions at the factories where she sourced her products. When describing the story, A. Ross (2004) writes that “Each step of her painful public progress was obsessively documented and dissected in the national press and TV . . . The instant butt of jokes, and cartoons featuring ‘Sweatshops of the Rich and Famous,’ it took Gifford only three weeks to ascend to the saintly rank of labor crusader” (A Ross, 2004, p. 36). During the summer of 1996, Gifford and her husband, a
former professional football player, pledged to be involved in a campaign against child labour. This promise gained a lot of attention from other celebrities, CEOs and the media (E. Brooks, 2007). By the beginning of July 2006, Gifford joined New York governor George Pataki to create a state-wide task force to improve garment industry conditions and was in a photo with Governor George Pataki signing a bill, which aimed to outlaw the sale of sweated products in New York.

In August of 1996, at a meeting attended by Phil Knight, the co-founder of Nike and Kathie Lee Gifford, Bill Clinton, then U.S. president, along with Robert Reich, the U.S., secretary of labour, issued a statement that expressed pride in American economic development and congratulated Gifford on her reaction to the publicity scandal. Clinton went on to announce that the politicians, CEOs, union representatives, labour activists and celebrities involved in the meeting had decided to do two things:

First, they will take additional steps to ensure that the products they make and sell are manufactured under decent and humane working conditions. Second, they will develop options to inform consumers that the products they buy are not produced under those exploitative conditions. They have agreed to report back to me within a maximum of 6 months about their progress. (Clinton qtd. in R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 161)

Clinton placed working conditions as an option for consumers to choose (E. Brooks, 2007). He named the companies who were participating in the initiative in a positive light as companies that were making steps to end sweatshop labour. This declaration was the peak of the Gifford campaign. After months of public scrutiny, through skilful public relations, Gifford was now transformed into a fair labour champion (E. Brooks, 2007). Gifford promised that independent monitoring would be conducted at all the factories that produced her brand. Gifford’s promise led Wal-Mart to create new codes of conduct for all of its contractors (A Ross, 2004). These highly publicized actions by Gifford, in addition to those by other trusted political figures, showed the general public that action had been taken and that they could continue to shop at stores like Wal-Mart without having to worry about production conditions. After the media attention died down, Gifford’s factories were never inspected (E. Brooks, 2007).

Gifford’s place in family homes every morning on her television show gave her a personal connection with the general public. Seeing a woman, who represents a typical
middle-class mother, being involved in perpetuating these injustices struck a nerve. For many North Americans the lives of garment workers are so distant from their daily realities that learning about these issues does not feel personal. People paid attention to the story but for many it was treated as an isolated event that was exposed and dealt with. After some time passed, the news media began to focus on other issues. While the fundamental structures of the GGI did not change, it was no longer a “hot story”.

**Fashion and image in news and advertising.**

In contrast to the occasional story about injustice in the garment industry, news coverage frequently features stories about fashion and design. From the collections that are shown on the runways in Paris to what celebrities wear to eat dinner, fashion is present in the daily news. There is even a Canadian television station dedicated explicitly to fashion. These public portrayals promote the desirability of purchasing new clothing.

In light of the surge of advertising after World War II, increased consumption became a priority in many Canadians’ lives. Advertising companies developed more sophisticated marketing techniques and began to impact people’s lives at every level. With the pervasiveness of fashion marketing, Canadians receive almost constant messages about buying clothing. Whereas social injustice in the garment industry was spotlighted in the media in the 1990s, environmental injustice in the garment industry has not specifically been a central topic of public portrayals. Messages from public portrayal encourage ever-increasing consumption. Images depict happy and stereotypically good looking people wearing new clothing with the underlying message that the viewers can be just like those idealized people if they buy the right clothing.

A significant form of corporate media is advertising. Schudson places advertising as one of societies ‘awareness institutions,’ which include government, schools, news, television, film, nongovernmental organizations, family and friends (Heath & Potter, 2004). Advertisers also have a strong voice in shaping what gets communicated through news media. This voice is heard through advertisements displayed side-by-side with news media. Although advertising has been claimed to play a very small role in the diffusion of trends (Heath & Potter, 2004), advertising has become a pervasive element of North
American society. People are exposed to thousands of advertisements each day, from billboards to items strategically placed in movies.

A major venue for fashion advertising is fashion magazines. These magazines are essentially funded by advertisers, who often also create the garments that are featured in the contents of the publications. “To be well known in fashion today, you have to appear in the women’s press. But, without buying advertising, it’s almost impossible. The relationship within the fashion business is one of give-and-give: ‘You pay, and I’ll write about you when I have the room’” (Marant qtd. in Tungate, 2005, p. 128). Fashion is an art form that does not often receive critical press. Tungate (2005) asks, “Could it possibly be because magazines need to keep their advertisers sweet?” (p. 126). The interconnection between advertising and fashion is so pervasive that it is often hard to distinguish between advertising and fashion spreads in fashion magazines (Tungate, 2005).

Thousands of fashion magazines are sold every week in Canada. Images in fashion magazines have been cited as portraying unrealistic images of beauty (Stice, Spangler, & Agras, 2001; Thompson & Heinberg, 1999; Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, & Dwyer, 1997) as well as promoting stereotypical images of women (Crane, 1999; Lindner, 2004). In addition to these negative effects, these magazines also separate garments from their history and future. Pictures are displayed showing designer clothing on beautiful people presumably living lifestyles the reader should strive for while completely ignoring how the clothing was created or how it will be disposed. Fashion magazines also portray almost constantly changing styles giving the message that to be “in fashion” one must buy ever-increasing amounts of clothing. According to McRobbie (1998), fashion magazines are purposively apolitical and seek to please the advertisers and readers.

The images might be designed to shock, but the text remains culturally reassuring. On these pages fashion reporting and writing conform to a pattern wherein no real offence is ever spoken and no rules appear to be broken. The ‘shock of the new’ remains carefully contained within the legitimate avant-gardism of fashion photography . . . and the fashion media regales itself with a system of informal censorship. Of all forms of consumer culture, fashion seems to be the least open to self scrutiny and political debate. This is because the editors deem that fashion must steer
well clear of politics, and fashion journalists are expected to go along with this. . . fashion-as-politics is only conceivable as a catchy idea for a ‘fashion story’. (McRobbie, 1998, p. 153)

Fashion stories remain superficial, full of style without substance.

Photographs play a key role in fashion advertising. Originally, fashion photography focused on the products, but due in a large part to the work of Guy Bordin\textsuperscript{13}, fashion photography has come to present an image (Tungate, 2005). By focusing on image, recognition is not given to how the garments were produced. These images often portray glamorized and idealized lifestyles. Fashion choices are seen as a form of personal expression. Consumers can create their self-images based on the clothing they wear. By keeping the focus on image, the fashion industry separates garments as fashion from garments as items that were produced by people using natural resources and are often disposed of in ways that are damaging to both people and the environment.

In most of the fashion advertising that North Americans are exposed to, the focus is on brands and retail stores. Public opinions are shaped by the images presented by the companies promoting their lines of clothing. These ads have been questioned for promoting stereotyped images of class (Crane, 2001), race (Millard & Grant, 2006), gender (Crane, 1999, 2001) and body image (Thompson & Heinberg, 1999; Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, & Dwyer, 1997). These critiques address important issues with the content and messaging behind fashion advertising. An area that is almost never addressed in these ads is where and how clothing is made or how it can be disposed of.

\textit{Retail Setting}

Companies also communicate to consumers through the designs of retail settings. Stores are created to be a comfortable environment for spending time and money. Items have labels which create images in the mind of consumers that are distinct from the garment’s previous history before it was delivered to the store. Langrehr (1991) explains how malls create fantasy environments describing malls as “theatres[s] where consumers can create their own world and fantasize their parts in a play” (p. 428). Brozzetti states, “Customers today expect shopping to be a brand experience. As they move from store to

\textsuperscript{13} Guy Bordin was a well-known French photographer who worked for several major fashion magazines.
store, they move from atmosphere to atmosphere” (as qtd in Tungate, 2005, p. 70). Many people enjoy shopping for clothes. “People buy so they can shop, NOT\textsuperscript{14} shop so they can buy” (Langrehr, 1991, p. 428). These statements epitomize the disconnect between the actuality of garments and their image in public portrayals.

The creation of highly stylized environments to display clothing has severed almost all recognizable connections between consumers and the sources of their clothing. When consumers enter shopping centers they are faced with branded fashion items. The large levels of raw materials and energy that are used to produce the garments are not apparent in the final product. Additionally the involvement of human labour is concealed in the perfection of each piece.

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Codes of Conduct**

To counteract the negative publicity generated around the use of sweated labour, many garment companies have enacted their own corporate codes of conduct. According to the OECD (as cited in Flanagan & Whiteman, 2005), a significant number of transnational corporations (TNCs) have been adopting codes of conduct since the 1990s and 60% of these are related to employment standards. Many of the policies relate to human rights and ethical production. They express to consumers that the companies are being responsible for their actions, yet the policies have little effect.

CSR is the alternative of choice for proemployer regimes in Asia and Latin America. CSR has spawned a big business in ‘social auditing.’ Perhaps thirty thousand audits are performed annually by a mix of for-profit and non-profit firms. The cost of these audits (and thus the gross from which profits may be taken) probably ascends to the billions. Corporate social responsibility is the subject of many international conferences of earnest people, and it has been, according to on-the-ground investigators from similarly earnest nongovernmental organizations in Central America and in particular Asia, almost useless. Workers rarely know the codes exist, contractors evade the standards with relative impunity and lie to the auditors, remediation of violations is slow, and violations are not public knowledge except as generalizations. (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 52)

\textsuperscript{14} Capitalization is part of the original quote.
Often these codes of conduct are like putting a bandage on a sore. It covers it up but the sore is still there.

In the GGI, with its multitude of connections across the globe, it is relatively easy to conceal unjust production processes. Factories often present false images of themselves to retailers so they will appear to be meeting the requirements of ethical codes of conduct. In 2008, the Clean Clothes Campaign organized visits to 30 workplaces in four countries (Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh and Thailand) and spoke to 440 workers. According to their report,

Tesco’s Indian factories are established factories with good reputations, meaning that officially they meet the requirements of Tesco’s code of conduct. Tesco’s supplier in Delhi, Bangalore and Tirupur all have official working hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. However, in reality they work overtime almost every day. To remain compliant with Tesco’s code of conduct, these hours are not recorded on workers’ time-sheets or pay slips, despite these factories’ investment in such systems to please Tesco.

(Hearson, 2009, p. 33)

Eight out of the ten Bangladeshi factories they visited had special rooms that were intended to show inspectors that the factories provided childcare, which were only used when the factories were visited by buyers or auditors. In theory, codes of conduct are important but without enforcement they appear to fix problems which they have not.

In March, 1992, Levi Strauss and Co. was one of the first multinational companies to adopt a code of conduct for producers and a code to decide which countries they would produce in (“Case file Levi Strauss & Co,” 1998). Levi Strauss and Co. said they would not make clothes in countries where they could not ensure fair working conditions existed in the factories and ceased their Chinese production (Benjamin, 1998). Levi Strauss and Co.’s actions received a lot of media attention, but the realities of their actions did not live up to the image they created.

In the media and within the corporate community, Levi Strauss was applauded for creating such a set of standards. The company's guidelines and other community service projects have even won awards. But the Levi's code has serious flaws: it does not meet or make reference to ILO standards: wage guarantees are only set at the local minimum wage not a living wage, the acceptable workweek is set at 60 hours; and a company-controlled system of verification does not ensure that even the standards
set in the code are implemented and regularly monitored. ("Case file Levi Strauss & Co," 1998)

According to the Clean Clothes Campaign, Levi Strauss and Co. did not even meet the standards of their own code in many instances. Five years later, in the face of severely declining sales, Levi Strauss and Co. resumed production in China. In 1997, they shifted their business strategy and moved away from producing their own products to focus on marketing, product design and sales and decided to close all of their North American factories by 2003 (Won, 2003). The closures included the Great Western Garment company in Edmonton which had been in operation since 1911 and had been acquired by Levi Straus and Co. in 1961. Once the largest employer for new immigrants in Edmonton, when the plant closed many Canadians lost their jobs, most of whom were women (Fenwick, 2007). While Levi Strauss and Co. had been a company that provided a lot of Canadian jobs and produced locally made options for Canadians, this change, following the global trend, resulted in lost jobs and decreased availability of locally made products for Canadians. Levi Strauss and Co. switched from saying they would not work in countries where they could not monitor the working conditions in their factories to outsourcing all of their production to factories that they could not effectively monitor.

Roots is a leading Canadian brand operating more than 120 retail stores in Canada and the United States as well as 65 in Asia. While they established a code of conduct, this code has been accused of “setting the bar too low” for its suppliers when it comes to labour standards (Maquila Solidarity Network, 2004). The Maquila Solidarity Network (2004) criticises the code of conduct developed by Roots for allowing for discrimination based on race or gender where it is permitted under local law; setting the minimum working age at 14; not ensuring the payment of a living wage; not prohibiting excessive hours of compulsory overtime; and not including support for the fundamental rights of workers to freedom of association or collective bargaining. In response to these charges, Roots released a revised “Workplace Code of Conduct” and also announced that it hired a US-based commercial auditing firm, Cal Safety Compliance to carry out factory audits.

Another Canadian based corporation, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), who prides itself on being socially responsible, has been accused by its own shareholders of not effectively monitoring working conditions in facilities where its goods are being
produced and not adhering to the standards of the International Labor Organization (Industry Canada, 2009). The Department of Labour in Lesotho co-sponsored an investigation that revealed chronic violations of local labour laws in a factory which made HBC name-brand apparel. Complaints included worker allegations of physical and verbal abuse and sexual harassment, emergency exits locked during working hours, compulsory overtime that stretches the workweek to seven days and up to 75 hours, wages lower than the prevailing industry wage of US$51 a month, child labour, pregnant women forced to stand throughout the workday, harassment and discrimination against union members, and firings of workers for wearing union caps. ("Tell Canada's Hudson's Bay Company: Don't cut and run; help eliminate sweatshop abuses in Lesotho," 2002).

This report clearly shows that HBC is not ensuring fair working conditions in its factories.

Marketing tactics have also been used to promote brands as ethical. To address the growing public concern for injustice in the garment industry, some corporations have developed ethical labelling systems. Labelling which conveys messages from marketers to consumers, can be seen as a textually based method of ruling. As such, labels prioritize organizational and administrative objectives in a way that can be made explicit through institutional ethnographic research (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Even if a large company has an ethical production policy, this policy is just a text. Its categories may be intended to be in the best interests of the producers, but its enactment may happen through certain “objective” criteria being fulfilled, without the employees actually being able to work in an equitable environment.

Through these labels, “people as subjects with individual needs and claims disappear. That is one of the administrative benefits of an objectified account” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 38). While this process facilitates administrative efforts, it diminishes the needs of individual producers. In this situation, ethical criteria, often defined by outsiders, are used to assess production conditions. The individual needs of workers and their communities are subordinated to the prescribed “ethical” criteria.

All of these examples show that corporations can present almost any message that they choose. The creation of CSR programs and codes of conduct do not guarantee that a
company is living up to any sort of regulations. These misleading messages place consumers in a situation where they often do not know what is actually involved in producing and disposing of their garments.

**Branding**

The development of the concept of brands to distinguish between mass produced goods has allowed consumers to feel a sense of security in the products they buy (Heath & Potter, 2004). These brands give mass produced products characteristics that consumers can identify with. Companies use all of the communication channels mentioned above to create the image of their brands.

While brands create personal characteristics for products they also create an image that is open to attack from those trying to expose injustice in the GGI. After doing research for a book about fashion, journalist Mark Tungate (2005) noted that, “All these brands are constantly on the defensive, as they present large and irresistible targets that media love to pepper with negative coverage” (p. 3). While corporations have developed highly sophisticated marketing techniques, activists have been able to use some of the same techniques to bring awareness to corporate misconduct.

In the development of the anti-sweatshop movement, marketing techniques have been used to promote an anti-sweatshop agenda. According to Rutherford (2004),

> Civic advocacy transforms both its domains of concern and its audiences. Even the ambitions of the leading players are influenced by its presence. It propagates a distinct vocabulary, a way of speaking about objects, and a repertoire of images. By the 1990s the lingo of marketing had thoroughly infected the ordinary language of political handlers and journalists. (p. 15)

Popular books such as Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* brought public attention to the injustices perpetuated by TNCs. Major campaigns have been targeted against specific brands. This tactic sends the message that problems related to labour injustice are limited and that if the poorly performing brands are avoided then the problems will be resolved.

Brand-based campaigns have led to the public belief that some brands are okay while others are not. Some campaigns have focused on boycotts of certain brands. This type of action has two main flaws. First, reducing employment at current sweatshops
means that the people who may have unliveable wages may lose their jobs and not earn any wages. Second, most major brands use sweatshops, with one factory often producing for several brands. Focusing public attention on specific brands creates the perception that competing brands have better practices, which may not actually be the case. Presenting the issue as brand-based minimizes the severity of problems which are systemic.

**Sweatshop-Free marketing.**

Whereas the large retailers and corporations referred to in the first section of this chapter generally continued their habitual production processes after appeasing customers with superficial public statements, new businesses developed to meet the growing market demand for ethically made clothing, some of which were discussed in Chapter Two. The creation of sweat-free brands gave concerned consumers an apparent way to express their dissatisfaction with the working conditions of garment workers. Some corporate brands marketed as sweatshop-free continue to use mass produced textiles and processes that are harmful to the environment. Through marketing programs, companies tell consumers that the garments they are buying are not involved with exploitative processes but the consumers are not aware of the specific processes that are involved and have to trust that the company is following its own standards.

In contrast to the prevalence of environmentally friendly brands, sweatshop-free brands have not been as popular. The most prominent and financially successful example of a company which markets itself as sweat-shop free is American Apparel, which has used sweat-free marketing to bring in $387 million in sales in 2007 ("American Apparel reports fourth quarter and full year 2007 financial results," 2008). With its production located in the United States, American Apparel pays above minimum wage and provides health benefits, subsidized lunches and English classes for its mostly Hispanic workforce. By promoting vertically integrated manufacturing (VIM), a production process that involves all processes in one building, from design to manufacturing to market and retailing, American Apparel has created a business model that has been a market success. Based on these practices, American Apparel could be considered an ethical producer, but the company has discouraged staff from joining or forming a union, which could put
them in a class considered by R.J.S. Ross (2006) as ‘rag-trade purgatory’ – with better working conditions than the majority of factories but not an ideal situation.

While reaping the benefits of widespread publicity of their fair working conditions, American Apparel has been accused of just using sweat-free as a marketing tool (A Ross, 2004). UNITE HERE, the largest union of garment workers in North America, accused American Apparel of blocking the union from organizing in its factory in 2003. The conflict between UNITE HERE and American Apparel highlights the challenge of citizenship based on corporate consumption (E. Brooks, 2007). An example that shows how American Apparel’s ethical stance is predominantly at a surface level is that their website promotes increased rights for immigrants, but does not directly support the legalization of immigrants’ status (E. Brooks, 2007). Additionally, as the American Apparel brand has increased in popularity the sweat-free marketing scheme has become less of a public focus and American Apparel has increasingly relied on sexual content to market its products. While initially American Apparel appeared to be attempting to create a real alternative to the industry standards for garment production, their subsequent actions seem to be following industry norms, with a focus on making profit overriding the importance of social justice.

“Green” clothing.

Although it is widely acknowledged that the world is facing an environmental crisis, the degree to which human impact has caused these problems is debated. While there are few stories about the environmental impacts of the textile industry, an increasing number of stories are being written about “green” clothing lines.

Newspapers, magazines, and websites represent the first source of textual information for the general public, and until very recently, were one of the few areas where ecofashion could be found. (Thomas, 2008, p. 527)

The idea of environmentally friendly products developed later in the fashion industry than in other creative industries (Thomas, 2008). The birth of commercial ecofashion has been considered to be the release of Esprit’s Ecollection in 1991 (Thomas, 2008). In many cases, the introduction of "green" clothing lines can be seen as a trend, rather than as a tactic to address the world's growing environmental problems.
While not addressing the problems with the fundamental structure of the GGI, companies have begun to develop clothing lines which they can market as environmentally friendly.

In a bid to cajole the environmentally concerned consumer, many marketers purport their products to be “green.” Shultz and Holbrook (1999) questioned the value of these marketing strategies, products, and advertising campaigns, suggesting that they may be “greenwashing” with little true environmental protection or improvement forthcoming. In their analysis, “Marketing and the Tragedy of the Commons,” they argued, “Environmentalism will be one of the greatest challenges in the twenty-first century. The effect of marketing activities on environmental preservation therefore matters increasingly to many marketers, consumers and marketing policy scholars.” (Cornwell & Drennan, 2004, p. 111)

Often, eco-brands are offered side-by-side with conventional lines. Many of these brands have been developed by corporations with the idea that they will meet the needs of a growing segment of the consumer population concerned with ethical production, thus increasing their customer base without making any changes to their current production methods.

Having a label that highlights the environmental sustainability of a garment gives consumers the message that by buying certain clothing, they are not contributing to the continuation of environmentally damaging processes. Yet, as many companies developing “green” brands are part of the global corporate ruling regime, supporting them helps to ensure the continuation of the current system. Another problem with marketing some garments as environmentally friendly is that some items are not actually made sustainably. A company may make one change that could be seen as environmentally beneficial but sometimes the process required in achieving the characteristic that distinguishes the product as environmentally friendly has a larger negative impact on the environment than conventional production methods. Also, while the garment may have one environmentally friendly characteristic, the other processes involved in its production may be harmful. For example, clothing can be made from organic cotton but still be dyed using products and processes that cause severe environmental damage. Additionally, green marketing campaigns actually encourage increased consumption through their advertising practices. Luring consumers into buying
increased levels of products that purport to be environmentally friendly has the potential to be as damaging to the environment as consumers continuing to buy current products that have a higher environmental impact per item.

The development of “green” brands has made the corporate fashion industry appear to be dealing with the world’s growing environment problems, yet the actions they have taken behind the marketing campaigns are not addressing the global scale environmental impacts created by the industry. This problem is compounded by the misleading nature of many public portrayals.

Due to the lack of a considered vocabulary and the often sensationalist use of language in fashion journalism, confusion and erroneous meanings sometimes arise. There are, unfortunately, large gaps in the information both available to the general public in the form of newspapers and magazines and those communicated in scholarly discourse. (Thomas, 2008, p. 526)

While the environmental damage from the GGI continues to grow, corporations continue to develop marketing campaigns which misleadingly tell the public that they can improve the system through their purchases.

**Formal Education**

While in theory, formal education has the potential to increase public knowledge about systemic injustice, it has been seen to support the needs of the middle classes by reproducing the current hegemonic system (Apple, 2004; Giese, 2006). Curriculums have often been developed based on non-critical paradigms that present limited frameworks for students to question the materials they are taught. By normalizing current global systems, much formal education has helped to foster the development of people who compliantly work within existing structures. This breeds spontaneous consent to hegemonic practices and helps to facilitate the ongoing exploitation involved in the GGI.

Recently, schools have begun to incorporate more critical curriculums and are beginning to involve environmental education. Yet at the present time students do not usually learn about the current garment industry or its historical development. While all
Canadians are involved in the GGI, it is not usually a topic of focus or discussion in classrooms.

**Sewing Classes**

In recent years, Canadian schools have minimized the emphasis of learning sewing as a necessary skill. This change is in line with the fact that there is a decreasing number of jobs available in Canada that require sewing. Canadians are buying their clothes rather than making them and they are throwing away damaged clothes rather than mending them. As Canadian children pass through school without learning how to sew, they have less understanding of the processes involved in creating the clothes they buy in stores.

An example of how many people in North America view the garment industry is the perspective taken by Montgomery (2006) when she questioned the value of having sewing skills taught in family and consumer science courses. She feels that, although there has been a continuing emphasis on sewing skills in elementary and high school classes, priorities in the twenty-first century have changed. Women are not responsible for making their family’s clothing because ready-made clothing is available and accessible. Buying supplies for sewing classes is expensive and does not provide a needed skill. These views show how the idea of sewing as a needed skill in North America has been devalued.

While Montgomery’s view of sewing education makes sense in the light of modern Western culture, this perspective highlights the lack of involvement of Canadians in the clothing production processes. If the same topic was approached in a garment producing country, a very different conclusion would probably have been drawn. The lack of focus on sewing skills in Canadian classrooms is contributing to the creation of a generation of Canadians that are growing up without an understanding of the basic processes of garment production.
Environmental Education

While schools are decreasing the attention played to sewing skills, environmental issues are becoming a topic of focus. Canadian schools are beginning to incorporate environmental education into their curriculums.

Most, if not all, provincial/territorial curricula include either goals or language relating to environmental education - to a greater or lesser degree. However, almost all provinces/territories lack a coordinated approach to the development and advancement of environmental education. In many provinces, there is not an environmental education curriculum per se. Instead the approach to environmental education is disbursed - it appears as a topic within other subject curricula (e.g. math, science, etc.) (Environmental education in Canada: An overview for grantmakers, 2006)

Schools also work with outside environmental organizations, have environmental education resource positions and have networks and associations to support environmental education.

While introducing environmental education to students has the potential to bring attention the environmental impacts of the GGI, the industry is not usually the focus of attention. Consumption and disposal of clothing is not a main topic. Further development is needed in creating comprehensive environmental curriculums to raise a generation of Canadians who are aware of the potential consequences of current industrial practices.

Providing Education that Promotes Awareness of Systemic Injustice

The potential exists for public education to help students to be more critical of corporate messages. By including lessons that foster critical awareness, schools can be forums where students can learn about the material realities that exist behind pervasive corporate communications. To address this issue, elementary and secondary school curriculums have begun to incorporate critical media literacy into their curriculums since the late 1980s. Every month over half a million users look at the Media Awareness Network’s website, which contains free copyright-cleared lessons to facilitate media education (Nightingale, 2006).

According to Steinberg and Kincheloe, “Critical media literacy is necessary in the struggle to construct counter- hegemonic practices that are grounded in a recognition of
the complex workings of power in a ‘democratic’ state” (1995, p. 3). Sholle (1995) describes the benefits of a critical pedagogy as maintaining “a continual process of critical media analysis” (p. 146). By fostering critical thinking, schools can prepare their students for examining the messages portrayed by the corporate media.

Media campaigns are skilfully developed to appeal to Canadians, developed by experts with large budgets. Preparing youth to question the messages of the powerful global corporate media system is a monumental challenge. By including a focus on critical analysis, elements of formal education are presenting a counterpoint to the power of the media.

**Governmental Public Portrayals**

While the Canadian government has had labour laws in place since the early nineteenth century, it has not been very active in addressing the re-emergence of sweatshops since the growth of neoliberal economic reform. In the wake of the Kathy Lee Gifford scandal, the American government took public actions to address growing popular concern with labour injustice. The Canadian government has been slower to respond and much less active in their responses to this issue. As this chapter is about public portrayals, in addition to discussing public portrayals related to the Canadian government, I will also discuss the American government’s responses since they have been portrayed to the Canadian public through the media.

**The American Response to Public Concern with Sweatshops**

Prior to the Gifford scandal, in August of 1995, a multi-agency team led by the California Department of Industrial Relations raided a compound in El Monte, California and found seventy-two undocumented Thai workers locked behind a barbed-wire fence. These workers were producing clothing for Montgomery Ward, Nordstrom, Sears, Macy’s and Filenes. At this time, major media outlets published news stories about the prevalence of sweatshops and made it clear that El Monte was not just a one-time occurrence but that the problems existed at a global scale (Rosen, 2002).

Though the El Monte raid made the news it did not become a top story. This is in stark contrast to the portrayals of the Kathy Lee Gifford scandal which made headlines
and remained a high priority in the news for months. While the Gifford scandal focused on a woman who generated a lot of attention on her own, the El Monte scandal was about anonymous workers. Although the general public may have felt sympathy for the workers at El Monte, they could not relate to them as fellow human beings.

While the Gifford scandal drew the public’s attention, the El Monte case drew the government’s attention. The conditions in El Monte were legally recognized as peonage and gave the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) the momentum to begin a crackdown on unfair working conditions in U.S. factories (A Ross, 2004). Following a decade of lack of enforcement of most labour legislation in the United States, growing public attention led Robert Reich, the U.S. Secretary of Labor, to develop the Hot Goods provision of the Fair Labor Standards Act and to begin to prosecute companies who transported sweated goods between states.

Due to lack of staff to efficiently enforce the labour laws, the DOL decided to try a strategy that relied on public reactions and naming names (A Ross, 2004). After El Monte, Reich announced a ‘white list’ of companies making honest attempts to improve working conditions in their factories. Those excluded would be publicly shamed, and would have to submit detailed proof that they would not accept goods produced in sweatshops for their names to appear on this Fashion Trendsetters list. Additionally, a quarterly Garment Enforcement Report published the names of offenders prosecuted for back pay. Reich’s strategy was a step in the right direction, but in the absence of any real political will, it could not be effectively enforced (A Ross, 2004). The White list barely grew from the initial thirty-six in December 1995, and a place on the list did not guarantee continued good conduct from any of the companies.

As a result of the growing public concern with injustice in American garment production, soon after the Kathie Lee Gifford scandal was exposed, Reich initiated a program of increased inspection of American garment factories. These inspections involved a series of raids in New York City’s Sunset Park. During these raids, government agents broke into employers’ offices to search through records. Some factory owners were arrested for violating minimum wage laws and noncompliance with factory fire and safety regulations (E. Brooks, 2007). While to the public these actions seemed
beneficial to garment workers, workers were not allowed to leave the premises until they were questioned, photographed, and had their files reviewed. This process increased workers’ fears about their immigration status, work permits, and residency, which caused increased fear towards speaking out about unfair working conditions (E. Brooks, 2007). When Alexis Herman took over the office from Reich in 1997, the DOL’s campaign came to an end. Not until recently has the Obama administration once again started to focus on the problems with the employers rather than on the immigration status of the employees (Rutten, 2009).

During the height of public interest, as a response to the growing negative image of U.S. retailers, Clinton convened the Apparel Industry Partnership (AIP), a garment task force that introduced the much disputed Fair Labor Agreement (FLA) to deal with working conditions in the garment industry. This group included UNITE, the National Consumers League, the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, and Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, and also industry representatives from Liz Claiborne, Nike, Reebok, Phillips-Van Heusen, Patagonia and L.L. Bean. In April 1997, the AIP reached an agreement on workplace codes of conduct. The AIP agreed to certain standards related to health and safety, forced labour, child labour (banning employment under fifteen years but excluding certain countries) and anti-harassment and non-discriminatory practices. After some debate, decisions were made relating to limited protections for the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

According to Ross (2004), problems arose surrounding the task force’s acceptance of a sixty-hour workweek as the industry norm, which included forty-eight regular hours plus twelve hours overtime. This sixty-hour maximum rule could be exceeded in certain circumstances, which could include a rush order. Also, the regulations around preventing mandatory overtime were very weak (A Ross, 2004) and workers were not guaranteed higher wages for overtime.

Major issues that were debated among participants were wages and independent monitoring. Labour and human rights groups advocated for a living wage, while other participants pushed the legal minimum wage. The agreement proposed the development
of a system that involved corporate auditors. This was disagreeable to some participants because these corporate auditors would not be familiar with local social and cultural conditions of the workers (A Ross, 2004). The corporate auditors, who would monitor factories, were not required to disclose the locations of companies investigated. The proposed corporate auditors were advised to consult with local institutions but it was not necessary. Furthermore, the agreements were voluntary and did not carry any legal penalties for violations. Another problem with the FLA is that its board operates by a super majority vote which essentially allows corporate members to have veto powers on all resolutions.

Due to an impasse related to these large loopholes that severely limited the effectiveness of the proposed agreement, labour and interfaith groups withdrew from the agreement. Consequently, the FLA was set up without their involvement. While the creation of the AIP was presented to the general public as a concrete way that the government was addressing the problem of unfair working conditions in the garment industry, this group has been seen as a corporate front (E. Brooks, 2007; A Ross, 2004).

The Canadian Government’s Response

While the above actions were taken by the American government, Canadians saw and read about these happening as well, yet the Canadian government did not immediately take action. After a two-year campaign by the Canadian labour rights group, Labour Behind the Label Coalition, in May of 1999 the Canadian government finally called a meeting to discuss how to deal with sweatshop abuses (J. Ross, 1999). The Canadian federal government along with representatives of labour, religious and nongovernmental organization met with retailers and manufacturers to discuss ways to ensure that consumer products sold in Canada would be made under humane working conditions.

The federal government appointed former MP John English to convene and facilitate discussions. A six-member committee, consisting of representatives of the Retail Council of Canada, the apparel and shoe manufacturers associations, the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), Steelworkers Humanity Fund and UNITE, was created to draft a voluntary code of conduct for Canadian businesses dealing with national and
international clothing suppliers. Bob Jeffcott, one of the committee members, said that although it is easier to persuade businesses to accept voluntary codes ideally the codes should have been backed by legislation (J. Ross, 1999). When commenting on the lack of legal power of the recommendations the committee would have, English said that mandatory labour regulations could violate WTO agreements and that because labour is under provincial jurisdiction, federal regulations cannot be put in place (J. Ross, 1999).

According to Jeffcott (1998), the many players who came together in Canada were not able to come to any kind of agreement. The negotiations fell apart when the Retail Council of Canada withdrew their support and decided to create their own code of conduct with relatively weak guidelines (Jeffcott, 1998). Canadian retailers and manufacturers were also unwilling to endorse a code that went farther than what their American competitors had negotiated. Also because at this time about one-third of all Canadian imports were coming from China, Canadians retailers were reluctant to take on the issue of freedom of association. The Canadian government, although facilitating this forum, did not really provide enough funding or support to make the process effective and it did not put pressure on companies to continue when negotiations stalled (Jeffcott, 1998).

In contrast to the actions of American politicians, the Canadian government’s response did not receive a lot of media attention. This may be because of the government’s delay in taking action. Since the issue of injustice in the garment industry was not a major news story, the minor actions of the Canadian government were not a topic that would attract a lot of reader attention. In the coverage of both the Canadian and American governments’ actions, the media portrayed actions by politicians and high profile individuals but did not generally cover the effects that government actions had or did not have on the exploitative structures of the GGI. For Canadians seeing the coverage, the main message was that the government was taking action. The fact that these actions did not affect global production processes was not addressed.

**Labels**

The Canadian government has regulations regarding the minimum amount of information that has to be shared with garment consumers. Legal mandates state that
garments sold in Canada must include labels with the country of origin, fabric content and contact information for the dealer ("Canada/Manitoba business service centre," 2005). This information is intended to assist consumers in making purchasing decisions but the information given does not allow the consumer to truly understand the processes involved in garments’ creation and potential disposal.

To be considered “Made in Canada” a product has to fulfill two requirements: the last substantial transformation of the goods must have occurred in Canada and at least 51% of the total direct costs of producing or manufacturing the goods must have been spent in Canada ("Competition Bureau," 2009). Therefore, if garments are finished in Canada, the labels would not have to indicate if the fabric was imported or other processes were done internationally. With this labelling system, Canadians may choose to buy products that are made in Canada and actually be buying products whose components are made at various locations around the world.

According to Canadian Textile Labelling and Advertising Regulations, fabrics must be identified with their generic names listed in order of predominance by mass e.g., 70% cotton, 30% polyester ("Competition Bureau," 2009). Providing information about fabric content supposedly allows consumers to make choices about which fabrics they prefer. Yet, the information needed to make an informed decision is not included. The labels do not indicate the environmental impact of the fabric’s production processes or the treatment of the workers or animals involved in creating the fabric.

The dealer information that is provided on garment labels is usually in the form of a CA number. This number can be looked up in a directory to see the information about the specific dealer. For customers in stores, finding out about the dealer would involve going home and looking up the CA number; then conducting research on the business practices and sources of the identified dealer.

For Canadians looking at clothes in a store the labels provide very minimal information. Information about the origins of the garments is usually limited to black and white internal labels in a short and sterile format, excluding the processes that were involved. Fabrics names are provided but the processes are not included. Additionally, the labels have no information about the individuals who were involved in making the
garment. Overall, these labels facilitate the presentation of clothing to Canadians as discrete products that are not connected to complex global production chains causing both social and environmental harm.

**Nongovernmental Organizations and Activist Actions**

Those seeking to draw attention to unjust practices in the garment industry have used a variety of tactics. These tactics involve two methods for reaching the public. One through direct contact and the other indirect, by taking actions that are portrayed in the media. Both venues have been able to bring the injustice in the garment industry to light for many Canadians. Forms of communication that involve direct contact include magazines, books, pamphlets, films, websites, ethical labels and public actions. Indirect contact is initiated through public actions that are able to generate interest by the media, through press releases and other activities which attract the media’s attention.

A major tactic of NGOs working to reform the GGI has been running campaigns. These campaigns usually focus on one issue and seek to draw wide public support for change. Some campaigns have involved collective action. Activists seeking to draw public attention to injustice in the garment industry have employed a variety of collective actions including boycotts and sit-ins. Collective action has the potential to connect with the broader public through both direct and indirect contact.

Oxfam has published a book called *Building National Campaigns: Activists, Alliances, and How Change Happens* in which Dalton (2007) writes about the various tactics activist campaigns can take to get their issues in the media, including press releases, press conferences, creating situations which could produce an interesting photograph for the press and cultivating links with journalists. By getting their issues into the media, activists can reach a widespread audience.

**Unions**

Unions have used a variety of these tactics to bring public attention to worker rights. Since 1999 the Canadian Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
(UNITE)\textsuperscript{15} has been teaming with Oxfam Canada, the Maquila Solidarity Network, Students Against Sweatshops, and the Canadian Labour Congress to defend the rights of garments workers overseas and in Canada by running a national No Sweat Campaign with an on-line petition and a campaign called Cut-It-Out, which involves consumers collecting clothing labels and presenting them to government officials. In 2007 UNITE-HERE organized a boycott of retailer American Eagle Outfitters by American and Canadian university students when doing their back-to-school shopping until conditions were improved for workers at a distribution centre near Toronto.

In an effort to educate consumers about production, UNITE has partnered with the National Consumers League to run an educational campaign that points out that, “The care tags tell you how to treat the garment but not how the worker who made it was treated.” At worker centers in L.A., New York and San Francisco, UNITE has worked with union and non-union workers to expose illegal working conditions. The union’s connections to the industry have helped to maintain public pressure to take concrete action as a result of retailers and manufacturers’ public image concerns.

\textit{Student Activists}

Since the mid-1990s, injustice in the garment industry has been a central focus of student activists. In the summer of 1995 UNITE hired eleven interns to work on anti-sweatshop activities. When one of the interns, Tico Almeida, returned to Duke University, he started an anti-sweatshop campaign which eventually led to the Duke University adopting an ethical purchasing policy (Elliott & Freeman, 2003). At the university level, students have created a large movement focused on eradicating sweatshops. The most effective consumer activist group has been United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS). In the winter of 1998-1999, the Collegiate Licensing Company, created a code of conduct that was loosely based on agreements drawn up by the American government’s highly criticized Apparel Industry Partnership. This agreement did not enforce transparency, independent auditing or a living wage. USAS had formed earlier that year and this issue quickly spread throughout its network of

\textsuperscript{15} In 2004, UNITE merged with the newer Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) to form UNITE-HERE.
chapters. Students across the country mobilized and created campaigns, sit-ins, and occupations at almost 200 campuses. These actions received a lot of media coverage. This was the first time since the 1930s that a large number of students were actively supporting workers rights (A Ross, 2004).

Students Against Sweatshops Canada was formed following a student conference at the University of Toronto in February 1999 to link student activists across the country in their fight to end sweatshop abuses. In 2000, the Governing Council at the University of Toronto made it the first university in Canada to seek to ensure that merchandise bearing its name, trademarks or images would be produced under humane and non-exploitive conditions (Boyes, 2000).

Through their collective efforts, students have been able to impact the purchasing policies of universities across North America. The actions of these students often reach the general public through indirect channels. While campaigns and activities have received coverage from the corporate media, the stories tend to focus on the actions of the students and do not bring attention to system problems in the GGI. Furthermore, the news stories usually portray garment workers as victims with North American students as their saviours.

**Canadian NGOs**

The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) is a Canadian-based group that was founded in 1994 to support the efforts of workers in global supply chains to achieve liveable wages and decent working conditions. Actions taken by MSN have challenged unjust process at factories worldwide. While these actions are creating changes that improve people’s lives, the corporate media does not focus on the activities of MSN. Consequently many Canadians are not aware of the organization’s activities or the systemic injustice that they seek to undermine.

In 1995, Free the Children was founded by twelve-year-old Craig Kielburger, inspired by a story he read about child labour in the newspaper ("Free the Children," 2009). To bring awareness to the issue of child labour, Kielburger toured South Asia and held a press conference from Delhi, India. He challenged the world to pay attention to the ongoing issue of child labour and brought the issue into the public spotlight ("Free the
Children," 2009). His group’s focus remains giving children alternatives to working at exploitative jobs. While Free the Children received a lot of press coverage when it was developed, the organization’s activities are no longer included in the corporate news media. The media’s initial attention to this story was similar to the attention received by the Gifford scandal. Canadians were touched by the story of a young boy trying to help “poor” people in other countries but the media did not bring attention to the structural nature of the challenges which Kielburger was attempting to address.

NGOs are working to improve conditions at factories worldwide but Canadians generally do not receive any information about these activities. To make news, activist campaigns have to incorporate catchy attention-seeking activities, which may be reported but usually do not stimulate a much needed public debate. Reaching the public through activist actions is a major challenge for those actively seeking to bring awareness to injustice in the GGI, especially without coverage by the corporate media.

**Ethical Labelling Initiatives**

Labels intended to publically convey the processes involved in mass produced products began with union labels in 1874 and spread to Canada before the end of the century (J. G. Brooks, 1900). While union labels were used in the ready-made clothing industry starting in 1886, the labels were not applied to garments referred to as “white goods”16 (J. G. Brooks, 1900). For the women of the NCL this was a problem and they found it necessary to create their own labelling system. Through these labels they sought to provide consumers with information about how their garments were made (J. G. Brooks, 1900). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the NCL’s labelling system ended after ongoing tensions with the union movement (R. J. S. Ross, 2006).

Once labour laws were enacted and consumers began to trust that their garments were made in factories with fair working conditions, the prominence of ethical labelling systems declined. In the face of growing imports and decreased union membership, the ILGWU developed a campaign to promote union labels in the 1960s which grew into the 1970s and 1980s with television commercials urging customers to “look for the union

---

16 White goods included petticoats, drawers, slips, corset covers and combination items made of cotton, linen or silk (Fields, 2007).
label” (Frank, 2003). This campaign helped to keep the idea of union involvement in garment production in the public eye.

Environmental labels take a variety of forms, including seal of approval programs in which a logo is applied to a product that meets specified standards; single attribution certification programs that certify that one attribute of a product meets a specific definition, such as being recyclable or biodegradable; and report cards, which are a type of information disclosure label that uses a standardized form to quantify the environmental impacts of the product. Examples of environmental labels applied internationally to textiles and textile related products include: Cradle to Cradle (C2C), EcoMate and the EU ‘Flower’ Ecolabel. Environmental labelling systems for textiles have not been very popular in Canada.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1990s, corporations started to develop ethical labels to accompany their corporate codes of conduct. At that time NGOs also started to develop labelling and monitoring initiatives to ensure fair working conditions. The most prominent ethical label is “Fair Trade Certified”. These labels are produced by the Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), which has developed criteria to assess whether a variety of products are made fairly and conform to some environmental standards related to the health and safety of producers. FLO’s vision is “a world in which all producers can enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods, fulfil their potential and decide on their future” (Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International, 2009). While the organization initially only certified agricultural products, they have begun to certify some manufactured products, including fabric and clothing. Certifying clothing is difficult because of the large number of processes that are involved in its creation. FLO has a complex inspection process and seeks to provide consumers with widely accepted standards surrounding the ethics of production.

The prevalence of ethical labels emerged after the development of sweatshops in the 19th century and after their re-emergence in the late 20th century. The labels in the early 20th century contributed to the growing public awareness of sweatshops which eventually led to the creation of labour laws. At the present time ethical labels also have the potential to increase public awareness of injustice in the GGI.
A problem with ethical labelling initiatives is that they maintain the divide between producers and consumers. The production processes that are promoted by FLO support sustainability and the labelling systems provide more information to consumers than those of many other products yet the system of consumers learning about their product through printed labels minimizes direct communication. As the prevalence of the Fair Trade Certified systems continues to grow, it remains to be seen how this system will affect the industry in the long run.

**Publications**

To reach the Canadian public directly, many people who are concerned with raising awareness of challenges in the garment industry are writing about it. NGOs have published reports which highlight unjust situations in the GGI worldwide. Additionally, there have been academic books and articles written about ethical issues in the GGI.

An example of an NGO that has been involved in creating publications to bring public awareness to the unjust processes of the GGI is MSN. In addition to running campaigns, MSN publishes articles and reports to provide greater public awareness to labour issues. MSN is the secretariat for The Ethical Action Trading Group (ETAG), which is a coalition involving: Canadian Autoworkers Union; Canadian Council for International Cooperation; Canadian Labour Congress; Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE); Kairos: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives; Maquila Solidarity Network; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; Oxfam Canada; Steelworkers Humanity Fund; and UNITE-HERE. ETAG has published two Transparency Report Cards evaluating the labour standards compliance of 30 top apparel retailers. NGOs across the globe are producing information that has the potential to broaden Canadians’ awareness of injustice in the GGI but their materials are not seen by most people.

Some academic authors have particularly focused on telling the stories of marginalized garment workers and their active struggles (E. Brooks, 2007; Louie, 2001; Ng, 1998; Ng, et al., 1999). These resources hold a large amount of information and have allowed students to gain greater insights into the GGI’s under-workings, but the majority of people are not exposed to them. Other publications have tried to bring attention to the environmental damage caused by the textile industry, such as the CEN Preparatory
Document for Environmental Non-Government Organisations Re: Municipal Wastewater Effluents put out by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (Elwell & Analyst) but the general public does not see these documents. While there are a number of publications which portray the exploitative nature of the GGI, these pieces are not reaching the majority of Canadians.

**Victims**

While messages that discuss broad-based injustice in the garment industry are not often presented to the public, when they are the content of the messages often portrays garment workers as victims. Through many of the public portrayals discussed in this chapter garment workers are conveyed as being victims. Activist campaigns and the actions of activist groups bring attention to and inform the general public of injustices in the garment industry, often reaching the general public through the media. In activist campaigns, producers are often viewed as victims of globalization. In news articles, the focus is often on affluent consumer-students fighting to support a good cause and helping powerless garment producers. These kinds of actions are both helpful and somewhat ironic as they continue to perpetuate hegemonic stereotypes with the affluent middle-class students trying to rescue the poor exploited workers.

In a 1994 *60 Minute* special on labour practices in the garment industry, twelve women, who were in a prolonged dispute with manufacturer Jessica McClintock over unpaid wages and unjust working conditions, decided to go on camera and speak publicly about their mistreatment. When the show aired the segment only showed them speaking in their native language without translation, effectively removing the message of what they were saying to the majority of viewers while still showing the seamstresses faces and potentially damaging their future chances of getting jobs (Louie, 2001). Women workers all over the world are facing challenges everyday and overcoming them but they barely receive any media attention.

In 1995, UNITE was founded as a merger between the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union. At the founding meeting, two female garment workers from Latin America addressed
UNITE’s members. This is an example of how garment workers have been used by the anti-sweatshop movement to act as examples of people experiencing abuse. “Each instance, each worker – nonwhite, women, exploited, and living outside the centers of consumption, advertising, and retail decision making – becomes yet another example of what mostly white, consuming activists, living in centers of consumption and retail decision making have to fight” (E. Brooks, 2007, p. 133).

Materials such as videos and books have been developed to educate consumers about the injustices related to production processes. Media spots and videos have been created for consumers in North America and Europe but have not been seen by garment workers who are named as the beneficiaries of the protest campaigns (E. Brooks, 2007). While these tools are informative, they can also create distance between producers and consumers.

Consumers are still invited – in an ironic twist of virtual reality – to purchase the videos that help them to experience the factory floor from the safety of their living rooms, long after the campaigns have ended and everyone has gone back to business as usual. Once the initial outrage has been assuaged by the successful outcome, we can return to the retail outlets that we know and love and consume at even greater levels than before, complacent that we are serving the purpose of social justice by patronizing shops with corporate codes of conduct. The garment factories will keep producing, and the women inside will keep working ten – to twelve hour days to satisfy the law of supply and demand while retailers continue to reap profits. (E. Brooks, 2007, p. 157)

While some of these messages perpetuate hegemonic relations, they are reaching many people and inspiring Canadians to take action to address the exploitative nature of the GGI. Many campaigns to improve garment workers’ working conditions have been initiated in consuming countries without consulting the people that are supposedly being helped (E. Brooks, 2007). Protests outside of company headquarters, consumer boycotts, the threatened embargo of imports from companies using child labour, and Internet communications have been carried out primarily by activists in North America and Europe, often with no contact with producers. Recent actions by USAS and other North American and European organizations seek to change this pattern and have increasingly involved partnerships with producers.
Unseen garment workers are working to improve their working conditions around the world. The needs of these workers may not be what distant consumers assume them to be. Currently, Canadians learning about the GGI through public portrayals do not usually hear their stories.

**Conclusion**

Since everyone purchases clothes, should individuals have a responsibility to understand the processes through which they are made? In our detached capitalist system, we feel that we are just buying products but often do not consider that we are paying people’s salaries and financing processes that are exploitative and destroying our planet. Are we all guilty of exploitation if we buy products which are made through exploitative conditions?

With all the publicity generated around the actions of celebrities and politicians after the Gifford scandal, members of the general public had reason to believe that appropriate action was taken to resolve the problems that were preventing them from being able to consume without worry. The way that these issues were presented took the onus away from individuals. Wal-Mart promoted its ‘Made in America’ tagged items as a way to ensure ethical production. While being made in American does not actually mean that a product is sweat-free, this was the message presented by Wal-Mart to consumers. Without exposure to any other critical messages, many consumers trusted that these issues were being addressed and remedied.

The analysis in this chapter has shown that corporate public portrayals do not express the realities of the global garment industry. Actions and publicity tend to focus on particular brands and do not present information about the industry’s inequitable production chains. People who work in the corporate headquarters are often not familiar with the day-to-day operation of the farms growing crops for fibre or factories creating textiles and clothing that work to fill the shelves of retail stores. As a result, even when policies are created to improve production conditions, they are often ineffective at the places where production happens. The messages in corporate public portrayals avoid the fact that the products they are marketing exist in a large and complicated global structure.
that they do not control. Additionally, by outsourcing production and working in places such as China where the media is restricted, corporations continue to exploit their workers hidden from the public eye (Bergene, 2007).

Although companies are not legally responsible for the actions of their subcontractors, they are responsible in the eyes of the public. This attitude is the basis behind the action of USAS and other activists groups such as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, MSN, the Clean Clothes Campaign, Sweatshop Watch and STITCH (Collins, 2007). As a result, new companies have developed that specifically market their products as “ethical” and other companies have developed a product-lines that are aimed at the “ethical” niche market. Both of these courses of action focus on the consumer choosing ethical products. While this choice is meaningful, messages surrounding consciously ethical consumption decisions often treat the producers as passive victims who can be helped by decisions made relatively easily by wealthy consumers.

There are many organizations working to improve labour conditions in the garment industry. These include NLC, Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, the Clean Clothes Campaign, MSN, Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, Asian Law Caucus, Bangor Clean Clothes Campaign, People of Faith Network, the International Labor Rights Fund, Campaign for Labor Rights, STITCH, CISPES, Vietnam Labor Watch, Child Labor Coalition, Human Rights Watch, New York State Labor-Religion Coalition, Verité, U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project, Press for a Change, UNITE, USAS, LMO, the Canadian Labour Congress and Fuerza Unida. The actions of each of these groups are given different levels of public attention depending on the race, class and gender of participants. None of them have received as much attention as that garnered by the Gifford scandal. In our entertainment focused culture, the public wants stories involving celebrities with shock value. While the government has taken some relevant actions, they have not placed a high priority on addressing injustice in the GGI. As a result the Canadian public has had minimal exposure to information related to harmful effects of the GGI.

When the National Labor Committee brought public attention to the fact that the Kathy Lee Gifford clothing line used sweatshops, it inspired a wave of activism. As a
result, some consumers began to question the production methods of other popular brands. This led to consumer activists seeking to improve conditions in garment factories. Assisted by educational programs that focus on encouraging critical thought, Canadians can attempt to analyze messages from public portrayals. Yet, the realities of the garment industry lie behind so many layers of communication that it is difficult to truly understand the GGI.

Even for those actively seeking to learn about the GGI, little information is available. Ng (2007) writes

that garment production evades generalization and statistical capture. Apart from the cyclical production process, increasing fragmentation and the use of casual, home-based workers make it difficult to track production in smaller plants and to track the size of the workforce. . . increasing levels of export vis-à-vis a shrinking workforce based on an examination of available statistics — indicates that much goes on beneath the surface.(pp. 198-199)

While some information about the GGI is available for those who actively seek it out, the main source of information presented to the majority of Canadians originates in corporate public portrayals. Everyday Canadians are presented with messages that ignore systemic injustice while highlighting image and style with the intent to convince Canadians to buy more clothing. Through these corporate public portrayals, the GGI is able to continue to function using unsustainable processes.

For consumers who are concerned with the effects of their garments’ production, the main messages they see focus on actions which recreate hegemonic structures and profess messages that contribute to the continuation of our highly imbalanced society. The most broadly publicized and known about actions are those taken by people who have the public spotlight, such as celebrities and politicians. The actions of these people may not have long lasting effects but they reassure the public that they can continue spending as usual. Receiving a moderate amount of public attention are the actions of consumer activists aimed at ending the ongoing injustices in the garment industry. The actions that receive the least public attention are those of people who are seeking to fight for their own rights at garment production facilities all over the world. Although the general Canadian public has low levels of access to knowledge of the GGI, they continue
to be involved with it daily. Consumers make decisions based on what little information is presented to them while this unsustainable industry continues to grow.
Chapter Four:  
Why the Global Garment Industry is Unsustainable

Now that I have outlined the history of the GGI and how it has been portrayed to the Canadian public, I will discuss how this industry is unsustainable. Through historical developments which have distanced consumers from experiencing the harmful consequences of the GGI and public portrayals which give distorted messages of its often unknown systems, the GGI has been able to grow while appearing to be a functioning industry. Yet, the conditions that characterize this industry make it unsustainable in the long-run.

The current GGI is unsustainable because it does not rest on the three building blocks of sustainability (life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue) and thus cannot support the civil commons (see Figure 1). Instead, the industry is based on money values, hegemony and one-way communication. Major decisions are enacted by powerful stakeholders seeking to maximize profits. Through hegemonic control, the majority of the consuming public perpetuates and supports – at least at a surface level – processes which exploit people and the environment. Concurrently the whole situation is presented to Canadians through corporate media which minimizes issues that could cause reactions by the public and focuses on creating idealized images, which are often distinct from the material realities of the GGI.

Money Values vs. Life Values

For the GGI to become sustainable, it would have to promote life values. These values encompass all aspects of life on earth. When speaking of his definition of life values, McMurtry (2001) writes,

The principle of value I adopt attributes intrinsic value to non-human life as well as human life. It accords intrinsic value, that is to say, to the entire kingdom of planetary life whose value in every instance is conceived as corresponding to the vital range of being (thought/ experience/action) borne by individual organisms as well as by ecosystems. (p. 79)

When looking at this definition, it is clear that the GGI does not put emphasis on supporting life values.
As can be seen in the depiction in Chapter Two, the structure of the GGI has negative impacts on both society and the environment. The garment industry promotes money values over the life values of environmental and social health. Major decisions in the garment industry are based on profitability for the shareholders of transnational corporations; where and how garments are produced is a secondary issue based on maximizing profits. For people who are employed in the industry, where and how garments are produced is of utmost importance. Yet, in this situation the corporations have more power.

**The Noxious Effects of Textile Production**

Textile production exemplifies money values. For example, to save money, transnational corporations sell garments produced in areas with few or poorly enforced environmental and health regulations. Waste generated by garment production processes is having a significant impact on the natural environment and human health around the world. One of the most damaging stages of the garment industry is textile production. The creation of both natural and synthetic fabrics involves consumption of high levels of natural resources and creates high levels of waste.

Cotton, one of the most popular clothing fibres, is dependent on high levels of water and is responsible for one quarter of all pesticide use in the United States (Claudio, 2007). An increased environmental burden created by America’s cotton industry is that a large proportion of America’s raw cotton is shipped to China to be processed before being sent back to North America as garments. Water pollution has been an ongoing problem with the textile industry. Producing wool also has environmental impacts as clearing land for sheep pastures and grazing causes land degradation. Additionally, insecticides and fungicides are applied to sheep’s wool. While the idea of natural fibres may seem to be good for the environment, current production processes are causing severe environmental damage.

Additionally, the rise of synthetic fabrics has lead to a host of environmental and health-related problems. Polyester and other synthetic fabrics use petroleum as an input and require high levels of energy usually obtained from crude oil, with emissions including volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and acid gases such as
hydrogen chloride, all of which can cause or aggravate respiratory disease (Claudio, 2007). Polyester production also emits volatile monomers, solvents, and other by-products through the wastewater it generates (Claudio, 2007). These emissions are harmful to both human and environmental health.

Fabrics are processed through both wet and dry processes. Dry processes include yarn manufacturing, fabric weaving and knitting. Wet processes include desizing, scouring, bleaching, mercerizing, dyeing, printing and finishing. Wet processing is responsible for the most water and energy usage as well as pollution, especially during the processing of natural fibres (Ren, 2000). There are a variety of harmful effects of wet processes which include material, water and energy consumption; chemical use and release; and waste generation (Ren, 2000).

Preparation processes for fabric include desizing, scouring, bleaching and mercerizing. These processes are responsible for about half of the total pollution and a significant amount of waste water from wet processing (Ren, 2000). Environmental issues associated with these processes include the use of chemicals with high biological oxygen demand and chemical oxygen demand; toxicity of surfactants; water use; and adsorbable organic chlorine and alkalinity in effluent (Ren, 2000).

Another part of fabric production that causes environmental damage is the dyeing of fibres or fabric. As dye is produced 2% is discharged directly in aqueous effluent and an additional 10% is lost during the textile coloration process (Pearce, Lloyd, & Guthrie, 2003).

Dyebath effluents may contain heavy metals, ammonia, alkali salts, toxic solids, and large amounts of pigments. Additionally, extremely hot water is often discharged into nearby bodies of water. Salt is the most destructive byproduct of the dyeing process, as it contaminates water and destroys fish, native plants, and crops. ("Environmental hazards of the textile industry," 2006, para. 3)

In countries with poor environmental regulations, dye effluent is often discharged directly into rivers. Even with the relatively strict environmental regulations in Canada, dye effluent is affecting the natural environment. In a 1992 study of the Yamaska River in Quebec, fifteen dyes were detected in the river’s water in both suspended solids and
downstream sediments (Maguire as cited in de Aragão Umbuzeiro et al., 2005). Dye effluent has been linked with increased mutagenic activity at sites around the world (de Aragão Umbuzeiro, et al., 2005).

Printing and finishing processes also have negative environmental consequences. Both processes affect air quality as they release volatile organic compounds and urea (Ren, 2000). Finishing is also high in energy use (Ren, 2000). All of these processes contribute to the damage that textile production has on human and environmental health and exemplify the choice of money values over life values.

The production processes used to create textiles have been known to produce harmful by-products for decades, yet many factories around the world continue to use harmful processes.

Contaminants of concern generated by many textile manufacturing plants include spent solvents and surfactants, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from transformers and other machinery, asbestos from spinning machines or structures, bleaching products such as hydrogen peroxide, phosphates from detergents or water softeners, insecticides, phenol (a manmade substance used to make synthetics such as nylon), underground storage tank contents, waste oil, and other petroleum products. Solvents comprise the majority of hazardous waste generated by textile mills. Spent solvents are used to clean machinery and for dyeing, finishing, dry-cleaning, and other specialty operations, and they include tetrachloroethylene (PCE), trichloroethylene (TCE), benzene, and ethylene dichloride (1, 2-dichloroethane). When released into soil or water or evaporated into the air, these substances can be harmful to humans. ("Environmental hazards of the textile industry," 2006, para. 2)

In addition to causing negative effects on the natural environment, many of these pollutants are harmful to human health. Over exposure to solvents can cause dizziness, headache, nausea, lung problems, liver and kidney diseases, unconsciousness, cancer and death ("Environmental hazards of the textile industry," 2006). For people working in factories with insufficient safety regulations, these are common hazards faced in the work place.

Garments are also made with a number of other notions. These include items such as zippers and buttons. Production of these items creates a number of harmful environmental consequences. Many of these items are created with metals and plastics.
For example, brass used for zippers is made from copper and zinc for which extraction and processing is linked to acid drainage in mines and to air pollution (Glausiusz, 2008).

The textile industry affects the environment through both depleting natural resources and creating pollution. While the Canadian government has had environmental protection laws since the 1960s which could have provided significant environmental benefits, as textile production is increasingly outsourced to countries that lack or have poor enforcement of environmental regulations much of the pollution has just been exported. This shift in production locations not only allows more pollution to be created during the production process but also creates additional pollution through transportation processes. The toxic by-products created during textile production affect textile workers as well as all of those whose local environments are impacted by the industry.

**Health and Safety during Clothing Production**

Workers assembling garments also face a variety of health and safety challenges as a result of money values. As labour processes have been modified to maximize production outputs, repetitive strain injuries have become common (Gunning et al. as cited in Fenwick, 2007). A wide variety of health issues have been identified in factory workers in the clothing industry. The risks include:

- the effects of noise level on hearing loss (18);
- the discomfort and long-term effects of continuous vibration from machinery;
- eyestrain and mental fatigue resulting from poor lighting;
- health risks due to poor ventilation (19–21).

Byssinosis or brown lung is associated with long-term exposure to dust; it is a recognized disease in the textile industry, but less is known about its occurrence in clothing manufacture (22, 23). The problem of workplace dust has been exacerbated with the use of synthetic materials (24, 25). Fabrics that are made shrink-resistant, stretchy, rough, soft, smooth, waterproof, fireproof, pestproof, easy to press, wrinkle-free, and even natural-looking through the use of harmful chemicals may cause dermatitis, eye and throat irritations, difficulties in breathing, dizzy spells, and possible cancer in the long term for sewing machine operators (26–30). In the garment industry, sewing machine operators suffer cervicobrachial disorders due to the static and repetitive exertion of hand and arm muscles (31); musculoskeletal disorders that give pain usually in the neck, arms, shoulders, and lower back (32); carpal tunnel syndrome (33–35); and inflammation of the joints that may cause bursitis. (Gannagé, 1999, p. 412)
All of these health issues face garment workers who work long hours engaging in repetitive processes to produce fashion items for consumer markets.

As can be seen in the history shared in Chapter Two, a variety of technological developments have sped up garment production processes. Many of these innovations put more strain on factory workers. For example, when writing about a factory where she conducted research, Gannagé (1999) described that

To all appearances, Jersey Garments was a successful family-run company. . . Employment was steady. . . The majority of sewing machine operators sewed garments at individual work stations beneath an automated conveyor belt known as the E-ton line. The E-ton line was a Swedish automated materials-handling system for transporting hangers carrying unmade garment pieces. Under the old system of section work, bundles of unmade garments were distributed by “bundle girls.” Reorganization to accommodate the new technology increased the pace of work. The work transported along the conveyor belt was orderly and arrived quickly. Sewing was highly sectionalized. With a push of a button a hanger dropped close to the operator’s needle; she positioned the fabric, sewed one seam or dart, and pressed a button that conveyed the hanger to the next operator for the next operation. Unanticipated health hazards, including the threat of new diseases and new kinds of injuries, resulted from management’s reorganization of work. Inhalation of dust from cotton, synthetic fibers, and chemically treated fabrics was worsened by the overhead motion of the materials-handling system. Women’s eyes were swollen and red from the perpetual motion of the dust. The serge machine combines sewing and finishing in a single function. Sewing machine operators bent over their machines could not help but inhale dust released by the cutting action of the knife attached to the needle of the serge machine. Respiratory problems and flu-like symptoms were prevalent at Jersey Garments. (pp. 417-418)

While garments can be produced faster by incorporating more advanced technology, almost all production processes still require human operators who have to increase their speed to accommodate pressure to increase production rates.

The pressure to increase garment production speed is based on the goal of increasing profits for the manufacturers and retailers. Garment workers who often have few other choices for employment must work at jobs that damage their health in order to get just enough money to scrape by while large retailers are making high levels of profit
in part based on the exploitation of the garment workers. In this system the money values of those who control production processes are clearly prioritized over life values.

**Increased Purchasing and the Effects of Garment Disposal**

With the growth of fast fashion, there is a high demand for quick turnaround time as customers want to have the latest styles. Retail stores have gone from having four separate seasons to getting almost daily deliveries of new styles. “Globalization has made it possible to produce clothing at increasingly lower prices, prices so low that many consumers consider this clothing to be disposable” (Claudio, 2007, p. A449). Canadian consumers are keeping their clothes for less time.

Fashion is an important characteristic of clothing consumption. Household appliances or other hardware goods may often be disposed because of malfunctioning of products or availability of new technology after relatively lengthy usages of products. Clothes, however, may be disposed simply because of a fashion change, boredom or one’s physical changes. (Shim, 1995, p. 39)

Shim (1995) identified eight patterns of clothing disposal: economically motivated resale, environmentally motivated resale, charity motivated donation, environmentally motivated donation, economically motivated reuse, environmentally motivated reuse, convenience-oriented discarding, and unawareness-based discarding. Despite which method of disposal a consumer chooses, overconsumption of clothing and its disposal have negative environmental and health impacts.

With consumers facing constant pressure to update their wardrobes many garments end up in landfills. At the end of the twentieth century it was reported that approximately 5% (or 8 million tons) of waste materials in U.S. landfills is made up of post-consumer textiles (Hammer and The Recycler’s Handbook as cited in Shim, 1995). Clothing by many top fast fashion retailers such as H&M and Zara are designed to be worn less than 10 times (McAfee et al., as cited in L. R. Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

While recycling discarded clothing could be an option to deal with excessive waste, recycling clothing is difficult for several reasons. Synthetics are hard to break down and natural fibres are usually processed, dyed and treated with various chemicals making it difficult to reclaim the pure natural products. As levels of purchasing increase
without effective disposal and recycling practices, the GGI is producing high levels of
profit as well as waste. This post-consumer waste adds to the environmental burden of
the previously discussed production-generated environmental effects.

While some people choose to donate their used clothing for charity or
environmentally motivated reasons, clothing that is donated to Canadian charities is often
sold to companies who then resell it in developing countries. This practice has resulted in
a large influx of used Western clothing in countries that previously had thriving local
garment industries. Prices for the used clothing are often lower than the cost of buying
locally made clothing. A study by the Institute for Manufacturing at Cambridge
University found that the second-hand clothes trade in African countries is hindering the
development of local industries (Claudio, 2007).

With few methods of disposing of clothing that do not harm the environment or
people, growing levels of garment consumption and disposal are creating a variety of
global challenges. As mentioned in Chapter Two, changes to the GGI have led to
decreased prices of clothing for Canadian consumers. When looked at through a lens
based on money values, consumers can buy more clothing when the prices are lower, but
looked at through a lens based on life values buying more clothing has negative effects
on environmental and human health.

**Prioritization of Money Values**

Because the GGI promotes money values over life values, the system does not
have one of the building blocks for sustainability. Acceptance of the GGI has been based
on a belief that unlimited economic growth is possible. The recent economic crisis is an
example of the problems caused by money values in the current global economic system.
In this system, people’s incomes depend on global markets which have been shown to be
linked to chaotic mathematical models (Medio & Gallo, 1995) with no life parameters.
With growing numbers of the world’s population are becoming dependent on global
markets, people’s livelihoods are increasingly vulnerable to economic fluctuations which
they have no control over.

Rising levels of low-cost production in the East accompanied by increased
incomes in the West has led to the specialization of some industrializing countries in
manufacturing, which has been associated with low-paying jobs and high levels of pollution. Production for Western fashion markets works within a globalized system based on countries competing to have the most beneficial investment environments. In a global system based on money values, two of the main advantages in many developing countries are cheap labour and lax environmental regulations. In the current system, governments seeking foreign investment must guarantee that wages will be kept down by ensuring that workers’ rights are suppressed, that environmental and industrial safety regulations will be implemented only as a last resort, and that generous tax breaks and other concessions will quicken the flow of profit. Princely returns on investment are promised, and the rights to free speech, freedom of association, and collective bargaining go begging. The oversupply of export factories in the world’s free-trade zones means that contractors and agents will accept orders with impossibly tight profit margins simply in hopes of establishing a more permanent arrangement with a big retailer. The wage floor slides under pressure from other regions with even lower labor costs, and the environmental impact on host communities can be catastrophic. (A Ross, 2004, p. 10)

These are some of the results of the spread of the GGI based on the prioritization of money values.

Through increased global trade, economic imperatives have caused negative changes within societies and social structures. Changes based on money values have led to large-scale migration from rural to industrial areas. In these industrial areas, people’s lives are shaped by the needs of corporate interests.

The worker dormitories run by the companies minimize the impact on communities of playing host to large migrant populations, and save local officials the social cost of policing shantytowns. On the other side remittance economy allows money to flow from the coastal cities to the provinces, and helps to sustain peasant families. (A Ross, 2004, pp. 123-124)

As the number of people working in manufacturing jobs has increased, many countries have experienced rapid economic growth, such as Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia and China. Yet this growth has not been felt equally by everyone. For the millions of people who now live and work in burgeoning industrial centres, the conditions are often arduous. A garment worker in Sri Lanka said,
I had to stay in a boarding house where 10 other girls were living . . . We have to sleep in crowded rooms made out of wooden planks for walls. The rooms do not get enough ventilation. And there is no escape from mosquitoes. (as cited in Hearson, 2009, p. 32)

While these types of working conditions would not be tolerated in Canada, they are prevalent in much of the world where industrial manufacturing is spreading. In this new system almost completely focused on money values, some people work for long hours in harsh conditions to make money to send to their families or to save up for a better life in the future, while their employers enjoy the profits from the sale of mass-produced goods.

In the GGI, the clothes that are sold in stylish retail stores are part of an unjust system which does not respect human or environmental rights. Life values should be a priority for a sustainable society.

Labor rights are not privileges that carry a price tag, and poverty does not preclude entitlement to them. There is no reason why core labor standards (recognized by the ILO) should be subject to a cost-benefit analysis. In any case, whatever increased cost are incurred from observing these rights should not be borne by host nations, but by the multinational firms that reap vast profits from the sweatshop system. Even if the cost were passed on to consumers (a more practical assumption), there is a reasonable expectation that they could be absorbed without much pain. In a comparative study of garment production in Mexico and the U.S., economists Robert Pollin, Justine Burns, and James Heintz estimate that 100 percent wage increases for workers at all points of the production chain would still only translate into a retail hike ranging from 2-6 percent. (A Ross, 2004, p. 53)

In the current system, businesses along the production chain attempt to make the most profit, regardless of the processes that make it possible.

A fundamental aspect of the GGI which renders it unsustainable is that it is run by transnational corporations (TNCs). These corporations have legal mandates to make money. According to the law, all their actions must prioritize money values.

All executive authorities within individual corporate bodies are . . . bound by the “fiduciary duty” to maximize monetized returns to their corporate stockholders (including in particular themselves) as the overriding obligation of decisions and actions, thereby compelling them by corporate charter prescription to minimise all expenditures on protecting human and non-human life by worker pay, social benefits or environmental regulation. In this way, it becomes a violation of legally binding corporate morality for its
operations to take account of the life interests of employees, surrounding communities and environments, or even the future life of the world ahead of shareholders’ continuous maximization of money profit. (J. McMurtry, 2002, p. 202)

These regulations are based on the classical economic theory that sees life values as externalities.

The system’s universal principle of “rationality” is, in consequence, to externalise all costs onto their individuals, societies and environments so that no form of human existence or responsibility such as “citizen” or “person” or “respecter of other life” is recognised by the corporate calculus or its state servants. Only self-maximising “profitable enterprises” and their “consumers” exist to the mindset. This form of life is then everywhere prescribed as “inevitable” for all peoples, and is proclaimed by its agents to offer societies across the world “no alternative”. (J. McMurtry, 2002, pp. 202-203)

As the inevitability of the current system is a myth promoted by those who profit from the current system, there is room for change. The unsustainable nature of the current system mandates that change will eventually take place.

While the current GGI prioritizes economic objectives, the way that it is run will not allow all of the world’s people to have access to increased capital. The current system fosters growing wealth inequality characterized by extreme differences in standards of living and freedom. The cheap prices available to Canadians are only possible because their garments are produced using systems that exploit people and the environment. In this system, money values are blatantly prioritized over life values such as environmental and social health.

**Hegemony vs. Counter-Hegemony**

The interaction of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces is complex. Through historical developments, societal structures have been developed in which certain groups have power over others, in ways that are often believed to be justified. Many people who are subordinated have accepted their subordinated state and do not engage in an active counter-hegemonic struggle. When people are aware of the dominant interests that are
shaping their lives and that the ruling structures are not natural, they can begin to fight back. According to Carroll and Ratner (1994)

For Gramsci, hegemony is understood as an historically specific organization of consent that rests upon—but cannot be reduced to—a practical material base. In the modern era, formal freedoms and electoral rights exist alongside the class inequalities of the bourgeois state; therefore, relations of domination need to be sustained with the consent of the dominated. This consent does not arise spontaneously; it must be won through ideological struggles and material concessions. By these means, a general interest or collective identity is constructed that unites the dominant—and subordinate alike as members of the same political community. In Gramsci’s formulation, power is both centralized in the coercive apparatuses of the state and diffused across other institutional sites such as the church, the family, and the school. Thus, consent is organized—and power is exercised—not merely through state policies and practices, but in civil society: a realm of activity distinct from the state and capitalist production in which many aspects of social and political identity (such as gender and ethnicity) are fundamentally grounded. (pp. 5-6)

Through this process subordinated people give consent to their subordinators.

The GGI is hegemonic in a variety of contexts. These include workplace hierarchies; gender relations; the connections between corporations and Canadians; and most dramatically between transnational corporations and their global workforce. The power relationships within these groups shape the opportunities available to individuals involved in the GGI. The structures which perpetuate these distinctions are upheld by many people in both the more and less powerful groups. The continuation of the current GGI is based on the continuation of the current hegemonic structures. Yet, this process does not lead to sustainability. As these power structures attempt to reduce people's rights, subordinated groups will inevitably withdraw their consent and fight back to re-establish their rights (Polanyi, 2001).

**Workplace Hierarchies**

Workplace hierarchies in the GGI are hegemonic. For example, the GGI is based on labourers earning low incomes working for companies that make large profits. Employees complete their assigned tasks in order to be paid while the companies make strategic decisions to maximize profits. In the division of labour some people have high-
power jobs involving planning and decision making and others have to follow orders. Hierarchies exist at workplaces across the GGI.

In garment production jobs, the division between what jobs are considered skilled or unskilled is often arbitrary. In the Canadian garment industry these divisions are based on the gender and ethnicity of the people who have historically been involved in the jobs (Steedman, 1997). For example men have historically been cutters while women have operated sewing machines. While the ethnicity of workers in the Canadian garment industry shifted during the 20th century from mainly European immigrants to mainly Asian immigrants, the status associated with job classifications has remained (Ng, 1998).

Across the industry there is perceived difference between the status of manual labour and intellectual labour. This difference is usually accompanied by different levels of income. The differences are generally accepted by people working in the industry but do not necessarily reflect how hard people have to work. People working in physically demanding garment production jobs earn much less money than people working in less demanding office jobs with shorter hours. In this system some of the people who work the hardest in the production chain have the lowest status and lowest pay.

The split between intellectual labour and manual labour is often blurred in creative industries (Wayne, 2003). Recent changes have led to a situation where previously respected professional positions are being transformed into jobs where people sell their intellectual labour. To produce fast-fashion, designers are hired by companies to replicate designs by high-fashion labels. These designers are expected to anonymously produce designs that can be mass produced and sold to Canadian consumers.

While Canadians and people all over the world look to consumer goods for fulfillment, their daily work has become less fulfilling. Wayne (2003) described the fundamental importance for humans to engage in meaningful labour. He describes how under capitalist production, labourers are not free to make their own choices and are engaged in ‘life-denying’ activities. In this system, individuals spend their days supporting a hegemonic industry intended for their bosses’ benefit.

Throughout the GGI people work in positions with perceived status differences that are characterized by different levels of authority and independence. Many people
accept the structure of the GGI as a legitimate global system, yet is has been created by a series of events which have left some people working in unjust conditions. The continuation of this system is based on the continuation of workers consenting to exist in their current positions. This consent is based on an acceptance of the current structure, social relations, government regulations and workers’ immediate subsistence needs.

**The Place of Women**

Another hegemonic power relationship in the garment industry is related to gender relations. From the early stages of industrialization, Canada’s garment industry was predominately staffed by women. As a result of dominant attitudes towards women’s work, garment industry jobs have been increasingly marginalized and based in the informal sector. These jobs are generally unstable and low paying.

The fight for women’s rights has changed through the history of the garment industry. As the fundamental structures of the industry have changed, what were once considered as achievements for labour may now be considered burdens.

Unions that had fought in the 19th century for protective legislation for women now shifted their views under pressure from women activists, and agreed that laws and regulation restricting the amount of weight women could lift, or their access to night shifts, were discriminatory. (Eisenstein, 2006, pp. 496-497)

An outcome of feminist struggles has been the redefining of women’s roles, not simply enclosed within a family but as “[individuals with] the right to participate in the market economy as a worker or entrepreneur in one’s own name, separated from one’s role as a wife and/or mother” (Eisenstein, 2006, p. 498). While these changes give women more freedom, they have also strengthened their link with the pressures of the global capitalist system. Within this system human needs are subordinated to economic objectives and people spontaneously consent to this subordination.

As women entered the job market, employers were able to pay less in the expectation that families would be receiving two incomes, leading to the “[abandonment of] the concept of a wage that would cover the expenses of wife and children, a goal that was struggled for during the 19th century by patriarchal unions” (Eisenstein, 2006, p.
501). This left many families with two working parents, with the mother having the double burden of having to work in the labour market and take care of her household.

In her 2006 study, Meyer seeks to determine whether trade liberalization provides women with access to more resources through their integration into national labour markets. She found that,

While women may experience increased independence and power within the household when they enter the labor force, the conditions under which they gain employment and how they participate in the economy are crucial determinants of whether or not they improve their economic and social status. (p. 89)

As growing numbers of individuals, who have been mostly women, entered the workforce around the world in the last few decades of the 20th century, global structures of family and work began to change (Meyer, 2006).

Women working in the garment industry often have demanding jobs which are harmful to their health. These women must follow the directions of their bosses or face the risk of reduced income or job loss. The GGI is completely dependent on a large workforce of low-paid female labourers.

Starting with the women who organized the first strikes at the turn of the 20th century, women working in garment factories have repeatedly organized themselves to improve their working conditions. This counter-hegemonic resistance has been called a “significant minority” by Fredrickson (2007) and has led to the improvement of working conditions for thousands of people around the world.

Despite the monumental achievements of these activists, global trade has become increasingly deregulated and garment production conditions have deteriorated over the last 30 years. Without international regulations, companies are now free to leave countries which enact labour reforms that will result in increased production costs, which has created new challenges for workers trying to fight for their rights.

Overcoming the challenges, female garment workers all over the world are involved in counter-hegemonic worker activism.

Although largely unsung heroines, these risk-takers and their organization, constitute the bleeding edge of anti-corporate movements in an age of
globalization. Their perspectives and experiences constitute a treasure trove of lessons on how to organize the most disenfranchised sectors of their communities and create a more just society. (Louie, 2001, p. 211)

Garment workers’ organizations along with other civil society groups have fought to prevent and limit the hardship caused by NAFTA, to prevent impending plant closures and to fight for severance pay, benefits, and job retraining. In 1997, partially based on the work of La Mujer Obrera (LMO), NAFTA-displaced workers won a $3 million extension in government funded training for laid-off workers in addition to the original $4.2 million originally allocated (Louie, 2001).

In this global system, women’s roles involve both reproductive and productive duties. Many women work extremely hard to support their families and themselves. The GGI takes these women’s time and effort in return for low pay. While the global system that perpetuates this model is hegemonic, it is not impenetrable. Women are engaging in counter-hegemonic struggles and fighting back.

**Consumerism**

The prevalence of advertising shapes Canadian culture, promoting a way of life based on the designs of corporate advertisers that helps to produce the spontaneous consent that supports corporate hegemony. Modernism and mass media induce mass consumption by presenting the message that increased happiness will be the result of the accumulation of more possessions (McKibben, 2007; Serrano, 2000). As Canadians live in a society that portrays itself as one in which people have free choice over their lifestyles, it can be argued that participating in consumerism is just a choice that Canadians have made.

If people voluntarily choose to live in similar houses, wear similar clothes and participate in similar activities, then who are we to criticise them? As long as it’s what they really want to do, then it’s very difficult to make the case against it. Furthermore, if mass production allows individuals to access to goods that they would otherwise not have been able to afford, it would be obnoxious to deny them the opportunity on the grounds that we don’t like the aesthetic consequences. (Heath & Potter, 2004, p. 226)

This statement has two major flaws. First, it ignores the production processes that must occur to mass produce identical consumer goods. While production of some goods can be
completely mechanized, this is not possible with clothing. So the creation of mass produced garments unavoidably involves a workforce of individuals spending their days engaging in repetitive tasks. Secondly, living in an environment without creativity cannot fulfill people’s needs (Wayne, 2003) – hence the desire to continue consuming.

Advertising promises fulfillment through consumption and persuades people to buy in to unsustainable ways of life. The explosion of advertising after World War II gave credibility to Gramsci’s arguments about the concept of hegemonic power relationships because the ability/processes used to control cultural systems became more apparent (Heath & Potter, 2004). The prevalence of advertising shapes Canadian culture and promotes a way of life based on the designs of corporate advertisers.

The consumer landscape of the 21st century is different from that of the past. Whereas seeing individual neighbourhoods reflecting regional differences and heritages used to be common, it is becoming increasingly rare. Chain stores proliferate on city streets and Canadians work to buy branded products. “Brands have become individual statements about status with respect to other individuals, [with] ghetto youth flaunting their sneakers or Wall Street traders brandishing their watches” (Strasser, 2006, p. 53). The global market promotes homogeneity (Heath & Potter, 2004).

Through the hegemonic control of large corporations, individuals spontaneously consent to gain status according to criteria invented by the corporations. People seek to earn money to obtain branded products to supposedly increase their happiness. In this system, people make sacrifices to obtain goods that corporate media have portrayed as desirable so that corporations can profit. This corporation-consumer relationship epitomizes a hegemonic power structure.

**Neoliberal Paradigm and Corporate Control**

As was shown above, the GGI prioritizes money values. The importance of money values can also be seen in the hegemonic power structures which shape modern global society. According to Shamir (2005),

One general observation is shared among scholars of the global political economy regardless of their disciplinary, analytic, or ideological inclinations. Namely, that corporate global rule is already here. (p. 92)
TNCs and the intergovernmental organizations favouring the objectives of TNCs have power over national governments. Internationally mobile capital, including productive enterprises and financial institutions, has had growing levels of structural power since the 1980s (Gill & Law, 1989).

Many fashion companies that manage large brands are transnational corporations. Out of the world’s top ten luxury brands, six of them are fashion companies with Prada ranking number ten at 2.7 billion in sales, Fendi at number nine with 3.47 billion, Chanel at number four with 6.22 billion, Gucci at number three with 7.47 billion, Hermès at number two with 7.86 billion and Louis Vuitton at number one with 19.4 billion (Sherman, 2009). In addition to the powerful luxury brands, many lower-end retail outlets are also run by large corporations, such as Wal-Mart, H & M and Zara. All of these companies shape the industry, often focussing on developing large-scale marketing campaigns while outsourcing production.

TNCs have ultimate control in the operations of the GGI. These corporations have rights which sometimes override those of nation states (Greer & Singh, 2000). For example the 300 largest transnational corporations control at least one-quarter of the entire world’s productive assets (Greer & Singh, 2000). Less industrialized countries vie for these companies to invest offering not just the potential for market expansion, but also lower wages and fewer health and environmental regulations. These transnational companies exert their power by lobbying government officials, participating in national economic policy- making committees, making financial contributions to political parties and bribery (Greer & Singh, 2000). For example, the transnational corporations were very involved in getting free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the ATC passed, which greatly benefited them by lessening governmental restrictions on their movement and further enabling these companies to maximize their profits. There is no intergovernmental organization in charge of regulating the behaviour of transnational corporations. With the goal of profit-making, they dominate the global political economic system. They conduct business in countries that offer labour at low costs, with the least environmental regulations and often move on to a new country when the benefits accrued in the country they are using have expired (Greer & Singh, 2000).
“Free trade, on closer examination, looks much more like forced trade and its conduct, in most countries, resembles the process that Marx describes as primitive accumulation” (A Ross, 2004, p. 10). The current system in which foreign governments forcibly open markets to global trade put citizens of sovereign nations at risk due to policies and agreements of foreign governments with local elites. The rapid spread of globalization has created new levels of global interconnectedness. This process has brought benefits to many, but it also ties the lives of the world’s vulnerable people to unpredictable global markets and unhampered environmental consequences. “The extreme mobility of capital has now become a major weapon of powerful countries like the US for the domination of the global economy at the expense of debt burdened countries” (Serrano, 2000, p. 97).

The NICs (Newly Industrializing Countries) of East Asia are often cited as examples of how export jobs in garment and electronic assembly triggered higher levels of development and living standards. Yet . . . the Asian tigers achieved economic growth through ‘trade protection, state controls on capital, and manipulated exchange rates.’ They were also beneficiaries of Cold War funding to some significant degree. The deregulated system that sustains today’ global sweatshop in Asia and the Americas has no such control, and is primarily designed to ensure the free movement of capital after the model of Jack Welsh’s barges.17 That is why wage levels have dropped not only in the South but in the North as well, where the slippage of labor standards, by comparison, has been much greater. (A Ross, 2004, p. 54)

The growing power of corporate interests has led to a decrease of labour standards worldwide.

Global sourcing practices designed to reduce costs of products for individual consumers have severed connections between consumers and producers. Through the processes described in Chapter Two, Canadians generally no longer know the producers of their clothing. In this system, individual consumers have more power than producers. This is part of an overall trend in which Western society has become increasingly focused on prioritizing individual consumer benefits over community benefits. In his book, Deep Economy, McKibben (2007) writes about the growth of hyper-individualism and the degradation of community values that have occurred in western society. Following liberal

17 Jack Welsh describes the ideal factory as a barge that can move to the country with the cheapest labour.
ideology, the agency of each individual is seen as the basis of society’s decision-making processes. This perspective minimizes the needs of communities which may not be the most beneficial to each individual. The focus on consumer demand in the garment industry feeds into this process.

In this system, manufacturers benefit by having low production costs, consumers are able to purchase clothing at very low prices and people working in manufacturing facilities or retail outlets spend their days working for unreasonably long hours for very low wages. This system could aptly be described by a description made by Morris over one hundred years ago.

And all that mastery over the powers of nature which the last hundred years or less has given us: what has it done for us under this system? In the opinion of John Stuart Mill, it was doubtful if all the mechanical inventions of modern times have done anything to lighten the toil of labour: be sure there is no doubt that they were not made for that end, but to "make a profit." Those almost miraculous machines, which if orderly forethought had dealt with them might even now be speedily extinguishing all irksome and unintelligent labour, leaving us free to raise the standard of skill of hand and energy of mind in our workmen, and to produce afresh that loveliness and order which only the hand of man guided by his soul can produce—what have they done for us now? Those machines of which the civilized world is so proud, has it any right to be proud of the use they have been put to by Commercial war and waste? (Morris, 2004, p. 14)

The use of technology today unfortunately continues to make Morris’ statement true.

Despite the creation of ever more efficient technologies, people working in the garment industry have not experienced the benefits. While being exposed to health and safety hazards, garment workers are paid extremely low wages. An example can be seen by the wages earned by garment workers in India. In a study on the practices of large retailers, Hearson (2009) writes that

Labour rights organisations in Bangalore, India, estimated that the bare minimum a garment worker’s family (average size 4.4 members) needs is around 4364 rupees per month to live. Yet the minimum wage for garment workers in Bangalore starts at 2418 rupees per month, and our research indicated that many workers earn just this amount. (p. 29)

Hearson’s study found similar conditions in Bangladesh.
At two typical Bangladeshi factories supplying Lidl, Walmart, and Carrefour, take-home pay averaged 3,270 and 3,447 taka (€ 33 and € 34). In order to achieve this higher pay, the working week at one factory was 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., six days a week - about 60 working hours. At the other, workers were expected to stay until 10 p.m., seven days a week – a working week exceeding 90 hours. (p. 32)

These stories illustrate the conditions that exist in garment production facilities all over the world.

While some people argue that developing countries have a competitive advantage by paying low wages and that the growth of the industrial sector in developing countries will lead to a similar process of development as occurred in the Western world (A Ross, 2004), the fundamental structure of the industry today is different than it was during the growth of industrialization in Europe and North America.

Today’s export-processing economy does not . . . transplant older forms of industrialization to the developing world . . . Unlike in Western nations, where capital intensive manufacture was central to economic growth, in many developing countries these low-wage industries have become central to the economic growth that is expected to occur. And unlike in the West, where the higher-paid men’s industrial jobs were central to the economic welfare of families, in export-processing economies the low-paid women workers make up about 80 percent – the vast majority - of the workforce. (Rosen as qtd in Eisenstein, 2006, p. 505)

The garment industry relies on this system of extreme inequality. While some benefit and have access to greater choices and cheap clothing, workers are relegated to producing products that generate money for large corporations while barely supporting themselves and their families. This situation is a direct outcome of the hegemony of the GGI.

**One-Way Communication vs. Dialogue**

As discussed in the previous chapter, Canadians generally learn about the GGI through corporate public portrayals. The globalized nature of the industry makes two-way communication of any sort very difficult. Canadians can receive information about processes occurring at distant locations but cannot communicate with the people making their garments. In fact, since in the globalized industrial production system there are so many people involved in the process of getting each garment to a Canadian store, it
would be impossible for an individual to be in contact with all the people involved in making her/his clothing. Meanings in the GGI are generally defined by corporate marketers and the other people involved in the industry whether as farmers, garment producers, retail staff or consumers have very little communication with each other.

**Public Portrayals**

When Canadian consumers learn about the garment industry through public portrayals, the disconnected global structure of the GGI restricts two-way communication between producers and consumers and limits communication to a one-way flow from corporations to consumers.

We no longer make our clothing or prepare a large quantity of our food, nor do we know the people who do it for us. Purchasing and amassing standardized products, individual consumers create ‘lifestyles’ that come as close to fulfilling their need and representing their tastes as their budgets, and their time and tolerance for shopping, allow. (Strasser, 2006, p. 53)

We mainly learn about the garment industry through advertisements or news stories.

Corporate advertisers create images that consumers can hope to realize through their purchases. A crucial factor that is missing in the flow of information is how the clothing is made. Viewers of ads may see a lifestyle they want but they do not see the lifestyles of those who create the products in the image or the effects that its production processes have on the environment.

After receiving various messages about the garment industry from public portrayals, Canadian consumers’ main form of response is their consumption-based choices. In this system there is great inequality in the variety of ways corporations can communicate with consumers compared to the narrow forms of reciprocal communication available to consumers. Consumers constantly receive messages from the corporate media but have very little opportunity to respond.

Companies can use public portrayals to express any message or image they want. Brands differentiate products based on lifestyles. The physical piece of clothing is not connected to a way of life until marketers draw those connections. These portrayals can also identify brands as being environmentally friendly or sweatshop free. In all of these
types of messaging the consumers are forming opinions about the products based on the one-way communication of the company’s messages. Dialogue between individual customers and TNCs is virtually impossible.

**Status and Commodity Markets**

In deciding the value of garments companies dictate to consumers. The garment industry can be seen as a system of two interacting markets, which Aspers (2008) divides into as commodity markets and status markets. Commodity markets exist within the interactions of producers and retailers. In these interactions garments are seen as basically interchangeable commodities. As garments move from this place to the status markets, they attain a higher perceived value. The status market exists between retailers and consumers and is based on branded products and their public images. Western consumers only interact with garments when they have become part of the status market and retailers are the ones who earn a profit in transactions in the status market. “When clothes leave the factories where they are made, they are merely ‘garments’ or ‘apparel’. Only when the marketers get hold of them do they magically become ‘fashion’” (Tungate, 2005, p. 1).

Status markets are based on consumers’ perceptions of garments at the retail level. In the GGI, marketers present retail items as desirable.

Traditional marketing is based on need. You take a product that corresponds to an existing demand, and attempt to prove that your product is the best in its category. But fashion is based on creating a need where, in reality, there is none. Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire. (Remaury qtd in Tungate, 2005, p. 8)

Consumers are shown countless messages daily, which are designed to fuel their desire for new clothing.

In this system companies decide the value of an item and the consumers react to the companies’ decisions. For example, if two t-shirts were made by the same factory one could be sold as a generic brand for $10 and the other could have a high-end brand label applied and be sold for $100. When the consumer comes into contact with the t-shirt she/he sees the brand and the price and makes a decision whether to purchase it. Global citizens seek to have status through wearing corporate logos. As garments move through
production chains, their meaning changes. When consumers finally enter the picture they
can only react to the products in their final branded state.

The difference between status and commodity markets is made possible through
the global divisions of production and consumption. With no direct contact, retailers can
present any message that they chose to and consumers can react to the messages to which
they are exposed. Without dialogue and increased two-way communication, consumers
cannot make informed decisions.

**Corporate Monoliths**

The most influential actors in the GGI are corporations. The power that
corporations have to act unilaterally to achieve their objectives can be critiqued because
of their lack of all three building blocks of sustainability. The dominance of corporate
interests in the GGI makes the industry unsustainable. These corporations are mandated
to place money values first. Corporate actions are intended to increase money for
shareholders, with damage to life values seen an externality. According to McMurtry
(2002),

> The ultimate subject and sovereign ruler of the world is the transnational
corporation, operating by collective prescription and enforcement through
the World Trade Organization in concert with its prototype the NAFTA,
its European collaborator, the EU, and such derivative regional
instruments as the APEC, the MAI, the FTAA, and so on. Together these
constitute the hierarchical formation of the planet’s new rule by extra-
parliamentary and transnational fiat. (p. 202)

Through their power in the international arena, corporations can shape the choices made
by consumers who idealize their corporate sovereigns. The power that corporations have
over national governments can be seen by the fact that,

> no binding regulation yet protects any right but that of transnational
corporate investors, and not one article of any already signed international
covenant or treaty protecting human rights, labour or the environment is
binding on any part of any one of these unprecedentedly enforced
“agreements”. Indeed, the Kyoto Treaty on climate-altering gases, the
Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting chemicals and emissions, the Basel
Convention on transboundary pollutants as well as the entire body of
established international solemn agreements and covenants on human and
labour rights have been consistently overridden by transnational corporate
practices or the explicit judgements of WTO trade panels. (J. McMurtry, 2002, p. 202)

In addition, corporations make decisions unilaterally. They do not engage in communicative action with other stakeholders in the GGI.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown that the current GGI is unsustainable on all three of Sumner’s criteria. In a sustainable garment industry life values would take precedence over money values, power would be more evenly distributed and decisions affecting peoples’ lives would be determined through dialogue as opposed to foregone conclusions. In today’s garment industry money values rule over people’s well being and the health of the environment; power and decision making are in the hands of TNCs; and how the situation is viewed is manipulated by mass media especially in the form of the advertising industry.

In the current industry the prioritization of money values over life values has caused severe environmental damage at a global level and put many people’s health at risk. Additionally because of these priorities, working conditions in the GGI are unjust in production sites around the world. As these harmful effects of the GGI are felt globally, TNCs are making high levels of profit. Yet these processes cannot be sustained indefinitely.

The hegemonic nature of the GGI has created a situation in which millions of people all over the world chose to contribute to an industry that is not in their best interests. Many people see garments with brand name logos as status items and do not question the structure of the system which allows for the production of these branded items. The power of corporations is growing as the WTO has increasing levels of power over national governments. Simultaneous civil society groups are forming counter movements all over the world and contesting the growing power of corporations.

As described in the previous chapter, the main way that Canadians learn about the GGI is through public portrayals. These messages are one-way communication shaped by experts. Canadians often do not have any way to communicate with other stakeholders in
the GGI. While corporate-designed messages are portrayed to Canadians, corporations are taking autonomous actions with global implications, leading to consequences that are felt globally. While the development of modern communication technology has the potential to facilitate higher levels of information sharing worldwide, currently most Canadians are not connected to the GGI outside of the information provided by corporations.

Reaching a sustainable society involves building the civil commons. Sumner (2007) wrote that “the civil commons regulates in life-protective and life-enabling ways. While it has been built up over years of human existence, it can be dismantled very quickly by the unsustainable, life-blind choices of corporate globalization” (p. 97). To promote a sustainable GGI it is important to look for actions that build the civil commons.

As this thesis is being written, the economy is experiencing the largest decline since the Depression. The effects are being felt globally. This shows an example of the unsustainable nature of our economic system. This crisis is being felt by the GGI. MSN (2009) identifies the obvious impacts as declining retail sales, declining order volume; and factory closures resulting in job losses in exporting countries. They also identify other impacts that are affecting garment workers:

- Retail sales may be declining overall, but common wisdom says discount and fast-fashion retailers are doing better than specialty brands – even though the reality is more complex – and this belief could reinforce the drive to lower prices;
- Order volumes may be lower, but exports from the lowest-wage countries are in some cases increasing;
- Workers on the whole are losing employment, but women may be hit harder by job losses and have a harder time finding new employment;
- Some companies are using layoffs to target union supporters; and
- Factories are closing, but many others are on shorter hours or temporary shutdowns, with huge impacts on workers’ wages, which were already so low, with workers depending on overtime to survive. (p. 1)

These points help highlight the unsustainable nature of the GGI. As more people experience the effects of the global economic crisis, the unsustainable nature of global
industrial processes is becoming more apparent. Many Canadians are choosing to take personal actions in promoting a new system. In light of the current state of the GGI and its harmful effects on people and the earth, these actions are of fundamental importance.
Chapter Five:
Looking at the GGI from the perspective of Canadian Consumers

In recent years the unsustainable nature of the GGI is becoming increasingly apparent. More and more consumers are beginning to see past the messages in public portrayals and deciding that they do not want to participate in exploitative processes. This chapter will explore the experiences of Canadians who interact with the GGI as consumers and who consciously try to make ethical purchasing decisions. For this study, I interviewed six Canadians who actively seek to buy garments that meet their own ethical criteria. The stories which are shared demonstrate some of the challenges the informants have experienced while trying to act according to their morals.

For the people I talked to for this study, ethical consumption is not just an act that occurs at the cash register. It affects many of the choices that they make in their lives. The participants choose to spend time learning about their garments above and beyond the information provided by retailers. In this sense the work of ethical consumption is an active process involving research and planning. This chapter explores what the informants define as “ethical” and looks at their lived experiences in trying to buy products that meet their standards. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, actual levels of ethical consumption are much lower than the proportion of consumers who say they would consider ethical issues when making purchasing decisions (Hertel, et al., 2007). In discussing the experiences of the informants, broad challenges preventing increased levels of ethical consumption will be identified.

Consumers’ vision of an ethical garment industry

During their interviews, the participants shared their visions of an ethical garment industry. Their definitions had many common elements. The main themes included fair labour conditions, environmental considerations, local production and the fair treatment of animals. These elements can be seen as a part of a sustainable model and promoting them would help to build the civil commons.

For the participants in this thesis, their approach to buying clothing is part of their beliefs about social and environmental justice. All of them value qualities that are based
on their ethics when making purchasing decisions. The participants are all willing to pay more for ethically made items. Higher importance is placed on the value of garment workers being treated and paid fairly over getting access to cheap clothes.

It’s all about cheap labour and what kills me too is this whole emphasis on cheap. You know, I do watch talk shows and they just go on and on about ‘affordable’, ‘cheap’, whatever - all that stuff. You know, every time something’s cheap, whether it’s clothing or food, somebody else is paying for that. (Anne)

Participants expressed an appreciation for knowing details about a garment’s background. When I asked Vikram about his conception of an ethical garment industry, he stated,

I think it would have to be more personal. There would have to be more information. I don’t want to be bombarded with information but I think that’s the only way. There would have to be some sort of story behind a garment. I’m not trying to say that I want to be marketed or sold to but I need the information to feel comfortable that the people who made my garments are making a decent living off of what they’re doing or they gain some sort of job satisfaction – like they’re doing their job because this is what they want to be doing with their lives.

The participants would like to see a more personal garment industry with systems that do not exploit people or the environment. Overall the participants would like to have closer connections with the garment industry. The following paragraphs will outline the main criteria that the participants shared as part of their definitions of an ethical garment industry.

**Fair Working Conditions**

The participants’ most often-cited criterion for an ethical garment industry was fair working conditions, namely garments that are not made in sweatshop conditions and that are produced by workers paid a fair minimum wage. Additionally, the value of a Fair Trade label was mentioned several times. Having empathy for garment producers was also mentioned as an important element of being an ethical consumer. Identification with
producers can be seen by participants asking themselves questions such as, “Would I want to be the person who had to go through this to make this” (Vikram)? Mark felt that it was very important that garments workers be paid a fair wage. He said,

My first thought is to have people . . . be paid let’s say a minimum wage . . . that they get paid enough that they would get access to education. That would be my standard. I hope for more but it’s hard . . . [They should be paid] enough that they [would] not be chained to their job[s].

Anne described her vision of an ethical garment industry as involving “good labour practices and treating people fairly, paying them properly and abiding by local labour laws according to [Canadian standards] – even though we may be manufacturing in another country”. All of the participants felt that the majority of clothes available in Canadian stores do not meet this condition.

**Low Environmental Impact**

The second most common element mentioned in relation to defining ethical consumption was environmental considerations. The participants felt that ethical clothing should not harm the environment. Environmental values were displayed by the participants engaging in behaviours including buying used clothes; attempting to consume less; considering the end-of-life fate of their garments, whether the items were biodegradable or recyclable; and thinking about the environmental impact of the production.

The participants agreed that reducing consumption was very important. Anne felt that consuming less was the most important thing she could do for the environment. “My main thing, as I mentioned before is trying to reduce consumption. I’ve been an over-consumer and I think it’s the best thing I can do.” Amy agreed with this statement. An example of the participants’ concern with reducing consumption is Mark’s experience with trying to minimize the environmental impact of his clothing purchases.

I wanted to . . . go somewhere that sold used clothes because I felt that way . . . I wouldn’t be buying new clothes that created more waste. The clothes are already made, someone bought them and now they’re being
sold for a third . . . of the price or whatever it was that they were originally sold for – better that they should be on my back than just go right into the garbage.

Overall the participants believed that high levels of consumption are harmful to the environment.

The participants also expressed their concern with environmental issues through their disposal habits. When considering buying clothing made with synthetic materials, Claire asks, “What’s going to happen when I do throw it out? Is it going to break down?” The participants looked for ways not to throw out their clothing, most of them choosing to give it to people or organizations that they thought could benefit. There were few comments about the environmental impacts of production, which may be a reflection of the low presence of this topic in public portrayals.

**Local Production**

Throughout the discussions, the participants mentioned looking for garments that are made in Canada as a way to consume ethically. Participants mentioned feeling good about supporting local designers and communities.

There are just some stores around town where I know the designer and it’s not super expensive. So, I’ve bought things there and I feel good about it because I know that I’m helping a local artist do what they love doing.

(Amy)

When Amy goes shopping she seeks to build personal relationships with the people who make her clothes.

The idea of supporting local workers was also important to Gary, who said, “My bête noire is . . . companies that have off-shored jobs to other countries [and] throw Canadians out of work to save money [and] improve their bottom line.” This statement shows Gary’s disapproval of the high importance that is placed on money values in the GGI. He would like the industry to place more emphasis on supporting individual Canadians instead of large companies.
The participants valued the benefits that local producers bring to their communities, both socially and economically. Consequently, they would like their purchases to support local production. Despite some awareness of local labour problems, overall the participants seemed to be more comfortable with locally made items than imports.

**Fair Treatment of Animals**

Additionally, two of the participants mentioned taking into account the ethical treatment of animals. Anne said that she looks for “fair practices . . . with regard to human labour but also the living conditions and treatment as it applies to animals.” Claire does not buy clothing made with leather. Both referred to this as a secondary issue and less important than fair working conditions.

**Challenges Faced by Would-Be Ethical Consumers**

The act of buying clothing is part of the complex structure of the GGI, which is controlled by networks of relations often unseen by Canadians. While being shaped by corporate interests, the industry is coordinated by many stakeholders, each with their own objectives. While the participants all have a vision of what ethical would look like to them, choosing to act in ways that do not conform to the current structure can be difficult.

Throughout the interviews, the participants expressed frustration at their lack of ability to make purchases that fulfilled their ethical requirements. As can be seen by the following quotes, all of the participants found attempting to consume ethically challenging.

So, I’m very much a hypocrite on the whole garment thing. The only place I do buy and I feel some sense of ethical commitment is Mountain Equipment Coop because I do a lot of outdoor travel and that sort of thing and I believe they make as best effort as possible on the ethical side. I mean, it’s not pure because these are still manufactured goods with synthetic materials and whatever but otherwise it’s hard. I mean, I buy second hand. I buy at consignment stores so at least that’s recycling but otherwise it’s really hard because I hear recently about even cottons . . .
apparently they have issues because there’s organic grown and then there’s an organic processing and then there’s Fair Trade and then it’s just . . . crazy . . . (Anne)

If you think the whole thing through it can be just exhausting. If you look at every single thing that goes into your clothes, well - where can I draw the line? Because in the end I’m just going to not wear anything. (Claire)

Gary commented that “It just feels exhausting and frustrating.” All of the informants struggle to interact with the GGI in ways that they believe to be ethical.

In their experiences, the participants encountered common challenges. The main challenges identified by participants when trying to engage in ethical garment consumption were: being able to find ethically made garments; not being able to afford the higher costs usually associated with “ethical” garments; and not having enough information about the garment industry and particular garments. As a result of these extensive challenges, the participants often had to compromise their ethics when making purchases.

**Accessibility**

A major challenge all the participants experienced was trying to find garments which met their ethical criteria. This was a barrier that the participants found difficult to overcome. The high levels of conventional garment production in the GGI are not satisfying the needs of these Canadians.

**Purchasing location.**

Finding stores that sell “ethical” garments can be difficult. Most of the participants noted the same chain stores that they felt made ethical clothing (Mountain Equipment Coop and American Apparel). Following their varying definitions of ethical, some identified a wider variety of ethical options, including experiences finding pieces sold in smaller boutiques and second-hand stores. Despite the fact they valued ethical consumption, all bought some clothing in places that did not fulfill their ethical requirements.
When asked about where they regularly go shopping, most of the participants named large chains that are easily accessible but do not have ethical options. With the current options, for someone to make ethical purchases they would have to specifically go to the few stores that sell ethical items. Several of the participant said that they would chose an ethically made garment over a conventional garment if given a choice but that it was difficult to find ethical items.

If it can be made convenient for me, I’ll definitely go out of my way to do that - but if I’m very busy and I don’t have that much money and it’s very far away then I can’t really do it so much. (Anne)

Claire looks for most of her clothing online because she had trouble finding items in stores that met her ethical requirements. Finding places to buy “ethical” clothing was a significant challenge for all of the participants.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the face of the Canadian garment industry has been constantly changing. The introduction of chain stores with wider selections and lower prices has made it difficult for independent stores to stay in business. The stores that are generally successful have had to prioritize money values and thus are less likely to have items which meet the participants’ ethical requirements.

Production location.

As the participants often referred to local production as an important issue during our discussions, this is something they look for when shopping. Throughout the interviews, participants referred to having difficulty in finding locally made garments, as can be seen in the statement, “I wish there was something else that I could do or that there was another option available or a way to buy something that was made that was keeping my neighbours at work” (Gary). When talking about buying locally made goods, participants referred to the decreasing availability of locally made garments. Many of the participants talked about reading the country of origin labels and facing the fact that it is becoming increasingly rare to find items made locally.

If you needed to buy an article of clothing and you tried to buy something that wasn’t made in China – good luck! Good luck trying to find
something that wasn’t made in a Third World country. If not China, then Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh . . . There is virtually nothing being made in Canada or the United States anymore. (Gary)

This trend that the participants have experienced has occurred as a result of the major change in the size of the Canadian apparel manufacturing industry that was discussed in Chapter Two.

Another issue that was brought up was the fact that when a label says “Made in Canada” many of the processes that went into the garments’ production may have occurred in other countries. Anne mentioned that local production helps to ensure greater control over production conditions but also acknowledged the current poor working conditions in the Canadian garment industry. She said that she thinks that there are still sweatshops in Canada “people are oppressed . . . and we just don’t know that much about it.” Since the participants did not have any direct experience with Canadian garment production, this information was not readily available. This can be seen by Anne’s comment, which refers to choosing to buy locally made items. “Apparently there are labour issues here that are hidden so it’s extremely difficult, especially on the garment side.” The other participants did not mention the topic at all. Even while Anne was aware that there were labour issues in Canadian manufacturing, she did not know any details. She felt frustrated that she did not know if a “Made in Canada” tag meant that the garment was made ethically.

These experiences show how the changing landscape of the Canadian garment industry has been experienced by consumers. International trade regulations have changed and higher levels of clothing are being imported from countries that pay low wages. Imported clothing is undercutting locally made clothing and many local production sites have had to close down or relocate as production is outsourced to countries with lower wages. When the participants go shopping they see this change reflected in the lower prices and the scarcity of “Made in Canada” labels.
Style and size.

Several of the participants recalled experiences of shopping and only being able to find “ethically” made items that were not in their desired styles or sizes. When the participants are able to find places that have goods that meet their ethical requirements, the items for sale sometimes do not appeal them. This problem compounds the difficulty of being able to buy items that meet their ethical standards.

While expressing some feelings of guilt, the participants spoke about wanting clothing that was stylish. Buying ethical items is often seen as a choice that is distinct from buying stylish items.

I think another problem is style, as ridiculously shallow as that seems. There are some things that I wouldn’t mind buying but there are things that I see that are ethically sourced or that are reused and so that I’m just wearing garbage. It’s ugly or it’s frumpy. (Claire)

Amy said, “If you want to follow the styles that are in fashion right now, sometimes that makes it kind of hard.”

I sometimes see these big woolly sweaters from Ecuador or something but they’re kind of ugly when you put them on. I mean the shoulder is down to here and they’re this wide and whatever. I keep thinking, “Is anyone working with the people locally to help them from a design point of view?” because it’s an interesting product but from a saleability point of view in the Western market, a little help with the style and sizing would probably help them. (Anne)

That’s cool if you’re in high school or starting university - people tend to really like get into these sorts of topics - like trying to be ethical and everything and they can wear stuff like that but when you find that you’re in your thirties or forties, you’re expected to look a little bit more polished and if you come out wearing some big huge sweater from Ecuador, for example. Yeah, it looks kind of out of place. So definitely, we need a little more selection, a little more input on stuff like that. (Amy)
The participants shared similar challenges when talking about buying used clothing. When talking about looking for clothes at Goodwill and the Salvation Army, Amy said, “Not too much good stuff there, I’d have to say. It was pretty rough. Because people feel good giving their old clothing to Goodwill or Salvation Army but when you look at it . . . [It is] ten or twenty years out of style.”

Some of the participants mentioned that they felt that a lot of “ethical” garments are not made in professional styles. Gary shared, “I find that if I’m in a situation where I need a business suit, I’ll look but the odds are I’m not going to find that business suit made in Canada – let alone ethically.” Claire said,

I work at [an NGO] and when I was first hired, I was like, “oh, it’s my first [professional] job. This is amazing. I’m so happy.” Then I was like, “Oh . . . then I have to go buy [professional] clothing now – I can’t just wear cords and my . . . hoodies” and so I had this huge crazy debate with myself because what . . . can I wear now . . . I can’t just go into a regular mall and go buy a bunch of things because I’m going to go insane trying to buy a pantsuit that is ethically made – I don’t know if it exists.

For the participants, not being able to find garments that they considered to be ethical in styles that they would wear was a challenge.

The participants in this thesis face contradictions between their desire to consume ethically and societal pressures. Part of the problem with being unable to find “stylish” items made by non-mainstream producers is that the concept of style is shaped by corporate advertisers. The images that are created by marketing campaigns shape the aesthetics of many Canadians. Furthermore, different types of clothing are associated with stereotypes and when choosing how to present themselves, Canadians face the risk of being judged by their peers.

Items designed in other countries may not suit the tastes of Canadian consumers. In mainstream fashion, clothing is usually designed in the West and produced in developing countries. Some businesses exist where clothing is made and designed by women in other countries then sold in Canada. While this gives creative control to the
producer, the aesthetics of the garments may not appeal to Canadian consumers. This problem is a result of the disconnection between producers and consumers that can still exist in the GGI even when the producer is working under fair conditions.

Finding ethical garments is especially difficult when the participants are looking for garments that are outside the standard offerings. Mark noted having difficulty finding used clothing that fits “Yeah, the thing is I’m [tall] and . . . my dimensions are sometimes hard even with brand new clothes.” Amy spoke about looking for maternity clothing,

[My] carrier is ethically made in L.A. and it’s great because on the website they tell you how it was made and everything. My coat is made in Canada and then my jeans are from the Gap - which was one of the big ones that [anti-sweatshop activists] hit but they’re maternity jeans and it’s really hard to find maternity stuff that’s ethical. I tried buying some stuff a couple of years ago and it only ended up fitting me for a couple of months because it was regular clothes and it was made by designers in Toronto, but now I feel kind of stupid for buying it because it fit me for a couple of months and then it will never fit me again - so, just in special times in your life, like that, it’s really hard to buy ethically. You’re just like desperate to find anything at all that fits.

The lack of size ranges in items that the participants consider as ethical shows that the supply of these products is not meeting the needs of consumers.

In the participants experiences the items that they believe to be ethical are only offered at limited stores and in limited styles and sizes. These challenges have made it difficult for them to buy “ethical” items although they place a high level of importance on ethical consumption. These challenges are based on the lack of connections between producers and consumers and the consequent lack of understanding of each other’s requirements.

Cost

Although all the participants indicated being willing to spend more money for ethical clothing, some mentioned not having more money to spend and how hard it was to
make the decision to buy clothing because it was cheaper even though it did not fulfill their ethical requirements. “I’m embarrassed to say that the money crunch hit me and all of a sudden I found myself at these stores anyway. I felt bad about it but . . .” (Amy). In Canada, many consumers work in jobs that do not provide them with incomes high enough to afford clothes that are branded as “ethical”.

Participants mentioned the imperative for fashion companies to strive for higher profits. “I would love for the fashion industry to be responsible and I think that they should be but I think . . . why would they? They make so much money this way” (Claire). They expressed dismay at the fact that some companies seem to be charging premium rates for items because they are marketed as ethical. They felt that some companies are making more profits by taking advantage of the consumers’ desire for “ethical” garments.

I’m willing to pay a small premium if the increase in cost is legitimate.
For example – yes, union made clothes cost more because the manufacturer is paying a higher wage for their labour. I’m willing to accept that but I don’t like being fleeced. (Gary)

Due to the one-way communication between companies and consumers, the participants did not trust that the increased prices would be supporting ethical processes.

Used clothing is affordable but the problems related to style mentioned in the previous section became a barrier to purchasing used items. The participants face the direct comparison in prices between those that meet their ethical requirements and those that do not. While they would like to choose the ethical items the choice is sometimes difficult. Although the participants would like to buy garments they would consider to be ethical, sometimes they cannot afford to be ethical.

The structure of the GGI attempts to separate garments from their production and disposal conditions and present garments to Canadians as items that can be valued on a monetary scale. While the participants support life values over money values, they live in a society which often prioritizes money values. Making decisions which challenge the dominant values can be difficult.
Learning and Awareness

When trying to understand if a garment meets a consumer’s ethical criteria, there is a lot of information needed to make a fair judgement. The participants expressed difficulty in getting access to information about the history of garments and the industry in general.

I think the only way to truly know [if a garment is made ethically] is to have enough information about [the] garment, for example: how it was produced, where it was produced, who was involved with its production through the production chain and getting it sold. . . . When you asked me what are the main considerations in the garment industry, I said sweatshop labour but there is probably so much more that I’m not aware of. (Vikram)

The participants felt that they did not have enough information about their garments' production and disposal.

Understanding the complex and unseen processes that go into garment production is a difficult endeavour. Even for those working in the industry, it is hard to be aware of all the elements of global production. In this system, big corporations can deny knowledge and culpability of the labour and environmental offences involved in the creation of their products. In most cases no one is aware of the full history of the garments as they pass through global chains of production and disposal.

Labelling.

A major problem identified by the participants is insufficient labelling. The participants experienced this lack of product knowledge as an impediment to knowing if a garment was ethically made. Currently, the law states that garments must have a country of origin, fabric content and dealer contact information on labels. The participants mentioned reading these labels and feeling more comfortable if a garment was made in Canada.

Companies have the freedom to put almost anything on their marketing labels. Participants expressed mistrust for big companies declaring their own production to be ethical. This mistrust was felt for both labels and other information presented by
companies such as websites. When talking about a Canadian clothing company, Mark said,

I remembered that they had on their website something about meeting
some international standard . . . not Fair Trade but no child labour . . .
ookay, that’s good, right? But what does that mean?

In the garment industry, the only information that most consumers have about their
garments are these texts that are generally written by marketing employees of companies.
The people writing these texts usually do not have personal connections with the
garments and their writing is just intended to appeal to the perceived desires of the
consumers.

Campbell and Gregor (2002) write about the power of texts to mediate social
relations.

People that have basic literacy skills can go about their daily activities in
ways that make a bus pass a useful instrument, or that make a bus
schedule “work” as it is written, without ever being aware of the layers of
activity that intervene. One actor in a social relation never needs to know
the other actors. The text functions to make such invisible connections
work. (p. 32)

In this case texts are not meeting these needs. Participants felt that it was a lot of work to
know whether certification systems are legitimate.

The information available through texts is insufficient and the participants do not
trust the sources. According to Gary,

There are two kinds of certification out there. There’s certifications where
they actually legitimately go to factories and are ensuring the people are
paid reasonably, that children aren’t being employed, that people have
some reasonable amount of control over their lives . . . that sort of thing,
or what we call “a good employer” . . . Then there’s other front
organization - certification groups that have come up - have sprung up to
offer a rubber stamp . . . There’s a part of me that goes - I’m not sure if I
have the time to spend . . . on the net sorting out - is it a legit certification
or is it a [phoney] front certification that’s there to either fool people like
ourselves who consider that stuff when they go to buy something. It’s exhausting and annoying.

While labels have the potential to convey information that can help consumers make choices, lack of regulation results in labels which make engaging in consciously ethical consumption more difficult.

A large part of the frustration felt by the participants is a sign of the inability of consumers to distinguish between labels which indicate that products were made with genuinely improved processes and those that may be used just to increase sales while still having harmful social and environmental impacts. Cliath (2007) writes that, “Problematically, both alternative trade and other market actors use the same labeling technology to link conscientious consumers to place, process, and producers. How can conscientious consumers tell the difference?” (p. 414). Based on her study examining the type of communication used on coffee labels, she concluded that, “labeling alone is not enough to permit concerned consumers to see shades and make real choices” (p. 434).

Ethical labeling can be confusing for customers because some companies may create their own labels, which emulate legitimate labeling; some labeling systems only look at one dimension, such as social or environmental justice; and some labels may use confusing terminology. Despite the confusing nature of the wide variety of currently used labels, according to Cliath (2007), labels have the potential to help social actors to not fetishize commodities. Yet, just looking carefully at artifacts themselves (product labels, in this case) does not allow a consumer or sociologist to access the inner workings of real technologies and their histories. It does not incorporate the actions of people doing things required to make labels meaningful and effective. Nor does it emphasize the constraints of the market, the cultural understandings of consumer contributions, or the social networks needed to maintain truthful and useful labels. (p. 415)

Despite potential benefits, current labelling systems are not providing messages that meet the needs of Canadian consumers who would like to make ethical purchases.

The information presented to consumer through labels and other branded messages is carefully designed by marketers to present messages that will be appealing to
consumers. The main purpose of these labels is to create an image surrounding the garment. While the government mandates some information be provided on apparel labels, this information is presented as a sterile fact and as such is not very meaningful to consumers. The participants in this study see the information that they are presented with on labels and feel that it is inadequate.

**Marketing presents fashion items as desirable.**

When consumers are interested in buying items that fulfill their ethical requirements when they go to stores, they see items presented in ways that look attractive. Some of the participants noted how the image presented by companies can detract individuals from thinking about ethical considerations. This is done both through falsely advertising ethical issues and through presenting glamorized images.

Just seeing people who are flashy who are lined up to buy this stuff that obviously is not Fair Trade and whatnot and get into a nice shiny car . . . as a kid, I wanted my dad to have a Porsche and we had a station wagon simply because the guys up the road had a Porsche. So, I know where they’re coming from but it’s just very telling that when I think about it, maybe at first glance it looks so good, right? Then I think about it for a second and maybe it doesn’t look as good as it first did. (Mark)

The marketing industry is filled with experts in persuasion. As was discussed in Chapter Three, Canadians face a wide variety of messages from corporate sources intending to encourage increased consumption. When faced with a bombardment of messages with pressure to consume, some of the participants shared that they had trouble resisting. Anne spoke about experiencing difficulty when trying to reduce her clothing consumption and Amy said she experiences the same problems.

I don’t need anything. (Anne)

But I always say that and then I go shopping and it’s like, "oh, no!" (Amy)
I’m just trying to avoid malls. (Anne)

Although being tempted and sometimes giving in, the participants in this study are making a conscious effort to look past corporate messages.

The impact of corporate messaging is broad and affects all Canadians. Corporate public portrayals are apparent in the media, on the external logos of people’s clothing and in retail environments. Images of fashion are updated constantly, creating pressures for Canadians to continue to buy new clothing. Faced with pervasive advertising and other more subtle messages from corporate retailers, trying to be aware of and resist images presented by corporate sources is challenging.

**Formal education.**

A few of the participants spoke about the lack of formal education on issues related to the GGI. Anne noted the large amount of industry advertising that is directed towards youth when stating that, “There’s so much marketing oriented towards the kids and it’s just phenomenal what consumerism and everything has done to their whole social lives.” In response, Amy shared her experience as a teacher,

> At the high school where I work, we have a Global Youth Issues club and I was one of the leaders for that and the students are interested in this sort of thing if you can bring the information to them and then once they find out then they want to spread the information around to the other students. They know that teenagers do care about their world and want to make it a better place. I think a lot of people start to learn about these kinds of issues in university but it would be great if they could learn about it earlier even and we could touch more students with that kind of information because it will make a difference their whole lives.

Anne asked Amy about what drives educational policy change. “Does it start at the grass roots? But so much comes top-down, doesn’t it?” Amy responded,

> It’s a little bit of both. I mean we have the curriculum documents but teachers themselves will come up with topics themselves to talk about
anyways. So, you know, all you would have to do was pull an article from a magazine and turn it into a discussion topic and that’s still reading and writing. . . It would be very easy to do.

Despite the ease that Amy says would be involved in including education about the ethics of the garment industry, the participants noted not receiving very much education on this topic while in school.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Canadian curriculums do not usually cover the GGI. Individual teachers may include relevant topics but on the whole most Canadians do not learn about the garment industry in schools. Without the information being taught in schools it is difficult for Canadians to understand this complex industry and their role within it.

Conducting research.

While the participants all placed a lot of value on consuming ethically, they found it difficult to go through all the processes that are necessary to find “ethically” made garments. To understand if a garment meets their ethical criteria, some of the participants spoke about researching products before buying them. Gary commented that, “It’s exhausting the amount of research you have to do when you’re trying to live ethically.” Mark agreed.

With the main sources of information about the GGI coming from corporate media based on the objective of increasing sales, to understand the industry it is necessary to spend time conducting research. As the system is fragmented across the globe, understanding its processes is a difficult challenge. For an individual consumer seeking to buy a garment, the amount of effort that is required to understand the garment’s history and potential future is very high. Ng (2007) writes about the contradictory messages available in information about the industry and how internal variations make understanding its processes challenging.

As the GGI has developed in ways that involve long globally distributed production chains and complex technical processes, individual Canadians often cannot find out information about the history and future of their garments. For many consumers
who walk into a store to buy a garment, they have no way of knowing whether the item would meet their personal ethical criteria. As garments in stores are presented as detached items without a history or future, for consumers seeking to buy items that meet their ethical criteria they must face the challenge of conducting research to understand the items’ production processes.

Compromise

Throughout the group and individual interviews the participants acknowledged having to compromise. It is almost impossible for any one garment to meet the participants’ ethical standards in the current system that violates conceptions of ethics at almost every level. Participants frequently mentioned having to buy things that did not meet their ethical standards. “With clothes, I just try to do the best I can, knowing that it’s probably not that great” (Vikram). The participants spoke about making choices between different ethical criteria.

I don’t wear fur or leather so I look to see if that’s in there . . . I guess for me, I would much rather wear leather shoes that were not made by children in a sweatshop than wearing shoes that were canvas that I know were made in a Nike sweatshop. (Claire)

In many situations, consumers are forced to choose between which of their ethics they would like to abide by when making a purchasing decision.

Mark had to compromise in the story mentioned above when he was looking for items that were Fair Trade Certified and only found a policy that said the company did not use child labour. He recalled, “I try to do the lesser evil a lot of the time . . . It’s tough.” Mark’s story shows how the participants are choosing from the options available but cannot find items that meet all of their ethical criteria.

A Sustainable Garment Industry

The values that are important to the participants can be seen as elements of a broader vision of a sustainable garment industry. Each value is not a discrete requirement to be checked off a list. To be realized, these ideals must work together within a broader
sustainable model based on life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue. These elements can help to build the civil commons. Sumner (2007) writes about examples of the civil commons as including language itself, building regulations, water and power installations, bridges, social safety protections, laws, libraries, sewage systems, postal services, and social assistance. In a more sustainable society, the garment industry would also help to meet society’s needs.

While the current structure of mass production is not supportive of the needs of individuals working in the industry, by recombining the processes that have been separated by industrialization, fashion designers could produce garments for people in their communities. This profession has the potential to allow practitioners to express their creativity through meaningful work. Designers could have a creative outlet that could be appreciated by others and also used by consumers to express their creative tastes.

Fairness . . . is not an outcome with a settled nature or established coordinates. Nor is the travel plan so easy to interpret, at least not by the norms of approved politics. Apparent paradoxes must be embraced; freedom is fostered through regulation but not power, well-being through common knowledge but not mastery, and democracy through the kind of citizenship in which no one, and least of all the elected few, has the final say. For people who can thrive under these conditions, labor should no longer be an act of mere service; it might instead, be the feat of creativity it aspires to be (A Ross, 2004, p. 13).

Ross’ passage shares a vision of the way the garment industry could be.

In the current global economy, the development of modern technologies has allowed affluent individuals to have increasing freedom of choice. Many jobs are becoming more flexible and customized. This trend has the potential to spread to all levels of work through the development of local economic communities in which all individuals can work in fair conditions in jobs that support their own well-being as well as that of their community members and the natural environment.

A more sustainable garment industry would support the civil commons. It could involve neighbours creating garments for their neighbours in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation. When artisans create products for their own communities, direct interactions between producers and consumers are facilitated. Local production and local markets
have the ability to stimulate the human interactions and the development of communities. When residents of a community have regular contact, stronger bonds are built and communities are healthier (Jacobs, 1992).

One of the benefits of local production is that supply can better meet demand. If the processes of design and production were reconnected, items created by local designers could be customized to meet the needs of members of their communities. Producers could better anticipate demand as they would have similar experiences to the people who would wear their designs. Currently, producers are subject to rapidly fluctuating orders based on international market conditions. With the development of a local economy, production for the local community would be more stable and predictable, allowing producers to be able to plan more efficiently. Additionally, proximity of production to markets also limits transportation and reduces environmental damage caused by transporting goods across the globe.

One form that a sustainable garment industry rooted in local production could take is developing a system of independent designers who could work together to facilitate more efficient small-scale production. Groups or cooperatives could work together to share in the more time-consuming and tedious tasks. This would help to eliminate the divisions embedded in the current processes which leave some individuals doing all of the mundane and routine tasks involved in manufacturing garments while others get to enjoy the creative benefits. In a sustainable industry these processes would be distributed more equitably.

Although a strong local economic base is fundamental, global trade also has a role in a sustainable garment industry. While local production is important, geographic specialization provides global benefits. For example, many crops are only able to grow in suitable climates. Also, communities around the world have developed unique aesthetics and products. To overcome the potential pitfalls currently involved in international trade, a new system would have to involve increased global communication and cooperation.

Furthermore, the use of environmentally friendly technology and techniques is essential to the creation of a sustainable garment industry. Production and disposal processes must be reconfigured based on a consideration of their effects on the natural
environment. Traditional methods can be combined with new and innovative
technologies to create clothing that is compatible with the long-term health of the planet.

Currently local production is not a guarantee of fair working conditions, international trade is based on limited levels of communication and the environment is damaged by almost every action of the GGI. It is crucial that systemic reforms happen at all levels and locations of the current garment industry. As the current GGI is pervasive and involves the spontaneous consent of the parties involved, a new model would require re-examining the Canadian consumer’s role in maintaining the GGI.

Both hegemony and counter-hegemony involve relationships to structures of power. By actively withdrawing their spontaneous consent to structures of power, people can learn to build new, resistant, counter-hegemonic relationships to corporate globalization. They can also learn to build relationships to structures of cooperation and collaboration, thereby contributing to sustainability and to alternative forms of globalization. (Sumner, 2007, p. 94)

A new structure is possible but it involves changes in the relationships and priorities in all parts of the GGI.

Conclusion

The current global garment industry is based on a system that values economic development over social development and environmental consequences. Money and garments travel across the world regardless of the social and environmental implications. Despite the apparent entrenched nature of the current GGI, the possibility exists for a brighter future that involves healthy communities based on life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue supporting the civil commons. Arnold and Harman (2003) argue for the need for moral imagination to see a system of respectful production. The participants have this moral imagination and have shared their visions. Having an idea of a better future allows people to take actions to work towards their vision.

In trying to buy garments that meet their ethical criteria, the participants in this study have faced numerous challenges. A fundamental problem is that while Canadians may want to be able to interact with an ethical GGI, it does not currently exist. To be able to buy garments that meet the participants’ ethical criteria, the challenges presented in
this chapter must be addressed. In a sustainable garment industry consumers would have access to goods which met their ethical requirements; be able to afford garments that were made using processes that respected life values; and would understand the life-cycles of their garments.
Chapter Six:
Can Ethical Consumption Create Sustainable Change?

In a sustainable garment industry, people and the environment would be treated fairly and individuals would be able to wear clothes that were not involved in exploitative processes. The previous chapter addressed barriers to Canadians being able to consume ethically. Consuming ethically is an act that is fundamentally part of a sustainable industry. Yet, the question remains, is ethical consumption an effective tactic for reforming the GGI or is it just an act that can occur as reform happens through other means?

In this chapter, the need for individuals to engage in broader efforts towards reform will be shown to be necessary to promote a sustainable garment industry. To overcome the daily challenges faced by consumers attempting to be ethical, it is necessary to examine the networks that shape consumers’ choices. Looking at this issue solely from the perspective of consumers is not enough. It is also important to question the structure of the system that supports exploitative processes.

Decisions affecting the structure of the GGI occur at many levels, including factories, governments, international institutions, NGOs and individual Canadians making purchasing decisions. These groups mediate the actions available to each other and limit the capacity of each group to create change. In Chapter One, I wrote about the ability of institutional ethnography to assess where activists’ efforts may be put to best use. Within the complex structure of the GGI, there are many places that different types of reform efforts can take place, but these actions can be most effective if they are done in collaboration with other stakeholders. Consequently, consumer action should be an integrated element in a wider effort for change.

Ethical Consumption and Sustainability

Cornwell and Drennan (2004) posit that “consumer behaviour is a powerful macroforce, as evidenced by its links to pollution, society well-being, and resource use” (p. 108). As this thesis explores the role of consciously ethical consumption, it is important to understand the process and its place in systemic reform. The ability of
ethical consumption to initiate structural change has been questioned. Can consciously ethical consumption create the kind of change which will promote the building blocks of sustainability as outlined in Sumner’s theoretical model? If consciously ethical consumption leads to increased sustainability, it would exist within the section of Sumner’s model which includes life values, counter-hegemony and communicative action. As will be shown in this chapter, conscious ethical consumption on its own does not promote sustainable change. The act of making ethical purchasing decisions does not undermine the current industry norms. Ethical consumption is an action that is similar to Naples’ (2003) socialist feminist critique of state actions, which address surface problems related to structural inequalities without questioning the underlying structure creating systemic inequality.

To foster sustainable change the actions of consumers must be accompanied by broader actions from all the stakeholders involved. The structure of the GGI must be questioned at all levels and recreated by those involved to meet their own needs and those of all other stakeholders. Promoting a sustainable industry will require Canadians learning more about the current industry and working with its many stakeholders to build an alternative model based on the civil commons.

**Prioritizing Life Values**

Sustainable actions must be based on prioritizing life values. Promoting life values involves engaging in actions which support the health and well being of humans and the environment. While the motives for ethical consumption may be based on life values the action in itself is embedded in a system based on money values.

When people choose to make their own purchases ethical, are they implicitly accepting a market-driven capitalist system? Are their actions just creating an “ethical” market segment within an unsustainable market? In the current system the desire of companies to meet consumers’ needs is driven by a profit-seeking motive based on money values. Most companies will not improve the production and disposal processes of their garments unless they feel that changes will lead to more sales. While some consumers are actively seeking to be ethical and operating from a life-values perspective, other consumers have passively accepted, ignored or are unaware of the exploitative
processes involved in the garment industry. So, while companies are beginning to offer “ethical” alternatives, sales of “unethical” garments continue to play the major role in the global economy with many consumers not placing sustainable production or disposal as a purchasing criterion.

**Voluntary ethics and economic democracy.**

A 1998 survey found that most Canadians were willing to pay higher prices for ethically produced products with 55% saying they would pay 15% more for ethically labelled coffee and 48% claiming they would do the same for a $100 pair of running shoes (J. Ross, 1999) but should “being ethical” be a choice? If ethical production and disposal processes are based on consumption decisions then the well-being of some people is dependent on the choices of others. In a world where ethics are based on consumer choice, should 45% of coffee and 52% of running shoes sold be “unethical”?

In our society, consumption is often seen as part of citizenship (E. Brooks, 2007). People can vote with their dollars. People have used their purchasing power to stage boycotts to protest labour-rights violations and bring attention to brand names and company logos. In this form of action, the primary sites of activism have moved from factory floors and government offices to stock markets, the Internet, and shopping malls. These sites are all within the realm of the private – a realm that can potentially allow consumers unthinkingly to maintain a self-contained world of protest, similar to gated communities and malls. (E. Brooks, 2007, p. 167)

Consumers can voice their opinions with their purchasing power. Choosing to express one’s opinions through purchasing decisions can be seen as a form of economic democracy. In an economic democracy, each citizen’s opinions have different levels of power.

Citizenship and participation have become linked increasingly with buying power and the ability to boycott and protest labor rights through attacks on brand names, company logos, and corporate reputations, which reinforce the supremacy and integrity of corporate recognition and marketability. In this form of protest, the privileging of consumption demands a reinscription of existing discourse of class, gender, and race, since it is precisely these differences and histories on which consumption relations have depended. (E. Brooks, 2007, p. 167)
Basing the structures of the GGI on the opinions of those with the most purchasing power creates a situation in which those who do not have enough money do not get their opinions heard.

Overall, encouraging citizens to vote with their money has the potential to lead to many problems, especially in our disconnected society. Without being fully aware of the consequences of their decisions, consumers who face economic pressures will often choose to buy products that will save them money. These decisions may be motivated by necessity, but this system has potential to lead to widespread exploitation. Ethical consumption involves giving monetary support to the vendor of a product that aligns with one’s ethics. The opposite side of this situation is not giving money to vendors whose products do not align with one’s ethics. One of the negative effects of consumer-based activism is that boycotts can lead to factory closures and job losses, which end up hurting the same workers that those attempting to be ethical consumers are trying to help.

Using money and money values to motivate people’s decisions is fundamentally unsustainable. Choosing to consume ethically is a way for Canadians to express themselves, but at the same time marketing products as ethical is a way for producers to manipulate consumers. Consumer action can only change the marketplace as much as each individual chooses to buy. Consumption-based decisions cannot shift the industry’s focus from money values to life values. To attempt to shift away from money values, it is necessary to act in ways that undermine the current system and promote a new system.

**Ethical branding to meet consumer demand.**

In response to consumer demand for garments which meet their ethical standards, some companies have developed ethical products and brands concurrently with their conventional brands. In the current economic model, corporations work to meet the demands of potential customers. The actions of these corporations are based on profit-seeking motives. Corporations that prioritize money values often make changes to increase their market share while maintaining their current practices for products that they do not market as “ethical”.

Participants in this study often referred to certain brands as being ethical or not ethical. These general classifications minimize the pervasive nature of injustice in the
garment industry. As production of garments occurs at diverse locations, most brands, especially large ones, source their products from a number of production facilities of which the majority subcontract certain processes. This leads to the involvement of almost countless producers in the production of each brand’s products. Functioning in such a complex system makes it more difficult for a company to be aware of what happens at each step. Even when “ethical” policies are in place, the factories may hide certain practices from inspectors. In the current system, the majority of garments are involved with processes that are exploitative at one or many points along their lifecycle before and after their use by the consumer. The problem is systemic and not isolated within certain brands.

While creating “ethical” brands and products may have beneficial effects, corporations’ motivation for offering these products is based on money values. An area which clearly expresses that companies’ desire to make money outweighs the “ethics” behind ethical marketing plans is the high availability of “green” garments compared to sweatshop-free garments. If companies wanted to meet the ethical requirements of their consumers then they would have reacted in concrete ways to consumers’ demand for fair working conditions. Yet, the offerings of companies, when it comes to transparently improving their working conditions, do not match the demands of consumers.

The informants in this study were generally concerned with both social and environmental issues but usually placed a higher value on the social ramifications of garment production. The participants’ prioritization of social issues can clearly be seen in Claire’s description of what she considers to be ethical.

When I think of ethical clothing I would think of fair wages and not sweatshops and so that would be the [the most important attribute] and secondary and tertiary which would also be very important would be not having leather and environment[al impact].

Although most of the informants prioritized fair working conditions over environmental concerns, there are many more companies making environmentally friendly clothing than sweatshop-free clothing. The reason for this may be that environmental issues can be rationalized economically but improving working conditions often has a cost. Countless
brands are now being developed that seek to be perceived as environmentally friendly. These brands perpetuate the current system based on money values while satiating the consciences of consumers.

While some authors have argued that there are economic benefits for corporations to improve their working conditions (D. G. Arnold & Hartman, 2006), the economically motivated actions of large retailers have shown change based on increasing the sales of environmentally friendly products while maintaining exploitative labour practices. Tesco, the largest British retailer, has been working to implement a system to label every product sold in its stores based on its carbon emissions (Claudio, 2007). Yet, Tesco does not provide decent working conditions for the employees at its suppliers. This can be seen by a comment from a worker at a Tesco supplier in India.

We do a lot of overtime. Almost every day there is at least one hour extra. We are called on Sundays as well. However, our monthly wage slip will not show all the overtime that we do. It will quote only 1-2 hours as overtime in a month. (as qtd in Hearson, 2009, p. 6)

Another example of a company that has a poor labour record being involved in progressive environmental initiatives is Wal-Mart, the world’s largest buyer of organic cotton in 2007 (Claudio, 2007).

By creating “ethical” options within an array of other options, consumers interested in ethical production can express their life values by purchasing these items from specialty stores while other consumers simultaneously continue to purchase products involved with exploitation. In essence, “ethical” can just be seen as another brand name in a multitude of choices that consumers face every day, thus purchasing products marketed as ethical reinforces the money values that underwrite unethical practices in the GGI. A system cannot be sustainable with a small segment of consumers living in an ethical bubble within a larger exploitative system.

Consumption and the environment.

A fundamental problem with ethical consumption is that it involves buying more products. Companies create unnecessary products and market them as environmentally friendly. Marketing plans for “green” brands promote increased consumption but buying
additional products always causes more waste than not buying new products or buying used products.

Reducing consumption is a behaviour that is very important in reducing environmental damage, but it is at the same time antithetical to our capitalist society.

The pressure placed on young people by the relentless consumption mantra is such that they feel obliged to buy branded products to fulfil their identity, even when these purchases leave more basic needs unmet. For example, a young mother and teen ward of the state told U.S. researchers (Cornwell and Gabel 1996) that when she had money, she bought her baby an expensive outfit and a pair of Barney shoes. The purchase of expensive clothing helped her support her identification with the image of a good mother. (Cornwell & Drennan, 2004, p. 115)

In order to reduce consumption Canadians must reconceptualise the value of buying new items. Arkes and Hutzel (1997) identify a paradox,

On one hand, people dislike being wasteful. Their dislike of being wasteful is so great that they will occasionally act contrary to their own self-interest in order to avoid behaviour they think promotes wastefulness. For example many of us have closets bulging with clothes we have not worn in years, yet we just can’t seem to discard them. It seems wasteful to throw out all those very thin ties and bell-bottom trousers when there is obviously a lot of use left in those relics. On the other hand, even though people dislike being wasteful, they will discard or abandon minimally used items in order to procure a band-new item. . . . Such lack of conservation results in the underutilization of many products and the overutilization of many landfills. How can people both dislike wastefulness and yet prefer new items to perfectly good but used ones? (p. 154)

A direct effect of over-consumption is increased waste generation, but many people continue to buy new products designed to be environmentally friendly without considering the impact of discarding previously used products. This type of behaviour does not address the growing global problem of over-consumption.

Many companies are developing "green" products in response to growing public concern for environmental preservation. While seeking to earn more money, companies often make changes that will appeal to customers in their marketing messages but, as discussed in Chapter Four, do not actually reduce the environmental impact of the item. These companies are often just seeking to increase their overall sales. To truly reduce the
environmental impact of the GGI, production, consumption and disposal processes have to prioritize environmental health over increased profits.

**Creating Change that Does Not Reproduce Hegemonic Power Structures**

Looking for ways to promote change that do not reproduce current hegemonic power structures requires fundamentally questioning the current system and understanding how it is hegemonic. When people become aware of the ways that their lives are shaped by those with powerful places in society and question the fundamental basis of choices that are currently available, they can begin to promote counter-hegemonic change. Canadians have the power to challenge current structural systems and becoming aware of the pervasive injustice involved in the GGI can be counter-hegemonic. Yet, the act of ethical consumption does not pose a substantial opposition to currently accepted norms. The actions involved neatly fit inside the current system. Being presented with some ethical choices can in fact placate people who otherwise may have taken more substantial actions.

**Counter-Culture.**

The development of a counter-culture could be seen as a counter hegemonic force. Shopping at stores like American Apparel can be seen as an example of lifestyle politics defined as a manifestation of the process of using the market to express political and moral concerns (Shah et al., 2007). The “lifestyle” that American Apparel represents can be seen to represent counter-culture, which is seen as a sub-culture that counteracts values of the dominant culture. While the current counter-culture movement could be seen as a genuine alternative to the pressures of the neoliberal agenda, Heath and Potter (2004) argue that it is just another branch of culture that promotes global capitalism. Citizens as consumers feel that they are acting to promote alternative world views without actually questioning the underlying structures responsible for presenting the consumers’ choices in the first place.

To be counter-hegemonic, ethical consumption should provide a counter to consumerism, a hegemonic force. According to Sklair (as cited in Worth & Kuhling, 2004), it is
important to theorize about the ‘culture-ideology’ of consumerism, its role in confusing the issue of the satisfaction of basic needs, and the difficulty of mobilizing against global capitalism on the basis of anti-consumerist ideology . . . any attack on capitalist consumerism is an attack [on] the very centre of global capitalism. (p. 37)

Ethical consumption does not provide this type of challenge. The option of buying items that are marketed as ethical exists as a part of capitalist consumerism.

While ethical consumption as an act may not be counter-hegemonic, for the many people who attempt to be conscious of the effects of their consumption, the ideas behind it have been. However, as with many elements of counter-culture their actions have become appropriated by global capital. “Cool hunters” are people hired to learn about street/underground culture and figure out how to create marketable products based on emerging trends. Through this investigative marketing strategy items that have been used to express the political views of the counter-culture are marketed to the larger pool of consumers as apolitical fashion items. While symbols used by counter-culture may originally be meaningful, the cooptation of these items can be seen as part of the hegemonic nature of the current system.

Overall, counter-culture expressed through personal image and purchasing decisions does not counteract consumerism. While the ideas behind some of the actions involved in counter-culture movements are intended to draw awareness the hegemonic nature of the current system, the methods of communication are often co-opted by those seeking to perpetuate current hegemonic norms. To instigate counter-hegemonic change, actions must fundamentally question current power structures while promoting a new system.

**Power and hierarchy.**

Seeing decisions of consumers as a method for reforming the GGI places high levels of power with consumers, while those affected by purchasing decisions must live with the consequences. Should consumers be responsible for the ethics of their garments’ production and disposal? What if some consumers just do not care? In the current model, the wants of individual consumers are seen as a top priority.
The pure ideal of the ethical consumer seeks to mobilise the conscience of the buyer on behalf of the oppressed producer. Finally, it is about guilt, but along the way it can become arrogance. (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 55)

The high level of importance sometimes placed on the role of consumers in reforming the GGI minimizes the importance of the role of other stakeholders and does not accurately reflect the power structures within the current industry.

Despite an apparent reverence for consumer demand, corporations have the ultimate control.

Consumer sovereignty – the notion that ‘we consumers’ can get what we want, or even more fantastically, do get what we want . . . in our age of saturation advertising, product placement in movies and television drama, and chain store oligopoly, it seems way out of touch. (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 55)

In the current system, consumers choose from the choices presented to them and have feelings of control, yet the companies choose what the consumers see. Additionally, presenting consumption as an ideal type of politically expressive behaviour excludes people who cannot afford to pay the premiums often charged on “ethical” products.

Consumption may be personally and socially enhancing for consumers in the affluent world who have affordable choice, time, knowledge, and skill; however, it may be frustrating, alienating, and damaging for less affluent societies when envy and discontent are experienced (Ger 1997). Thus, Strijbos (2001, 532) argued that “the most important goal in the era of globalization . . . should be concerned with identifying solutions to satisfy the material and immaterial needs of the world’s population. (Cornwell & Drennan, 2004, p. 114)

Within Canada, only certain people can afford to be “ethical consumers”. Pursuing ethical consumption as a sole strategy does not question the underlying structure that is based on decisions and processes which ultimately benefit powerful corporations.

Voluntary ethical consumption does not challenge the structure of the current system which places many people in positions where their choices are limited and they must interact with the exploitative systems of the GGI. Ethical consumption exists within the current power structures of the GGI. Creating real change would involve breaking down these structures and building new structures that support equitable relationships.
Victimization.

The idea of ethical consumption as a politically powerful act reinforces divisions between consumers and producers. Looking at ethical consumption as a method for improving systems in the GGI promotes the belief that consumers have the right to decide what is best for people in the rest of the world. In this conception, consumers are seen as powerful actors with agency and choice while producers are seen as passive victims who are subject to the whims of consumers.

In the current system, some activism involves promoting embedded stereotypes. This can be seen in much of the anti-sweatshop movement.

Like globalized production relations, transnational protest has drawn from and built on a configuration of identities that poses some women (poor, suffering, and usually from the third world) exclusively as workers and other women (rich, Northern, and empowered) as consumers. (E. Brooks, 2007, p. 166)

While individuals in North America and Europe have sought to ease injustice in the garment industry, their actions have often been based on assumptions that ignore the activist struggles of garment workers.

When consumers attempt to engage in ethical consumption they are trying to address social and environmental problems that they themselves may not have experienced. Consequently, the concerns of consumers may not reflect the concerns of the people who have direct experience with injustice in the GGI. As the complex structure of the GGI places the majority of Canadian consumers far from sites of production and disposal, consumer actions are based on reactions to public portrayals. By seeing garment workers as people who need to be helped, consumers often make unilateral decisions about what type of help garment workers need.

When images are shown of women working and suffering in the Third World, viewers in consuming countries see these workers as victims and think of their power to stop the suffering. This process increases the divide between women living in different situations in different parts of the world. Brooks (2007) asks, “How can we challenge the politics of globalization in ways that are not hegemonic and that do not replicate and utilize current categories of gender, race, nation or class?” (p. 134). This is a complex
question. Current global capitalist structures leave so much power in the hands of consumers and factory owners that it is easiest for them to make changes, yet these changes may not be the changes that are important to garment workers and others who are negatively affected by these global structures. While attempting to “help” producers, consumers’ actions may cause more harm than good. Dialogue needs to be developed between everyone involved for efforts at change to meet everyone’s needs.

Breaking down the barriers between consumers and producers in the GGI is important for making the industry more sustainable. Ethical consumption maintains those barriers and places consumers in a position where they feel they can unilaterally help producers. Creating a real challenge to the current system would involve building new relationships that are not possible in the current structure.

**Ethical consumption as a new social movement (NSM).**

Carroll and Ratner (1994) discuss three conceptions of counter-hegemony as being based on Lenin, Gramsci or radical pluralist. Leninist counter-hegemony is seen as a unified front fighting concrete hegemonic regime. Gramscian counter-hegemony is based on a unified effort between the proletariat and various popular forces. Radical pluralists reject the idea of coalition forming and believe that “the struggle against the existing hegemony must also be a struggle for an alternative social vision” (p. 13).

As consciously ethical consumers seek to address an identified societal issue, they could be seen as a new social movement (NSM) and as such they could be classified by Carrol and Ratner (1994) as radical pluralists. Carroll and Ratner write that the post-modern politics of radical pluralists are “not counter-hegemonic in the sense of aspiring to build consensus around an emancipatory project; [they are] anti-hegemonic in the sense of opposing attempts to construct a general interest of whatever kind” (p. 13). According to Carroll and Ratner (1994) “But were it the case that resistance to hegemony remained fragmented and episodic, one would have little reason to invoke the concept of counter-hegemony with its hopeful prognosis for social and political transformation” (p. 6). With this understanding, can ethical consumption as a NSM be seen as a counter hegemonic force?
Furthermore, when considered as a NSM, individuals who attempt to be ethical consumers are not very unified. In general they do not work together but are connected by engaging in a common action. Carroll and Ratner (1994) write that

NSMs cannot expect to pursue their respective agendas unimpeded by state institutions; moreover, the demands of democratization that give rise to “chains of equivalence” require coordination at a level that transcends community-based multiform politics. A new counter-hegemonic logic of pluralism that transcends the liberal practicality of single-issue politics cannot be founded on a descent into micro-politics. (p. 20)

While the ability of NSMs to stimulate counter-hegemonic change has been questioned, people who try to make ethical purchasing decisions may not even be unified enough to be considered a NSM. Without working together, the isolated and fragmented actions of those who support ethical consumption cannot stimulate structural change.

**Encouraging dialogue**

For actions to be sustainable they need to involve communication and cooperative inputs from members of a society. Ethical consumption is a personal action that is based on individuals’ responses to the one-way communication channels through which consumers learn about the garment industry. The actions involved can be conducted by individuals who do not have direct communication with other stakeholders in the industry or with other consumers.

**Communication between corporations and consumers.**

In the current system, marketing messages designed by mass producers encourage Canadians to increase their consumption. These messages create desirable images surrounding garments and virtually create a fantasy world in which products just appear on store shelves for the short-term use of Canadian consumers. These messages are expertly crafted and conveyed to consumers through one-way communication channels. In the face of these messages it is difficult for individuals to perceive the true nature of the systems on which the GGI is founded.

Despite the strength of corporate messages which display the GGI in a positive light, some Canadians are not satisfied with the current system. To meet the demands of the growing number of people who are looking for change, corporations have created
brands and labels designed to appease customers’ desire for garments which meet their ethical standards. When consumers go shopping they do not know the story of the garments that they see in stores beyond the image that is created by the retailer. Attempts at ethical consumption can build apparent relationships between consumers and their branded products, diminishing the need for human interaction.

Most consumers’ purchasing processes do not include dialogue with producers or corporations. Without creating any direct connections, consumer actions within the current system can be seen as a minor form of communication with retailers, but a communication form that is basically one-dimensional, based on one variable - how much money is spent or not spent. Ethical consumption cannot create sustainable change as it is not based on dialogue.

**Knowledge sharing.**

When consumers choose to buy garments that match their own ethical criteria they do not have to communicate their choice with anyone else. The move towards ethical consumption as a way to express one’s political concerns fits in with the siloed model that has developed in Canadian society. Canadians often make choices and can take actions that are almost completely independent of other community members.

Although a growing number of people are actively attempting to be “ethical consumers,” they are not necessarily working together. While some of the participants in this study mentioned being part of communities that were conscious of consumption issues, these were presented as passive characteristics and not central aspects of these relationships. Gary spoke about having friends who shared his world view and said,

> I don’t want to argue with people every day of my life. You know? I don’t want to be with people who don’t get it – what I’m about. It’s natural to gravitate at least in part toward people who [have similar values].

The participants’ consumption decisions seemed to be personal choices.

When I asked about sharing knowledge with peers, the participants had varying responses as can be seen in the following set of comments.
I’ve talked about it before with people that I work with. I’m a teacher and a lot of teachers are interested in social justice. . . So it’s something that people will talk about - and also at my church, they’re very interested in social justice so they’ll talk all about things like that and just trying to make things more fair in the world. . . (Amy)

Yeah, I would say that I don’t really pursue it much with friends. I’ll make comments here and there and I think they’re genuinely interested in organic - or whatever - either from a health point of view or something else but with my set of friends I would say that we don’t get into any deep discussions on any of that. I kind of venture a little bit to see if there is interest but then if there’s not, I don’t really pursue it. (Anne)

Generally the participants in my study shared personal stories of working on their own to find garments that met their ethical requirements.

Throughout the interviews, participants made various statements referring to “other” people who are not concerned with ethical issues. This sentiment can be seen in statements such as, “My sense is that there are probably not a lot of people who are outside the ‘counterculture’ for lack of a better term who are really actively caring about this sort of stuff” (Gary). Claire stated that,

When talking with my friends who aren’t really in that kind of mindset – in the ethical mindset – they always just see us as the semi-dirty hippies. They’re just like, "Oh, you work for an NGO and you can tell" – and you can tell us at parties because we’re not wearing super trendy clothing. . . Everyone else is just wearing things that all kind of look the same and I’ll have the tags that say hemp on it . . . you can just totally pick us out of the crowd – which is really funny and it’s great – I’m fine with it – and it’s okay living in my little world because I kind of fit in but when I’m the only person at the part that’s like ‘the hippy,’ it’s like . . . I can’t fit in at all.
These experiences shared by the participants show how making ethical consumption an individual’s choice can be divisive.

The individual nature of ethical consumption and the self-satisfaction it provides may make people less likely to share their concern with their peers. Yet sharing concerns is of fundamental importance to drawing more attention and stimulating action to resolve the problems in the GGI. Engaging in consciously ethical consumption is a decision made by individuals that can happen within the current system and does not in itself pose a challenge to existing structures. The individual nature of ethical consumption prevents it from creating sustainable change. For actions to promote sustainable change they must be based on dialogue.

**The Role of Canadians in Promoting a Sustainable Garment Industry**

While ethical consumption cannot lead to sustainability on its own, being able to consume ethically is part of a sustainable garment industry. In a sustainable industry, Canadians would not experience the challenges described in the previous chapter. This section will address the changes that are necessary to alleviate these challenges.

The fact that the participants found it difficult to find clothing that met their ethical standards is based on the low levels of garments that are produced sustainably. This problem cannot be addressed without fundamental changes to the GGI. Companies may produce more clothing marketed as “ethical” but without other pressures, they will only change their production processes for the people who actively seek to buy “ethical” garments and are willing to pay a price that will make it profitable for the companies.

Another challenge identified by participants was finding garments that met particular size and occasion requirements. Low-production volumes also mean that “ethical” garments do not have the same variety of styles and sizes as other garments. As long as “ethical” garments continue to be considered speciality items, they will not be produced in all sizes and for all occasions.

That some participants mentioned finding imported items which met their ethical criteria but did not conform to their style preferences is a result of producing garments for consumers in foreign countries. To address this challenge, more communication needs to
take place between producers and consumers. This can be facilitated by increased levels of local production and also by building international design partnerships.

Being able to afford the premium prices usually attached to items that are marketed as ethical was also identified as a challenge for participants. Often these additional costs are levied because the items have been made with small production runs. As the “ethical market” grows it should become more cost competitive. Changes that are needed for the GGI to conform to higher environmental standards will be cheaper with economies of scale and money saved by creating less waste. Dealing with the increased costs of improving labour conditions will be a harder challenge. Overall, items would probably cost more if they were made using methods which upheld social and environmental criteria.

The way that people conceptualize the value of clothing in Canada is based on unsustainably cheap production processes. In a sustainable GGI, each piece of clothing would have more value than it currently does. Consequently, clothing would cost more and people would have to keep each item for a longer period of time. An example of the participants’ acknowledgment about the necessity for a modified value of clothing can be seen by the fact that when I asked what changes needed to be made to have an ethical garment industry, Vikram said, “People would have to be willing to spend more money for our clothes.” In a system that prioritized life values, the time, effort and natural resources that are involved in making garments would be given a higher value.

The participants all found it challenging to find out how garments are produced and disposed. The lack of information is a characteristic of the current industrial global system. The participants wanted to know more about the industry and they made several suggestions about how to increase public learning and awareness of ethical issues in the GGI. These suggestions ranged from improving labelling; creating a worker history month; developing formal education programs; mounting a public awareness campaign and developing worker union run educational programs. Developing initiatives that can increase Canadians understanding of the GGI is an important step in creating sustainable change. As more consumers become informed about the industry’s multifarious nature, they will realize their involvement either contributes to maintaining current systems or
has the potential to improve people’s lives and the health of the planet. Claire spoke about the personal impact of learning about the GGI.

I think in North America, we’re so isolated and we let ourselves be isolated. We don’t want to have that picture in front of us of that kid in sweatshop but once someone sees that, they can’t un-see it. They can ignore it but you can only ignore things for so long until you start seeing it and it’s kind of there. Once we make it public discourse then people in their hearts and their mind . . . can kind of believe it as well. I think more advocacy has to happen.

For consumers to be able to make informed decisions, more awareness needs to be generated about the systems that shape the current industry and processes involved in the life-cycles of individual garments.

The participants found it difficult to engage in the work necessary to know if individual garments were involved in exploitative processes. This is a large task and it is understandable that when Canadians have to work and take care of their families that it would be difficult to also find time to research each piece of clothing they buy. The fact any garments are sold in Canadians stores that are involved in exploitative processes must be changed. The Canadian government should have a greater responsibility for protecting workers and the environment. While many of the impacts of the GGI are mainly felt outside of Canada, Canadians are directly involved in the processes that support exploitative systems. To address these concerns the government needs to play a larger role in regulating the industry.

With the current system, the responsibility of finding “ethical” garments is in the hands of the consumers. The growing numbers of Canadians who are engaging in consciously ethical consumption expresses a desire for change in the GGI. Yet, as was shown above, pursuing ethical consumption as a tactic to improve the GGI will not be effective. Ethical consumption cannot create change on its own. A multipronged approach that promotes sustainable change is needed. Through engaging in actions that prioritize life values, counter-hegemony and dialogue, Canadians can work towards
promoting sustainable change that builds the civil commons and fosters equitable relationships between members of society and the natural environment.

As the size and complexity of the GGI make its reform a monumental task, solutions must also be complex. To instigate change in the GGI Canadians can focus on two broad areas of action. The first is seeking to learn more about the industry and sustainability. For Canadians to change their roles in the GGI, they would need to become more aware of how the industry’s global systems function. The second broad area of action would be increasing communication and building communities among those involved in the GGI. Stakeholders in all parts of the industry have their own objectives and developing a mutual understanding would enable the development of methods of change that are supportive to the needs of all stakeholders. Increased understanding of the current system and building new relationships would help to instigate counter-hegemonic change. Through these actions, Canadians can help to build the civil commons and create a sustainable garment industry.

**Learning for Sustainability**

With the advancement of communication technology, greater possibilities exist for disseminating knowledge. Yet, the media’s attention only seems to focus on the production conditions in the garment industry when particularly extreme events occur and there has been almost no attention given to disposal processes. When the industry is functioning in a “business-as-usual” mode, the general public is presented with messages that place garments as fashion items without a past or a future.

At the height of the publicity surrounding sweatshops, there was a lot of public pressure for companies and governments to take action. Many companies created corporate codes of responsibility or ethical production policies but these policies were just words. As the stories faded from the media, so too did the focus of companies and governments. Despite the creation of new policies, the companies did not fundamentally change the way that they behave and have continued to be involved in exploitative systems.

In light of the lack of readily available information about the GGI, consumers who are concerned with the history of their garments must research the production and
disposal systems in which their garments may be involved. This type of research is beneficial for promoting sustainability. It can be considered part of learning for sustainability. Actively seeking to find information about the GGI can help consumers to question the structure on which it is based.

In order for people to effectively act to address the exploitative conditions in the GGI, greater awareness needs to be developed about how the industry works and why it is not sustainable. Learning for sustainability is a way to engage Canadians in the GGI. Education and knowledge sharing systems must be established by and involve all levels of society from the government to grassroots organizations. Ng (2007) writes

Given the dramatic and continuous changes in the garment sector, we need more and better research done to track the global production and organization of apparel and textile. . . It is only through collaboration and partnership among researchers in different locations (e.g., in the government, in the academy, in unions, in the community) that we may unravel the complex nature and organization of garment production in Canada and elsewhere. (p. 206)

Cooperatively seeking to break down barriers and learn about the industry's complex processes is a crucial step in promoting systemic reform.

A growing public awareness of ethical issues in the globalized garment industry has been developing since the early days of the anti-sweatshop movement in the 1990s and the decade of shocking exposés that followed (A Ross, 2004). While information about the industry is limited there are a variety of sources for Canadians who are looking, which include NGOs, academic publications and alternative new media. As discussed in Chapter Three, organizations seeking to promote change in the GGI have been attempting to share knowledge with the public. Public campaigns can also stimulate learning. Trade unionist, scholars, students, people of faith, environment and human rights activists, citizen groups, sympathetic politicians, and outraged consumers have participated in campaigns which have relied on the high levels of publicity generated through targeting well known brands in their anti-sweatshop campaigns. While these messages reach a wider public and may stimulate popular interest, they often do not present the underlying structural challenges facing the industry.
As discussed throughout this thesis, it is difficult for Canadians to learn about GGI. As the dominant messages seen by Canadians are corporate public portrayals that present normative messages, Canadians must consciously seek to learn more about underlying exploitative structure of the GGI. For those whose activities are not currently affected by knowledge of injustice in the GGI, the development of programs designed to increase their awareness of the need for global action so end systemic injustice in the GGI would be beneficial.

Curry-Stevens (2005) developed a model for a pedagogy for the privileged. Her approach focuses on using techniques based on Frierian principles to help oppressive groups realize that they are part of oppressive systems. Programs designed to increase Canadians’ awareness of their place in supporting exploitative systems are important for inspiring Canadians to take action to address the unsustainable nature of the current GGI.

As most consumers are adults, it is important to consider the place of adult education when examining the process of learning for sustainability. Sumner (2008) quotes Nesbit, who sees adult education as having three main traditions: social purpose rooted in a desire for justice; a critical approach; and, focus on location and practice. Sumner sees building the civil commons as embodying the desire for social change. By enabling accessibility to life goods, Sumner’s sustainability model allows adult educators to foster a critical perspective towards a system which promotes the well-being of only a few. She also writes that sustainability looks at locations that are important to Canadians, such as education, healthcare, the environment and food. Adult education for sustainability can include structures such as universities, NGOs, social movements and community forums (Sumner, 2008).

Ng (2007) writes about the importance of developing education for citizenship, which “involves educating citizens, including immigrants, about ethical employment practices to which all employers should adhere” (p. 207). Programs can be designed to let students explore the deeper connections between items and processes which they deal with daily but may never have considered. Students should learn about the structures of the GGI including information about the involvement of people all over the world and the industry’s affects on the environment.
In the past, more structured educational programs have helped to mobilize people to address exploitation in the garment industry. For example, the Southern Summer School for Women Workers in Industry, first established in 1927, was a residential program that focused on training grass-roots leaders in union organizing, labor history, economics, and public speaking (Frederickson, 2007). The school was founded by educators and activists from diverse class and regional backgrounds and broke through religious and racial barriers throughout its existence (Frederickson, 2007).

Students shared their individual life stories and came to see themselves as part of a long history of labor activism and struggle. Knowing about the past empowered them to act in the present, in the belief that they could shape a different future for their children. (Frederickson, 2007, p. 64)

According to Fredrickson (2007), “Today’s activists, need access to the contested and suppressed labor history of ‘other souths’, for while each generation creates its own future, the historical consciousness of workers, activists, and trade unionist can move the struggle toward economic justice” (pp. 66-67).

In the early days of unions, members of the working class were able to communicate through community networks and the worker produced newspapers and pamphlets. Herman and Chomsky (1988) wrote about the decline of newspapers produced by working class publishers as advertising became the major source of funding in the early twentieth century. Now, computer technology allows people to communicate with a wide audience with no capital investment. Can this renewed ability of citizen-led mass communication herald a new movement of global organizing in the GGI?

In the 21st century, information communication technology can be used as a tool to help with global education. Modern communication technologies have allowed people to see what is happening in far-away locations to bridge the divide created by geographic distance between consumption and production. Activist groups and individuals have used these technologies to expose the unjust working conditions faced by many workers in manufacturing industries globally.

While many people may believe the quote, “the repugnance attached to the term sweatshop commands a moral power, second only to slavery itself, to rouse public opinion into a collective spasm of abhorrence” (A Ross, 2004, p. 35), millions of people
today contribute to the existence of sweatshops. Learning for sustainability is necessary to help these people realize the consequences of the current system.

Solutions must incorporate education at all levels of society. Learning for sustainability can help to inspire the creativity of individuals and groups to define new paths. This process will involve consciousness raising and critically examining and reflecting on current systems. If the world’s citizens open their minds and hearts to a new future then they can work together to build the civil commons.

**Breaking Down Barriers and Building Global Connections**

Carroll and Ratner (1994) discuss the issue of the fragmentation of NSMs and the need for collaboration to promote counter-hegemonic change. As the American NCL supported the fair working conditions in the early 20th century and the Canadian MSN does in the 21st century, groups can be formed that involve consumers working together to promote changes in the garment industry. By sharing their concerns, Canadians can become a stronger force for driving positive change. Those concerned with ethical issues in the garment industry must seek to take counter-hegemonic actions that will build the civil commons.

There are groups that exist in Canada that promote issues that are complementary to reform in the GGI. From groups such as Engineers Without Borders Canada which seeks to promote fair trade and economic development in Africa, to the David Suzuki Foundation, which seeks to protect natural diversity and human quality of life, there are thousands of Canadians presently working to promote global justice. Members of these groups need to work together to provide a strong counterpoint to current global economic systems which are currently fortified by the strength of transnational corporations and powerful international trade associations and agreements.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, ethical consumption is an individual action. To be more sustainable, it could become part of a collective action. Through developing an integrated community of people working towards a common purpose, the act of ethical consumption could become a social norm.
According to empirical research, social norms affect people’s propensity to engage in consciously ethical consumption (Starr, 2009). According to Starr (2009), studies of specific ethical-consumption behaviors suggest that people care not so much about having their peers see them engaging in socially desirable behavior, as they do about keeping their behavior aligned with what they believe to be the norm in their neighborhood, community, or social group – suggesting that they feel bad about free-riding on a collective action (Elster, 1989) and/or are more likely to join one if they believe it is already off the ground (Schultz, 2002). There is, however, evidence that people are more sensitive to perceived norms among people like themselves than among more abstract sets of ‘others’; for example, people’s likelihood of recycling rises with the share of their neighbors they believe to be recycling and also with the analogous share of people in their city, but the former effect is stronger than the latter (Schultz, 2002). (p. 920)

This type of behavior was seen in the experiences of the participants of this study. While the participants generally said that they do not talk about their consumption habits with their peers, it may be beneficial to make consciously ethical consumption decisions more public to increase the potential for developing a new social norm. An example of this type of behavior can be seen by the actions of a participant in a study by Cherrier (2006), who consciously chose to carry a reusable shopping bag to encourage people in his community to be more aware of the environment.

A difficulty with cooperative action is the apparently conflicting objectives of different interest groups. A. Ross (2008) writes about the tension between anti-consumer activists and the anti-sweatshop movement. He says that within anti-sweatshop politics,

Apologies to reduce consumption, or to redirect production into sustainable channels are not a high priority, and are still likely to be seen as an awkward fit, for most labor activists weaned on the gospel of raising standards for workers. (p. 783)

While there is some conflict, the two groups have potential to work together. Ross writes about the potential for the two groups to learn from each other.

Concerns about the unsustainability of a consumer civilization can, and should be, addressed at the point of production. Thus, anti-sweatshop campaigns would be less vulnerable to cooption by the CSR juggernaut if they were able to broaden the definition of fair labor and fair trade to include factors that are all too often ‘externalized.’ Wages and workplaces,
for example, should be adequate enough to protect the social and environmental wellbeing of communities both in the host location and elsewhere. It is more difficult for corporate PR agents to spin the brand out and away from socio-environmental relationships with communities than from wage contracts with individuals. On the other side, anti-consumerists ought to consider production workers and labour-based organizations as likely allies rather than as hapless victims of false consciousness. They would therefore be less vulnerable to critiques that they rely on individual acts of moral volunteerism if they hitched their wagon to progressive institutional forces with proven records of trust among communities and popular constituencies such as unions. (pp. 785-786)

While superficial conflicts may exist, moving beyond difference and learning to cooperate would be beneficial for all those involved with reforming the GGI.

The most fundamental reason that ethical consumption cannot create a solution on its own is that the group of people who are likely to engage in consciously ethical consumption is relatively small. The findings in a paper by Starr (2009), which support the results of other authors, show that

there is a core of consumers who consume ethically for ‘intrinsic’ reasons; another group who may not place the same intrinsic value on consuming ethically, but would begin consuming ethically if it became a social norm; and a last group of people who are neither intrinsically concerned with consuming ethically nor sensitive to social norms related to it (Sen et al., 2001; Janssen and Wander, 2002; Brekke et al., 2003; Eriksson, 2004). . . Ethical consumption may become widespread if the first two groups make up a sizable share of the population and if the actions of people in the first group induce people in the second to also change their behavior. However, if the intrinsically motivated group is relatively small and/or its behavior does not much influence the behavior of others, ethical consumption might remain a niche phenomenon and/or spread too little to make a dent in the social, ethical, and environmental problems it aims to address (Eriksson, 2004). (p. 9.24)

To address this problem, consciously ethical consumers must work with other groups to promote systemic change.

In the structure of the current GGI, consumers exist on the periphery of complex systems. From a distance consumers often see distorted images of how the industry functions. From their vantage point as Canadian consumers, the participants in this study take actions that they believe are beneficial for both people and the environment. Yet,
Canadian consumers who are trying to be ethical may not always act in ways that are conducive to promoting a sustainable GGI. To promote meaningful change their actions must be developed in collaboration with the industry’s other stakeholders.

Modern communication technology also allows individuals all over the world to communicate and become aware of each others’ predicaments and to create direct connections which can help build communities and provide support (Serrano, 2000). Global networks of individuals are now being created over the internet. Information from remote areas of the world is available for all to see by the use of blogs and other modern forms of information communication technology.

The patterns of trade and investment liberalization that [global elites] covet are everywhere met with resourceful resisters who use the Internet to circumvent the pro-capitalist media, who organize and educate each other across national borders, and who are piecing together progressive, humane versions of globalization. (A Ross, 2004, p. 13)

While information communication technology is not yet accessible to everyone, its use is spreading quickly and has great potential for increasing global communication.

As noted by Caroll (2007), recent years have seen increased global cooperation to address social and environmental just issues. “Globalization-from-below is diverse in its conceptions of social justice, yet its minions are agreed that injustice is rooted in contemporary social arrangements and structures that can be transformed through collective action” (W. Carroll, 2007, p. 36). While the structures and systems that shape the GGI are strong, civil society can be an even stronger force for change. Working together and sharing ideas and strategies can help concerned global citizens to create a counter-hegemonic force to promote sustainability. Collective action can help to build a new industry that is rooted in a strong civil commons. Concerned Canadians must work with the industry’s various stakeholders.

In the new consumer-based campaigns “the producers and the consumers involved are different people; not only does class distinguish them, but nation as well, reflecting, in part, the new global structures of production and distribution (Frank, 2003, p. 373). Bridging these divides is essential for the development of movement that can undermine the current system. Workers all over the world are struggling to improve their
own conditions. Consumers in Canada have resources which can help to strengthen producer movements.

Middle-class activists calling out to their fellow middle-class shoppers have access to power and resources that labor activists often do not. They have college educations, literary skills, social networks through school and family, self confidence about speaking in public. They have access to political power and funding agencies. All this means, as with middle-class consumers, that they have a lot of strengths to bring to oppressed workers trapped in exploitative jobs in whatever part of the world. (Frank, 2003, p. 374)

While bringing assets to global collaborative efforts, it is important for consumers not to overstep their positions and develop hierarchical relationships.

Canadians do not know about the daily lives of producers and their wants and needs. When discussing the role of consumers in consumer-producer partnerships, Frank (2003) reminds us that “we need always to ask: Does this campaign empower people on the ground as workers? Does this activity help build workers’ own worker-led and defined organizations? What power differentials are emerging within the movement?” (p. 374) Frank provides an example by citing that when U.S. consumers wanted to improve the conditions in maquiladoras in northern Mexico workers had to insist that they did not want people to boycott their products because they would lose their jobs.

This thesis has shown that ethical consumption cannot create change in isolation. As part of the process of promoting sustainable change, ethical consumption cannot be an isolated action based on a response to public portrayals. Canadians have to build their own communication networks, both within Canada and connecting to people around the world. International cooperation is necessary to create systemic reform. According to Bergene (2007), “higher-scale solidarity is needed to prevent inter-place competition and restrain the advantages of mobility to halt a ‘race to the bottom’” (p. 144).

While recent developments in transnational organizing have shown positive results, it is important to consider how this movement will progress. Creating global connections has been recognized as a challenge (Bergene, 2007), but they must be made to help improve working conditions for labourers world-wide. New relationships must be built that do not reconstruct current hegemonic structures.
The good news is that global networks are already developing. As concerned individuals have learned more about the lives of farmers, garment producers, retail workers and many other people whose lives are intimately affected by this market system, many have realized the importance of global communication. While this growing process of globally communicative action has received little public attention, it is starting to create active and counter-hegemonic change. Worker-based groups formed to fight for their own rights are increasingly creating connections to global networks of concerned individuals who have the potential to instigate widespread change and reform the garment industry.

In the current GGI, successful labour organizing is not enough - as companies can easily relocate.

Despite the necessity of and even attempts at organizing globally, the labor movement has . . . had greater success in commanding power in places and territories than in controlling space. As a result the capitalist class has been able to use spatial manoeuvres to its advantage, defeating the place-bound labor-struggles. (Bergene, 2007, p. 43)

Where globally coordinated labour movements have failed to be successful in the past, the involvement of consumers has the potential to strengthen these movements.

R. J. S. Ross writes that historically garment workers relied on three pillars of support to gain fair working conditions.

The first and most important pillar upon which vulnerable workers in the twentieth century depended for material decency and social enfranchisement – their own self-defense in unions and community organizations. The history of U.S. progressives’ response to super-exploited labour in sweatshops shows two other pillars of support, one enabling the other. One is the alliance – sometimes uneasy – between workers and their reformer, usually middle-class, allies. This alliance resulted in the third pillar for worker decency: public policies that supported workers’ rights to organize and created social supports that allowed them to participate fully in the life of the society. Reformers did not always intend to support such policies, sometimes preferring consumer action through ethical labelling and consumer choice. Often, though, reformers’ market–based voluntarism turned into advocacy for protective legislation for vulnerable populations – child labour laws, minimum-wage-and-hour legislation and the like, and social safety nets such as Social Security and Unemployment Insurance. (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 50)
Can the alliance between garment workers and middle-class consumers bridge international/national divides? Their historic partnership indicates that it is possible. With strengthened connections, maybe the growing movement towards ethical consumption will again lead to the development of internationally recognized protective legislation, which would be an example of the civil commons in action.

Through this thesis, I have discussed consumers and producers as separate groups, but Arnould (2007) challenges this notion and says,

Producer and consumer are essentialized binaries that derive from a model of industrial capitalism in which these two actors are divided by capital. But even if this model was once descriptive, there is reason to question its usefulness today. (p. 101)

The disconnect between Canadian consumers and the GGI is a symptom of our isolated society. A problem with unsustainable lifestyles and global inequality is that individuals focus on their perceived world and do not question the system that is responsible for creating these consumer goods. An important step in the processes of Canadians reconnecting to the industry is developing personal connections to the people who make their garments.

To support locally initiated worker movements, numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have begun working with producer groups. While building such connections has many potential benefits, the process can be difficult. Fernández-Kelly (2007) points out three challenges that can occur with transnational cooperation. The first is that the objectives of foreign NGOs may affect the priorities of local labour organizations. Locally created movements may be swayed towards meeting foreign objectives. Second, working with foreign organizations can lead to the need for increased administrative activity that may detract from an organization’s strengths. Third, Fernández-Kelly refers to a 2006 study by Jon Shefner, which showed that support from outside groups can be seen as a source of supplementary income instead of a means to strengthening worker organizations. While transnational cooperation may be crucial for creating widespread changes, it is important to consider these potential pitfalls. Egels-Zandén and Hyllman (2006) also write about the benefits of cooperation between NGOs
and unions. They conclude that while conflict may occur, overall cooperation is beneficial for both parties.

For the efforts of Canadians to have more potential to impact the GGI, they need to be done in cooperation with a variety of stakeholders. In Chapter Three, I discussed what has been portrayed to Canadian consumers through public portrayals. Other stakeholders have been taking additional actions which have not been featured in public portrayals. These include manufacturing facilities beginning cleaner production programs; regulating bodies creating legislation designed to protect workers and the environment; and workers organizing internationally to protect their own rights. On their own, each of these actions creates an isolated change but if these different stakeholders can work together, structural changes can begin to emerge. The actions of all stakeholders seeking to make improvements in the GGI can help to build the civil commons.

*Production facilities.*

Companies producing textiles around the world have been improving their environmental performance through environmental management systems. These systems are designed to look at how companies can increase their performance through improving their environmental behaviour. Producers have been learning about cleaner production, which is a concept that redefines the current system of industrial production and replaces it with a system that is environmentally sustainable, conceiving of the creation of processes and products that do not produce any waste. In the current system, more trade means more pollution. In an ideal situation which follows the principles of cleaner production, this would not be the case; increased production would not impinge on environmental sustainability and could lead to increased social and economic development.

A variety of organizations are promoting cleaner production. Examples include organizations such as UNIDO’s Cleaner Production Unit and the United Nations Environmental Program. Additionally, regional initiatives include the Asia Pacific Centre for Technology Transfer (APCTT) in New Delhi; the Centre for Environmentally Sound Technology Transfer (CESTT) in China; the International Centre for Environmental
Technology Transfer in Japan; the Ecolinks initiative operated by USAID for Central Eastern European countries; the Canadian Centre for Pollution Prevention; and the National Pollution Prevention Roundtable. With support of organizations like these, manufacturing facilities around the world are modifying their production methods to reduce their environmental impacts.

Some companies have been very innovative with finding ways to incorporate new environmentally friendly sources of raw materials for inputs in textile manufacturing. Patagonia has been making fleece clothing from postconsumer plastic soda bottles since 1993, saving approximately 86 million soda bottles from ending up in the landfill by 2006 and recycles their cotton T-shirts (Claudio, 2007). Other companies are using polymers from plant-based materials as alternative fibre sources to reduce the environmental impact of synthetic fabrics created with petroleum.

Another initiative that companies have been involved with is extended producer responsibility (EPR). In this system, companies are responsible for the full life-cycles of the products they produce. With this system, companies would have to take back items after consumer use and either recycle them or design them to be biodegradable. According to a report by Clean Production Action (2007),

The end of life product stage has become the popular focus for most EPR policy and in Europe producers are now financially responsible for the take back and recycling of batteries, packaging, vehicles and all electrical and electronic consumer products.¹ In Japan producers are responsible for recycling cars and electronic products² and in Canada many provinces are now passing take-back laws for paints, batteries, tires, packaging and electronics.⁵ Almost half the states in the US have passed or are about to pass take-back legislation for electronic waste. (p. 1)

This way of reconceptualising the role of manufacturers has potential to create large-scale changes in the GGI.

While many of the environmentally and socially responsible actions that companies have taken have been designed to increase profits, some companies have also been developed with specific missions to address social and environmental justice. Flanagan and Whiteman (2005) question the role of corporations in global politics, examining the rights and obligations of corporations as global citizens.
The increasing influence of transnational corporations within both domestic and international affairs suggests that ‘corporate citizenship’ is an emerging and powerful phenomenon. . . The multinational corporation is also increasingly acquiring transnational rights in the form of treaties that provide for a minimum standard of treatment for the foreign investor . . Much as the growth of international human rights reflects a concept of individual citizenship that transcends national boundaries, investment protections for multinational corporations grant them valuable rights as corporate global citizens. . . This raises the question of what might be the corresponding obligations of this global citizenship. (p. 214)

If corporations begin to have responsibilities to the people and the environments that are affected by their actions, the GGI would see significant changes.

**Legislative and policy actions.**

An important area to consider when envisioning a sustainable GGI is the role of the government. Does waiting until the populace demands changes for sustainability absolve the government of responsibility? To address the social and environmental challenges caused by the GGI, the government should play a more active role in creating legislation to protect human and environmental rights.

Although there are pressing concerns related to sustainability due to the democratically led structure of our current socio-political system, change towards a more sustainable model must be led by public initiative. Increased learning about the GGI can lead to higher levels of public pressure. This is an area in which Canadians who are concerned with the unsustainable nature of the GGI can make a large difference. With popular demand, governments will be able to develop legislation and public policy that could build the civil commons.

An example of a policy that builds the civil commons is the Canadian Environmental Protection Act of 1999. This act regulates the environmental impact of textiles produced in Canada and regulates the use of substances that may be toxic to human or non-human organisms or take a long time to break down in the environment. This act does not regulate the environmental or health impact of imported substances during their production before they enter Canada.
In terms of supporting the right to fair working conditions for garment producers, the Canadian government has not taken an active role. After the meetings to discuss a voluntary code of conduct for Canadian retailers fell apart in 2000, the Canadian government has not taken any specific measures to address this issue. While there has not been much action at the national level, by 2007 four Canadian cities had adopted ethical purchasing policies ("Ottawa's no sweat policy passes," 2007).

The European Union has developed the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) regulations which were enacted on in 2007 and require clothing manufacturers and importers to identify and quantify the chemicals in their products (Claudio, 2007). REACH entered into force on 1st of June 2007 and seeks to ensure protect human health and the environment. Claudio states that “Such regulations and standards, coupled with increasing consumer awareness about less toxic and sustainable products, may provide some impetus to revolutionize the garment industry” (p. A454). The policy has faced international controversy. According to Fisher (2008)

The REACH proposal was one of the most controversial legislative proposals in the history of Community law-making. Debate over it was heated, intemperate and has involved not only regulatory actors within the European Union (EU) but also regulatory actors in other jurisdictions. (p. 541)

While this policy has been controversial, it is a step toward creating global regulations which can help sustain global industries.

A. Ross (2004) believes that to create reform in the GGI an important goal is to win a voice at the table of the world economic community, where elites from government and industry, unencumbered by labor representative, make the key decisions about capital regulation and allocation of the debt burden. Until that kind of top-level participation is achieved, labor and environmental standards will only get lip service. (pp. 54-55).

He states that these powerful actors are beginning to be affected by growing awareness and popular pressure to improve the GGI.
Intergovernmental institutions are working to support the rights of the humans and the environment. For example the International Labor Organization (ILO) seeks to develop opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work with freedom, equity, security and human dignity; and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has a number of regulations for textiles. These organizations run a variety of programs that reach businesses all over the world.

In addition to policies directly governing the GGI, the government could also play a role in raising awareness of the industry’s ethical issues. Research has shown that public policy can influence consumer behavior through programs such as creating green taxes; improving public transit systems; creating eco-labeling regulations; running promotional programs on topics such as recycling and not smoking; and influencing social and moral norms (Cherrier, 2006).

Overall, while the world's governments have the potential to take actions that could create dramatic improvements in the GGI, their actions have not lived up to this potential. Canadians seeking to reform the GGI can pressure the government to create laws and policies that would protect the people and natural resources that are negatively affected by the industry. Despite the lack of support from government in the past, rebuilding the GGI into a sustainable industry will require supportive government policies.

**Grassroots organizing.**

A third set of groups that Canadian consumers can work with are grassroots organizations. In spite of almost insurmountable challenges, groups of female garment workers are organizing all over the world to improve their own lives. Not only do they have to face large corporations who hold power over their financial livelihoods, they also have very little time to spend organizing. In addition to these difficulties, another major challenge to organizing is the fact that global capital is almost completely mobile. Overcoming these barriers numerous groups are organizing worldwide.

An organization that has been successful in building the civil commons by fighting to improve workers’ rights from the developing world is UBINIG, a feminist activist and research group based in Dhaka. This group works with transnational alliances
but does not allow international solidarity organizations to shape its work or reduce its agency (E. Brooks, 2007). Their actions are part of the global effort to reform the GGI.

Another example of the civil commons can be seen by the actions of a group of garment workers in El Salvador, who formed a union to attempt to maintain their rights as global competition stiffened with the end the MFA. When their factory closed, the union sought international support and the factory was eventually reopened under worker control under the name Just Shirts. While under worker-led management, Just Shirts has continued to function and fill international orders mainly from consumers who are seeking to buy ethical garments (Martinez & Quintanilla, 2006).

Additionally, many transnational organizations are seeking to support the rights of women working in the garment industry. These organizations include the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, Women on the Border, the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), the Colectiva Feminista Binacional and La Mujer Obrera, the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros (CFO)-Committee of WomenWorkers, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), the League of Women Voters (LWV) and Women Working Worldwide (WWW). All of these groups represent thousands of people who are seeking to improve working conditions worldwide.

Various organizations have developed in the last ten years to monitor labour conditions O’Rourke (2003) writes that

New nongovernmental regulatory systems hold out both potential and peril. They offer the potential of opening up and strengthening regulatory systems and bringing in new voices and mechanisms for motivating improvements in global supply chains. They also harbor the peril of privatizing regulation, effectively closing off democratic forms of regulation and bypassing local governance. (p. 23)

She suggests measuring these organizations on legitimacy, rigor, accountability and complementarity to government regulations. After a 2005 conference on Constructing Markets for Conscientious Apparel Consumers another group of activists proposed a simplified criterion that would join the Fair Trade movement’s emphasis on agricultural producer co-ops and the anti-sweatshop movement’s emerging preference for union-made goods: they call their approach
‘worker voice’. The ‘worker voice’ standard requires that a garment be made by workers represented by a union of their choice or by a worker-owned cooperative. (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 54)

This system identified three levels of production conditions. The first was called a “sweatshop zone;” the second was factories that “pay decent wages and provide some but not all reasonable benefits. But by resisting unions these firms make working condition subject to unilateral whim and caprice of the employer, not to mutually agreed conditions among workers and their bosses... rag-trade purgatory;” and the third was factories where workers have a voice (R. J. S. Ross, 2006, p. 54). The third level, which encompasses union and coops, can play a part in building a strong civil commons.

Numerous groups are working around the world to promote changes in the GGI. All of these initiatives are creating local or issue specific changes. Each group has the potential to learn and cooperate with the others. All members of the global community have a shared responsibility for building a brighter future. To create this situation, global systems and politics should follow Habermas’ (1984) concept of communicative action, acting based on mutually determined objectives. There needs to be much higher levels of communication and global structures should be redefined to include the needs of all of the world’s people.

**Conclusion**

For the last two hundred years processes in the GGI have distanced consumers from the garment industry. Production and disposal systems are now out of sight for most Canadians. The development of industrialization and urbanization has moved garment creation and disposal away from the lived experiences of Canadians. Additionally the increasingly complex technology involved in garment production has made it harder for individuals not working in the industry to understand its processes.

Consequently, consumers mainly learn about the garment industry from public portrayals, created by corporate media, teachers, nongovernmental organizations, activist groups and governments. Of these sources, the dominant provider of information is the corporate media, which expertly shapes its messages with the objective of increasing profits. The current divide between production, use and disposal has increased the
effectiveness of corporate messages at presenting idealized images of garments. Mark spoke about the process of appealing images overriding underlying material concerns.

I feel like our little child comes out, especially when I was in China and you have these huge incredible buildings, especially in the new part of Shanghai. It used to be farmland 15 years ago and now it’s the financial centre of Shanghai – of China, basically – and all these people come and most of them, like I said, are peasants and they look around – they look up at these huge buildings and that’s all anyone ever wants to talk about. And I think to myself and I look on the ground and I look at these people and I think to myself is that progress or is this progress? And I don’t understand how people can invest all of this meaning into these building when we have people right here – right here! – who have nothing but a bowl of crappy noodles to eat every day. So I feel like our little child comes out – these shiny big things that we get so impressed that we forget.

While being bombarded with glamorized images, a growing number of Canadians are seeking to understand the lifecycle of their garments and the part that Canadians play in socially and environmentally unsustainable systems.

Through institutionalized processes, including technological development, complex global production chains and corporate media communication, companies sell clothes in environments that focus on image and cost. The attempted removal of garments from their conditions of existence outside of the store leaves Canadians with the work of trying to learn about garments that have traveled through complicated production chains spanning the globe. If companies are not obliged to meet social or environmental standards when selling clothing, the work of understanding the life-cycle of garments is downloaded onto consumers who to satisfy their ethical criteria must do research on every product they buy, which is neither practical nor desirable.

The high levels of concern for ethical issues demonstrated in other studies about ethical consumption indicate that people would like to be part of a sustainable system. For individuals who are concerned with potential injustice in the current system, trying to learn about the industry and trying to minimize one’s role in exploitative processes is
difficult as the fundamental problem lies in the structure of global production chains, which are not affected by individual consumer behaviour. Yet, corporations often create the appearance of placing the choice in consumers’ hands.

While the concept of consciously ethical consumerism in a mass-market system first began with the development of union labels in the late 19th century, marketing of garments as ethically made has recently become a growing trend. Since the mid 1990s, companies have started to specifically produce clothing to meet the demands of the growing ethical consumption market. Many of these brands have been designed to increase business for large corporations regardless of their potential impact on unsustainable systems.

Companies have generally developed separate brands that are marketed as sweatshop-free or environmentally friendly. Large retail stores generally do not carry products that are marketed as sweat-free because their presence in the stores would imply that other products in the store were made in sweatshops (A Ross, 2004). This issue has not been of such high concern for products marketed as environmentally friendly. Preserving the environment seems to be more acceptable as a consumer choice than human rights. Yet, environmental degradation is affecting people’s livelihoods worldwide. When seeking to create sustainable change, the two issues cannot be separated as they are both symptoms of the unsustainable structure of the current system.

The main challenges identified by Canadians attempting to engage in ethical consumption were accessibility, cost and lack of information. Addressing these challenges is not possible at the consumer level. For the garment industry to meet the ethical requirements of these Canadians it would have to become a sustainable industry, which requires fundamental structural changes in the current relationships and processes. Actions that Canadians can take to promote the development of a sustainable industry include learning for sustainability and communicating to developing collaborative actions with other stakeholders.

This study attempts to paint part of the picture of how Canadian consumers interact with the GGI in their attempts to be ethical consumers. The challenges that are identified here are based on complex relations that intertwine with the lives of the
participants. The results in this thesis form the basis for the beginnings of an institutional ethnographic study. While this study has identified externally originating challenges to engaging in ethical consumption, the data collection was focused on individuals’ experiences. To complete an institutional ethnography further research would need to be done into the ruling relations of the GGI, including corporations, governments, trade organizations and numerous others who are involved.

Questioning current systems and looking for ways to meet the needs and desires of all members of the global community was a priority throughout the study. If ethical consumption is defined as a choice, then are the other "choices" exploiting unknown people and destroying the natural environment? Even if individuals make these choices consciously (which I believe they do not, because of the skewed nature of the reality presented in public portrayals) who is responsible for the effects of their cumulative choices? It is necessary for all the stakeholders in this industry to work together to address the global challenge of reforming the GGI.

The ecosocialist/eco feminist perspectives of the GGI, which have been discussed in this thesis, highlight the industry’s unsustainable nature. The capital interests of dominant groups are elevated while individual human needs and the importance of healthy ecosystems are being suppressed. However, Canadians have the ability to help realize a vision of a sustainable future industry.

While ethical consumption cannot lead the way out of the current unsustainable nature of the GGI, the fact that a growing number of Canadians are becoming conscious of their consumption is a sign that Canadians are not just accepting the current system. The people who are interested in improving the current system have the potential to learn about the structure of the current industry and use their knowledge to collaboratively challenge current processes. By working together to build the civil commons, the actions of Canadians and other stakeholders can lead the process of creating a new and sustainable garment industry.
 Works Cited


Ng, R. (2005). Immigrant garment workers as the embodiment of gender, race and class relations. In L. Biggs & P. Downe (Eds.), *Gendered Intersection: An Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies.* Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.


Appendix A:
Recruitment Poster

Ethical Fashion

Do you look for sweat shop free clothing? Organic or biodegradable fabric?

Are you interesting in being part of a research project aimed at improving access to ethically made garments? If so, a group discussion will be help on Sunday March 1st at 3:30 pm. For more information, please contact Rachel Alexander at r.alexander@utoronto.ca.
Appendix B:
Guiding Topics for Group Interviews

- The challenges in considering ethical issues when purchasing garments
- Barriers to finding ethically made garments
- The place of the media in educating individuals about ethical issues in garment production
- Experiences with public portrayals of the garment industry
- Public attitudes about the ethics surrounding the garment industry
- Developing a group definition of ‘ethical’ garments
Appendix C:
Questions for Individual Interviews

- How do you feel about the group discussion?
- Are there any topics that came up during the group session that you wish to discuss further?
- What factors do you consider when making a garment purchase?
- What do you feel are the main ethical issues in the garment industry?
- What is your vision of an ethical garment industry? What changes do you think are necessary to reach this vision?
- How do you feel that ethical consumption helps to achieve these goals?
- What are the challenges you face when looking for ethical clothing?
- How often do you buy clothing?
- What do you do with your clothing when you are finished with it? What makes you decide that you are finished with it?
- What are the factors that led you to become conscious of ethical issues in the garment industry?
- How would you see the learning process that you have experienced as being relevant to others?
- What do your peers think about ethical consumption?
- Could you tell me about some of the reactions that your friends or family have had to your desire to buy ethical clothing?
- How do you feel when you buy clothing that does not fulfill your ethical requirements?
- Who do you feel should be most responsible for educating individuals about the ethical issues surrounding garment production and disposal? Why?