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POLITICAL CONSUMERISM IN AMERICAN POLITICS

by

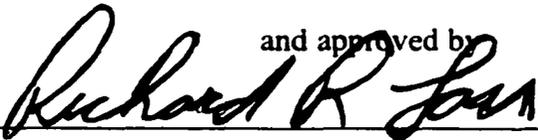
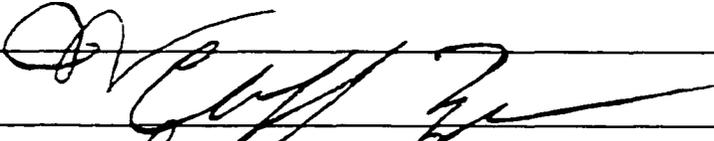
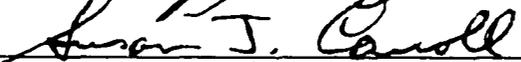
CAROLINE ELISABETH HELDMAN

A Dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School – New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Program in Political Science

written under the direction of

Richard R. Lau

and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Political Consumerism in American Politics

by CAROLINE ELISABETH HELDMAN

Dissertation Director:  
Richard R. Lau

This dissertation is a quantitative assessment of citizen engagement in political consumerism in American politics. Political consumerism is defined as citizen actions directed at corporate entities to explicitly influence the distribution of social goods and values. Such activities include but are not limited to boycotting, buycotting, socially conscious investing, a variety of political shareholder tactics (e.g., proposing a resolution, testifying at a shareholder meeting, disrupting a shareholder meeting), protest directed at a corporate organization or governing board (e.g., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and actions aimed at businesses directly (e.g., protests in front of stores selling fur.) This dissertation introduces political consumerism to the field, describes this political behavior using original survey data, and discusses the democratic implications of increasing citizen engagement in political consumerism in recent years.

Findings from a regional sample indicate that a majority of respondents engaged in political consumerism during 1999, and many engaged in multiple forms of this behavior. Younger respondents were more likely to initiate political consumerism than their older counterparts, and education is positively correlated with engagement in this activity. Rates of conventional participation and political consumerism were similar in the sample, and a majority of respondents report initiating both behaviors in the past year.

Consumer empowerment, measured by consumer complaint behavior, is a significant predictor of both conventional participation and political consumerism.

The prevalence of citizen engagement in political consumerism, documented in this regional sample and with national, longitudinal data, has meaningful democratic implications. First, it calls for a reframing of the participatory decline debate if rates of political consumerism are on the rise and many Americans are engaging in this type of unconventional participation. Secondly, increasing engagement in political consumerism suggests that citizens are savvier than they are often given credit. As modes of power shift away from government and toward corporations in American politics, citizens appear to be altering their modes of participation to account for these new political realities.

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The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and mentoring of Richard R. Lau. His commitment to graduate student development is deeply appreciated by many. Mark Schlesinger also provided many hours of invaluable assistance and support with the dissertation and graduate school in general. Stephanie Olson offered perceptive commentary and corrections on several drafts that dramatically improved the quality of the dissertation. Thomas Speedling undertook the tedious task of locating typographical, grammatical, and sometimes substantive errors. He also spent weekends watching Joseph for a year so I could complete the project. Suzanne Speedling provided many hot meals for long nights spent away from home. Kathleen Heldman offered long-distance emotional support, and Joseph Tindall gave me the inspiration to finish the project in a timely fashion. I am truly thankful to have had such a caring dissertation “team.”

**Dedication**

*For Thomas*

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

“Battle in Seattle” read the headline of the November 29, 1999 *New York Times*, an apt description of the contentious organized protest events of the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting (*New York Times*, 1999). This action was also dubbed the “Protest of the Century,” the “Woodstock of Globalization,” and “N30, an International Day of Resistance” by various news organizations. An estimated 50,000 participants marched, formed blockades, and caused the delay or cancellation of various WTO events. Participants came to the rainy city from several countries and continents, a great number drawn to the event by information provided via the Internet (Postman, Brown, and Davila, 1999). WTO organizers were aware that protest plans were afoot. However, they did not anticipate the size and voracity of the events that would unfold. Likewise, Seattle city officials and police were woefully unprepared for the protest events. City officials used curfews and heavy-handed police tactics to “handle” the protesters and local news organizations put journalistic standards aside and refused to cover events they found distasteful (e.g., violent). Long time Seattle police chief Norm Stamper was pressured into resigning in the wake of the Seattle demonstrations.

The WTO protests took Seattle by surprise, but they likely did not surprise political scientists and others who monitor trends in political behavior. Citizen attempts to curb corporate power and use corporate channels for political ends have become an increasingly important part of the political landscape in the United States and other nations. Inglehart (1997) finds that boycotting has become more popular among citizens

in both advanced industrialized and less industrialized nations in recent years. According to the World Values Study, approximately 55% of U.S. citizens stated they had or would boycott in 1981 compared to 63% in 1990 (Micheletti, 2000). Public opinion research from several European countries shows that engagement in politically-oriented purchasing has increased markedly in the past decade (Petersson, 1998). According to Petersson, in Sweden, consumer boycotts were one of only two political activities that increased from 1987 to 1997, nearly doubling from 15% to 29%. Recent research involving young people in the United States finds similar results (Keeter, Zukin and Andolina, 2001). Twenty-seven percent of respondents in a national poll report that they have engaged in boycott behavior in the past year. A recent report from the Canadian-based research firm *Environics International* shows an increase in boycott behavior that stems from global public concern about local pollution issues (*The Economist*, January 8, 2000).

The current popularity of political consumerism is obvious enough to be identified as a major trend in a recent *Newsweek* special issue on trends in the new year (2001). "The Big Idea after the cold war was to privatize the public sector. Now it's to 'publicize' the private sector -- to get its wealth to work for social ends" (*Newsweek*, 2000). It would appear that we have entered a new era of consumer activities with evident political implications. For a variety of reasons, including postmaterialism (Inglehart, 1997; Micheletti, 2000) and a crisis in governance (Mayntz, 1993; Kooiman, 1993; Vogel, 1978), political consumerism has become a political tool in American politics, one that warrants further research and understanding. This dissertation is one of

the first projects to take an empirical look at political consumerism as a political behavior in the United States.

### What is Political Consumerism?

When one hears the term “political consumerism,” Ralph Nader or “Nader’s Raiders” may spring to mind. Nader’s extensive use of consumer activism to gain government and industry concessions brought national attention to the issues of consumers in the 1960s and 1970s. Political science research on consumer efforts focuses almost exclusively on conventional (electoral) participation, such as consumer lobbying, congressional letter-writing campaigns, and congressional testimony. Little scholarly attention has been paid to consumer activities that do not involve the government directly. Extra-governmental political consumerism (referred to as simply “political consumerism” in the remainder of this dissertation) is defined as citizen actions directed at corporate entities to explicitly influence the distribution of social goods and social values. This definition is a hybrid of Rosenstone and Hansen’s (1993) definition of political participation. Examples of political consumerism are boycotts, buycotts, socially conscious investing, a variety of politically-oriented shareholder tactics (e.g., proposing a resolution, testifying at a shareholder meeting, disrupting a shareholder meeting), protest directed at corporate or quasi-governmental organizations (chambers of commerce, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund), and protest directed at businesses directly (e.g., protests in front of stores selling animal fur, union picket lines). There are a myriad of other activities one could list under the definition of political consumerism, some disruptive and illegal. Julia Butterfly Hill camped in a tree in

Northern California for two years to protect the surrounding old-growth stand, and the Environmental Liberation Front (ELF) burned five buildings and four ski lifts at a ski resort in Vail Colorado to protect lynx habitat, according to the organization. Ted Kaczynski's brutal bombing of an advertising executive could arguably be classified as an act of political consumerism as he was attempting to redistribute social values by eliminating a societal "value maker." These individual, disruptive, and often illegal acts of political consumerism are not the focal point of this dissertation because they are hard to quantify and are not widely practiced. This analysis centers on more mainstream and quantifiable types of political consumerism, namely, boycotts and buycotts.

### The Importance of Political Consumerism for Political Science

Political consumerism is an increasingly popular form of political participation whose consideration challenges us to reevaluate how we determine what "political." Consideration of this political behavior in the field also calls for further understanding of the role of corporations in the policy process, and alters the terms of the participatory decline debate. Political scientists who seek to understand the intricacies of the policy process and public involvement in it cannot ignore the tide of citizen willingness to use market channels for political ends.

### **Political Consumerism as Political (Participation)**

A number of researchers inside and outside of political science who have looked at this behavior consider it a form of political participation (Kirchner, 2001; Micheletti, 2000, 2001; Brown, 2000; Smith, 1990; Friedman, 1999, 1995; Vogel, 1978; Mayer,

1989; Bykerk and Maney, 1995). Bykerk and Maney, two political scientists with an extensive research portfolio on consumer politics in the United States (1991, 1994, 1995; Bykerk, 1992), lament the fact that political scientists continue to overlook consumer activities because these activities are not generally considered to be political (1991). Likewise, political scientist David Kirchner (2000) notes that current research in political science “presupposes that the state is the primary (or sole) target of movement activists” (4), and by excluding corporations as a channel for group (and citizen) participation, scholars are overlooking important political opportunities (1). He argues that group (and by extension, citizen) challenges to businesses and corporations are indeed political because these entities are political. Political scientist Michelle Micheletti makes a similar argument when she notes that “Consumption has become a venue for political action (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). It offers citizen-consumers an inroad -- a venue -- into policy-making that may be rather closed to grassroots citizen participation” (11). She further argues that political consumerism “gives citizens political voice, [and] carves out new arenas for political action. . . Consumption should, therefore, be seen as a new dimension of politics”(2001:12). Extensive corporate involvement in the policy process means that citizen efforts to curb corporate power, and make political statements through purchasing and related activities, are political as well. According to Micheletti and Kirchner, citizens have identified the political attributes of corporations and view them as a site for public input.

Another way to investigate whether political consumerism is indeed political is to look at public perceptions of this behavior. One study has examined how the public views political consumerism. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) report that citizens see

political consumerism as political participation, more effective than some forms of conventional participation. Respondents in this study of Danish residents ranked voting in elections as the most efficient form of political participation (8.20 on a scale from 1 to 10), followed by gaining media attention, working in associations, and working in political parties. Boycotting and buycotting came in next in terms of efficiency with mean scores of 5.71 and 5.81, respectively. Respondents ranked these two forms of political consumerism as more effective than contacting politicians, peaceful demonstrations, influence via the Internet, and illegal demonstrations. The authors report that respondents were more divided about the perceived influence of political consumerism than other types of political participation. "Some people consider political consumerism highly efficient, others consider it very inefficient" (18). Not surprisingly, respondents who engage in political consumerism are far more likely to classify this behavior as effective than those who do not engage in this activity (18).

Another way to evaluate the proper classification of political consumerism in the field is to examine its fit with existing definitions of political participation. Political consumerism fits well with some author's ideas of what is "political," but fails to meet the criteria presented by other authors. This lack of fit speaks to how we define what is political, and how narrow definitions preclude understanding of citizen involvement in the policy process.

Political consumerism fits well with the Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) broad definition of political participation. These authors define political participation as "action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and social values (3)." Any actions that attempt to alter existing arrangements of social goods (resources)

or values (norms) are political. Political consumerism influences the distribution of social goods and values in obvious ways. The goal of boycotts and buycotts is to influence the distribution of social resources -- allocating consumer dollars away from or toward certain corporations to punish or reward their practices. Boycotts and buycotts influence the allocation of societal values when they involve public policy issues or societal norms (e.g., environmental preservation, discriminatory hiring practices). Other types of political consumerism, such as interrupting annual shareholder meetings, attempting to amend a corporate statement with strategically purchased shares, or socially conscious investing, also aim to influence the distribution of social goods and values. Shareholder disruptions often attempt to get stockholders to use their power to allocate resources, such as shortening the wage gap between CEOs and the lowest paid worker, paying factory workers in other countries a higher wage, or halting corporate support of candidates who support abortion. Socially conscious investing may also involve societal values. This form of political consumerism entails funneling resources to certain entities whose values coincide with the consumer's, away from corporations holding divergent political/social values.

Political consumerism does not fit with all widely accepted definitions of political participation in the literature. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1996), authors of the most comprehensive assessment of political participation in the United States to date, define political participation as activities that have "the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (38). Rosenstone and Hansen's definition of political participation centers on influencing

social resources and values, whereas Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's definition revolves around influencing the government. According to the latter authors, an activity must in some way influence or have the potential to influence government action to be considered political participation. Political consumerism does not fit under this definition of participation because the government is not the ultimate target in most cases. While some political consumerism does target government policies, this behavior is unique in that it uses market channels to bring about political change.

In their classic text *Participation and Democracy* (1972), Verba and Nie also define political participation as government-focused: "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take (2)." They go on to say that they are "interested more abstractly in attempts to influence the authoritative allocation of values for a society, which may or may not take place through governmental decisions," but concede that citizen actions that target government are a good proxy measurement. Verba and Nie leave the door open for a much broader definition of political participation than simply electoral activities. They recognize that the government is not the only actor in the political/public policy process. The authors write that the focus on "ordinary" political behavior in the literature should not discount the importance or appropriateness of other forms of participation that do not target the government directly.

Political consumerism does not mesh with a government-based conceptions of political participation, but the gaps highlight an important bias in the literature, one noted long ago by Verba and Nie above (1972). Definitions of political participation that require actions to target the government are premised on the assumption that the making

and implementation of public policy are strictly governmental functions. One does not have to look far to see that this is not always the case. Corporations (and a multiplicity of other informal policy actors) are heavily involved in both the making and implementation of public policy. In addition to substantial corporate contributions to political campaigns and interests, employee mobilization, revolving doors, "iron triangles" and issue networks, corporations also influence, and at times, determine, the implementation of public policies. They have the power to decide how laws are carried out in some situations, such as environmental regulations, equal opportunity in hiring and advancement, workplace conditions such as safety and sexual harassment, and product safety regulations. Businesses have many ways of affecting the delivery or implementation of public policy that in effect alters the face of the policy, including foot-dragging in implementation, interpreting laws differently than intended, simply not abiding by public policy guidelines, holding up implementation or altering policy decisions through lengthy court action, relocating branches of the business to other countries to avoid compliance with U.S. laws, and lobbying executive departments to be lenient in application of legislation.

Definitions of political participation that focus solely on citizen activities targeting government do not capture the various actors involved in public policy making and implementation, and thus, do not capture the whole picture of political participation. Many forms of political consumerism undercut conventional wisdom that participation has to target, or directly involve, the government to be political. Boycotting targets companies directly and impacts public policy. For example, many companies have had to respond to consumer concerns about "sweatshop" production processes for fear of losing

customers. Without the presence of strong government regulation of foreign production practices, many companies have altered their practices and conducted public information campaigns in response to political consumerism. Furthermore, activities that target corporations directly sometimes bring attention and public pressure to an issue that results in government intervention. Consideration of political consumerism as political participation is useful to the field because it challenges our sometimes narrow conceptions of what is political.

Vogel (1978), Smith (1990), and Kirchner (2001) have explored the connection between corporations as political targets and the political character of citizen challenges to corporations. Vogel “suggests that the distinction between the ‘public’ act of voting in the political market-place, which is public and political because it involves an attempt by the individual to advance a perception of the general good, is becoming blurred when ostensibly ‘private’ acts of voting in the economic market-place, guided entirely by self-interest, are beginning to incorporate social factors” (in Smith, 1990: 182). Smith adds that extra-governmental political consumerism, such as a boycott, “provides for political participation in three ways: by stopping a firm from committing a grievance, using the firm’s insider status with government (to lobby for appropriate government action on the issue), and by mobilizing public opinion against the grievance and putting it on the political agenda” (288). In this assessment, political consumerism constitutes political participation because individuals’ preferences on social issues in the marketplace will ultimately contribute to a policy outcome. “Understanding policy outcomes as a result of this process of disjointed incrementalism means that each individual consumer’s ‘vote’ can contribute to some change in the socio-economic system” (Smith, 290). Extra-

governmental political consumerism constitutes political participation because it has the potential, however small, to influence the distribution of social goods and/or values. Consumer activities that have the potential to alter the balance of power between citizens and corporations are political because these interests are often competitors in the political marketplace. Likewise, consumer activities that have the potential to influence the distribution of social goods or values through corporations are political because they alter public policy or de facto public policy, however incrementally.

Micheletti (2001) and Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) have addressed the question of whether political consumerism is political in yet to be published works on the subject. While their research became available at the tail-end of this dissertation work, long after the question was posed and answered at length, their ideas enrich this project because they approach this question in different ways. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) apply Beck's (1994) ideas of sub-politics to classify political consumerism as participation:

Sub-politics is distinguished from 'politics' first, in that, agents outside the political or corporatist system are allowed to appear on the stage of social design and second, in that not only social and collective agents but individuals as well compete with the latter and each other for the emerging shaping power of the political. (10)

The emergence of sub-politics is common in modern society where states lack legitimacy and citizens distrust political systems and politicians (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001). Various formal and information political constituencies influence public policy, including citizens, who influence the policy process on a daily basis through their individual actions. Political consumerism entails individual (and group) activities that are outside the formal political system that are closely knit to citizens' personal consumption patterns, a political behavior under the theory of sub-politics presented here.

Existing research on political consumerism assumes the political character of this behavior for the most part, but a framework or set of criteria are needed to draw the line between consumer activities that are political and those that are not. There appear to be four general ways a behavior could get the label “political”: (1) motive-based, that is, the participant considers their behavior to be political, (2) channel-based, meaning that the action targets a governmental (political) entity, (3) outcome-based; an action is political if it has the potential to influence politics/policy in some way, and (4) interest-based in that the action goes beyond self-interest to broader societal interests. Classification of conventional participation as political primarily rests on the second criterion of the action targeting a governmental channel. The outcome-based criterion is not the norm when it comes to conventional participation as evidenced by the fact that many types of this participation have little if any influence on politics/policy, but they are still considered participation. For example, voting is counted as political participation, even though one vote rarely counts in and of itself. Likewise, the first criterion, participant motive, is not generally used to discount the political character of conventional participation. Continuing on with the voting example, if a respondent reports that they voted in the last election, but for non-political reasons, researchers would still classify their voting as an act of political participation. The fourth criterion, interest-based, is also not prominent in the literature. Respondents do not have to pass a litmus test to see whether their vote in the last election was based on broader societal interests.

The predominance of channel-based classification of conventional participation can also be seen in several of the definitions of political participation presented above.

Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1996) write about “the intent or effect of influencing government action” (38), and Verba and Nie (1972) discuss actions “influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take” (2). The target of the activity being governmental is key for classifying conventional participation as political. The same criteria cannot possibly apply to political consumerism as corporate channels are not governmental.

The standards for political consumerism being classified as “political” differ from the standards for conventional participation because consumer actions do not directly involve governmental institutions or actors. Consumers engage in countless interactions with producers. Most of these interactions are not political, but some are. Where do we draw the line? The third and fourth criteria above are key. In order for a consumer action to be considered political consumerism, it must have the potential to influence politics/public policy, and it must involve broader societal interests (as opposed to, or in addition to, self-interest). These elements are implied in the definition of political consumerism presented earlier: citizen actions directed at corporate entities to explicitly influence the distribution of social goods and social values. Politics is all about deciding the distribution of social goods and values (who gets what, when, and how), and consumers who use market channels to influence the distribution of *social* goods and values are engaging in actions that go beyond themselves. The action is often individual, but the potential for impact extends beyond the personal interest of the actor to broader societal interests. This is not to say that self-interest can play no part in political consumerism, rather, the act is not political if personal interest is the only interest involved. In a sense, the two criteria listed above are redundant. Exclusively individual-

level concerns do not involve public policy by definition (public meaning shared or collective), and broader societal interests necessarily involve politics/public policy. Assessing the interests involved is simply a way to further validate the potential of the consumer act to impact politics/policy.

So what activities pass the outcome-based and interest-based test? A consumer complaint about the overuse of seasoning in a restaurant's dinner dish does not pass either test. Food seasoning, unless it involves safety concerns, is not a public (shared or collective) policy issue. Furthermore, the nature of the claim is based on the complainant's personal taste and does not obviously extend to broader society. This act would not be classified as political consumerism, regardless of whether the respondent claims that broader, collective issues are at stake.

The case of a customer complaining to an establishment over alleged mistreatment based on race is another example for analysis. Racial discrimination is clearly a political issue, one that is hotly debated on the policy agenda, and consumer complaints about discrimination have led to major governmental and corporate policy changes concerning race (discussed further in Chapter 2.) But does this situation pass the interest test? Racial discrimination and many other issues automatically extend beyond the individual in that they concern the treatment of groups, not individuals. This is the case for many policy areas addressed by political consumerism (e.g., labor and employment practices, environmental concerns, health issues). For many acts of political consumerism, it is easy to determine whether the issue is individual or represents broader societal interests. In situations where this is unclear, survey researchers are faced with the task of determining the respondent's motive, and further determining whether the

motive precludes broader societal interests. Respondent report of self-interest does not automatically discount broader interests. As with conventional participation, if the activity in question does involve broader interests, it should be classified as political, even if the participant reports only a self-interested motive. For example, if a citizen contacts the mayor to fix a pothole that is causing alignment problems with her car, this is a political activity because the impact of getting the pothole fixed extends beyond the individual placing the call. It involves a shared, public street.

Similar sticky situations can arise in determining whether consumer behavior is political. For example, when a citizen invests in a socially conscious investment fund because of the high return rate and not the values of the fund, this would be considered political consumerism because the act has the potential to influence the values and resources of society more broadly (beyond just the investor's financial interests). The political values of the fund are furthered with additional investors, and resources are dedicated toward these political values as opposed to the values of other funds.

Outcome-based and interest-based criteria were prominent in devising the coding scheme for classifying consumer behavior as "political" in this dissertation. The task of determining whether the content of the consumer action reflected broader societal interests or solely self-interest was straightforward. Only a handful of responses were deemed to reflect only self-interest (e.g., boycotting a store because the cashier is rude), and were not classified as political consumerism.

## **Political Consumerism and Corporate Influence**

Political consumerism is also important for political scientists to study because it brings to light the role of corporations in the policy process. Political scientists tend to ignore corporate power both independent of and in relation to government in studies of politics (Smith, 1990; Vogel, 1978; Dahl, 1973; Bowman, 1996), and as a consequence, we tend to ignore direct citizen challenges to corporate power and practices (Smith, 1990, Vogel, 1978; Kirchner, 2001). Some researchers in American politics have studied corporate power. Byrd identified that the interests of consumers and producers were distinct in his 1937 *Political Science Quarterly* article “Democracy’s Third Estate: The Consumer.” C. Wright Mill’s (1956) classic *The Power Elite* details business and government power in America. More recently, political theorist Jeff Lustig examines corporate power in his book *Corporate Liberalism: The Origins of Modern American Political Theory, 1890 - 1920* (1982). Dahl (1990) also addresses this topic in *After the Revolution*. But even with a bevy of studies of corporate power outside the field, and a sizable amount in sub-fields or related fields in American politics, Bowman (1996) asserts that “the subject of corporate power has not received the attention it merits” and that there is no political theory of the corporate as of yet (xi).

Bowman explores different theories of the role of corporations in American politics before concluding that the field has not adequately addressed this topic. Traditional liberal theory makes a distinction between the public (governmental) realm and the private (corporate) realm that fails to accurately describe current power relations. Pluralists view corporations as simply another interest group, an inadequate description of the current privileged position of corporations in American politics. Institutional or

elite studies come closer to reality by examining the political and economic aspects of corporate power, but these studies continue to distinguish between the public and private realm, a distinction that does not take into account various modes of power within each realm. By studying political consumerism, we are forced to consider modes of political power in both the public and private spheres. This line of inquiry furthers our understanding of corporate power in American politics/public policy. This study also illustrates how citizen challenges to corporations have heightened the political responsibility of corporations in the policy process as they are held accountable for their public policy decisions and involvement.

It is gratifying to identify a “hole” in the participation literature, but the importance of studying political consumerism as a political behavior goes beyond adding it to an already long list of participatory acts or using it to further our understanding of politics and the policy process. Its significance also lies in challenging the terms of the civic participation debate. Political consumerism calls for a re-evaluation of the health of our democracy and a reassessment of the public’s political prowess.

Scholars who study participation have lamented the steady decline of political participation, trust in government, social capital, and political efficacy in recent decades (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1996; Putnam, 1995a). The chief concern is that citizens are less engaged in government and that this weakens democracy, which requires fairly high levels of citizen input. Political consumerism is missing from political science tallies of civic participatory activities. When citizens band together to stop the production of products in sweatshops, this constitutes political action for the collective public “good.” When millions of Americans avoid products that have been tested on

animals, corporations respond, and this becomes de facto public policy. When many prominent high-tech companies pledge to boycott products from old-growth forests in response to consumer pressure, this constitutes self-governance. When the town of Arcata, California, passes a resolution allowing citizens to hold corporations accountable for their social and political practices, and more than half of the town's citizens are involved in determining guidelines for corporate conduct, this is self-governance. If political consumerism were included in the basket of political participation, overall rates of participation would likely be much higher than current estimates. As noted above, about 30% of adults in existing research report engaging in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year (Micheletti, 2001). The United States may be experiencing a decline in political participation, but possibly not as precipitous as imagined when political consumerism is added to the mix.

The growing popularity of political consumerism calls for a re-evaluation of the terms of the participatory decline debate. When this unconventional form of participation is included as a measure of participation, how steep is the decline? Have citizens shifted their participation from formal governmental channels to market channels in response to shifts in political power? Is political consumerism a consequence of the rise of the citizen-consumer, which is also at the root of decline in traditional political activities? While these questions can only be addressed theoretically in the final chapter of this dissertation, they illustrate the potential importance of political consumerism to issues of representation and democracy in political science.

The growing popularity of political consumerism may reflect a shift in political participation instead of a decline. Several authors suggest that heightened engagement in

this political behavior reflects a citizenry who is savvier than they have been given credit (Vogel, 1975, 1978; Micheletti, 2000). According to business scholar David Vogel (1978), the American public now views corporations as the locus of power instead of government, and citizen challenges to corporate power are a reflection of the declining legitimacy of the state in U.S. society (9). Vogel argues that political consumerism reflects the public's general lack of trust in government to represent the public's interest (9). Citizens have recognized a shift in power from the state to corporations, and now consider the market place to be a legitimate political target.

Vogel's claim of an enlightened and participatory citizenry, echoed by Micheletti (2001), is not amply supported with empirical longitudinal data, and is thus speculative. With this said, the timing of the recent rise in political consumerism coupled with a continued decline in participation suggests that citizens are looking for other avenues of participation. It would behoove political scientists to gather longitudinal data on political consumerism to gauge whether we are truly in a participatory decline, or if citizens are simply shifting their activity to the marketplace.

Political consumerism also speaks to the participatory decline debate by shedding light on a new type of citizenship and a new political environment in the United States that may account for dropping public interest and involvement in politics (Micheletti, 2000; Inglehart, 1997; Boyte, 1989). Scholars have examined this new political environment -- the new consumerist society -- to determine the root causes of participatory decline among the citizenry, but consumerism or the rise of the citizen-consumer has yet to be explored as a major cause of this trend. Later in the dissertation I explore theories of the rise of our consumerist society and the advent of the citizen-

consumer who views her civic responsibility and relationship to government through the lens of a consumerist identity. Boyte, in Barber (1989), characterizes American consumerist society as people thinking of themselves as clients and consumers in every relationship, including those with corporations and the government. This has permanently altered the way that citizens perceive their relationship to government and others. This subject is addressed at length in the closing chapter of this dissertation.

### Primary Questions of the Dissertation

Several political scientists have laid the theoretical groundwork for studying and thinking about political consumerism in their yet unpublished works on the topic (Micheletti, 2000; Kirchner, 2001). Micheletti (2000, 2001) addresses questions of how political scientists can make sense of political consumerism theoretically, why political consumerism is on the rise, and whether we can view the marketplace as a new political arena. She approaches the subject from a theoretical perspective with good use of secondary data. Kirchner (2001) examines the effectiveness and potential of political consumerism as a political tool through case study analysis. The dearth of research on this topic leaves many holes for interesting research on political consumerism, particularly empirical behavioral research. This dissertation builds upon the theoretical base provided by Micheletti and Kirchner and researchers in other disciplines, but it goes beyond existing research to address behavioral questions about political consumerism.

Four major questions are investigated in this dissertation: (1) What does engagement in political consumerism look like? (2) Who engages in this political

activity? (3) Why do people initiate political consumerism? and (4) How do citizens use this political tool in relation to conventional political tools?

The “what” of political consumerism is addressed by looking at recent and lifetime rates of political consumerism, and examining what types of political consumerism are initiated. For example, are citizens more inclined to punish or reward corporations using political consumerism? The “who” of political consumerism is explored by assessing whether certain groups are more likely to initiate this behavior than others. Do racial, age, gender, or other demographic differences exist? The “why” of political consumerism is investigated by examining the most common policy concerns (e.g., environmental concerns, safety concerns, employment practices, etc.). What policy issues motivate citizens to use political consumerism? The “why” of political consumerism is also examined through the motives reported for these activities. What interests motivate people to engage in political consumerism (e.g., self-interest, to bring about a change in government, to change society)?

The last major focus of this dissertation is how citizens use political consumerism in relation to conventional political tools, such as voting, contacting an elected official, volunteering for a political campaign, or making a financial contribution to a campaign or other political organization. In addition to giving political scientists a greater understanding of how citizens make use of political consumerism in the policy arena, this question also provides information on how to classify and analyze this behavior for future research. The specific questions examined are: How do rates of political consumerism compare to rates of conventional participation? How do predictors of political

consumerism compare to predictors of conventional participation? What role does consumer empowerment play in conventional participation and political consumerism?

The four major themes of this dissertation are investigated using eighteen hypotheses. These hypotheses are tested using the public opinion data briefly described in the next section and discussed at length in Chapter 3.

**Table 1.1**  
**Primary Questions and Hypotheses**

Primary Question	Hypothesis
"What" of Political Consumerism	H <sub>1</sub> : At least 50% of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life.
	H <sub>2</sub> : At least 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism during the past year.
	H <sub>3</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents engaged in boycotting than buycotting during the past year.
"Who" of Political Consumerism	H <sub>4</sub> : A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism in the past year than male respondents.
	H <sub>5</sub> : A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.
	H <sub>6</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents ages 18 - 49 engaged in political consumerism than respondents ages 50 and older during the past year.
	H <sub>7</sub> : Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were less likely to have engaged in political consumerism than other respondents during this time.
	H <sub>8</sub> : Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during this time.
	H <sub>9</sub> : Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than respondents with lower levels of education during the past year.
	H <sub>10</sub> : African-American respondents were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.

“Why” of Political Consumerism	H <sub>11</sub> : Environmental concerns were the primary policy focus of political consumerist activities during the past year.
	H <sub>12</sub> : Self-interest is not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism during the past year.
“How” Political Consumerism Compares to Conventional Participation	H <sub>13</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents engaged in conventional participation than political consumerism during the past year.
	H <sub>14</sub> : Respondents who engaged in conventional participation during the past year were more likely than others to engage in political consumerism.
	H <sub>15</sub> : Age, education, race, gender, and income are significant predictors of both conventional participation and political consumerism.
	H <sub>16</sub> : Self-interest was not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism or conventional participation during the past year.
	H <sub>17</sub> : Empowered consumers are more likely than others to have engaged in political consumerism during the past year.
	H <sub>18</sub> : Empowered consumers are more likely than others to have engaged in conventional participation during the past year.

The theoretical and quantitative basis for each hypothesis is presented in detail in chapter 2. Based upon past survey findings, I anticipate that a sizable number of respondents have engaged in political consumerism in the past year and at some point in their life. Likewise, I expect to find that respondents are more likely to have initiated negative political consumerism (boycotts) than positive (buycotts).

The “who” hypotheses that women and younger people are more inclined to engage in political consumerism comes from previous survey data, whereas the race and income hypotheses come from qualitative studies that find that political consumerism has

been used as a “weapon of the weak” by these groups at different points in American history.

The “why” hypothesis, that environmentalism tops the list of policies addressed with political consumerism, is based on existing literature from other countries that “buying green” is a popular motive for this behavior. The hypothesis that self-interest is not a primary motive for political consumerism is based on the idea that other motives are at work since political consumerism often runs counter to the individual consumer’s economic self-interest. For example, products made without sweatshop labor are more expensive than those that are not, and environmentally friendly production processes are generally more expensive than processes that allow greater pollution.

The “how” hypotheses are admittedly more speculative because research comparing political consumerism to conventional participation is not available. Ideas and pertinent literature are presented in Chapter 2 to support the anticipated finding that political consumerism shares many attributes with conventional forms of participation. I also present the theory that with the new consumer model of citizenship, consumer empowerment is an important predictor of both conventional participation and political consumerism. These theories are based on empirical evidence gathered outside of the discipline and theory presented by scholars within the discipline.

### Sample Description and Methods

The hypotheses presented above are tested with original data from a regional sample from central New Jersey. The sample area included all of Middlesex County and most of Ocean and Monmouth counties in New Jersey. The location of the sample was

selected for convenience as well as to obtain a relatively representative sample without having to gather information from the entire nation.<sup>1</sup> New Jersey is a demographically diverse state, which makes it ideal for survey research. Salmore and Salmore (1993) claim that New Jersey is “the heart of the American ‘Main Street’” in that it is socioeconomically and racially diverse and represents many of the demographic trends of the nation as a whole (xxii). While a sample from a small corner of the United States cannot be said to represent the attitudes or behaviors of the nation, the demographic distribution of the sample population does mirror that of the nation for the most part. Three-hundred and twenty-five interviews were completed during the fielding period. An in-depth description of the sample is presented in Chapter 3, as well as information about questionnaire development and fielding procedures.

The hypotheses presented above are tested using frequency distributions and other measures, including crosstabulations, ordinal logistic regression, correlation analysis, and comparison of means. The procedures used to test each hypothesis are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 2 is the literature review. Some general information about political consumerism is also presented in this chapter since little is known about this behavior in the field. I then move on to a more specific application of existing literature to the four main questions of the dissertation; the “what,” “who,” “why,” and “how” of political consumerism. Chapter 2 also highlights

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<sup>1</sup> While a national sample was preferred, monetary constraints limited the scope of the research. One important area for future research on this topic is gathering information from the entire nation.

the original contribution of this dissertation to political science since little has been written in the field about political consumerism.

Chapter 3 is the first of two data chapters. This chapter describes the procedures and survey instrument used to gather the original data reported in this dissertation. A detailed description of the sample is also included, and a discussion of its representativeness. Chapter 3 also presents measures taken to deal with over reporting due to social desirability among survey participants.

Chapter 4 is the heart of the dissertation. Each hypothesis is tested and discussed at length in this chapter. In summary, I find that many more respondents in this sample engaged in political consumerism in the past year and during their lifetime than previous research suggests. I also find that gender does not influence respondents' likelihood of engaging in political consumerism, counter to existing research and theories to this effect. In terms of the "why" hypotheses, I find that environmental concerns are indeed the most popular issue for political consumerism, and that societal interests, not self-interest, are the primary motives for this behavior.

My original hypotheses pertaining to political consumerism and conventional participation produce a mix of provocative results that are reported in Chapter 4. I find that political consumerism is indeed highly correlated with conventional participation, but the pathways to each type of participation are dissimilar. In terms of consumer empowerment, this variable is a significant predictor of both conventional participation and political consumerism. The findings in Chapter 4 generate many questions for future research on political consumerism.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with a look at the implications of the findings. Based upon the “who” findings in Chapter 4, I explore the idea that political consumerism is an underutilized “weapon of the weak;” a political tool with great potential for groups or interests that lack power in formal political channels. The political importance of consumer empowerment as a predictor of both conventional participation and political consumerism is also discussed in Chapter 5 in terms of citizenship. This line of inquiry brings ties the dissertation into larger issues in political science. I examine existing research that suggests that the struggle for citizen versus corporate power has reached new heights and is a reflection of a new kind of citizenship in the United States. More specifically, I analyze an idea presented by several authors that we have become a consumerist society, marked by a shift from a producer to consumer model of citizenship. Existing empirical data and findings pertaining to consumer empowerment here lend cursory empirical support for the rise of the citizen-consumer.

Related to questions of citizenship, I discuss the current civic decline debate in terms of political consumerism. I speculate that a shift in values -- the emergence of consumerism culture -- lies at the root of participatory decline in the United States, not simply new technologies that have enabled transmission of these values (e.g., television). Social connectedness has been displaced by more than just an alteration in how we spend our free time. An underlying shift in values accounts for the fact that the consumer-citizen neither needs nor desires a connection to institutions and people that used to exist. I discuss the feasibility of civic education and institutional reforms in curtailing participatory decline, and conclude that these reforms do not take into account the rise of the citizen-consumer. I end this analysis of the implications of political consumerism on

a more positive note: Fears about democracy being on its deathbed due to participatory decline are overstated. Existing research fails to take political consumerism into account, although a majority of survey participants say they engage in this activity. The influx of political consumerism suggests that citizens are shifting their participatory input in a manner that suggests a more sophisticated understanding of the policy process than is commonly attributed to public. Chapter 5 concludes with a research agenda for political consumerism. I specify what information is needed to gain a better understanding of this political behavior, and the best methods for gathering this information.

## **Chapter 2: Overview of Political Consumerism and Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with some detailed examples of different types of political consumerism to familiarize the reader with these activities and their connection to politics/public policy. The second part of this chapter is a summary of existing literature pertaining to the four dissertation questions: What are people doing when it comes to political consumerism; who engages in this political activity; why do people initiate political consumerism; and how do citizens use this political tool in relation to conventional political tools? I also examine some possible reasons why this political behavior has been mostly overlooked in political science.

### **Examples of Political Consumerism**

Classifying political consumerism as a political behavior reflects the assumption that corporations are actively involved in the political process and influence public policy. Many researchers have substantiated these ideas over the years (Vogel, 1996; Bowman, 1996; Mayer, 1989, Dahl, 1973). Many different types of political consumerism are in use, but not all consumer activities that target corporations are political. For example, a customer complaining to a Denny's manager that his soup is cold is not engaging in political consumerism because his complaint does not involve broader social goods or values. It involves self-interest. The subject of a consumer's action must involve the distribution of social goods or values to be classified as political consumerism. A Denny's customer complaining to a manager about the treatment of

African-Americans in the establishment would be political consumerism because it goes beyond the complainant and involves the broader societal value of equality. “At a minimum, the consumer must be concerned about the social or aggregate implications of his or her choice, about the possibility of using his or her ‘voting right as a consumer’ deliberately in order to affect aggregate outcomes”(Goul Anderson, 2001:6).

Political consumerism comes in many different forms: boycotts and public information campaigns, boycotts, consumer protests, socially conscious investing, and a variety of shareholder activities. Existing research has not lumped all of these consumer activities under one umbrella. Studies typically focus on one type without exploring the universe of political activities citizens are engaging in through the marketplace. Studies of political consumerism most often look at boycotts (Micheletti, 2000, 2001; Goul Anderson, 2001; Friedman, 1999). Different forms of political consumerism, whether boycotting or socially conscious investing, make use of the same market channels and are likely used by the same people. The examples presented here show the many avenues citizens have for pressing political claims using political consumerism, and the variety of tactics commonly used in consumer campaigns.

### **Consumer Boycotts**

One of the most direct ways to communicate a social/political message to corporations is through the consumer boycott. Many boycotts address major public policy issues, and all boycotts flex varying sizes of consumer muscle in the face of corporate power. Consumer boycotts usually involve a public information campaign to mobilize a larger constituency. The “world’s biggest boycott” of Nestle ran from the

early 1970s through 1984 (*Ethical Matters*, 2001).<sup>2</sup> This boycott targeted the company's practice of selling infant formula to less industrialized nations without proper product education that led to product misuse and a disputed numbers of infant deaths. This boycott involved 19 countries and was ultimately successful in compelling Nestle to alter their labeling. In addition to the boycott, organizers also staged the Boston Nestle Party. Following in the footsteps of the American colonists, protesters dumped Nestle products in the Boston Harbor. These actions sent a larger message about the responsibility of multinational companies in a globalizing economy, and the willingness of American citizens to monitor corporate activities overseas (Smith, 1990).

In addition to direct corporate action, Nestle protesters lobbied for government involvement in the issue. The United States Senate held hearings to investigate the claim that Nestlé's marketing led to the death of infants in less developed nations (Smith, 1990). Senator Ted Kennedy spearheaded the investigation into Nestlé's practices. A company executive agreed to testify and was asked "Can a product which requires clean water, good sanitation, adequate family income and a literate parent to follow printed instructions be properly and safely used in areas where water is contaminated, sewage runs through the streets, poverty is severe and illiteracy is high?" The executive answered "no," but stated that the company had "no corporate responsibility" for these problems (Awounda, 1998). The Senate investigation did not result in official sanctions

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the examples of political consumerism presented in this dissertation are contemporary, but many date from the 1970s and 1980s because more comprehensive research is available after some time has elapsed. Scarce analysis is available on more recent activities, probably because many efforts are still ongoing, and the effects of such activities are best measured in hindsight. The use of examples from these earlier decades should not be interpreted as a comment on the frequency of these activities since statistics presented earlier in the dissertation suggests that rates of political consumerism have increased in recent years.

against the company, but Kennedy denounced the corporation's practices and endorsed the boycott, proclaiming that such actions were a viable tool of democracy (Smith, 1990).

The Nestle boycott sent a message to major corporations that citizens are watching their activities, even practices in other countries (Awounda, 1998). This boycott also brought government oversight to bear. The issues addressed in the Nestle campaign reflected several public policy and political issues, including international trade, nutrition standards, product labeling, and government regulation of corporate practices. This example shows political consumerism aimed at both influencing public policy and altering the balance of power between corporations and citizens. It also shows a variety of consumer tactics used to achieve the same goal (e.g., boycotting and governmental lobbying).<sup>3</sup>

Another example of a high-profile boycott was the organized effort against companies doing business in South Africa during Apartheid. Campaigns during the late 1980s and 1990s in particular forced many companies to sever their ties with South Africa. Many U.S. companies halted their South African operations as a result of boycott actions, including the Ford Motor Company and Apple Computers (Smith, 1990:240). A commentator writing for the *Financial Times* stated that boycotters "want to make their opposition felt, and have proved again that they can bring effective pressure to bear on

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<sup>3</sup> Another Nestle boycott was started in 1989 to end the company's marketing of infant formula in less industrialized countries altogether. This more recent boycott of the company is based on new research pertaining to the use of infant formula in these countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and boycott organizers Baby Milk Action, Nestle is violating WHO codes recommending that babies be exclusively breastfed for the four months and up to six months in possible. UNICEF reports that 4,000 babies die every day in poor countries because they are not breastfed (Aaronson, 2000). The WHO has declared that baby formula should not be advertised in these countries or free samples given to health providers as formula use greatly increases the likelihood that an infant will die. As with the first boycott, activists are seeking government assistance in altering Nestle's practices. The European Parliament plans to hold a public meeting on the responsibilities of multinational corporations later in the year, and Nestle is the first company on the agenda.

commercial organizations even if they cannot move foreign governments. Moral pressure of this kind . . . is an increasingly important fact of business life” (240). This example shows a boycott being effectively used to influence government practices in addition to the practices of the targeted corporation(s) as the boycott was ultimately aimed at the South African government.

Another case of a boycott that ultimately targeted the government was the boycott of Colorado state for its passage of an anti-gay measure. In 1992, the state passed a constitutional amendment that overturned laws banning discrimination against gays and lesbians. Several protest organizations formed in response to this governmental action, but the primary weapon used by these organizations was an extended boycott. A coalition of organizations called for consumers to avoid traveling in the state and to boycott products manufactured by companies in the state (*Coors, Samsonite, Celestial Seasonings*) (Friedman, 1999).

Friedman (1999), quoting a reporter from the *Denver Post*, notes that “[w]hile the Colorado boycotts had several objectives, a first priority was ‘to provide a visible deterrent to the institution of antigay civil rights initiatives in other cities and states of the United States’”(149). The Colorado boycott resulted in cancellation of conventions and meetings by several organizations, an official ban on travel to the state by New York City and Los Angeles government workers, and a relocation of the television program *Frasier* from Denver to Seattle. Greenhouse (1995) reports that the state lost approximately \$40 million in convention and tourism business because of the boycott. The consumer campaign was suspended in 1994 when the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that the amendment, which started the controversy, was unconstitutional.

A similar boycott of several southern states is currently underway to compel these states not to fly the Confederate Flag outside of government buildings. According to the NAACP, this boycott is having a major effect on the economy of some southern cities. South Carolina alone recently reported a \$30 million loss in tourist revenue. Several cities have voted to remove the confederate flag from their capital buildings, and Holiday Inns across the South have removed their flags. Boycott efforts sometimes elicit a counter-boycott. The *Southern Patriot Group* has organized a boycott of Holiday Inn in response to its removal of the confederate flag. The organization's website reads "We will drive all night or sleep in the car if necessary. We will demonstrate true Southern grit by eating peanut butter sandwiches, if necessary, rather than partaking of Holiday Inn's Sunday buffet" (*Southern Patriot Group*, 2000:1).

Public information campaigns are often an important part of contemporary boycott campaigns. Consumer organizations inform the public about the boycott effort through a variety of channels; media outlets, mass mailings, and more recently, the Internet. One example of a public information campaign using media channels was the *Earth Island Institute's* (EIS) successful campaign against *Heinz (Starkist Tuna)*, *Bumble Bee Seafoods*, and *Van de Kamp (Chicken of the Sea)* to end dolphin deaths during the process of gathering tuna fish. A multi-year campaign to inform the public about the effects of tuna harvesting resulted in intense consumer pressure. EIS ran advertisements featuring schoolchildren and celebrities to educate the public about the routine killing of dolphins under the most popular methods of tuna harvesting. In response to this public information campaign, Starkist, Bumble Bee and Chicken of the Sea labels adopted dolphin-friendly policies in 1990. Heinz (Starkist) went a step further and adopted the

dolphin-friendly position in their marketing campaign to stimulate buycotting (Friedman, 1999:195). Friedman (1999) argues that public information campaigns are more effective at bringing about corporate concessions than straight economic boycotts. “The successful boycott apparently worked not because consumers stopped buying the boycotted goods but because the boycotter were able to secure news media coverage of the offending practices of the targeted companies” (198-199).

The number of boycotts has increased in recent decades, and their effectiveness seems to have also improved (*Co-Op America*, 2001). Todd Putnam, former editor of *National Boycott News*, observes that “boycotts used to take between five and ten years to get results, but now they take two. That’s because they’re better-organized and get more media attention: Corporations recognize the potential damage much earlier” (*Co-Op America*, 2001). The expansion of mass communication in recent decades has improved the efficiency and effectiveness of consumer campaigns in the marketplace.

Boycotts are by far the most well studied and understood type of political consumerism. We know when they work, why they work, how they work, and how they are organized, for starters. We also know how corporations respond to boycotts, and how they should respond. What is not known about boycotts is their political influence. In what ways do boycotts influence formal and informal public policy? These are questions for future research.

### **Consumer Buycotts**

The term buycott (also called girlcott, procott, white listing, and reverse boycott) describes consumers making an effort to purchase a product or undertaking some other

activity to reward a company or government for its behavior (Friedman, 1985). Boycotts are “negative” purchasing behavior aimed at punishing corporations or governments, and buycotts are “positive” purchasing behavior meant to reward companies or governments for favorable practices (Friedman, 1999; Smith, 1990).<sup>4</sup>

Friedman (1999) provides many examples of buycotts or positive purchasing behavior, most notably, the Florida Gay Rights Buycott Campaign (FGRBC). This campaign was assembled in response to the state’s repeal of an ordinance which outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation. The purpose of the buycott was to encourage citizens to purchase products from companies that have policies banning discrimination based on sexual-orientation. To achieve this end, the FGRBC initiated a massive research and public information campaign.

In 1993, the FGRBC produced a listing of local businesses that had chosen to maintain a standard of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, despite the absence of a legal obligation to do so. The campaign also distributed “thank you” cards for consumers to send to businesses to inform the companies that they were being targeted for the buycott. According to one campaign operative, the buycott “helped secure changes in local business policies in a non-discriminatory direction” (446). Businesses that had not been actively involved in anti-discrimination efforts were compelled to do so by consumers. The outpouring of business support resulted in the establishment of de facto anti-discrimination policy despite a government ruling to the contrary.

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<sup>4</sup> Smith and Friedman both use the term “boycott” to describe a much broader array of consumer activities than organized efforts to curb purchasing behavior. They include shareholder proxies, other forms of protest (e.g., picketing), and use of the media to harm corporate images, to name a few.

Some companies create a socially conscious identity to promote boycotting. *Working Assets Long Distance (WALD)*, *Ben & Jerry's Ice-Cream*, and *The Body Shop* were established with a socially conscious identity. These companies each forward a liberal political mission and donate profits to non-profit political organizations. WALD is prime example of a company set up to achieve political ends. In 1999, WALD donated \$4,000,000 to 49 different organizations targeting economic and social justice, peace and international freedom, education and the expression of freedom, civil rights, and the environment. Some recipients of large donations include the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (\$107,469), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (\$173,668), and the Rainforest Action Network (\$134,115). The company selects organizations and asks its customers to decide the amount of funding each receives. WALD also sends information about current boycotts and other political consumerism campaigns, and political book recommendations, with monthly bills. Members have the option of joining FAN, the Flash Action Network, and receiving e-mails informing them of political issues and actions of interest (WALD billing statement).

In addition to cash contributions to various "political" organizations, WALD also coordinates call-in campaigns to members of congress, the president, executive agency heads, and corporate CEOs. In 1999, WALD customers placed 825,761 calls pertaining to the "witch hunt" of President Clinton, genetically engineered foods, protection of national forests, support of renewable wind energy, federal judge confirmations, protection of Tibet from China, and medical record privacy, to name a few ("Political Review '99", *Working Assets*, 1999). 18,001 phone calls were placed to the CEO of Wal-Mart in September, 1999, urging that the company carry emergency contraception.

37,463 calls were placed in April of 1999 to the CEO of Exxon in an effort to make Exxon pay for the Valdez oil spill. 40,959 calls were placed to members of the House of Representatives in May of that year, urging them to protect public lands.

Vogel (2001) writes that “Over the last decade, political consumerism has acquired a new dimension: it is increasingly being employed by consumers to express their **approval** of particular corporate practices” (1). A quick look at the mushrooming of companies (e.g., *The Body Shop*) and products (eco-labeling, socially conscious investment funds) created to appeal to **buycotters** suggests that this activity is becoming more popular.

### **Consumer Protests**

Consumer protests directed at corporations and corporate-oriented organizations have gained prominence in recent years. Demonstrators came together in Seattle (1999), Washington, D.C. (2000), Quebec City (2001), Genoa, Italy (2001) and New York (2002) in large numbers to protest corporate power and what they perceive as a tight corporate-government relationship. These protests have brought a lot of media attention to the citizen-corporate relationship, and the U.S. government’s investment policies in less industrialized countries. Smaller-scale protests of specific companies have also erupted in recent years (e.g., *The Home Depot*, *Denny’s*) that do not directly concern issues of globalization. Consumer protests are few and far between, but they tend to garner a lion’s share of media attention.

Denny’s Restaurant has been the target of a variety of consumer activities in recent years, including litigation, direct protest, and boycotting for racial discrimination.

One incident in April of 1997 sparked a consumer protest when a group of Asian American, Japanese, and one Anglo-white student, were escorted out of a Denny's restaurant in Syracuse, New York, for belligerent behavior in response to what they perceived as preferential seating for white patrons (Harlan, 1997). A group of approximately 20 white men then followed the group out, shouting racial slurs. This group attacked the Asian students and beat two of them into unconsciousness. The security guards, moonlighting police officers, did not come to their aid, citing an unsafe situation due to the numbers involved in the melee (Harlan, 1997). Several witnesses alleged that indeed other customers had received preferential seating, and that the security guards were well aware of the violence occurring outside the restaurant. Three days after the incident, students at the local university organized a rally that drew over 200 people. They also picketed the restaurant for months after the incident and called for a local boycott.

Consumer protest has also been used in the anti-sweatshop movement that has taken hold in recent years, especially on college campuses (Sullivan, 1999). (Other tactics used by student groups include a boycott of offending companies, direct corporate action, and a congressional letter-writing campaign.) Students at Georgetown University had an 85 hour sit-in in the President's office to force negotiation of university apparel production procedures (Sullivan, 1999). Similar protests took place at the University of Wisconsin and Duke University. *Consumer Reports* described student protests against sweatshop labor as a response to "an economic war on the underpaid, overworked laborers who make the products that bear [university] logos" (*Consumer Reports*, 1999:18). Students have been joined by religious organizations, labor unions, and

governmental agencies in their efforts to ban sweatshop production. In October of 1999, Nike released factory lists as requested for Georgetown University, the University of Arizona, Duke University, the University of Michigan, and the University of North Carolina in response to widespread student protests (Sullivan, 1999).

Efforts to curb sweatshop manufacturing -- protests and boycotts -- began in the early 1990s and have become a formidable political force. "By now, most brand-name companies and retailers have adopted at least a code of conduct for their manufacturers and suppliers (*Consumer Reports*, 1999:19)." These codes require manufacturers to pay legal wages for the local country and maintain a clean and safe workplace. They have been difficult to enforce, and major American companies are now inspecting sites to ensure that the code is being upheld. The American Apparel Manufacturers Association, the biggest garment industry trade group, is also working on factory "self-certification," to be overseen by a board of industry insiders and outsiders.

Anti-sweatshop efforts have also influenced societal acceptance of these practices through public information campaigns. According to a national survey by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland, when a representative sample of Americans were asked to choose between an article of clothing that "is certified as not made in a sweatshop" and an identical garment without this guarantee, 3-out-of-4 respondents say they would choose the no-sweatshop product (*Washington Post*, February 15, 2000).

Consumer protests, a big part of the anti-globalization and anti-sweatshop movements, have brought about public awareness of these issues (*Consumer Reports*, 1999; Friedman, 1999). As with media-oriented boycotts, the primary purpose of protest

action is to garner media attention. Little is known about consumer protest activities compared to boycott activities. This area is wide open for future research.

### **Socially Conscious Investing**

Millions of Americans now use investments as a political tool. According to the Social Investment Forum, a well-established source for business information, \$2.2 trillion is currently invested in socially conscious funds in 1999, an increase of 82 percent in two years (*Co-Op America*, 2000). This large increase reflects a spike in an overall upward trend of investment of this nature in the past decade, up from \$40 billion in 1985. Currently, every one-in-eight dollars is under professional management is invested in socially conscious funds (*Social Investment Forum*, 2000). Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) report that 40% of respondents in their study of Danish citizens prefer that their pension fund take ethical and political considerations into account. Twelve percent of respondents in their survey report that they consider ethical and political factors when it comes to managing their own investments. While these results are not representative of the United States, they suggest that this form of political consumerism is practiced by a sizable number of residents in another “advanced” industrialized nation. Here in the United States, Baron (2001) finds that 25% of his 50 experimental subjects said they were willing to express their values by not purchasing a good or by not buying stock when given a hypothetical scenario (8). Socially conscious investing is on the rise, and the number of such funds is responding in kind.

Social investment funds come in many different forms. The *Parnassus Fund* “invest[s] in companies that practice corporate social responsibility: companies that

demonstrate respect for the environment, their employees and the communities where they operate” (advertisement, 2000). The *Green Century Equity Fund* screens companies for environmental and social responsibility: “Your investment will not support companies with the worst environmental records or the tobacco industry and will actively promote a cleaner, healthier environment” (advertisement, 2000). *Domini Social Investments* proposes shareholder resolutions that “encourage corporations to end sweatshop conditions and promote environmental responsibility” (advertisement, 2001). *Domini* funds are the oldest and largest socially and environmentally screened index funds in the United States. They exclude “booze, butts and bets -- alcohol, tobacco, and gambling stocks” (Roosevelt, 2000: 79). *Domini* also files shareholder resolutions on behalf of investors and “haggles with Walt Disney for better working conditions overseas” and “with Coca-Cola for more recycling” (79). Amy Domini, the founder of this family of mutual funds, argues that “global companies are more powerful than governments” (79). She sees socially conscious investing and shareholder actions as ways to keep these powerful organizations in check. Some socially conscious investment funds deal with a few issues while others apply broad criteria for companies they invest in. Some funds take a very active role and promote shareholder resolutions as a part of their social consciousness.

Another way that investors can practice political consumerism is through shareholder resolutions. According to Rembert (2001), shareholder resolutions “have played a key role in changing corporate behavior regarding environmental, health, social justice, and workplace issues” (13). Owning \$2,000 of a company’s stock allows investors to propose a shareholder resolution. In 1999, approximately 220 shareholder

resolutions were filed with 150 major U.S. corporations (Brown, 2000). \$1.2 trillion is currently controlled by investors who either vote or propose resolutions based on socially responsible goals (Brown, 2000). Of the 220 resolutions proposed in 1999, one-quarter (25%) pertained to environmental concerns, 19% to global corporate accountability, 17% to equality, 14% to international health and tobacco and equitable compensation, respectively, 6% to global finance issues, and 5% to militarism and violence.

Shareholder resolutions are a direct challenge to corporate power and reflect explicit attempts to influence the distribution of social goods and values.

Passage of shareholder resolutions is often not the end goal of many campaigns as this is nearly impossible for controversial resolutions (Borkowski, 2001). Activists often have other goals in mind. First, many campaigns try to garner media attention to force corporate compliance. Secondly, many companies respond to resolutions, whether or not they are passed. In 1999, AT&T, Bank of America, and the Bank of Boston were compelled to publicly acknowledge the growing gap between the rich and the poor in the United States (Brown, 2000). This public acknowledgment was based on an unsuccessful resolution requesting a maximum pay ratio between the CEO and the lowest-paid employee in the companies. McDonald's stopped its use of Styrofoam containers based on a resolution from only 3 percent of its shareholders (Borkowski, 2001). Other major fast food chains followed McDonald's lead and public policy pertaining to a whole industry was implemented without government intervention. Baxter International, the largest health products manufacturer in the world, announced that it was phasing out polyvinyl chloride materials that release the toxic chemical dioxin. The shareholder resolution involving this issue did not receive enough votes to pass, but the company

responded anyway. Universal Health Services and Tenant Healthcare, two other health products manufacturers, are following suit without shareholder resolutions (Brown, 2000). Political consumerism here led to establishment of a new environmental policy in an area without government regulation.

Other shareholder actions underscore the breadth of policy issues addressed with socially conscious investment practices. McDonald's implemented a sexual orientation nondiscrimination policy in 1999 in response to shareholder action (Brown, 2000); Ford Motor Company and Nike recently endorsed a ten-point code of conduct for environmental responsibility (Rembert, 2001); 15 fund companies and a coalition of shareholders successfully persuaded Mitsubishi to abandon plans for building a salt factory over a whale refuge in Mexico (Rembert, 2001). Shareholder resolutions, while rarely successful in garnering enough support from shareholders, can significantly alter corporate practices that result in de facto public policy change.

Socially conscious investing and shareholder activities are sometimes classified as political consumerism (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001), but they are often left out of such studies. Future research is needed to understand the relationship between these different types of political consumerism.

### **Consumer Campaigns**

Political consumerism often begins with an organized campaign put forth by a consumer organization or an issue organization that uses consumer tactics. Rarely do consumer campaigns use only one avenue to put pressure on corporations or governments: they often involve many different types of political consumerism. It is not

uncommon for an organization to call for a boycott while lobbying congress and running a media campaign to bring about public pressure. “Typically a combination of economic pressure and adverse publicity is employed to pressure a firm to change a particular behavior, or less commonly, to punish it for a previous behavior” (2) (Vogel, 2001).

The story of the consumer campaign involving *The Home Depot* illustrates the variety of channels that political consumerism campaigns typically employ, and the various points for citizen input. The campaign to stop *Home Depot* from selling products made from old-growth forests began in 1997. The Rainforest Action Network (RAN), an international organization aimed at environmental preservation, initiated the effort. *Home Depot* was targeted because they sell 10% of the world’s lumber and represent 40% of the home improvement industry in the United States (*Rainforest Action Network*, 1999). The first leg of the effort was a public information campaign. In October of 1998, *Time* magazine did an expose on *Home Depot*’s use of old-growth wood in response to RAN’s politicization of this issue. RAN and sister organizations also purchased advertisements in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, the location of *Home Depot* headquarters, detailing “How two guys in pinstripe suits cut down more rainforest than anyone in flannel shirts.” The Coastal Rainforest Coalition, a partnership organized by RAN, took out a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* in December of 1998 praising 27 major fortune 500 companies for halting their use of old-growth wood. *Home Depot*’s refusal to pledge an end to their use of old-growth wood was also prominently featured in the advertisement.

Popular music acts were also a part of the *Home Depot* public information campaign. The Dave Matthews Band, the Indigo Girls, and REM spoke on stage during

their tours about Home Depot's use of old-growth wood. The entertainers wrote letters to the company urging them to stop use of old-growth products. During their summer tour, the Dave Matthews Band, along with RAN activists, gathered over 50,000 signatures on petitions that were delivered to *Home Depot* headquarters.

RAN and partner organizations also used protest as a means to gain compliance with their consumer demands. An International Day of Action took place in October of 1998 with 75 demonstrations run simultaneously at *Home Depot* stores across the nation. Throughout 1999, an average of 5 protests were held per week at *Home Depot* stores nationwide. A total of 700 grassroots demonstrations were held at *Home Depot* stores in 1998 and 1999. In response to a measure proposed by *Home Depot* to reduce but not eliminate their use of old-growth wood, activists in the United States and Canada protested at 150 stores, one of the largest single-day demonstrations of its kind.

Socially conscious investing and shareholder actions were also part of the consumer campaign against the *Home Depot*. First, investors proposed a resolution at the 1999 annual shareholder meeting calling for an end to the selling of old-growth products. This resolution became a hotly debated topic. In addition to putting the issue on the shareholder agenda, members of RAN and sister organizations attempted to testify about this issue at the annual meeting. In May of 1999, RAN brought two leaders of the Nuxalt, an indigenous tribe in British Columbia, to speak at *Home Depot's* annual shareholders meeting in Atlanta. Old-growth wood from Home Depot has been traced back to their land. These two speakers were not allowed entry to the meeting. The speakers were "roughed up" and "taunted" by security guards, and the incident received local and national media coverage. The *Wall Street Journal* of May 28, 1999 ran a story

on the incident titled “Home Depot Meeting Bars Indian as Activists ‘Reclaim’ Wood.” It brought national attention to the event. In addition to the two Nuxalt leaders, representatives from RAN, the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Americans Land Alliance and other organizations were barred from attending the event despite holding legal proxies granting them the right to not only attend, but to speak. A representative from RAN was able to get into the meeting and disruptively communicated the message that consumer pressure would continue until the company stopped its harvesting of old-growth forests.

The government was not a prime target of consumer activists during this campaign because the actions of *Home Depot* were legal. As a result of all of the RAN campaign, several local communities had debates in July and August of 1999 about whether they should bar the construction of new *Home Depots* in their area. An unprecedented 12 percent of stockholders supported a resolution that the *Home Depot* stops selling old-growth products at the annual stockholders meeting in 1999, and the company made it official on August 26, 1999. *Home Depot* has pledged to stop its use of old-growth wood by the year 2000, joining the ranks of many other companies, including *Menards*, *86 Lumber*, *Lanoga*, *3M*, *Kinko's*, *Nike*, *Dell Computers*, and *Pacific Gas and Electric* (Rembert, 2001; Quirke, 1999). According to RAN, *Home Depot's* decision to stop selling old-growth wood, or what the company calls “wood from endangered areas,” “will transform over 20% of the world’s lumber market,” not to mention other stores that will follow suit because of *Home Depot's* decision.

This story illustrates how organized campaigns, the root of much political consumerism, typically make use of a variety of different types of activism. In this case, RAN and related organizations ran a public information campaign, an international

boycott of the store, protests, socially conscious investing, some government involvement, and disruptive shareholder tactics to bring about a major public policy change. Citizens were involved in all of these efforts.

Bearing in mind all of the different type of political consumerism available to citizens, and the often organized but individual nature of these activities, it is now time to review existing literature that pertains to the major questions of this dissertation.

### Literature Review

This literature review focuses on the four primary questions of the dissertation: What are people doing when it comes to engaging in political consumerism, who engages in this political behavior, why do they initiate political consumerism, and how does this activity compare to conventional forms of political consumerism? Before addressing these questions, I discuss possible reasons why political consumerism has been overlooked by political scientists for the most part.

### **Oversight of Political Consumerism**

Political consumerism has been essentially overlooked by political scientists, despite the mainstream media's penchant for covering these activities. Recent organized efforts that have received ample coverage include the national university anti-sweatshop movement, campaigns to "buy green," grassroots efforts to stop the production and use of genetically-engineered foods, and the highly publicized protests in Seattle, Washington, D.C., Quebec City, Italy, and New York against the World Trade Organization (WTO) the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the G-8, the World Bank, and the World Economic Forum. Bennett (2001) reports that media coverage of consumer issues from

the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* increased from 1991 to 2000, from just a few stories per year in the early 1990s to over 20 stories per year by the mid-1990s (23). Stories about general consumer issues and sweatshops spiked up dramatically starting in 1995. Protest activities are the high-profile tip of the iceberg when it comes to political consumerism. They represent only a smidgen of the vast number of political consumer activities underway in the United States; from trillions of investment dollars being used to achieve socially conscious ends (*Social Investment Forum*, 2001) to over 300 current boycotts against corporations to alter policies affecting millions of Americans (Kelleher, 1998).

Political consumerism has been an important part of politics in the United States since before the American Revolution and during the unionization of labor, the Progressive Movement, the consumer movement, and the Civil Rights Movement. Political consumerism played a key role in the founding of the nation. According to Friedman (1999:1), the Boston Tea Party incited broader popular rebellion that led to the American Revolution. In light of the longevity of political consumerism, its impact on the political process, and existing scholarship on this topic in other fields, one is left wondering why it has been overlooked for the most part in political science scholarship. A handful of political theorists have identified the participatory and democratizing potential of citizen actions in the marketplace, but this has taken place mostly in unpublished works in other countries (Stolle and Hoogh, 2001; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001; Goul Andersen and Hoff, 2001; Bennett, 2001; Micheletti, 2000, 2001). (Bennett is the exception here). Participation researchers have not classified or studied political consumerism as political participation. Women and politics scholars have not

recognized political consumerism as a uniquely powerful political tool for women who have an affinity for the marketplace (although Micheletti , an Americanist in Sweden, and Friedman, a sociologist, have). Researchers inside and outside the discipline have offered several explanations for this. The most plausible explanations are a general emphasis on electoral modes of participation in American politics, a prevailing private/public distinction, and a questionable political/economic dichotomy. These three possible explanations are addressed in turn.

### *Emphasis on Electoral Modes of Participation*

One possible explanation for the lack of research on political consumerism in political science literature is the general lack of attention paid to non-electoral or non-governmental modes of participation. Political activities that are not electoral, such as protest, are commonly referred to as "unconventional" participation and have not received the same attention as "conventional" activities. Corporations, despite their role as political institutions, are not seen a legitimate political targets for participation because they are not a formal part of the electoral process. Some steps have been taken to consider unconventional participation in mainstream literature, but much work remains to be done.

Critiques of the electoral bias in existing participation literature have come primarily from scholars who argue that this emphasis systematically excludes the distinct participation of certain segments in society. Feminist scholars argue that many political activities that women disproportionately engage in are not considered political participation because they fall outside the realm of electoral politics (Hardy-Fanta 1993;

Acklesberg, 1997). Acklesberg (1997) argues that, despite the gains in women's participation in the United States, "it remains the case that a focus on the electoral arena, and on traditional forms of participation, offers us only a partial view of politics and participation in this country, and, in particular, the participation of women (2)." Many grassroots activities are dismissed as "social" or "private" instead of "political."

Townsend-Gilkes (1984) argues that similar modes of participation dominated by women and forms of political participation that are disproportionately used by African-Americans are not explicitly electoral and thus are not studied as political. She cites alternative institution building as one example. Expansion of conceptions of political participation beyond the electoral arena would increase our understanding of the level of engagement of different groups as well as our knowledge of overall rates of political participation in the United States.

### *Public/ Private Dichotomy*

Political consumerism has also been overlooked in political science literature because it is considered a "private," domestic activity, separate from the "public" affairs of politics. Many of the activities subsumed under political consumerism have to do with "private" purchases that, when viewed through a public-private lens, do not come off as very "public," regardless of their influence on social goods and values. Many "private" activities have very "public" effects, and the private or domestic nature of such activities is not reason enough for their exclusion from the "political." The public/private distinction at work in existing literature is related to the electoral bias in the literature. The formal political/electoral realm is privileged because of its "public" character.

Critiques of the public/private distinction as a viable demarcation of what is political and what is not have come under attack in recent decades, primarily from feminist scholars who see this distinction as systematically discounting and dismissing women's participation (Hardy-Fanta 1993; Acklesberg, 1997).

Researchers critique the use of the public life/private life distinction because it segregates and devalues the contribution of women and others not participating in the conventionally defined "public" sphere (Pateman, 1970). Davidoff (1998) writes that the most common distinction between the public and the private spheres has been the invisible line drawn between "the state as representative of the public in contrast with private organizations such as the church, voluntary societies, and, particularly, privately owned businesses or professional enterprises" (166). Activities that take place in or target "private" institutions, such as political consumerism or community organizing through the church, are thus not considered political, regardless of their public implications. The prevailing use of the public/private dichotomy does political scientists a disservice by narrowing conceptions and analysis of what is political.

Acklesberg (1997) argues that broader definitions of political participation are "critical to an accurate understanding of the full range and extent of women's activism in what is generally termed 'public life'(2). In other words, if we were to dissolve the public/private dichotomy and analyze activities that take place in what is now considered "private," we would gain a better understanding of what is political; the universe of activities that influence the distribution of social goods and values. Our conceptions of the political realm would likely be expanded to include many domestic or non-governmental activities that have very public implications. Political consumerism

transcends private/public boundaries in that it melds “private” market activities with “public” political aims, evidence that the public/private distinction is not intrinsic to politics. As evidenced in the many examples of political consumerism above, the private activities of purchasing and investing have been used to bring about changes in government practices and legislation, and corporate decisions with political and public policy implications. Davidoff (1998) note that despite the continued “fascination with the seeming separation of private and public life. . . a consensus is emerging that public and private are not (and have never been) conceptual absolutes, but a minefield of ‘huge rhetorical potential’”(165). Political consumerism is likely another casualty of the rhetorical but nonetheless potent distinction between “public” and “private” activities in the study of politics.

#### *Political/ Economic Dichotomy*

Another possible explanation for the oversight of political consumerism in political participation research is the persuasiveness of a potentially misleading political/economic dichotomy. This dichotomy is obviously related to the public/private dichotomy above: market activities are “private” whereas governmental activities are “public.” The economic/political dichotomy in political science is evidenced by a general lack of scholarship on corporations and corporate power, despite apparent and documented corporate influence in politics and the policy process. American businesses, far from being politically innocuous, profoundly influence the lives of most Americans, whether it be through direct involvement in politics and policy, setting corporate policies

that significantly influence the way most Americans live, or shaping culture through socialization (Vogel, 1996; Bowman, 1996; Mayer, 1989, Dahl, 1973). Corporations play a major role when it comes to social goods and values, and political consumerism that targets corporations likewise influences the distribution of social goods and values.

Social scientists have identified many connections between corporations and government that give business a unique place in American politics. Fred Harris (1973) asserts that “corporate power in the political process is a reality” (26). Bernstein and Berger (1998) write that “whether it likes it or not, business is a powerful social actor. Its actions have consequences in the public arena, its views influence the political and policy debate, and its very existence and the terms of that existence are subjects of debate and controversy” (8). Bradshaw and Vogel (1981) write that “the line between government and business, once sharp and clear, has become more and more shadowy. Economic decisions are no longer clearly distinguished from political ones” (xxvi). Smith (1990) points out that the “military-industrial complex” makes it difficult to divorce government from business (133), and Friedman (1999) writes that “boycott leaders, targets, and offenders are all, to some degree, political actors performing on a public stage” (31). Many specific links between business and government have been identified that illustrate the close, interdependent, and sometimes seamless relationship of these two entities.<sup>5</sup> Corporate influence in politics comes in many forms, including the funneling of “soft” money through the political parties, “hard” money contributions to candidates, “iron triangles,” revolving doors, lobbying, influencing employee voting decisions, provision

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<sup>5</sup> The terms “business” and “government” are used here in a monolithic sense for simplicity of argument, but these are crude characterizations of each. Businesses comes in many shapes and sizes, as do governments. The discussion pertains primarily to large corporations and the national government,

of human resources for campaigns, and filing of lawsuits on behalf of companies that change, alter or create public policy, to name a few.

Smith (1990), citing Vogel, points out that “the distinction between the ‘public’ act of voting in the political market-place, which is public and political because it involves an attempt by the individual to advance a perception of the general good, is becoming blurred when ostensibly ‘private’ acts of voting in the economic market-place, guided entirely by self-interest, are beginning to incorporate social factors” (182).<sup>6</sup>

Political consumerism is both economic and political. It is an economic means with a political end in mind. The economic basis for this behavior does not discount its political intent or implications.

The electoral focus, public/private dichotomy, and economic/political dichotomy in existing research on political participation have left us with unnecessarily narrow conceptions of what is “political.” We have an incomplete understanding of the modes and locations of political power in the United States, especially corporate power, and we have only a partial understanding of political participation in the United States, both in terms of certain groups and overall rates. Studying corporate power and political consumerism will allow political scientists a better understanding of what is “political.”

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although some smaller businesses are also involved in politics and public policy, for example through trade organizations, and many local and state governments are influenced by corporate interests.

<sup>6</sup> The false economic/political dichotomy is also at work in other disciplines that study political consumerism. Friedman (1999) and others distinguish between political and economic boycotts. He characterizes economic boycotts as activities that use the marketplace to achieve political/social ends, such as minority rights and improvement of the environment. “Economic” boycotts involve consumer complaints about product safety, high prices, and the poor quality of goods and services. The difference between these two types of political consumerism is whether the goal of the boycott involves the product or service being boycotted. “Political” boycotts do not concern the targeted product or service directly whereas “economic” boycotts do. Despite the distinction, both types of activities are political as both aim to influence the distribution of social goods and values. Economic and political boycotts involve citizen challenges to corporate power and attempts to alter the balance of power between citizens and corporations. These challenges are, by definition, attempts to influence the distribution of social goods and values, whether or not they explicitly engage a public policy issue.

### **Existing Research on Political Consumerism**

This literature review centers on existing research pertaining to the four primary questions of this dissertation. The first section examines what has been written about what citizens are doing in terms of political consumerism. More specifically, statistics are provided on how many people are willing to and actually engage in this activity. The second section looks at who engages in political consumerism according to past studies. Certain groups have been found to engage in this behavior at a higher rate than others. The third section focuses on previous findings about why people engage in political consumerism. Certain policy topics garner greater use of this political tool, and existing research tells us that respondents who engage in political consumerism are not doing so out of self-interest. The last section of this literature review assesses studies on the parallels between conventional political participation and political consumerism.

#### *What Citizens are Doing in Terms of Political Consumerism*

Only a few studies have measured what citizens are doing in terms of political consumerism, and even fewer longitudinal studies exist. A lack of longitudinal data is to be expected considering that this behavior did not come to the political fore in force until the 1960s (Vogel, 2001). Evidence is presented here suggesting recent increases in political purchasing behavior, socially conscious investing, other shareholder tactics, disruptive tactics, and protest activities involving consumer concerns.

## Political Purchasing Behavior

Questions about boycotting, a proxy measure of political consumerism, have been included on the World Values Survey since the early 1990s, and the Swedish Study of Power and Democracy starting in 1987. Questions of “green” political consumerism have been included in surveys fielded by the private Canadian research firm *Environics International* for almost a decade. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) present data on political consumerism in Denmark from 1990 and 2000. More recently, other researchers have started to gather data on this subject within the United States (Keeter, Zukin, and Andolina, 2001). In terms of the “what” of political consumerism, these studies find that political consumerism is on the rise, and currently about one-third of the population engages in this political behavior.

Boycotting for political reasons has become more attractive to citizens in recent years (Inglehart, 1997; Micheletti, 2000; Petersson et. al., 1998, *Environics International*, 2000; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001). Three studies to date have measured actual citizen engagement in political consumerism (as opposed to willingness to engage in this behavior). The first study is based on data from Sweden. Petersson (1998) reports that 29% of residents engaged in a boycotts the previous year. The second study of political consumerism measures this behavior among Virginians. Similar to Petersson, Keeter, Zukin, and Andolina (2001) find that 27% of respondents from the state of Virginia had engaged in boycott behavior in the past year. The Citizenship Survey, part of the Danish Democracy and Power Project, found that about 20% of residents engaged in a boycott in the past year, and 45% engaged in buycotting behavior. This study seems to be an anomaly, both in terms of the low percentage of boycotters and the high percentage of

buycotters. Based upon these mixed findings, I anticipate that about 30% of respondents in my regional sample engaged in a boycott in the past year.<sup>7</sup>

Additional evidence is available that suggests that political consumerism has increased in recent years. Putnam, the founding editor of the *National Boycott Newsletter* and perhaps the best source on boycott numbers over time, claims that these activities have increased markedly since the 1960s and 1970s (Kelleher, 1994). Putnam reports that the number of boycotts had risen from 30 to 300 per year from the 1960s to the 1990s. Rob Harrison, a founding member of the Ethical Consumer Research Association, observes that “there seems to have been an increase in the number of boycotts in recent years” (1998:1). The dramatic rise in the number of boycotts initiated annually is an imperfect measure of citizen engagement in boycotts because many campaigns are now media-oriented and may require only limited public participation. Nonetheless, it is roughly indicative of rates of citizen engagement in boycotts and suggests that participation in this type of political consumerism has also increased since the height of the consumer movement in the 1970s.

The University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes recently published the results of a national survey on consumer willingness to engage in socially conscious consuming. Again, while not a direct measure of behavior, willingness to engage in boycotts or buycotts is a rough indication of actual engagement. Researchers found that when respondents were asked to choose between a \$20 piece of clothing that “is certified as not made in a sweatshop” and an identical piece of clothing of unknown origin, three out of four said they would opt for the article with the no-sweat guarantee.

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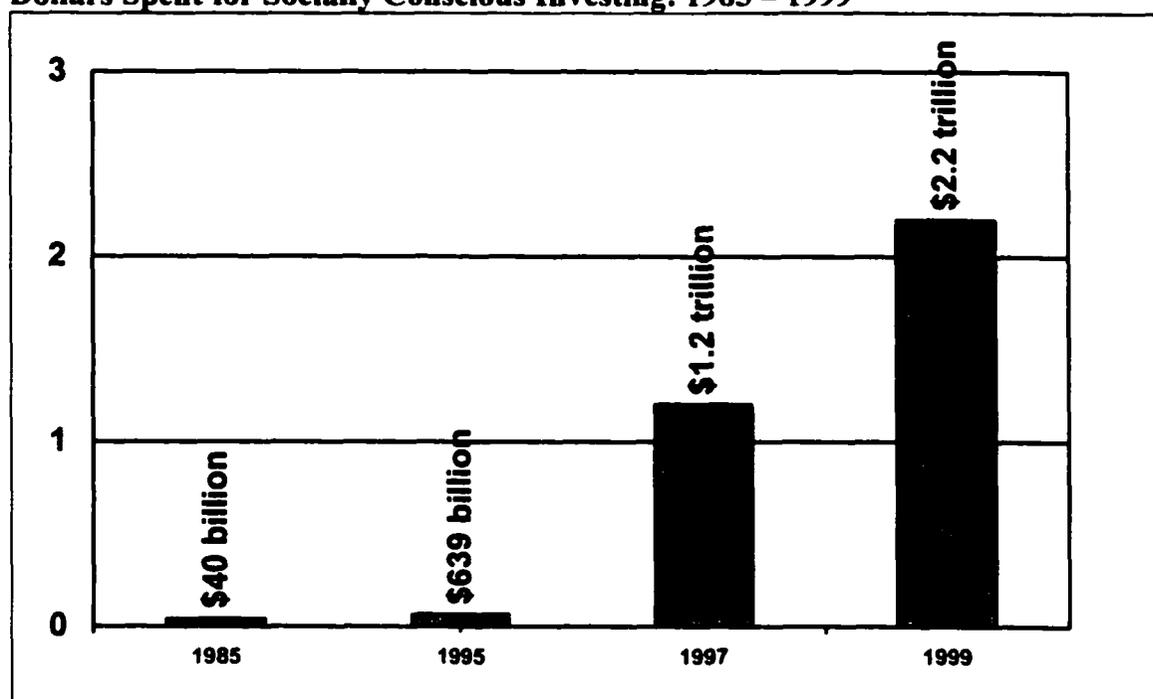
<sup>7</sup> The Virginia data was gathered after the data for this dissertation. This study simply allows me to apply the findings from Sweden to the United States with greater surety.

Three quarters of respondents also said they would avoid products made under “harsh or unsafe conditions.” Another study by Ray (1997) shows that one-fourth of the population, termed Cultural Creatives, place a high value on social consciousness in their purchasing decisions.

### Socially Conscious Investing and Shareholder Tactics

Reliable data is available on socially conscious investing as this activity is fairly easy to track over time. Rates of socially conscious investing skyrocketed in the 1990s. This activity, motivated by a variety of liberal and conservative concerns, increased steadily in the early 1990s and experienced a major jump in the latter part of the decade. According to the *Social Investment Forum*, \$2.2 trillion was invested in socially conscious funds in 1999, an increase of 82% in two years (*Social Investment Forum*, 2000). This large increase reflects a spike in an overall upward trend of investment of this nature in the past decade, up from \$40 billion in 1985 (**Figure 2.1**).

**Figure 2.1**  
**Dollars Spent for Socially Conscious Investing: 1985 – 1999**



Source: U.S. Social Investment Forum, "1999 Report on Responsible Investing Trends"

One-in-eight dollars under professional management are currently invested in environmental or socially conscious funds. The popularity of this activity has not gone unnoticed by financial firms and employers. Account managers offer the option of socially conscious investing as a matter of course, "more employers are offering socially responsible investment options as part of retirement plans, and employees are increasingly moving assets into them" (1). The number of screened mutual funds grew from just 55 in 1995 to 139 in 1997 and 175 in 1999 (*Social Investment Forum*, 2000: 9)

The Social Investment Forum also reports that about \$1 trillion is involved in shareholder advocacy and social responsibility issues. \$992 billion is used to promote shareholder resolutions through over 120 financial institutions. These investors use their ownership in corporate America to bring about social/political change "They also [vote] their proxies on the basis of formal political embodying socially responsible goals and

actively [work] with companies to encourage more responsible levels of corporate citizenship” (2). In 1970, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) decided that shareholder resolutions that addressed overtly political issues were acceptable. Since this time, rates of politically-motivated shareholder activities have steadily increased. Churches, schools, and pension funds have used proxy tactics frequently in the past two decades, successfully compelling pharmaceutical companies to adopt World Health Organization (WTO) guidelines for the sale of infant formula, causing mass divestment in South Africa in protest of Apartheid, and diverting funds from companies that use sweatshop labor. Welsh (2001) points out that “dissident shareholder actions are granted more credibility today than ever before. . .” (4) because they are used more frequently and with greater sophistication. The Social Investment Forum (2000) observes rapid growth in shareholder advocacy as well. The amount of money controlled by investors who are directly involved in shareholder advocacy increased 25 percent from 1997 to 1999, from \$736 billion to \$922 billion, respectively (13).

When politically-based corporate proxy actions were introduced in 1970, many had a difficult time garnering the 3% vote needed to reconsideration the following year. Now, nearly all resolutions-- about 95% -- obtain the required 3% (Welsh, 1998). Success of shareholder actions cannot be measured by simply looking at the percentage of votes a resolution garners:

In many cases, shareholder advocates do not even formally introduce a resolution for their concerns to have an impact. Most often this occurs because management, knowing that investors have access to the shareholder resolution process, agrees to discuss issues with investors to avoid a formal shareholder proposal. (Social Investment Forum, 2000: 14)

Citizens are placing political pressure on corporations through investments and shareholder resolutions to a degree unparalleled in American history. This dramatic increase in political consumerism of this sort is also indicative of the growth rate of boycotts and disruptive or illegal political consumerism.

### Disruptive Political Consumerism

Along with increases in more mainstream forms of political consumerism, disruptive and illegal tactics have also seen a rise. The past decade was marked by numerous high-profile acts of disruptive and sometimes illegal political consumerism. Protesters targeted governmental organizations, such as the WTO and World Bank, and non-governmental targets, such as the Summit of the Americas. The popularity of disruptive and extra-legal tactics to protest corporate power and policies reflects a sub-culture that is actively anti-corporate and anti-capitalist. Julia Butterfly Hill illegally camped lived on Luna, a tree in California, to protest the planned cutting of the surrounding stand. Her stay lasted from December 10, 1997, to December 18, 1999 after lengthy negotiations with the Pacific Lumber Company. Butterfly Hill paid the company \$50,000 to preserve Luna and other trees within a 2.9-acre area, and she can visit her former home anytime with 24 hour notice (Gasperini, 2000).

The Environmental Liberation Front and Earth First! engaged in a number of illegal activities to protest “greedy corporation” that “put profits ahead of wildlife” (Rhodes, 1998). Clausen (*FOX News*, 2001) claims that environmental terrorism aimed at corporations has become an increasing threat in the past decade. Examples abound. The ELF set a car lot of new SUVs on fire in Portland, Oregon, issuing a statement that

"we can no longer allow the rich to parade around in their armored existence" (*FOX News*, 2001). In the past few years, the ELF has claimed credit for burning down two logging companies, a Michigan-based research facility, and a Colorado ski lodge with the goal of putting these corporations out of business. Damage to the ski totaled \$12 million dollars. This target was torched to stop a planned expansion over the "best lynx habitat in the state," according to an ELF statement. The ELF has also burned numerous private residences in an effort to stop urban expansion in Long Island and states in the West. In 1997, masked ELF activists stormed California Congressman Frank Rigg's office, threatening his staff and causing several thousands of dollars in damage to his. The protest involve "tree stumps, sawdust, urinating on the furniture, and locking themselves down" (Rhodes, 1999).

The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has engaged in similar acts of terrorism in the name of their cause. On March 11, 1997 the Animal Liberation Front bombed the Utah Fur Breeders Agricultural Cooperative in Sandy, Utah. Five feed trucks were also blown up, resulting in total damage of \$1 million (Rhodes, 1999). This incident was retaliation for the jailing of animal activists in Minneapolis, Indianapolis, and Syracuse. Later that same month, a fur trapping supply store in Ogden, Utah was torched by the Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade on behalf of the Animal Liberation Front (Rhodes, 1999). On July 3, 1998, 310 animals were released from a research center in Washington. George W. Bush recently announced that both the ELF and the ALF top a new list of domestic terrorist organizations.

On a more peaceful note, other evidence of an anti-corporate citizen groundswell appearing in recent years are the high-profile citizen protests of the WTO, World Bank,

and IMF in Seattle (November, 1999), Washington, D.C. (April, 2000), and Quebec City (March, 2001). Consumer activists targeted governmental (WTO, World Bank, IMF) and non-governmental bodies (Summit of the Americas) to protest corporate power and practices. The remainder of this section examines the Seattle WTO protest in greater detail to illustrate why disruptive political consumerism has gained popularity in recent years.

The goal of the demonstration in Seattle was to shut down the WTO meeting altogether. This objective, established by the Direct Action Network (DAN), was eventually achieved after many months of planning and many days of protest activities. DAN worked with labor unions and a variety of environmental and other organizations to this end. Thousands of volunteers signed up for non-violent protest training and camps where they learned classic civil disobedience techniques, human blockade formation, rappelling (to hang banners on buildings and other tall objects), and “lock down” techniques that link protesters to each other through plastic tubing. David Solnit, the organizer behind DAN, toured the West coast in the months leading up to the WTO meeting to recruit participants for the event.

The Internet played a crucial role in the mass outpouring of political consumerism observed in recent years. The number of participants at the Seattle WTO demonstration was unexpected at all levels. Recruitment took place through the quiet, personal channels of the Internet. Beck complains at the number of e-mail messages she handles on a daily basis, but explains that “We couldn’t do this work without it. . . .” (Finnegan, 2000:49). Several websites operated around the clock that linked participants and provided information about the planned events. According to Vidal (1999), “e-mail and the Net

are revolutionizing the way environment, human rights and social justice groups work” (1). He reports that most non-governmental groups now depend on the Internet for “motivate, activate and communicate their uncensored messages” (2). All organizations have e-mail, and most have camcorders and websites. The massive mobilization of demonstrators in Seattle, Washington, D.C., and other organized protests in recent years could not have been possible without the Internet. Coordination between the thousands of groups involved in these events also would not have been possible without a private, rapid means of communication.

The WTO, IMF, World Bank, and pseudo-governmental organizations, such as the Summit of the Americas, can no longer convene without citizen protests in the United States and elsewhere. The global citizen movement made itself known in George W. Bush’s visit to several European countries in June of 2001. He was met at every stop by a crowd of vocal citizens, protesting what they perceive as his anti-environmental, pro-business stances. Citizen outpouring against corporate power, both legal and extra-legal, is a logical part of the consumer model of citizenship. When consumers are disgruntled, they complain. When citizens are disgruntled, they complain. The consumer model of citizenship encourages Americans to think of themselves as being on the receiving end of an exchange in all their relationships, including interactions in the marketplace. Citizens think of themselves as consumers in relation to government and corporations, and they feel empowered in this position. Disruptive protests against corporations and corporate power are reactions from disgruntled consumers. Juliette Beck of *Global Exchange* who was involved in the planning of the protest efforts in Seattle and Washington, D.C., describes this culture undercurrent in the following way: “I think a lot of people in my

generation -- not a majority, maybe, but a lot -- feel this void. We feel like capitalism and buying things are just not fulfilling. Period” (Finnegan, 2000). A sub-culture of people who seek to end corporate power worldwide epitomizes the anti-materialist, anti-corporate sentiment of many Americans who pursue political goals through political consumerism.

### Positive versus Negative Purchasing Behavior

Scholars distinguish between positive actions that seek to reward corporations for their political practices (buycotting), and negative actions that seek to punish companies (boycotting) (Friedman, 1999; Vogel, 2001). Vogel (2001) writes that “Over the last decade, political consumerism has acquired a new dimension: it is increasingly being employed by consumers to express their **approval** of particular corporate practices” (1). He notes that positive political consumerism involving environmental concerns has become “increasingly widespread” (5). Despite the increasing popularity of buycotting, and the unusually large number of Danish residents who engage in this behavior, I anticipate finding that Americans are much more likely to engage in boycotting than buycotting. The primary reason being that consumer campaigns, the catalyst for much political consumerism in the U.S., continue to use boycotts instead of buycotts to gain corporate concessions (Friedman, 1999).

### “Who” Engages in Political Consumerism

The question of who engages in political consumerism has been addressed by many scholars in different fields. Qualitative evidence is presented to support the claim

that political consumerism is used by groups that lack political power, in particular, women and African-Americans. Survey data is the basis for the conclusion that a greater percentage of women, younger people, educated people, and those with great income engage in political consumerism than others.

Many researchers have reached the conclusion that political consumerism is an important avenue for politically disadvantaged groups when governmental channels are not accessible or attentive (Vogel, 2001; Friedman, 1999; Scott, 1985; Smith, 1990; Ownby, 1999; Morris, 1984; Ashby, 1973; Vogel, 1978, Harrison, 1998). Friedman (1999) argues that “Since the Revolutionary War it can be argued that the boycott has been used more than any other technique to promote and protect the rights of the powerless and disenfranchised segments of society” (3). He writes that political consumerism was an alternative to governmental political participation practiced by American colonists, unionists, the American Jewish community during the 1930s, labor organizers during the 1960s, Civil Rights protesters, and women. Friedman (1999) also notes that Scott (1985) classifies the boycott as a “weapon of the weak” in his classic text of the same name on the subject. Harrison (1998) writes that “A boycott is a useful tool in addition to other democratic means. It may also be useful where normal democracy is denied” (1).

Researchers have documented the use of political consumerism as a political alternative by many different segments in society. Systematic quantitative research has not been undertaken on how often activists representing politically disempowered groups turn to the marketplace to press their concerns, or under what conditions this choice is made, except that more formal political recourse is not available. I am not able to answer

many of these questions in this dissertation with the available data, but I can assess the overall rates of political consumerism among certain groups that are considered less politically powerful in American society. Claims that women and African-Americans disproportionately engage in political consumerism are presented here.

### Women and Political Consumerism

Researchers who argue that women disproportionately engage in political consumerism forward two primary claims. First, some scholars argue that because women are the primary purchasers in the United States (Bergman, 1986), they have easier access to market channels (Sandel, 1996; Friedman, 1995, 1999; de Grazia, 1996). Secondly, researchers argue that this behavior has been an important political tool for women when denied more formal political power throughout American history (Friedman, 1995, 1999; Kish Sklar, 1995; Smith, 1990; de Grazia, 1996). In addition to these theoretical claims, survey research indicates that women do indeed disproportionately engage in political consumerism.

Several authors note that the use of political consumerism by women is not surprising given their unique relationship to the market (de Grazia, 1996; Smith, 1990; Sandel, 1996, Friedman, 1995). Virtually all homemakers in the United States (98%) are female, and, by the nature of their occupation, they make the majority of purchase decisions for the household (Bergmann, 1986). Homemakers are in a prime position to know more about the variety, availability, relative price, and quality of products -- information that increases the likelihood of practicing political consumerism (Smith, 1990). Friedman (1995) writes that "For centuries the traditional division of labor meant

that it was housewives who did the shopping and thus they were the ones who most directly felt the impact of adverse changes in price or availability for consumer goods“(56).

Women hold power as consumers in American society, and they are generally familiar with this power. Scott (1976) writes that “In the woman’s function as consumer, [she] is indomitable and it is indisputable that the phenomenon of female consumption in Western society is marked by two overriding principles: first, it is massive and second, it is both frequent and extensive”(ix). Women are a primary segment of society when it comes to purchasing which might explain their affinity for this route of political activism. Scott estimates that American women make the purchase decision in 70% to 90% of consumer sales (x). It is therefore no surprise that when confronted with less formal political power than men, women will turn to market channels with which they are familiar and in which they hold power via their consumer dollar. Smith (1990) argues that not only do women participate in political consumerism at a high rate, corporations have generally been responsive because they know that women spend more dollars in the marketplace than any other group (6). Women appear to be a distinct segment when it comes to their opportunity for engagement in political consumerism.

Existing literature on political consumerism is replete with case studies of women using this tool to bring about change when formal political channels were not available or would not accommodate their interests. Friedman (1999) writes that “while women are not technically a minority, they are usually perceived as having less economic and political power than men. . . ” (89).

Historian Katherine Kish Sklar (1995) examines women's involvement in the National Consumer's League in the early part of the last century and concludes that women accomplished what men could not in terms of consumer policy through grassroots mobilization efforts. This form of activism gave women political power where it was otherwise denied. Female organizers were able to rally public concern and support through their grassroots activities in ways that male organizers were not able to, and this gave them political leverage. Women were important players in early consumer efforts even before gaining the right to vote (7).

Friedman (1995) discusses the use of boycotts by women during the last century and concludes that "It should come as no surprise that women in general and housewives in particular have been at the forefront of direct grassroots action such as boycotts to further the consumer interest" (56). He argues that the consumer boycott has been a primarily tool for women's political action. "Through such direct action techniques as [boycotting], demonstrations, picketing, and leafleting, they have made their voices heard in the marketplace and the halls of government. By engaging in these grassroots activities, these women have complemented on the consumption side of the economic coin their husband's activities on the production side. Indeed, the consumer boycott is the economic mirror image of the labor strike" (70). Women gained political access and power through the marketplace that was otherwise unavailable to them.

Organization of Consumer Leagues represents some of the earliest organized consumer efforts on the part of women. The first League was established in 1899 to improve working conditions (Sorenson, 1941). Early Housewives Leagues were also heavily involved in consumer policy through political consumerism during the early part

of the twentieth century. These leagues arranged boycotts against merchants in order to bring prices down, and engaged in a number of subversive consumer tactics to punish dishonest producers (7). Women's groups were again active in bringing about passage of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938 (13). These groups used both conventional participation and political consumerism in their approach. According to Sorenson (1941), their boycott and direct corporate action efforts were so successful that businesses formed their own women's organizations to oppose the Leagues (13). Housewives Leagues were successful in bringing citizen pressure to bear in changing corporate conduct, and bringing attention to the need for governmental regulations. Micheletti (2001) writes that Consumer and Housewife League "revolts" put the "concerns of the everyday women consumer on the public agenda" (4).

de Grazia (1996) examines the use of boycotts by "housewives" in the mid-1950s and finds that political consumerism brought many women into politics who were previously non-participatory. "Women exercised a new public role through the daily task of provisioning and domestic labor" (283). An estimated 7% of the female population in the United States belonged to a housewives' association, which "acted as a powerful lobby and appealed to nonorganized women to exercise their rights -- as the American housewives purportedly did -- by means of consumer boycotts" (283). Housewives' associations appealed to women in their role as consumers and brought participants into the fray who had previously not been involved in politics. The existence of housewives' associations was made possible by women's shared identity as consumers in the marketplace. Micheletti (2001) writes that women's leagues "created bonds among housewives who found that they had the same experience, and this helped them to see

their worries as a problem that needed a political solution” (4-5). Conventional forms of political participation could not have played upon women’s shared identity as consumers like political consumerism did.

Women were also a political presence in the 1960s and 1970s with frequent boycott activities. First, the Womens’ Liberation Movement brought issues of “manipulative consumerism,” what Betty Friedan (1963) termed “the feminine mystique,” to the forefront of social consciousness. Reminiscent of efforts by African-Americans to extinguish stereotypes of advertising, women revolted against images of rigid gender roles that maintained high standards of consumption (Landes, 1998). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan argued that “the perpetuation of housewifery, the growth of the feminine mystique, makes sense (and dollars) when one realizes that women are the chief customers of American business. . . . the really important role that women serve as housewives is to buy more things for the house” (197). The National Organization for Women (NOW) called for product boycotts during congressional hearings on discrimination against women in Washington. Edith Green, a Representative from Oregon, even announced her own personal boycott:

I have made a personal resolve not to buy certain products advertised by ridiculing women; and I would hope that (women’s groups) would really carry on a systematic boycott of products that in their advertising depict the woman as a supercilious idiot. This is what happens in a lot of the TV commercials. I see it and I think this is by design. We have gone past that stage. (Craig, 1997:5)

NOW and a coalition of other women’s groups did call for a boycott of Silva Thins cigarettes, Ivory Liquid detergent, Pristeen feminine hygiene deodorant, and Cosmopolitan magazine. These boycotts “caused a good deal of uneasiness in corporate boardrooms,” although Warner Lambert, the maker of Pristeen, responded that “Pristeen

is for femininity, freshness and women's confidence. How can anyone be against that?" (Craig, 1997: 5). Craig writes that boycott efforts during the most recent wave of the women's movement successfully brought significant attention to women's issues (5).

Women also spearheaded a number of national supermarket boycotts that were generally successful in the 1960s and 1970s in response to perceived unfair prices. Friedman (1985) conducted a survey of local price boycott leaders and found that all of the 64 leaders were women -- young, well-educated, middle-class housewives (63). Boycotts were a primary tool for women to bring public attention to what they considered to be unfair pricing schemes. Friedman (1985) documents a number of other consumer boycotts in the 1970s in which women were active. The milk and sugar boycotts of 1974 involved some interesting public performances. In Concord, New Hampshire and Hartford, Connecticut, women dressed in colonial costumes and dumped what appeared to be sugar (white sand) into the water. An activist from a local community organization commented that the protest was a way "to help poor people back into the eating business" (66). Consumer groups, primarily headed by women, used political consumerism to bring about policy change.

In addition to case studies suggesting that women are disproportionately likely to engage in political consumerism, and Friedman's survey of boycott leaders, empirical data is available that supports this claim. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) find that 50% of women in Denmark engaged in some form of political consumerism in the past year compared to 44% of men. Micheletti (2001) finds that women comprise about 80% of the organizers in the Swedish Act and Buy Environmentally network, a national organization that promotes political consumerism (11). She also reports in the Swedish

Study of Power and Democracy, later called the SNS Democratic Audit, that “women more often than men participate in consumer boycotts whose aim is social betterment” (12). Micheletti also mentions one American study that concerns eco-labeled seafood by Wessells, Donath, and Johnston (1999) that finds that women are more likely to engage in boycotting along these lines (Micheletti, 2001:13). She also mentions an interview with Chad Dobson at the Consumer Choice Council in which he confirms that “middle-class women are the focal point for all new consumerist efforts” (13). Both qualitative and quantitative data suggests that women are more inclined to engage in political consumerism, and I expect to find a gender gap in this research as well.

#### African-Americans and Political Consumerism

Many researchers have commented on the importance of political consumerism for African-Americans at different points in American history (Vogel, 2001; Greenberg and Page, 2001; Friedman, 1999; Smith, 1990; Ownby, 1999; Morris, 1984; Ashby, 1973; Vogel, 1978). Greenberg and Page (2001) write that “Politically weak populations with focused goals have historically found boycotts and other consumer protests immensely useful” (1). Vogel (1978) traces the start of the corporate accountability movement to civil rights boycotts that heated up in the mid-1950s in response to lukewarm government responses to demands for racial equality from civil rights activists. He finds that “Political consumerism was particularly important for southern blacks who, prior, to 1965, were legally precluded from participating in the electoral process” (2).

Ownby documents the use of consumer tactics during the most recent Civil Rights Movement in *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumer, Poverty & Culture* (1999).

He concludes that political consumerism was influential in bringing about the "gradual if uneven decline of overt racism, " and that this "shows the power African Americans continue to have when they withhold their spending money" (158). Ownby cites political consumerism as an important tool in efforts to improve the position of African-Americans in American society.

According to Friedman (1999), since the turn of the last century, "African Americans have been responsible for more consumer boycotts than all the other groups combined" (90). Political consumerism was often the primary tactic used in Civil Rights campaigns. Boycott campaigns during the Civil Rights movement came in different forms. Some called for substantive or instrumental changes, such as an end to segregation or racial discrimination. Other campaigns sought symbolic or expressive goals, including challenging societal norms that held Blacks in a bad light. Examples of instrumental campaigns are presented first, followed by examples of expressive campaigns.

Instrumental campaigns initiated during the Civil Rights era primarily revolved around issues of racial segregation and discriminatory hiring practices. Protesters sought desegregation and more equitable hiring practices as the end goal. Political consumerism was seen as a powerful political tool among protesters in light of tacit and sometimes overt government endorsement of both informal and institutionalized racial segregation. Friedman examines why political consumerism has been such a popular tactic for African-American interests. He quotes E. Randel T. Osburn of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference: "The boycott is the most potent economic empowerment weapon that blacks have. . . That's what the oil embargo was about in the 1970s. Everyone uses

economic pressure. . . The minute we silence that cash register, they can hear everything we say.” Civil Rights activists embraced boycotts because they offered political power when it was otherwise denied. The use of boycott tactics was so prevalent during the movement that “much of the history of the civil rights movement can be viewed as a series of direct confrontations between a minority group and an inequitable marketplace” (Friedman, 1999:91).

The bus boycotts in the South during the movement exemplified activists’ efforts to bring about political change through the marketplace. Morris (1984) writes that “Buses became the first target of the movement because members of the black community had begun to see bus discrimination not as a private misery but as a public issue and a common enemy. It became a widespread social grievance shared throughout the community”(48-49). The Montgomery Bus Boycott, perhaps the most known boycott of this period, eventually led to a 1956 federal court ruling that bus segregation was illegal.

The Montgomery bus boycott started when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to an Anglo-white man. Contrary to folklore about Parks being a passive private citizen, she was a NAACP activist who had refused to give up her seat several times prior to the “incident” on December 1, 1955. This was the first time Parks had been arrested for her actions. Two local civil rights leaders started boycott efforts when the arrest was made known. E.D. Nixon, a Montgomery local who had been involved in union matters previously, and Jo Ann Robinson, an English professor who headed the Women’s Political Council, decided that a boycott was the option of choice since the local government was not responsive. The Women’s Political Council, a group of middle-class

Black women, had previously tried to bring about changes in the delivery of bus services that discriminated against African-Americans through the City Commission. The Commission granted one of many requests -- more bus stops on routes in Black neighborhoods -- but they refused to act on requests for desegregation in seating.

Friedman (1999), citing Garrow (1987), notes that Robinson saw the consumer boycott as the only alternative given the political situation. In an interview, Robinson recounts this decision: "What must we do? What can we do? I asked, half aloud, half to myself. And the answer seemed to come from everywhere at once: 'Boycott! Boycott! Boycott! BOYCOTT!'" (98).

After one successful day of boycotting in which only 10% of African-Americans in Montgomery rode the bus, organizers recognized that this effort could be a landmark effort for civil rights advancement. Martin Luther King, Jr. was brought in to organize the boycott as Robinson and Nixon were unprepared to lead such an effort. In addition to the bus boycott, King organized consumer pressure against downtown stores in Montgomery (Ownby, 1999: 152). Pressure was put on both the bus company and local businesses to end segregated riding rules.

The Montgomery Improvement Association, the organization that headed the boycott, developed alternative modes of transportation for Black commuters that were "independent of the white power structure" (Friedman, 1999:102). This allowed the boycott to extend for over a year. The government attempted to stifle the boycott with police harassment and brutality, and grand jury charges of conspiring to carry out an illegal boycott. When NAACP attorneys took several harassment cases and the grand jury ruling to federal court, it became clear that the higher courts planned to rule against

segregated busing. In light of this, the bus company attempted to desegregate on their own, only to be threatened with driver arrests by the City of Montgomery. This example clearly demonstrates the limited options available to civil rights protesters in terms of formal political tactics. Not only was the local government not accessible, it was actively working against the protesters and their cause. Activists had little recourse except political consumerism in the form of a boycott that was quite successful in bringing about instrumental, and ultimately expressive, results.

Ownby (1999) also writes about boycotts involving discrimination during the Civil Rights era. For protesters, “The most forceful statements they made about their place in consumer culture came when they boycotted stores owned by Whites” (152). Ownby discusses how, beginning the 1960s, Civil Rights activists were involved in countless numbers of boycotts and protests in towns and cities in Mississippi. These actions were an attractive alternative to marches and formal political participation because they could involve large numbers of people in the community and they did not “depend on powerful leaders, outside protesters, student foot-soldiers, or people ready to go to prison. Almost anyone could participate in a boycott” (151). According to Ownby, these protests were used to pressure local governments to negotiate over issues they refused to discuss, including white violence against blacks, discriminatory hiring, and segregation issues. “Among other things, the boycotts showed that African Americans were spending enough money to use their purchasing as a weapon” (152). In Ownby’s account, political consumerism was used to open up more formal political channels, such as negotiations with public officials, that were otherwise not accessible. Activists put pressure on businesses who in turn put pressure on government officials to

negotiate with activists. One notable example of this was the 1965 effort in Natchez, Mississippi, initiated by the NAACP. Organizers first appealed to the local Natchez government to bring an end to rampant racial discrimination and segregation in the city, but to no avail. Protesters then made a list of the grievances the organization wanted to address through boycott efforts:

Members demanded that the city's Board of Alderman denounce the Klan and Citizen's Council and end police brutality, and they called for the hiring of blacks by the police force, immediate desegregation of schools, parks, and swimming pools, the appointment of blacks to the school board, equal police protection for African American funerals, equal city services like street cleaning and sewage, and some action toward equalizing job opportunities, housing standards, and a new code to govern relations between tenants and landlords." (Ownby:152)

The NAACP called for African-Americans to avoid all white-owned stores in the area until concessions were gained from the local government. Various picket signs in the South read "Don't Buy Segregation and "Keep Your Money in Your Pocket" (153). Black boycotts of white-owned businesses in Natchez were so successful that whites organized buy-ins to counteract the effects with a buycott. Anglo-White shoppers came from all over the state to shop all day in the city. Ownby describes the atmosphere of the buycott as a "big party" for White people. Organized buy-ins were also held in Fayette, a neighboring Mississippi town whose merchants were being negatively effected by the Natchez boycott (156-157). But buy-in efforts by Anglo-Whites were not enough to counter the Natchez civil rights efforts. Local officials eventually met many demands of the protesters. Concessions were only possible after protesters used political consumerism to force the local government to address their concerns.

In addition to challenging segregation and discrimination, Civil Rights protesters also targeted societal myths with boycotts and other acts of political consumerism when

formal governmental channels were not an option. Ashby (1973) details efforts by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to get advertisers to present more racially representative advertising in the 1960s (155). CORE organizers went after advertising because it reflected societal norms that activists found to be unfair and unrepresentative of African-Americans (172). CORE targeted major, national advertisers and “was quite successful in bringing about integrated advertising. A few of the old stereotypes remained, such as Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Cream of Wheat’s black chef. But even these have been restricted to pictures on the product packages and were no longer featured in advertisements” (171). Civil rights activists were able to regulate the advertising industry through political consumerism in ways the government could not. The government is limited in its regulation of advertising content, and a ban on racial stereotypes in ads would likely not pass constitutional muster. But when consumers use their power in the marketplace to compel changes in advertising content, businesses have no choice but to respect the sovereignty of the consumer and respond in some fashion. Civil rights activists used boycotts to regulate the portrayal of African-Americans in advertising when no redress was available from public officials.

African-Americans continue to use economic boycotts to forward civil rights today. The NAACP, Operation PUSH, and the Rainbow Coalition have orchestrated many highly publicized boycotts in recent years with moderate success. African-American buying power is currently growing at a faster rate than the national average, so political consumerism is likely to remain an important political tool for this group (*Daily News*, 1998). Jesse Jackson notes the effectiveness of these tactics as an alternative to more formal political participation:

We have the power, nonviolently, just by controlling our appetites, to determine the direction of the American economy. If black people in thirty cities said simultaneously 'General motors, you will not sell cars in the black community unless you guarantee us a franchise here next year and help us finance it,' GM would have no choice but to comply. (Smith, 1990: 199)

More recently, Kweisi Mfume, former congressman and current the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, referring to racial discrimination and stereotyping among television networks, stated that “sometimes at the end of the way, economic action becomes the only action with teeth” (*CBS News broadcast*, March 24, 2002). Political consumerism appears to be considered an effective political tool among modern civil rights leaders.

The question to be answered with empirical data in this dissertation is whether Black Americans engage in political consumerism at a disproportionate rate, assuming that they have a similar number of political claims as Anglo-Whites and others, but choose to pursue them through market rather than formal political channels. It would also be instructive to know under what circumstances African-Americans choose political consumerism over conventional political participation to see whether it truly is being utilized as a “weapon of the weak.” Unfortunately, survey data is not readily available that looks at political consumerism by race. I can only guess that I will find that African-Americans engage in political participation at lower rates than Anglo-Whites in the survey based upon existing data to this effect (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1997:232); African-Americans engage in political consumerism at a lesser overall rate than Anglo-Whites for the same reasons they tend to engage in conventional participation at lower rates (mainly education and income); but that among Blacks who do engage in political participation (including political consumerism), a greater percentage choose political

consumerism over more conventional participatory tools than Anglo-Whites. These expectations control for lower rates of political participation among African-Americans that would otherwise muddy measuring their disproportionate preference for political consumerism.

### Age, Education, and Income

Empirical evidence is found that younger people, educated people, and respondents with higher incomes are more likely than others to engage in political consumerism. Jenkins (1983) writes that the consumer movement fits the resource-mobilization model quite well. It follows that the participation of citizens who have a wide range of experience in dealing with community issues and problems, and better-than average educational and income levels, would certainly enhance the viability of a local consumer movement” (87).

Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) find that engagement in political consumerism declines as age increases. About 55% of respondents ages 18 - 49 initiated a boycott or buycott in the previous year compared to 46% of respondents in their 50s, 42% of respondents in their 60s, and only 25% of respondents age 70 and older. Micheletti (2001) reports the same finding pertaining to respondent age and political consumerism. What makes this finding so compelling is that young people are less interested and involved in politics than others (Putnam, 1995a), yet they are more participatory when political consumerism is the measure. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) do not explicate why age influences political consumerism, but Heldman (2000), Bennett (2001), and Micheletti (2000) present a possible explanation in their descriptions

of the rise of the citizen-consumer which would entail generational differences in use of the marketplace as a political forum. The rise of consumer society and the citizen-consumer are discussed in the last chapter of this dissertation. Reconceptions of what is “political” seem especially important in light of this finding that younger generations are more likely to engage in this behavior than older generations.

Education is also a determinant of political consumerism. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen’s (2001) study of Denmark shows that respondents with higher levels of education are more likely than others to engage in political consumerism. About two-thirds of respondents with a university degree boycotted or buycotted in the past year compared to about 55% of respondents with some college and only one-third with less than a high school education (34). It would appear that education, the most potent predictor of more conventional forms of political participation, is also an influential predictor of political consumerism. I expect to find educational differences in the data analyzed in this dissertation.

Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) also find income differences in political consumerism, although not as dramatic as educational differences. According to their analysis, only one-third of respondents in the lowest income category engaged in a boycott or buycott in the previous year, compared to 44% - 63% of respondents in higher income categories reporting the same. Warland, Herrmann, and Moore (1986) find that respondents who engage in consumer redress actions, some of which are political and some of which are not, are more likely than other to have greater income (93).

One explanation for the relationship between income and political consumerism could be that respondents with little money are simply not making as many purchases as

other consumers, so their contact with the market is limited. Another explanation may be that they are so focused on daily subsistence that the distant world of politics hold little importance. I anticipate a similar finding that respondents in the lowest income category (\$25,000 or less annually) engage in political consumerism at much lower rates than respondents with greater household income.<sup>8</sup>

Existing studies report that politically disadvantaged groups, including women and Black Americans, are inclined to engage in political consumerism when formal political channels are not accommodating. This translates into disproportionate use of political consumerism by Black Americans when racial differences in overall rates of participation are taken into account. Women's unique relationship to the marketplace, in combination with their use of political consumerism as an alternative political channel, translates into disproportionate use of political consumerism by this group. Previous research also finds that younger respondents, those with higher levels of education, and respondents above the lowest income levels are more likely than others to engage in political consumerism. I anticipate similar findings in this research.

#### *"Why" Do Citizens Engage in Political Consumerism?*

Two measures of why citizens engage in political consumerism are explored in this dissertation. First, the content of consumer claims is examined. What issues do respondents choose to address with political consumerism? Secondly, what interests motivate respondents to engage in political consumerism? Do citizens initiate this behavior primarily for self-interest or family-interest, or to bring about a change in society or the government? Existing studies and ideas are reported here.

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<sup>8</sup> \$25,000 was the lowest income category in the dataset gathered for this dissertation.

Empirical research on the issue content of political consumerism is not available, but one issue area seems to stand out as a recurring theme in case study work on the subject: the environment. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) note that the term “green consumerism” emerged in the 1980s and describe a popular object of boycotts and buycotts. Eco-labeling and corporations with an image based on ecologically sensitive products (e.g., *The Body Shop* and *Ben and Jerry’s Ice-Cream*) speak to the influence of environmental concerns in the marketplace. I expect to find that environmental concerns comprise a sizable number of political consumerism claims.

Jonathan Baron, a psychologist from the University of Pennsylvania, has examined self-interest as a motive for political consumerism using experiments (2001). He finds that “people are willing to sacrifice their narrow self-interest for the sake of their moral beliefs” (14), replicating prior results (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler, 1986; Thaler, 1988). His experiment used socially conscious investing as the form of political consumerism, and he found that respondents are “unwilling to buy stock in a company that does something immoral, even if their refusal has no effect except (presumably) to hurt themselves” (14). A quick look at different types of political consumerism shows that these actions often run against objective self-interest in that products will cost more if they follow the requirements of consumer protesters (e.g., no sweatshop production, no animal testing, pollution-free production processes, use of recycled materials). And like voting, the individual act runs counter to rational self-interest as one action will not make a difference. I expect to find that motivations other than self-interest are a play among respondents in this dissertation research. More specifically, I anticipate finding that more

respondents engage in political consumerism to bring about societal or governmental change than for self-interest.

*“How” Does Political Consumerism Compare to Conventional Participation?*

The “how” of political consumerism involves questions of relative rates of conventional participation and political consumerism, the predictors of these activities, and the influence of consumer empowerment on both activities. I was unable to locate empirical studies that compare political consumerism to conventional participation, but several authors claim that the two are related. “The socially conscious consumer is usually an activist on many fronts, such as women’s rights and politics” (Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard, 1990:760). Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) compare different societal beliefs, like trust in various institutions, among respondents who engage in conventional participation and political consumerism, and Micheletti (2001) theoretically draws links between these two activities. In this section I discuss literature relating to comparisons between conventional participation and political consumerism.

The first “how” hypothesis -- that a greater percentage of respondents engaged in conventional political participation than political consumerism in the past -- is based on existing research that about 50% of Americans engage in the most common acts (voting and making a political contribution) of political participation annually (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1997:50). This figure, compared with the estimated 30% of the population who engage in political consumerism, indicates greater use of conventional political tools. I expect to find a significant difference in the number of respondents who

say they have initiated at least one conventional act of participation, and those who initiated at least one act of political consumerism.

The second “how” hypothesis presented in Chapter 1 is that respondents who engaged in conventional participation in the past year were more likely than others to also have engaged in political consumerism. This hypothesis is based on existing research that people who participate in one political behavior are likely to engage in others (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1997:54). Notwithstanding arguments presented above that political consumerism is used in lieu of more conventional forms of participation by certain groups, which would suggest that these two behaviors are negatively related for certain societal sub-groups, I suspect that overall, these political activities are positively correlated. Individuals who use political consumerism as an alternative tool must be participatory in some sense in the first place to know that formal political channels are not viable. It is logical, then, to assume that even politically disadvantaged citizens who use political consumerism are engaged in the formal political process to begin with, not a cross-section of all politically disadvantaged people. Given the proclivity for people who engage in one conventional act of participation to engage in others, and the likely participatory bias among politically disempowered people who use political consumerism, I expect to find that conventional participation and political consumerism are positively correlated. Respondents who are participatory in governmental channels are more likely than others to be participatory in market channels.

The third “how” hypothesis, that conventional participation and political consumerism have many predictors in common, is based on the idea that political consumerism constitutes political participation. Political consumerism is unconventional

participation because it targets market instead of governmental channels, but previous studies indicate that it is influenced by education and income in the same way as conventional participation. I expect to find that while these two activities have many common predictors, they also have divergent predictors that highlight the unique aspects of political consumerism in the policy arena. Differences in predictors are expected: women are more likely to engage in political consumerism but less likely to engage in conventional participation, and age seems to be negatively correlated with political consumerism and positively correlated with conventional participation. For example, young people engaging in political consumerism flies in the face of their otherwise disproportionate apathy toward politics. Political consumerism may be unique in that it is an avenue of participation for this group that has otherwise checked out of politics.

The fourth “how” hypothesis, that self-interest is not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism or conventional participation in the past year, follows from previous discussion above. Anthony Down’s (1956) classic work describes how participation runs counter to self-interest, and this has been verified several times since. If political consumerism and conventional participation are indeed both forms of political participation, it makes sense that neither would be motivated by self-interest.

The last two “how” hypotheses, that empowered consumers are more likely than others to engage in political consumerism, and that empowered consumers are more likely than others to engage in conventional participation, draw upon existing studies of consumer consciousness. One of the main elements of the consumer movement of the 1970s was the fostering of “consumer consciousness,” an awareness that buyers have interests distinct from sellers, and that consumers have enforceable rights in transactions

with vendors (Brobeck, Mayer, and Herrmann, 1997). Consumer consciousness on a national scale has resulted in altering the fabric of American culture as people are now more aware of and willing to assert their power as consumers. Mayer (1989) also notes the mass internalization of consumer consciousness as a result of the most recent consumer movement. Conscious or empowered consumers are more likely to assert their power in the marketplace, which suggests that they are more inclined to engage in political consumerism. Citizens who feel empowered in the consumer-producer relationship will logically feel more comfortable pressing political claims in this relationship than others, stepping outside of the traditional confines of this relationship as purely economic.

Two somewhat conflicting theses have been presented on the relationship between political consumerism and citizen empowerment. First, the idea was presented by Brobeck et. al. (1997) that consumer empowerment leads to political consumerism. The more empowered citizens are in the consumer-producer relationship, the more likely they will be to press their demands in the marketplace. In this assessment, the causal arrow runs from consumer empowerment to political consumerism. de Grazia (1996) presents another idea that consumers become empowered through their engagement in the marketplace. Here, the causal arrow runs from political consumerism to consumer empowerment. In my assessment, the Brobeck et. al. model is more accurate because it accounts for the recent increase in political consumerism, and it seems logical that citizens would have to view themselves as having power in the producer-consumer relationship prior to approaching the marketplace with political concerns. This does not

discount the potential politicizing effects of engaging in political consumerism, identified by de Grazia, but places the larger causal arrow from perceptions to behavior.

When it comes to more conventional political activity, it appears that empowered consumers are more likely than others to engage in this behavior. Business scholars Warland, Herrmann, and Moore (1986) find a connection between consumer empowerment, measured by the likelihood of respondents' seeking redress for consumer grievances, and conventional political participation. Using Verba and Nie's (1972) typology of activism, they find that consumer-redress actions are positively related to involvement in local community and political activities. The authors conducted a cluster analysis and found that 17% of the sample are Complete Activists, 22% are Mainstream Activists, 26% are Community Specialists, and 36% are Inactives. Complete Activists report participation in both community and consumer activities. "The breath of their experience in consumer and consumer-redress actions is most impressive" (89). Mainstream Activists are engaged in consumer-redress actions, the "most popular and conventional" forms of community activity (voting, political discussion), and activities requiring less involvement (signing a petition). Community Specialists participate somewhat in political and community activities, but do not participate in consumer activities. Lastly, Inactives are not active in either community or consumer activities. The Complete Activist and Mainstream Activist categories combined total almost 40% of the population and suggest that empowered consumers are highly likely to be involved in community affairs.

The mechanism behind empowered consumers being more likely than others to engage in conventional participation is not explored in existing research. I surmise that

citizens who feel empowered in the consumer-producer relationship are inclined to feel this way about the citizen-government relationship as well because many citizens now view the government through a client lens (Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill, 2000). The connection between consumer empowerment and conventional participation, and consumer empowerment and political consumerism, is examined in detail in Chapter 4.

### Conclusion

This chapter began with several examples of political consumerism to familiarize the reader with the nuances of this political behavior. This topic was also included to demonstrate the links between political consumerism and politics in the United States. The topic of why political consumerism has been overlooked in political science literature for the most part was discussed next as a precursor to the literature review. Reasons for this oversight include a narrow focus on electoral activities, a private/public distinction in the literature, and an economic/political distinction that tend to shadow the very political character of some private, economic activities.

Existing literature on the four primary questions of this dissertation was also presented in this chapter. Studies of engagement in political consumerism in the United States and other countries form the basis of the hypotheses discussed at length in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Hypotheses**

#### **Introduction**

Research on political consumerism as a political tool is at its dawn, an exciting time to be involved with a research topic. Work on this dissertation began in the mid 1990s, a few years before conference papers on this topic started to trickle into the academic arena. My initial literature review, conducted in 1997, was sparse as little quantitative data was available to build upon. During the process of writing this dissertation, the results of several quantitative studies have been presented at conferences, and a dialogue has begun. I revised the format of the dissertation to incorporate findings from these new studies instead of continuing on with the original dissertation plan. The data presented here substantiates existing knowledge on political consumerism, and extends the dialogue into new directions. Fortunately, the data gathered for this dissertation was rich enough to delve into previously unexplored questions of political consumerism. This research is also unique in that it provides a quantitative look at political consumerism among residents in a region of the United States.

This chapter is the first of two empirical chapters in the dissertation. It describes the survey methodology and other details of the project. This chapter also formally presents the eighteen hypotheses that are the focal point of this dissertation, and describes the variables used in the analysis. The next chapter furnishes the data analysis and findings for each hypothesis. This original data presented here answer many new or under-explored questions about political consumerism, and take us one step further in understanding this increasingly important political behavior.

## Survey Methodology

This section details the survey methodology used in this research. Many elements of the research process are addressed here, including sample selection, sample representativeness, questionnaire development, fielding procedures, response rates, and non-response bias. Internal and external validity of the data is examined in this section as well. A copy of the final questionnaire is included in Appendix A of this dissertation. Interviewer training materials can be found in Appendix B.

### **Sample Selection**

A random sample of people from a regional sample (central New Jersey) were polled for this research. The sample area included all of Middlesex county and most of Ocean and Monmouth counties in New Jersey. The location of the sample was selected for convenience of location and cost.<sup>9</sup> New Jersey is a demographically diverse state which makes it ideal for survey research. Salmore and Salmore (1993) write that New Jersey is “the heart of the American ‘Main Street’” (xxii) in that it is socioeconomically and racially diverse and represents many of the demographic trends of the nation as a whole. Although this region enjoys great diversity along many variables of interest to researchers, logically, a sample from a small corner of the United States cannot represent the attitudes or behaviors of the nation. With that said, there is no reason to believe that respondents in central New Jersey differ from other parts of the nation when it comes to their attitudes and behaviors pertaining to political consumerism, and respondents in this

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<sup>9</sup> While a national sample was preferred, monetary constraints limited the scope of the research. One important area for future research on this topic is gathering information from the entire nation.

region mostly mirror the nation in terms of demographic characteristics.<sup>10</sup> The sample location selected for this research is about as good as it can be for gathering quality information about political consumerism given the constraints of the research.<sup>11</sup>

The telephone numbers used to contact respondents were generated from a Random Digit-Dial sample of 2,500 telephone numbers in the 732 area code which covers central New Jersey. A list of randomly selected numbers in this area code was purchased from Survey Sample, Inc., a reputable polling firm based in Connecticut. Verifiable business numbers were screened out of the list, however, a sizable number of business listings were still included in the final list. Disconnected numbers and replicates were also screened out of the list prior to delivery, but some non-working numbers made their way to the final list. The inclusion of business and non-working numbers is material in calculating the true response rate, and is discussed further in the section on that topic. Only respondents from residential numbers were asked to complete an interview. The first 1,311 numbers from the list of 2,500 were used during the three-week fielding period, making the denominator for response rate calculation 1,311. Three-hundred and twenty-five interviews were completed for analysis.

### **Sample Diversity**

In order to demonstrate the great diversity of potential respondents in central New Jersey, this section compares demographic characteristics from the sample population to that of the nation. This sample cannot be representative of the entire nation as it

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<sup>10</sup>It should be noted that this topic is too new to know whether regional differences in attitudes or behaviors about political consumerism exist. Quantitative data is not available to assess such differences.

<sup>11</sup> Data gathered from respondents in central New Jersey will produce greater demographic variance than many other locations of similar size in the United States.

represents only a small sub-section of the population. **Table 3.1** compares the demographic composition of the United States to that of the three counties from which the sample was primarily drawn. Thirty-two percent of the sample included residents of Middlesex County, 33.7% were from Monmouth County, and 28.4% were from Ocean County.<sup>12</sup> The national and county-level data reported here is drawn from the 1990 census.

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<sup>12</sup> Less than 3% of the sample was drawn from Somerset and Union counties, respectively.

**Table 3.1**  
**Comparison of the Demographic Characteristics in the United States and the**  
**Sample Population**

<i>Demographic Variables</i>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Middlesex/Ocean/ Monmouth Counties</b>
	(N = 248,709,873)	(N = 1,658,107)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	48.7%	48.4%
Female	51.2%	51.6%
<b>Age</b>		
Median	32.9	35.6 (average median of the 3 counties)
Percent under 18	25.6%	22.7%
Percent over 65	12.6%	15.1%
<b>Race</b>		
Asian	2.7%	5.5%
Black	11.1%	10.2%
Hispanic	8.2%	9.4%
White	73.6%	74.7%
Other	4.3%	.20%
<b>Location</b>		
Urban	75.0%	89.8%
Rural	24.8%	10.2%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	24.8%	20.7%
High school graduate	30.0%	32.8%
Some college	24.9%	22.3%
Bachelor's degree	13.1%	15.5%
Graduate/Prof degree	7.2%	8.6%

As **Table 3.1** indicates, the gender, age, race, and educational background of the three counties surveyed is about as diverse as the nation. The gender composition in the counties is the same as the gender breakdown of the nation -- about 52% female and 48% male. The median age is also similar: 33 years old in the nation compared to 36 years old

in central New Jersey. Likewise, the racial composition of the area surveyed almost mirrors that of the United States. A greater percentage of county residents are Asian (5.5%) than in the United States (2.7%), and fewer county residents are classified into an “other” non-white racial group (.20% compared to 4.3% in the nation). Otherwise, the percentage of African Americans, Anglo-Whites, and Hispanics in the three counties matches that of the nation. In terms of education, about 30% of residents in both locations are high school graduates; 13% of the national and 15% of the sample population hold a bachelor’s degree.

Residency is the only major difference found between the counties and the nation as a whole. Almost all of the residents in the three counties reside in an urban area (89.8%) compared to three-quarters of residents in the United States as a whole (75.0%). This difference is not expected to affect the research results as there is no reason to believe that a respondent living in an urban area is any more or less likely to engage in political consumerism than someone living in a rural area. The demographic composition of the sample population is similar to the demographic profile of the nation, which means that group differences can be tested in this analysis if the final sample is close enough to the distribution of the region. The composition of the final sample, presented below, is a better indicator of how far the results of this data can be interpreted.

### **Response Rate**

Three hundred and twenty-five interviews were completed from an RDD sample of 1,311. **Table 3.2** provides a breakdown of the sample response rates per standards

presented by the American Association of Public Opinion Researchers, the governing professional organization for public opinion research in the United States.

**Table 3.2**  
**Detailed Survey Response Rate**

1.0 Interviews [325]
1.1 Complete [325]
1.2 Partial [0]
2.0 Eligible, No Interview (Non-response) [550]
2.10 Refusals and break-offs [398]
2.20 Non-contacts
2.21 Target Respondent Never Available [51]
2.22 Answering Machine Confirms Residential Status [64]
2.30 Other [37]
2.32 Target Respondent Physically/Mentally Unable to do Interview [11]
2.33 Language Problems [26]
3.0 Unknown Eligibility, No-Interview [187]
3.10 Not Known if Eligible Housing Unit Exists [187]
3.12 Always Busy [5]
3.13 No Answer [182]
4.0 Not Eligible [325]
4.20 Fax/Data Line [66]
4.30 Non-working/ Disconnected Number [89]
4.40 Special Technological Circumstances [10]
4.41 Changed Numbers [9]
4.42 Cell Phone Numbers [1]
4.50 Not a Housing Unit [147]
4.51 Business, Government, Other Organizations [147]
4.70 Housing Unit with no Eligible Respondents [13]
4.7X <sup>13</sup> Teen line [13]

A small number of potential respondents were unable to complete an interview because they did not speak English (26). Eleven potential respondents did not complete an interview because they were physically or mentally unable to do so, or had passed away.

<sup>13</sup> AAPOR does not present a category for teen lines in their standards for response rate reporting. Respondents who answered these lines were not included in the study unless the teen who answered the interview call was 18 years of age or older.

Fifty-one potential respondents could not be reached to complete an interview, despite their household being contacted on at least seven occasions. This number likely reflects some dishonesty on the part of certain potential respondents and/or their family members to avoid participation in the project (e.g., falsely reporting that the target respondent was not home on all seven occasions).

The true response rate for any project is difficult to pinpoint since the eligibility of many households cannot be determined. With this project, the eligibility of 14% of numbers in the sample list could not be determined. A more accurate response rate for this project can be estimated by making certain assumptions about telephone numbers with unknown eligibility. Since all of the telephone numbers in this category were contacted at least 7 times at different hours during the week and on weekends, it is safe to say that a sizable portion are non-working numbers. They could be numbers yet to be assigned by the local telephone company, or existing business or home lines that are not used. If the assumption is made that *half* of the telephone numbers with unknown eligibility are considered ineligible, the response rate increases to 34%. If *all* telephone numbers in the sample of unknown eligibility are considered ineligible for the study, the response rate is 37%. The actual response rate probably lies somewhere between 34% and 37%.

### **Non-response Bias**

An issue of concern when fielding a survey is whether the demographic composition of the final sample mirrors the demographic composition of the region from which the sample was drawn. If significant differences are found, that is, if certain

people are more inclined to complete an interview than others, the representativeness of the sample is compromised, as well as the ability to make inferences with the data. **Table 3.3** shows a comparison of the demographic composition of the sample to that of the three counties from which the sample was drawn.

**Table 3.3**  
**Non-Response Bias in the Sample**

<i>Demographic Variables</i>	<b>Middlesex/Ocean/ Monmouth Counties</b>	<b>Sample</b>
	(n = 1,658,107)	(n = 325)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	48.4%	41.5%
Female	51.6%	58.5%
<b>Age</b>		
Median	35.6 (average median of the 3 counties)	45.9 (mean of the sample)
Percent over 65	15.1%	16.5%
<b>Race</b>		
Asian	5.5%	4.5%
Black	10.2%	4.5%
Hispanic	9.4%	5.1%
White	74.7%	80.4%
Other	.20%	5.4%
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	20.7%	3.2%
High school graduate	32.8%	25.8%
Some college	22.3%	23.9%
Bachelor's degree	15.5%	30.0%
Graduate/Pro degree	8.6%	17.1%

Survey respondents do differ from the sample population in terms of gender, age, education, and race. Those who completed the survey are more likely to be female, older, better educated, and Anglo-white when compared to residents in the sample population. The percentage of respondents over 65 is approximately equal to the percentage of such

respondents in the sample population, however, average respondent age (46) is older than the average age of residents in the three counties (36). When it comes to education, twice as many respondents hold a bachelor's degree (30%) than do residents from the sample population (16%). Respondents are also more likely to report holding a graduate or professional degree than non-respondents (17% compared to 9%).

Racial differences are also found among respondents and the sample population. A representative number of Asian residents completed a questionnaire, however, fewer Black and Hispanic residents did the same. As to be expected given the lower rates of questionnaire completion among Black and Hispanic residents, the final sample is disproportionately Anglo-white (80.4% compared to 74.7% in the sample population). The small number of African-American and Hispanic respondents allows for only intra-racial analysis.

Since the sample for this research project was randomly selected, the differences displayed in **Table 3.3** indicate that certain people were more likely to complete an interview for this project than others. Not surprisingly, women were more likely to agree to an interview than men.<sup>14</sup> Older residents expressed greater willingness to complete an interview than younger target respondents, and better-educated individuals were more agreeable when it came to completing an interview than less educated residents in the sample population. Anglo-whites also completed interviews at a higher rate than Hispanic and African-American residents. These non-response biases are expected given prior research on survey sampling that find that gender, age, education, and race are all

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<sup>14</sup> Survey research houses have long been aware that women are more likely than men to be present in the household and willing to answer a survey. Many firms include a "male filter" to increase response rates among men (e.g., "Can I please speak to a male in the household who is over the age of 18?") The filter for this survey did not select for men. It asked for the person in the household with the next birthday.

positive predictors of questionnaire completion (Miller Rubenstein, 1995). The question is what these biases mean in terms of interpreting the data.

Non-response biases found in this data limit the internal and external validity of the data. When it comes to internal validity, non-response bias is found in four independent variables: gender, age, education, and race. I anticipate that these variables influence rates of political consumerism, similar to more conventional forms of participation. Regardless of the bias, enough variance within these variables exists to draw comparisons between sub-groups (e.g., rates of political consumerism among women and men). In terms of external validity, the non-response bias found here limits inference to sample respondents. While future research and national data may replicate many of the findings presented in this dissertation, for the time being, the figures here should be interpreted to represent only the respondents in the sample.

### **Questionnaire Development**

The survey instrument used in this project was developed from June of 1998 to August of 1999. It underwent two major waves of revision. The survey was initially pre-tested in Spring of 1998 with students attending an upper-level public law class at Rutgers University. Students were asked to complete the survey and then discuss it. The survey was pre-tested again by students in a public opinion class and research methods class in the Fall of 1999. This time, students contacted their friends and family to participate in an interview. The quality of the survey improved dramatically after both pre-tests. Confusing questions were eliminated or revised, and the format of the instrument was fined-tuned to maximize the response rate. The final product was a 9-

page questionnaire with 20 multi-part questions, well-suited for telephone interviewing.

A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

The final survey included sections on conventional political participation (voting, contacting a public official, contributing money to a campaign or party, and volunteering for a political campaign), political consumerism (boycotting, buycotting, contacting a corporation directly, and involvement in a consumer protest), and a series of demographic questions. Due to the unique nature of this research, only a handful of variables were borrowed from previous surveys. Variables that were created for this project were reviewed by several professional survey researchers and academic experts on the subject, and were included in several pre-tests to examine their validity. As with any original research, some questions of interest were left off the survey that, in hindsight, should have been included. Most notably, the inclusion of questions about political efficacy and political knowledge would have enriched the analysis presented here. Direct measures of several types of political consumerism were also inadvertently omitted, including socially conscious investing (a type of buycotting, an activity that *is* measured) and different shareholder actions (proposal of proxy statements, disruptive shareholder behavior). Despite these shortcomings, the survey instrument provides a multitude of detailed information about political consumerism.

One obstacle anticipated during questionnaire development was over-reporting due to social desirability. When asking about civic participation, whether it be voting or making a political statement with a product purchase, respondents are likely to over-report this behavior because it is laden with positive social values. The American public annually over-reports voting behavior on the American National Election Study (ANES)

because voting is widely considered a positive civic activity, one that enlightened or “good” citizens take part in (Burden, 2000). There is good reason to believe that many Americans may cast political consumerism in the same light. If previous speculation about the burgeoning “hipness” of political consumerism is accurate, people may over-report practicing this behavior. Several precautions were taken to reduce or eliminate socially desirable responses during survey development.

Three questions about political consumerism were deemed especially susceptible to social desirability, two on boycotting and one measuring buycotting:

Some people choose not to buy certain products because the products, even when properly used, can cause harm to people or to the environment. Have you ever done this? If yes, was this in the past year?

Some people choose to avoid certain products or services, not because of the product itself, but because they dislike the conduct of the company that produces it. Have you ever done this? If yes, was this in the past year?

Now shifting gears slightly, some people try to buy certain products or services because they like the social or political values of a company, quite apart from the products or services that company provides. Have you ever done this? If yes, was this in the past year?

Several steps were taken to minimize over-reporting. First, each of these series of questions began with a question about the *lifetime* practice of each consumer activity.

Previous research indicates that over-reporting due to social desirability can be reduced by manipulating the time-frames used (*PEW Research Center, 1993*). When respondents are asked whether they have engaged in a socially desirable activity within a recent period of time (e.g., the past year), they are likely to over-report their behavior. However, over-reporting is reduced or eliminated when this question is preceded by one asking whether the respondent has *ever* practiced this behavior. The logic is that if people are

able to first report having done the socially desirable activity at some point in their life, they have fulfilled their social obligation, and their compulsion to over-report their behavior in subsequent questions will be dampened.

A second measure take to prevent over-reporting due to social desirability involved the ordering of questions in the survey. Using logic similar to the time-frame manipulation, it was assumed that if participants were able to report practicing another socially desirable behavior prior to being asked questions about political consumerism, they would be less likely to feel the need to over-report on this series of questions. The series of questions about political consumerism were preceded by four multi-part questions asking about more conventional (electoral) forms of political participation. One question on voting in particular, borrowed from the ANES, was thought to elicit an unusually high positive response:

People are sometimes unable to vote because they're not registered, they don't have the time, or they have difficulty getting to the polls. Think about the presidential elections since you were old enough to vote. Have you voted in all of them, in most of them, in some of them, rarely voted in them, or have you never voted in a presidential election?

Many variations of voting questions are available in existing surveys, but this particular question was selected because it was thought to elicit a high number of positive responses for two reasons. First, presidential elections have much higher average turnout than off-election years, so respondents are more likely to have voted in this type of election than elections in general. Secondly, respondents were asked their *general frequency* of voting rather than the *actual number* of elections they had voted in, so over-reporting on this question would not feel like outright balderdash. I anticipate that this question will “soak up” a lot of over-reporting based on social desirability considering its placement and wording.

A third measure taken to prevent over-reporting due to social desirability was to ask respondents to provide specific details about their political consumerism in open-ended questions. The three measures of this behavior, listed above, were followed by several questions about the name of the company or product purchased or avoided, and the reasons for doing so. If respondents could not recall the specifics of their act of political consumerism, their participation could be reclassified. These sub-questions are helpful in weeding out possible over-reporting, however, failure to recall the specifics of a behavior does not necessarily mean that the respondent has not practiced political consumerism. A rule was established prior to fielding that if a sufficiently large majority of respondents can provide detail about their political consumerism – at least 80% – then all responses to the question would be used. On the other hand, if fewer respondents can recall the details of their political consumerism, only those who can furnish details would be included in the analysis.

### **Fielding Procedures**

Survey data was gathered from telephone interviews conducted from October 13, 1999, to November 10, 1999. The average interview length was 7.83 minutes, with a range from 3 minutes to 26 minutes. Interviewing primarily took place from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. during weekdays, and from noon to 5 p.m. on weekends. Households in which the target respondent ultimately could not be reached were contacted at least seven times on different days and during different hours in an attempt to maximize the response rate. During the last two weeks of interviewing, all numbers remaining on the list that had been contacted previously were called at least once during business hours to confirm that

the number was not a business listing. When a target respondent could not be reached repeatedly, their number was called at least once during the day on a week day, at least once in the evening during the week, and at least once on the weekend until an interview was completed or refused, or the respondent was deemed ineligible for the project. Respondents who completed an interview were called an average of 2.78 times, with a range from 1 to 10 calls.

The target respondent in each household was the adult with the next birthday coming up. Households where the adult with the next birthday was not available were recontacted until the target respondent could be reached. Interviews were not conducted if the listing was determined to be a business, or if the target respondent was not available, regardless of the willingness of the person who answered the phone to complete an interview. In some households, the target respondent was unable to complete an interview because of illness, death, or language issues. In these situations, another adult in the household was not substituted as this would have interrupted the random selection of respondents.

Interview refusals were classified as either "hard" or "soft." If the target respondent asked to not be contacted again, requested that they be removed from the calling list, or were unusually rude (e.g., used obscenities), they were classified as a "hard" refusal and were not called again. Respondents who politely declined an interview, or who hung up the phone without saying anything, were recontacted by the project manager or another experienced interviewer. Recontacts of "soft" refusals netted a conversion rate of 10.9%.

Students from two upper-level undergraduate political science courses (Public Opinion and Research Methods) conducted interviews for this research project. These students underwent at least five hours of training and preparation, and their final grade was partially dependent upon the quality of their interviewing. Quality control was an initial concern with these interviewers since most had little or no prior experience, but these fears were allayed when the process was underway. Student interviewers were professional and creative. Many class hours were dedicated to properly preparing interviewers for this task, and strict on-site quality control was established to ensure that interviews were completed in a professional manner.

Interviewers were introduced to the project through a class lecture and question and answer session facilitated by the project manager. During a second class period, student interviewers reviewed the survey instrument in detail and practiced interviews with each other. They were also required to complete a take-home exercise that involved conducting two interviews over the telephone with friends and/or family members. One of their assignments was to report any obstacles, respondent questions, or other issues encountered during this exercise. Copies of interviewer training materials are included in Appendix B.

Interviewers arrived at the telephone bank fifteen minutes prior to the start of their shift for an on-site orientation. Telephones were located in adjoining offices, and up to four interviewers worked at any one time. The project manager monitored the interviews to ensure that they were conducted in a professional manner. Interviewers were instructed to be neutral in their question presentation and responses to respondent

comments. They were also instructed to use the exact wording of the questionnaire during their interviews. No major issues were encountered along either of these lines.

Some variability surfaced in terms of interviewer skills, but for the most part, students successfully completed at least one interview during their one and a half hour shift. The average number of interviews completed per interviewer was 2.6, with a range from 0 to 7. Students from the Public Opinion class came in for one interview session and were told that they were required to complete at least one interview. Students from the Research Methods course were required to attend 2 interviewing sessions and complete at least 2 interviews during this time period. Students' grades did not suffer if they exhibited good effort but were unable to complete their required number of interviews (although the interviewers were not aware that the requirement was flexible, and almost all put great effort into reaching their interview goal).

Students who were especially skilled at interviewing were asked to do additional shifts in lieu of completing other required assignments. Four students came in for additional interviewing shifts. Students who were unable to conduct interviews because of language issues provided on-site administrative support for the project during interviewing shifts. Two interviewers were deemed unable to adequately complete the assigned task by the project manager after on-site observation. These two student interviewers were given numbers that had been called at least five times and were suspected business listings to minimize their contact with actual respondents. Neither of these "unfit" interviewers completed an interview. Interviewer skill, measured by the number of interviews completed during each shift and a subjective evaluation of

interviewing style, did not systematically vary by interviewer course, race, gender, or English as a second language.

Student interviewers from both classes were required to write about their experience with the project, and students in the Research Methods course analyzed data from the research and wrote up the results as their final project. Students in both courses also participated in the data entry and cleaning phases of the research process. This research project was an integral part of the students' experience in each class, and this was reflected in many students' dedication to and interest in the project.

### Description of Hypotheses

The dataset generated for this dissertation addresses many questions of interest pertaining to political consumerism, including the percentage of respondents who engage in consumer action, whether certain forms of political consumerism are preferred over others, whether certain respondents are more likely to engage in this behavior than others, and how these activities stack up next to conventional political participation in terms of prevalence and other characteristics. The “what,” “who,” “why”, and “how” of political consumerism are explored with eighteen formal hypotheses. The foundation for each hypothesis was furnished in the literature review in Chapter 2. This section more formally presents each hypothesis as a testable statement, and specifies which statistical tools will be used in analyzing each hypothesis.

### **The “What” Hypotheses**

The concept of what people are doing when it comes to political consumerism is operationalized with three hypotheses measuring rates of this activity during the respondent’s lifetime and in the past year, and the use of boycotts versus buycotts. Survey data presented in the previous chapter suggest that about 30% of people engage in political consumerism annually, and about 50% of respondents say they would engage in this behavior if faced with the opportunity (Micheletti, 2001; Goul Andersen, 1999). Existing studies have a shortcoming in that they use boycott activities as a proxy for political consumerism, but this is an acceptable rough measure upon which to base hypotheses for this dissertation. The inclusion of multiple measures of political consumerism in this dissertation (boycotts, buycotts, participation in a consumer protest) provide a better overall picture of political consumerism than previous research.

A question on the survey about lifetime engagement in political consumerism goes beyond existing research on the topic. Existing data on lifetime engagement is not available, but we know that about 50% of respondents say they are inclined to initiate political consumerism when given the opportunity (Goul Andersen, 1999). Based upon about half the population reporting a willingness to engage in political consumerism, I expect to find that

*H<sub>1</sub> At least 50% of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life.*

The null hypothesis here is that fewer than 50% of respondents in the sample have engaged in political consumerism in their lifetime. This hypothesis is explored with an

analysis of self-reported initiation of at least one act of political consumerism (boycotting, buycotting, consumer protest) at some point.

The second hypotheses related to what people are doing when it comes to political consumerism focuses on activities in the past year. Based upon existing studies, I expect to find that

*H<sub>2</sub> At least 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism during the past year.*

The corresponding null hypothesis is fewer than 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism during the past year. This hypothesis will be examined using a frequency distribution of the number of respondents who reported engaging in any of the different acts of political consumerism measured. Respondents will be grouped into those who report one or more acts of political consumerism, and those who report no acts for purposes of analysis.

The third “what” hypothesis tested here is based on Friedman’s (1999) claim that citizens in America are more likely to punish (boycott) than reward (buycott) companies for their behavior, despite the growing popularity of the latter (Vogel, 2001) and a contrary finding in Denmark (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001). Friedman notes that the buycott is a relatively unused political tactic “given the protest character of many activity organizations” (212).<sup>15</sup> I anticipate finding that

*H<sub>3</sub> A greater percentage of respondents engaged in boycotting than buycotting during the past year.*

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<sup>15</sup> As an aside, Friedman emphasizes that buycotts may in fact be more effective than boycotts in certain situations, and “one might wish to consider special needs of consumer activist groups at the community and national levels that could be served by buycotts” (209). For example, individual consumers can come together to help not-for-profit companies survive, or to influence public policy regarding local businesses.

This comparison of boycotts and buycotts is complicated by the fact that two questions were asked about boycott activities, and only one question measured buycott activities. A frequency distribution of buycott activities will be compared to overall boycott engagement. The null hypothesis will be accepted if rates of buycotting are significantly higher than either type of boycott.

### **The “Who” Hypotheses**

Questions of who engages in political consumerism have been proposed more often than they have been answered with data. Researchers present many claims about political consumerism being a “weapon of the weak” for those who lack political power, especially for Black Americans and women, but quantitative evidence is not available to support a difference in activity or supposed motive (disenfranchisement from formal political channels). The data here enable assessment of relative levels of engagement in political consumerism among different groups. They also allow for intra-group comparisons of engagement in different types of activities, a rough measure of whether certain groups are using political consumerism as a “weapon of the weak.”

The first “who” hypothesis is based on the claim that women are more likely to be involved in political consumerism because of their unique situation as the primary consumers in the marketplace, and their disadvantage in the formal political arena. The two reasons given for women’s anticipated affinity for political consumerism warrant different analytic tests. The idea that women have greater access to political consumerism than men because of their situation as primarily household purchasers

requires a simple comparison of rates of political consumerism among women and men.

For hypothesis four, I expect to find that

*H<sub>4</sub> A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism than male respondents during the past year.*

The null hypothesis implied here is that men engaged in higher rates of political consumerism than women during the past year, or that there is no significant difference between these two groups. This hypothesis will be tested with a comparison of rates of political consumerism among women and men, and a comparison of the mean number of acts initiated by each group. Significant gender differences at the .05 level in the hypothesized direction will be grounds for rejection of the null hypothesis.

The second reason provided for women's greater use of political consumerism is their relative disadvantage in formal political channels (Friedman, 1995, Smith, 1990, Micheletti, 2001). The survey data available here do not allow me to fully explore this hypothesis, but a comparison of women's engagement in political consumerism and conventional participation can suggest the relative importance of each as a political tool for women. If women are inclined to use political consumerism as a "weapon of the weak" when they are disadvantaged in more formal political channels, this would be reflected in their preference for political consumerism over conventional participation.

For the fifth hypothesis, I anticipate finding that

*H<sub>5</sub> A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.*

This hypothesis will be tested with a comparison of the percentage of female respondents who report engaging in political consumerism and conventional participation in the past year, and an analysis of the mean number of each type of act initiated. This analysis is

fraught with complications. First, existing research suggests that political consumerism is used as a “weapon of the weak” in circumstances when groups are excluded or powerless in the formal political process. Exclusion from the formal political process is not a constant for women, and this survey data does not include a question about the number of times women felt they were excluded in the past year (i.e., the number of times they might have turned to political consumerism over governmental channels to voice their concerns). Future research will hopefully include such a measure so that the “weapons of the weak” hypothesis can be directly tested. The second complication of this hypothesis comes with attempting to compare acts of political consumerism to acts of conventional participation. The relative weight or importance of voting versus abstaining from purchasing a product is presently unclear. Does it make sense to say that one act of voting is comparable to engagement in one boycott? Furthermore, questions of political consumerism center around the number of products or companies involved in boycott/buycott activities, not the number of times a respondent chose not to purchase a product. The different means of measurement used for political consumerism and conventional participation should be kept in mind when considering the results of this analysis.

The third “who” hypothesis pertains to age. Based upon Goul Andersen and Tobiasen’s (2001) finding that respondents younger than 50 are significantly more likely than those 50 and older to engage in political consumerism, I expect to find the same pattern in my data. These authors do not explicate why this is the case, and I am unable to directly measure whether conceptions of citizenship account for these differences (as speculated in Chapter 2 and discussed in greater detail in the last chapter of this

dissertation) with the data available here. However, I can document whether age predicts political consumerism in this sample. The sixth hypothesis tests whether

*H<sub>6</sub> A greater percentage of respondents ages 18 - 49 engaged in political consumerism than respondents ages 50 and older during the past year.*

The null hypothesis here is that a greater percentage of respondents 50 and older initiated political consumerism than younger respondents during the past year, or that these two groups are not significantly different in their respective levels of engagement. This hypothesis will be tested with a comparison of overall rates of political consumerism, and a look at the mean number of acts initiated by these two groups. OLS regression analysis, conducted to test a number of hypotheses, will also tell us whether age is a significant predictor of engagement in political consumerism.

The fourth “who” hypothesis concerns the effect of income on political consumerism. As reported in the literature review, Goul Andersen and Tobiasen (2001) find that Danish respondents in the lowest income category boycott at significantly lower rates than other respondents. This dissertation analysis extends this finding to an American sample. This poverty effect may be accounted for by that political participation requires resources that poorer people simply do not have (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995). This argument can be applied to political consumerism as it is also a type of political participation. The seventh hypothesis is that

*H<sub>7</sub> Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were significantly less likely to have engaged in political consumerism than other respondents during this time.*

Some researchers make the argument that poor people turn to extra-governmental types of participation, such as political consumerism, as a “weapon of the weak.” Scott (1985), Friedman (1999), and others have suggested that poor people who have limited options in

the world of politics may turn to political consumerism as their tool of choice. Political consumerism is market-based which complicates expectations about the influence of income. On one hand, poor people generally have little political clout and may turn to extra-governmental avenues to pursue their claims. On the other hand, the most popular types of political consumerism involve purchasing based on aspects that have little to do with cost, an aspect of more importance to those with limited income. The logic and case study evidence of political consumerism as a “weapon of the weak” is least compelling in the case of income as compared to race and gender. I still expect to find that

*H<sub>3</sub> Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were less likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during this time.*

The null hypothesis here is that people making less than \$25,000 a year engaged in conventional participation at similar or higher rates than political consumerism. This hypothesis is tested with a simple comparison of rates of conventional participation and political consumerism, and a look at the mean number of each activity initiated in the past year.

The next “who” hypothesis pertaining to political consumerism is based on the idea that education influences this activity in the same way it influences conventional participation. Goul Andersen and Tobiasen’s (2001) Danish study verifies that this is the case, and the research here tests this finding with an American sample. Based upon the demonstrated potency of education as a predictor of political participation in general, and existing research showing that it works in a similar way with political consumerism, I expect to find that

*H<sub>9</sub> Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than respondents with lower levels of education during the past year.*

The null hypothesis here is that education is negatively correlated or not significantly correlated with political consumerism. This hypothesis is tested with correlation analysis.

The next “who” hypothesis is the last of the hypotheses concerning political consumerism as a “weapon of the weak.” Many scholars have documented the use of political consumerism by Black Americans throughout American history, although data on overall rates and conditions of its use is not available. Use of political consumerism by this group has been extensively documented, and I expect to find that Black Americans in the survey exhibit a preference for political consumerism over conventional participation. More specifically,

*H<sub>10</sub> African-American respondents were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.*

The null hypothesis here is that Black Americans engage in conventional participation at higher or similar rates as political consumerism. This hypothesis is tested with a comparison of rates of conventional participation and political consumerism among African-Americans in the sample. The mean number of each type of activity will also be tabulated and compared to see whether differences in frequency of political consumerism and conventional participation surface.

### **The “Why” Hypotheses**

The question of why people engage in political consumerism is operationalized with two hypotheses concerning the focus of these activities and the reported motives. The first “why” hypothesis pertains to the policy issue involved. Existing research is

replete with case studies of political consumerism from different policy areas, but aggregate data is not available on the overall distribution of policy topics addressed with this political tool. Environmental concerns are often the focus of case studies and boycott activities, and while this may be misleading since analysis of this topic has not been systematic, the “greening” of American society has been documented (Pierce, Lovrich, Tsurutani, and Abe, 1987). If citizens are more concerned about environmental issues than ever before, and political consumerism deals with corporations that have a direct link to environmental politics, it is reasonable to believe that the overabundance of case studies of environmental boycotts, buycotts, and socially conscious investing is somewhat representative of activists’ concerns. The eleventh hypothesis is thus that

*H<sub>11</sub> Environmental concerns were the primary policy focus of political consumerism during the past year.*

The corresponding null hypothesis is that another policy topic tops the list of policies addressed with political consumerism. This hypothesis is tested with a look at the companies and products targeted with political consumerism. The content of both boycott and buycott claims will be analyzed. Aside from ascertaining the popularity of environmental concerns, this analysis will offer a sketch of policy topics addressed with political consumerism.

The second “why” of political consumerism concerns the stated motive for engaging in this behavior. The survey included several questions about motives for initiating boycotts and buycotts. I expect to find that the primary motives for political consumerism involve the company’s practices or broader societal interest, not self-interest. Baron (2001) documents that respondents are motivated by social, not personal, interests when it comes to socially conscious investing, and I believe this finding applies

to other types of political consumerism as well. Past research suggests that political consumerism is similar to conventional participation, and given that citizens often engage in political participation for broader societal interests, I anticipate finding that similar motives are at play with political consumerism. The twelfth hypothesis is thus that

*H<sub>12</sub>: Self-interest was not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism during the past year.*

The null hypothesis here is that self-interest was the most popular reason given for engaging in political consumerism during the past year. This hypothesis is tested by examining the frequency distribution of motives reported for each type of political consumerism. Respondents were asked: "Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit that might come to you or someone you know, or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what the company does or how our society functions?" The null hypothesis will be rejected if more respondents initiated acts of political consumerism to change what the company does or how society functions than did so for reasons of self-interest.

### **The "How" Hypotheses**

The question of how political consumerism compares to conventional participation is analyzed with a series of "how" hypotheses. The first "how" hypothesis involves a comparison of overall engagement in political consumerism and conventional participation. Existing research indicates that the latter is more popular than the former, despite the growing popularity of political consumerism. Vogel (1978) argues that citizen challenges to corporations are on the rise because Americans are following a shift in political power from government to major corporations. This means that rates of

conventional participation would decline as rates of political consumerism increase. The United States is experiencing a long-standing participatory decline that began in the middle of the last century (Putnam, 19975b), and political consumerism started its rise a few decades later. Given the disparity in the start dates of this decline and rise, it is unlikely that political consumerism accounts for the decline in conventional participation, although other variables may account for both shifts (e.g., shifts in political efficacy, new conceptions of citizen). Existing research tells us that despite the relationship between rates of political consumerism and conventional participation, the former has yet to displace the latter when it come to overall activities. Therefore, I anticipate finding that

*H<sub>13</sub> A greater percentage of respondents engaged in conventional participation than political consumerism during the past year.*

The null hypothesis implied here is that rates of these two different types of political participation are similar, or that political consumerism outpaces conventional participation. This hypothesis will be tested with a comparison of rates of engagement in each activity, and the mean number of each type of activity initiated in the past year. This hypothesis is somewhat tentative for a couple of reasons. First, the survey did not ask about frequency of conventional participation or consumer activities, so the comparison is based on the *number of different types* of activities respondents initiated. A respondent could have boycotted 10 products in the past year and only contacted a public official once, but both would count equally as one activity. Secondly, the opportunity for engagement in these different activities is quite different. The opportunity to participate in boycotts and buycotts is almost limitless. A respondent could make a decision to initiate either of these activities whenever he or she goes to the grocery store. The opportunity to participate in a consumer protest is based on the

availability of an organized protest and is thus more limited. With conventional participation, voting is the most restricted, limited to election days. Contacting a government official is somewhat limited by the requirement of a claim and the norm of contacting the official who represents the respondent. Opportunity for contributing time and money to campaigns or political parties is less restricted but seasonal, based on the election cycle, which limits these channels compared to the all-seasonal channels of the market. The opportunities to engage in conventional participation versus political consumerism are thus not equivalent.

The second “how” hypothesis directly tests the relationship between conventional participation and political consumerism. This hypothesis is based on previous research showing that respondents who engage in boycotts tend to be politically active in other ways as well. Considering that political consumerism is just another form of political participation, albeit unique in ways, I expect to find that

*H<sub>14</sub> Respondents who engaged in conventional participation in the past year were more likely than other respondents to engage in political consumerism.*

The null hypothesis here is that political consumerism and conventional participation are not related, or are negatively related. This hypothesis is tested with a bivariate correlation analysis of engagement in political consumerism and conventional participation in the past year.

Following from the reasoning of the fourteenth hypothesis, that political consumerism is similar to conventional participation, I anticipate that these two activities share many predictors in common. Previous research verifies that this is the case (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2001; Goul Andersen, 1999; Micheletti, 2000). If political

consumerism is indeed just another form of political participation, its pathways would logically be similar to those of conventional participation. Thus, I hypothesize that

*H<sub>15</sub> Age, education, race, gender, and income are significant predictors of both conventional participation and political consumerism.*

This hypothesis will be tested by comparing the significance of predictors in two OLS regression models with identical independent variables. The dependent variable for the first regression will be a scale of conventional participation ranging from 0 to 4. The dependent variable for the second regression will be a scale of political consumerism, ranging from 0 to 4. The significance of the predictors in the respective models will be compared to determine whether these two broad classes of political participation have independent variables in common.

I expect to find that political consumerism and conventional participation share more than just demographic predictors. The most frequently reported motive for engaging in each behavior (self-interest versus broader interests) is expected to be similar. Therefore, I anticipate findings that

*H<sub>16</sub> Self-interest was not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism or conventional participation during the past year.*

The null hypothesis here is that the primary motive reported for one or both behaviors is self-interest. This hypothesis is tested by comparing frequency distributions of reported motives for engaging in political consumerism and conventional participation. It replicates the analysis of H<sub>12</sub> but adds in a comparison to conventional participation.

The last two “how” hypotheses involve the relationship between consumer empowerment -- growing consumer awareness that buyers have interests distinct from sellers, and that consumers have enforceable rights in transactions with vendors

(Brobeck, Mayer, and Herrmann, 1997) -- and conventional participation and political consumerism. The connection between consumer empowerment and political consumerism is more obvious than the consumer empowerment-conventional participation connection. Respondents who believe they have power in the producer-consumer relationship would reasonably be more inclined to engage in political consumerism since they possess higher consumer efficacy.

The connection between consumer empowerment and conventional participation is not as straightforward. Warland, Herrmann, and Moore (1986) noted the logic of exploring a connection between empowerment in the marketplace and conventional participation. They find that consumer redress activities (complaining behavior), a proxy for consumer empowerment, is positively correlated with conventional participation. That is, respondents who complain in the marketplace are more likely than others to participate politically. These authors do not explicate the political nature or implications of this link, but in my estimation, consumer empowerment acts like political efficacy. Respondents who feel entitled to certain redress in the marketplace are more likely than others to also feel entitled to redress from the government. Consumer efficacy and political efficacy measure beliefs about power in the market and governmental domains, respectively. Beliefs about entitlement or rights as consumers parallel beliefs about political rights and entitlements. Consumer empowerment is operationalized with a question about whether the respondent has ever complained to a company or manager in their lifetime.

Based upon existing research and some new observations, I hypothesize that

*H<sub>17</sub> Empowered consumers were more likely than others to have engaged in political consumerism during the past year.*

and

*H<sub>18</sub> Empowered consumers were more likely than others to have engaged in conventional participation during the past year.*

These hypotheses are tested by measuring the strength of consumer empowerment as a predictor of political consumerism and conventional participation, respectively, using OLS regression analysis. Correlation analysis is also used to verify that relationships above are significant and are in the hypothesized direction.

### Variable Description

The survey included 20 questions, many of them multi-part with skip patterns. In this section, I describe the variables in the dataset using frequency distributions and qualitative and quantitative reporting of responses to open-ended questions. The dependent variable of interest, political consumerism, is described first, followed by examination of the independent variables in the dataset (conventional participation, motive for activity, consumer empowerment, and background variables).

### **Dependent Variables**

Five variables were included in the survey to measure political consumerism: boycotting for safety or environmental issues; boycotting based on corporate conduct; buycotting for social or political reasons; contacting a company for social/political concerns; and lastly, participation in a consumer protest. The company contact variable

was later dropped as a measure of political consumerism because it failed to reflect this activity.<sup>16</sup> The four variables operationalized to measure the concept of political consumerism are described in turn.

### *Boycotting for Safety/Environmental Reasons*

Respondents were asked whether they had ever boycotted a company or product for environmental or safety reasons, and if so, whether they had done this in the past year. If respondents answered affirmatively to both questions, they were asked to list the company or product and discuss why they had boycotted it. Safety and environmental reasons for boycotts are obvious policy domains with high governmental involvement, and citizen claims involving these issues are political on their face. These responses were then coded into categories and tabulated.

A large majority of the sample -- 64% -- say they have avoided products for safety or environmental reasons at some point in their life, and 47% of the sample report doing so in the past year. When asked to specify the content of their claim, 63% of respondents who engaged in this type of boycott in the past year did so for environmental reasons. One-in-ten (9.4%) of these respondents say they avoided aerosol products out of concern for ozone layer depletion. Many survey participants also mentioned that they avoid products that are non-recyclable or have excessive packaging. Other respondents say they boycott chemical pesticides and insecticides and choose organic alternatives instead. A small number of respondents named specific products or companies they avoided, such

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<sup>16</sup> Less than 2% of company contacts involved distribution of societal goods or resources.

as Exxon for its role in the Valdez disaster and Bumble Bee for the death of dolphins during tuna harvesting.

The second most frequently mentioned reason for consumer/safety boycotting in the past year was animal treatment. About one-in-five respondents who avoided companies for environmental or safety reasons in the past year (18.2%) did so to protest animal testing or other “improper” use of animals. Most of these respondents were general in their response, mentioning only “animal testing” or “animal abuse” as a reason for their boycotting behavior. A sizable number of survey participants mentioned specific products they avoid, such as make-up products and veal.

The third most frequently mentioned reason for environmental/safety boycotting is “safety” in general. Eight percent of participants who engaged in this behavior in the past year avoided products they deemed to be unsafe. Several participants mentioned that they avoid all products from companies owned by tobacco conglomerates. A small number of respondents specifically mentioned avoiding guns and products from gun manufacturers. A few respondents say that they boycott 6-pack soda cans because the plastic rings pose a safety risk to birds. Other reasons given for avoiding products or companies include unfavorable corporate political affiliations (2.3%) and the use of sweatshop labor (2.3%), responses that fit better with the next question on boycotting for reasons of corporate conduct.

#### *Boycotting for Corporate Conduct*

The second measure of boycott behavior asked whether respondents had avoided a product or company based on the conduct of the company in their lifetime and in the past

year. Just over half the sample (52%) said that they had done so at some point in their lives, and 30% of respondents did so in the past year. Unlike the first boycott question that presented possible policy issues of the boycott, this question focused on broader corporate conduct.

When it comes to the substance of corporate conduct boycotts, 22% of respondents cite specific company policies as the reason for their action in the past year. Survey participants mention avoiding companies that provide health benefits to partners of gay employees (e.g., Disney), companies with anti-union practices (e.g., Farmland Dairies), businesses with unsavory alliances with the Nazis during the second World War (e.g., Mercedes Benz), companies that create or allow an environment of sexual harassment (e.g., Mitsubishi), businesses with discriminatory employee hiring and promotion practices (e.g., Texaco), and companies with reported use of sweatshop labor (e.g., Nike). Boycotts based on sweatshop concerns were mentioned by 9% of respondents who engaged in a corporate conduct boycott in the past year. Respondents mentioned *Nike*, *Wal-Mart*, *K-Mart*, and Kathy Lee Gifford's clothing line as targets of their sweatshop boycott efforts.

Environmental concerns are the second most frequently mentioned reason for corporate conduct boycotting. Seventeen percent of respondents who engaged in this type of political consumerism in the past year targeted companies for their environmental practices. A surprisingly high 7% of respondents who engaged in a corporate conduct boycott in the past year say they targeted Exxon gas stations because of the company's involvement in the Valdez disaster.

Thirteen percent of respondents who participated in a corporate conduct boycott in the past year say they did so in response to offensive company advertising or image. Respondents cite the sexual content of advertisements, gender role portrayal in advertisements, and political stances taken by the company as reasons for this political consumerism. A few respondents say they are adamant about avoiding all products from companies owned by cigarette manufacturers that advertise their products to children.

Twelve percent of respondents who boycotted based on corporate conduct in the past year mentioned the political affiliations of the company or its executives as the reason. For example, some survey participants made a point to avoid *Coors* products due to the historically conservative political positions of its owners. Almost all mentions of specific companies that were targeted for corporate conduct boycotting reflect liberal ideological leanings on the part of the respondent, despite the increasing use of this tactic by conservative organizations (Friedman, 1999).

### *Buycotting*

The third measure of political consumerism in the survey measures buycott activities or positive activism. The buycott question followed directly behind the two previous questions of boycotts:

Now shifting gears slightly, some people try to buy certain products or services because they like the social or political values of a company, quite apart from the products or services that company provides. Have you ever done this? Was this in the past year?

Thirty-eight percent of respondents say they have buycotted in their lifetime, and 26% of respondents did so in the past year. The most frequently mentioned reason for buycotting

is favorable political or social involvement on the part of companies (29.8%). Many respondents mentioned specific companies or products they go out of their way to purchase for social/political reasons, including *Ben & Jerry's* ice-cream, *Newman's Own* brand, products from *The Body Shop*, and *Disney* products. Few respondents mentioned boycotting companies or products for politically conservative reasons. Sixteen percent of survey participants who boycotted in the past year did so to reward companies for environmental policies or practices. One-in-ten respondents who boycott (12.3%) say they go out of their way to buy products made in America or from companies that utilize union labor. "I buy American" was a frequent response to this question.

A smaller number of respondents (7.0%) who boycotted in the past year say they did so to reward companies for their practices or internal policies, including promotion of women and donations to charitable organizations. About 4% of those surveyed say they made a point to purchase products because they are not tested on animals, and 2% report the same for companies with favorable sweatshop practices.

### *Consumer-Redress Behavior*

The fourth measure of political consumerism asked the following:

Have you ever contacted a company or complained to a manager about a consumer issue? Was this in the past year?

This series of questions asked about consumer complaining behavior in general with the idea that acts of political consumerism as opposed to other consumer-redress behavior could be identified by examining the political content of the claim from the open-ended part of the question. Fifty-seven percent of respondents report contacting a company or

manager at some point in their life, and 50% did so in the past year. However, less than 2% of these contacts involved political or social concerns. Almost all of the contacts revolved around customer service and non-political product issues. This series of questions was subsequently dropped as a measure of political consumerism because it picked up on so little of this behavior. While not a good measure of political consumerism, this question does measure consumer empowerment -- how likely respondents are to contact a company or manager if they feel they have been wronged. This is a blunt assessment of how empowered respondents feel in relation to producers. Classification of this variable as "consumer empowerment" is based on two assumptions. First, I am assuming that all respondents have experienced situations that could have entailed contacting a corporation at some point in their life, not a particularly unlikely assumption considering the number of times consumers interface with companies in their life. Secondly, I assume that respondents who have complained to a company at some point in their life harbor more of a rights orientation than respondents who have not contacted a company at some point. Citizens who have initiated a corporate contact at some point in their life are thought of as "empowered." This single variable does not gauge the lifetime frequency of consumer complaining behavior, nor does it directly measure how empowered a consumer feels in their relationship with producers. For these reasons, this is a less than perfect measure of consumer empowerment.

### *Consumer Protest*

The last measure of governmental consumer activism is participation in a consumer protest. One-in-ten (10.3%) survey participants have been involved in a protest

concerning a consumer issue at some point in their life, and 2% say they were involved in a consumer protest in the past year. Respondents were not asked about the specific content of the protest they participated in because of limited survey space. A definition of consumer protest was not provided; respondents furnished their own interpretation in answering this question.

### **Social Desirability**

As mentioned previously, one point of concern with all of these dependent variables is over-reporting due to social desirability. The high rates of political consumerism reported above should certainly be called into question if a sizable proportion of respondents could not remember the specifics of these activities. Fortunately, this was not the case. Of the respondents who say they avoided products in the past year due to environmental or safety concerns, 81% were able to recall the specific company or product involved. Among those who boycotted based on a company's conduct in the past year, 80% were able to identify the company they avoided. Eighty-eight percent of respondents boycotted to reward a company for its social or political stances were able to recall the specifics of their activities. These high rates of respondent recall suggest that steps taken to mediate over-reporting due to social desirability were successful. As a result, all responses to these questions will be included in the analysis.

### **Independent Variables**

There are many independent variables of interest in this dataset: conventional participation, interests involved in political consumerism, consumer empowerment, and

background variables. The demographic composition of the sample was included in an earlier section of this chapter and will not be repeated here. This section describes the remaining three categories of independent variables.

### *Conventional Participation*

Measures of conventional participation can be grouped into two categories -- those that explicitly involve consumer issues, and those that do not. Three questions about conventional participation involving a consumer issue were asked: "Have you ever contacted a government official about a consumer issue?", "Have you ever voted for or against a candidate for public office because of their stance on a consumer issue?" and "Have you ever been involved in the filing of a lawsuit involving a consumer issue?" One-in-five respondents (19.0%) report that they have contacted a public official regarding a consumer issue at some point in their life, and 10% say they did so in the past year. When it comes to voting for or against a candidate for their stance on a consumer issue, 26% of respondents say they have done this at some point in their life, and 6% of those surveyed did so in the past year. About 11% of respondents report being involved in a consumer lawsuit in some capacity at some point in their life. Four percent say they have had some involvement in a consumer lawsuit in the past year.

Four questions measuring conventional participation not explicitly linked to a consumer issue were included in the questionnaire: volunteering for a campaign, contributing money to a candidate or campaign, contacting a public official, and voting. The time-frame for the first three questions was the past year, and the voting question asked about lifetime frequency.

Verba and Nie (1972) present a typology of political activities along a continuum of required involvement. Some activities are communal or community-oriented and require high involvement on the part of the participant. Volunteering for a campaign fits under this category. Other activities are individually initiated and require less involvement on the part of the participant, such as voting or writing a check to a campaign. Contacting a public official, while an individual act, requires more involvement than voting or making a campaign contribution. The measures of conventional participation examined here purposefully reflect a good mix of low, medium, and high citizen involvement.

In the past year, 5% of the sample volunteered for a political candidate or campaign, and 17% contributed money to a candidate, party, or political action committee. Nearly one-third of the sample (30.5%) contacted a public official in the past year. Forty-one percent of those surveyed say they voted in all presidential elections since they were old enough to vote, and 24% say they voted in most presidential elections.

These percentages are similar to national figures as reported by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady from their Citizen Participation Study (1995). Thirty-eight percent of respondents in both samples contacted an elected official. Five percent of survey participants volunteered for a political campaign or party in this study compared to 8.5% of Citizen Participation Study respondents (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995: 54). Slightly more respondents in the Citizen Participation sample report contributing money to a candidate or party (23%) than the sample analyzed here (17%). The only major difference in terms of conventional participation in the two samples is the

percentage who vote. Two-thirds (67%) of the dissertation sample say they have voted in all or most elections since they were eligible, compared to average voter turnout of 59% calculated for elections after 1945 (70). The difference here can probably be accounted for by the fact that the two voting measures are similar but not the same, and that the voting question was the first question about participation in the dissertation survey, intended to “soak up” social desirability. It is doubtful that 67% of the dissertation sample respondents are regular voters considering that respondent participation mirrors that of the nation on other measures of conventional participation.

### *Interests Involved in Political Consumerism*

The interests motivating involvement in political consumerism were also investigated in the survey. Respondents who reported acts of political consumerism in the past year were asked the following question: "Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit that might come to you or someone you know, or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what the company does or how our society functions?"

Different motives were reported for different types of boycotts. Reasons given for boycotting based on environmental harm or safety were mixed. Thirty-one percent of respondents boycotted to change how society functions, while 28% did so to bring about a change in the company's behavior. One-in-four respondents give a self-interested motive for avoiding products for environmental or safety reasons (26%).

The second measure of political consumerism is boycotting based on corporate conduct. Among respondents who reported this behavior in the past year, 47% say they did so to change corporate practices. One-in-five (21%) respondents report that their

motive was to change how society functions. Fifteen percent of respondents say they boycotted for personal benefit to them or someone they know.

Boycott motives were also examined in the survey, although all responses are classified as political because the filter question made this a requirement (i.e., “some people try to buy certain products or services because they like the *social or political values* of a company, quite apart from the products or services that company provides. Have you ever done this?”) Therefore, a political/social motive for boycotting was built into the question. The chief reason given for political/social boycotting was particular benefit to the respondent or someone they know (37.3%). Many survey participants see socially conscious purchasing for social/political reasons as personally beneficial. One-fourth of respondents who practiced this positive purchasing behavior in the past year say they did so to change how society functions, and 17% did so to reward the company's conduct. Many respondents seem to be saying that there is personal appeal in buying products from companies with a desirable social or political agenda. A consumer who buys lotion from *The Body Shop* because of their socially conscious image personally benefits from this. The personal benefit derived may be from the fragrant lotion, positive feeling from supporting a cause, or both.

### *Consumer Empowerment*

The question measuring consumer empowerment was described earlier in this chapter. As reported earlier, a majority of participants (56.6%) report having directly contacted a company about a consumer issue at some point in their life, and 50% of the sample did so in the past year. The principal motive given for initiating a corporate

contact was particular benefit to the respondent or someone they know (55.3%). Thirty percent contacted a company to change corporate practices, and less than 2% report that their corporate contact was to change how society functions.

### **Reliability**

There are several reasons to believe that rates of political consumerism relative to conventional participation are both overstated and understated in this sample. First, while attempts were made to control for social desirability with political consumerism, similar efforts were not made for conventional participation. It is therefore possible that respondents overstated their engagement in conventional participation relative to political consumerism. On the other hand, since this survey was fielded in 1999, a “dead” year for New Jersey politics, it is possible that rates of conventional participation were lower than average, and had the survey been administered during a more active year, rates of conventional participation amongst respondents would have been much higher. It is unclear whether the influences of social desirability and a slow political year cancel each other out, or if either skewed rates of conventional participation in the sample. The time-bound nature of the fielding period and social desirability should be considered when interpreting the results presented here, especially when comparing rates of conventional participation and political consumerism.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described the research process and survey methodology used in this research. Many topics were addressed, including sample selection, sample

representativeness, questionnaire development, fielding procedures, response rates, non-response bias, and internal and external validity. Although the sample was drawn from a region of the country that looks a lot like the nation, demographically, the results presented in the next chapter should only be interpreted as representing attitudes and behaviors of respondents in the final sample due to non-response bias and the regional character of the sample. Regardless of sample limitations, the final dataset has rich variance in terms of demographic characteristics.

This chapter also formally presented the eighteen hypotheses of the dissertation as testable statements. A brief justification was given for each hypothesis, drawing upon the literature review of the previous chapter. A description of the statistical procedures to be used with each hypothesis was also furnished. The last section of this chapter presented a description of the dependent and independent variables to be used in the data analysis of the next chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is the second of two quantitative chapters in the dissertation, truly the heart of the dissertation because it describes and evaluates different aspects of political consumerism in great detail. This chapter reports analysis of the data and findings pertaining to each of the eighteen hypotheses presented. A summary of findings for each hypothesis is included at the end of this chapter for quick reference.

This chapter builds upon the literature review of Chapter 2, filling in holes of knowledge and extending existing analysis to a regional sample in the United States. Analysis of the “what” hypotheses give us a good idea of the recent and lifetime prevalence of political consumerism in the sample. The “who” hypotheses describes which groups in society are more likely to engage in this behavior than others. This analysis is also the first to test the idea that political consumerism is a “weapon of the weak,” a proposition that has often been presented but not supported with quantitative analysis. Examination of the “why” hypotheses contribute new knowledge about the policy topics typically addressed with this political tool, and the reported motives for engaging in this behavior. The analysis of “how” political consumerism compares with conventional participation is new information for the most part. Knowledge of how the two behaviors are related, and how they differ, tells us a lot about how political scientists can think about and use political consumerism in future studies.

Tests of significance are reported throughout this chapter. For tests involving percentage comparisons, for example, the percentage of women and men who engaged in political consumerism during the past year, the reported p value is based on Pearson’s

chi-square test for significance. When significance is reported on mean differences, for example, the mean difference between samples of men and women in terms of average acts of political consumerism initiated in the past year, then the p value is based on Student's t-test of difference for means.

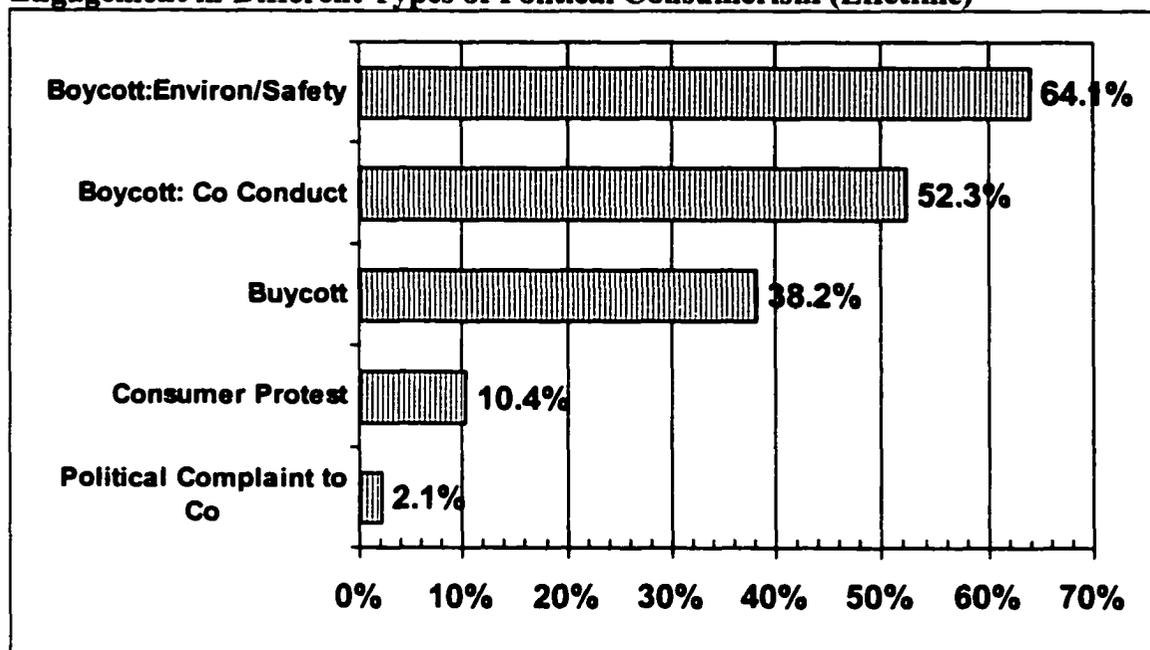
### The “What” Hypotheses

The first three hypotheses to be tested fall under the category of “what” respondents are doing when it comes to political consumerism. They are tested using frequency distributions, comparison of means, and correlation analyses.

### **Lifetime Engagement in Political Consumerism**

The first “what” hypothesis, that at least 50% of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life, is tested with a frequency distribution of engagement in different types of political consumerism, and overall rate of these activities. This hypothesis is also tested with an analysis of rates of engagement in multiple acts of political consumerism. **Figure 4.1** graphically represents lifetime participation in different types of political consumerism among respondents in the sample.

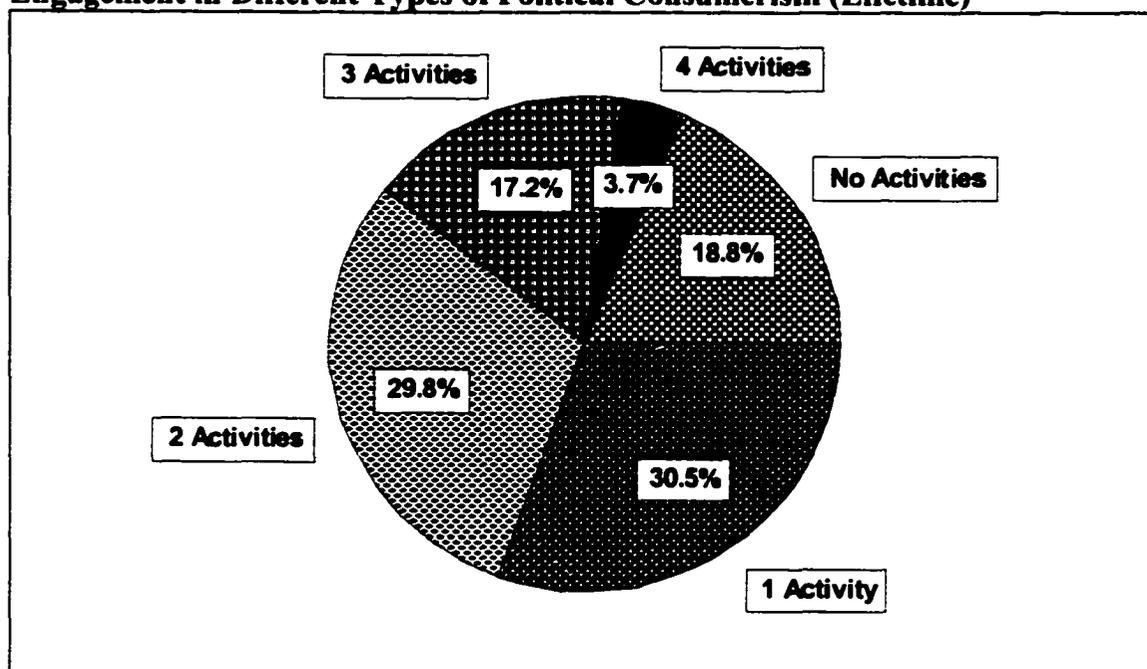
**Figure 4.1**  
**Engagement in Different Types of Political Consumerism (Lifetime)**



The most popular activity reported by survey participants is a boycott. Two-thirds of respondents say they have boycotted at some point in their life. About one-third of respondents say they have buycotted companies for favorable social/political behavior, and one-in-ten say they have participated in a consumer protest at some point in their life. Approximately 2% of survey participants say they complained to a company or manager at some point concerning a political issue.

Overall rate of engagement in political consumerism is examined in order to further test  $H_1$ . **Figure 4.2** shows the percentage of respondents who have engaged in at least one act of political consumerism in their lifetime. These figures only reflect the *different types* of extra-governmental consumer activities engaged in, not the *number of times* these activities were initiated. (Respondents were not questioned about how frequently they engage in acts of political consumerism).

**Figure 4.2**  
**Engagement in Different Types of Political Consumerism (Lifetime)**



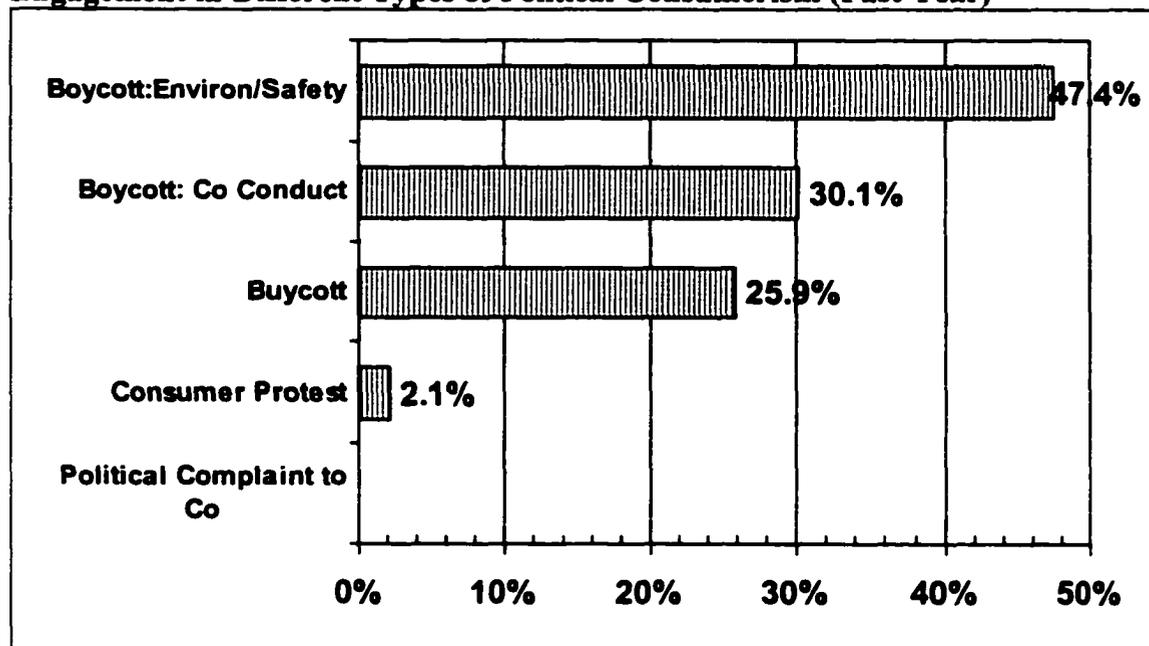
When it comes to engaging in at least one act of political consumerism, 81% of respondents say they have done so at some point in their life. Six-in-ten respondents (60.3%) report initiating one or two acts of political consumerism in their lifetime, and one-in-five (20.9%) initiated three or more different acts during their lifetime. Strong evidence is found in support of  $H_1$ . The null hypothesis, that fewer than 50% of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life, is clearly rejected. Figures of lifetime engagement are surprisingly high, much higher than the approximate 50% of respondents in previous surveys who indicate that they are willing to engage in this behavior.

### **Recent Engagement in Political Consumerism**

The second hypothesis, that at least 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism in the past year, is tested with a simple frequency distribution of reported

activity in the past year (Figure 4.3), and a look at initiation of at least one act of political consumerism during this time.

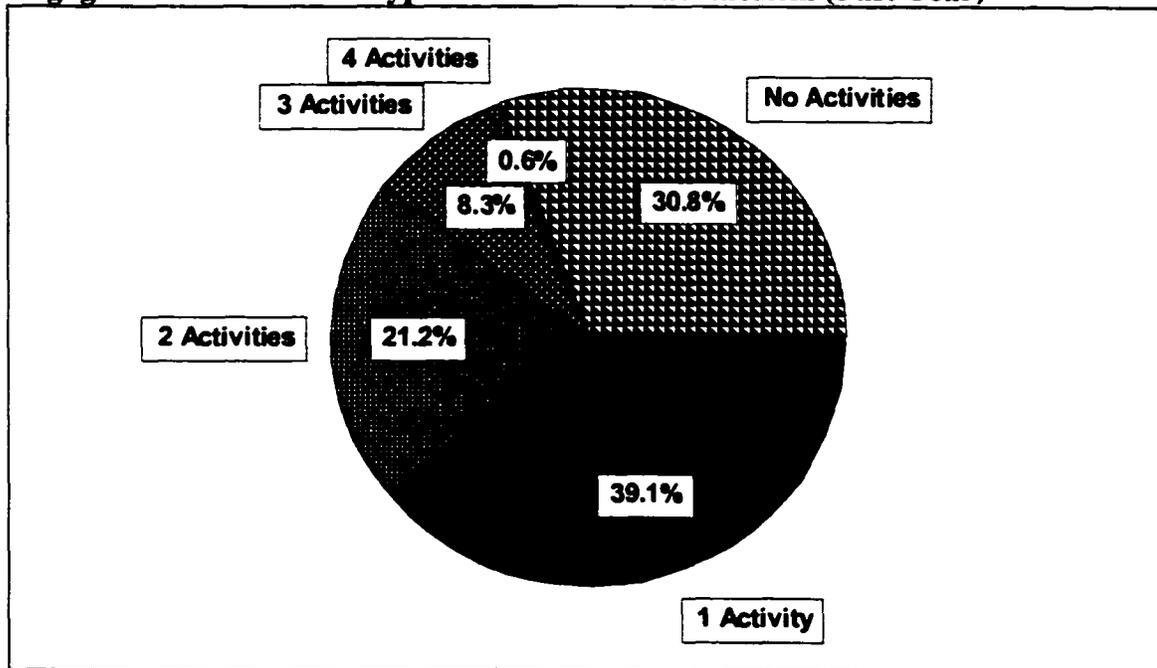
**Figure 4.3**  
**Engagement in Different Types of Political Consumerism (Past Year)**



As shown here, more than 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism in the past year. About half of the respondents in the sample were involved with a boycott for safety/environmental reasons, and about one-third boycotted for reasons of corporate conduct. One-in-four respondents report buycotting a company or product to reward favorable political behavior or positions, and a small percentage of the sample engaged in a consumer protest in the past year. Too few respondents reported complaining to a company or manager about a political issue in the past year to be included in this figure.

**Figure 4.4** shows respondent engagement in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year. Again, this table reflects the number of *different* acts initiated, not the number of times each act was initiated. The frequency of such activities is a better way to separate activists from others, a topic for future research.

**Figure 4.4**  
**Engagement in Different Types of Political Consumerism (Past Year)**



According to this figure, 69% of survey participants say they initiated at least one type of political consumerism in the past year. Six-in-ten respondents (60.3%) engaged in 1 or 2 different acts of political consumerism, while one-in-ten respondents (8.9%) initiated 3 or more different acts. The null hypothesis, that fewer than 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism in the previous year, is thus rejected. More than twice as many respondents initiated at least one act of political consumerism in the past year.

### **Boycotts And Buycotts**

The third “what” hypothesis, that boycotts continue to outpace buycotts, despite the growing popularity of the latter, can be tested by referring back to the data presented in **Figure 4.3**. As indicated in this figure, boycotts are the most popular type of political consumerism. More than half the sample engaged in at least one boycott activity compared to one-fourth of the sample who engaged in buycotting in the past year.

Therefore, the null hypothesis, that a greater percentage of respondents engaged in boycotting than boycotting in the past year, is rejected. Boycott activities significantly outpace boycott activities among respondents in this sample ( $p=.032$ ).

A finding worth note from this analysis is that although many respondents report engaging in political consumerism, both during the lifetime and in the past year, very few respondents actually communicated their intentions to the offending or favorable company. Complaints to corporations or managers almost exclusively revolve around (non-political) service or product issues. A majority of respondents include social/political considerations in their purchasing decisions, and one cannot help but wonder if the economic elements of boycotts would be more directly effective if boycotters communicated their participation in this activity directly to corporations. A silent mass of respondents are boycotting in ways largely unknown to the businesses they are targeting.

### The “Who” Hypotheses

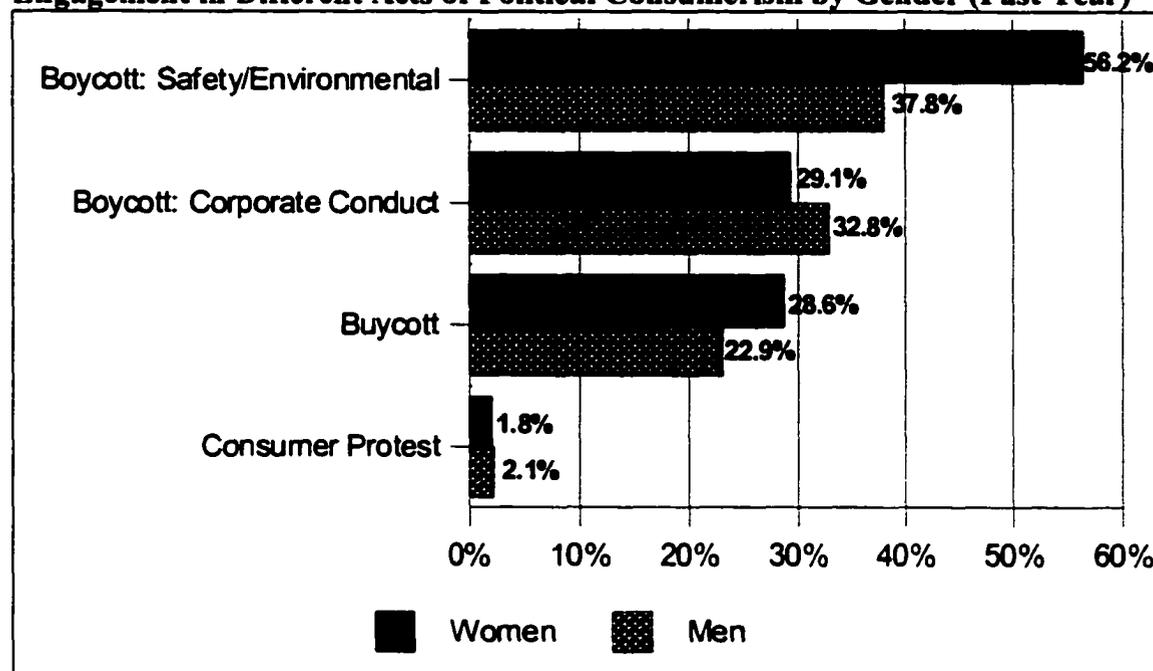
Seven of the hypotheses tested in this dissertation concern the question of who engages in political consumerism. As with other types of political participation, I anticipate specific differences in rates of engagement in political consumerism across groups.

#### **Political Consumerism and Gender**

The first “who” hypothesis ( $H_1$ ), that a greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism in the past year than male respondents, is tested using a

crosstab analysis of political consumerism with gender. **Figure 4.5** shows participation in each of the four acts of political consumerism during the past year by gender.

**Figure 4.5**  
**Engagement in Different Acts of Political Consumerism by Gender (Past Year)**



This figure indicates a potential pattern of gender difference in engagement in different types of political consumerism. Boycotting for safety or environmental reasons are more popular with women than men ( $p=.000$ ), as are buycott activities ( $p=.038$ ). A greater percentage of men in the sample boycotted for reasons of corporate conduct, but the difference is not significant ( $p=.171$ ). Women and men are equally likely to report initiating an act of consumer protest in the past year. The findings are mixed; gender differences surface for some activities of political consumerism but not others. Further analysis is needed.

Another way to assess potential gender differences is to compare the mean number of acts for women and men during the past year. Women initiated an average of

1.15 acts of political consumerism compared to an average of 1.01 acts initiated by men, but the difference is not statistically significant ( $p=.204$ ). Yet another way to assess a potential gender difference is to look at the probability of engaging in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year by gender. Almost three quarters (73.0%) of women in the sample report at least one act of political consumerism in the past year compared to 66% of men who report the same. This difference is also not significant ( $p=.172$ ) and drives the final nail in the coffin of the first “who” hypothesis. The null hypothesis, that political consumerism does not vary by gender, is accepted. Gender differences are found in terms of different types of political consumerism, but not when it comes to overall rates of engagement.

The second “who” hypothesis ( $H_5$ ), that female respondents were more inclined to engage in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year, assesses this political tool as a “weapon of the weak” for women. This hypothesis is first addressed by looking at the percentage of female respondents who participated through governmental channels compared to those who participated through market channels. Eighty-two percent of female respondents initiated at least one act of conventional participation in the past year compared to 73% who initiated at least one act of political consumerism ( $p=.002$ ). This statistic runs counter to the idea that women are more inclined to press their concerns through the marketplace rather than governmental channels, but further examination is needed to substantiate this finding.

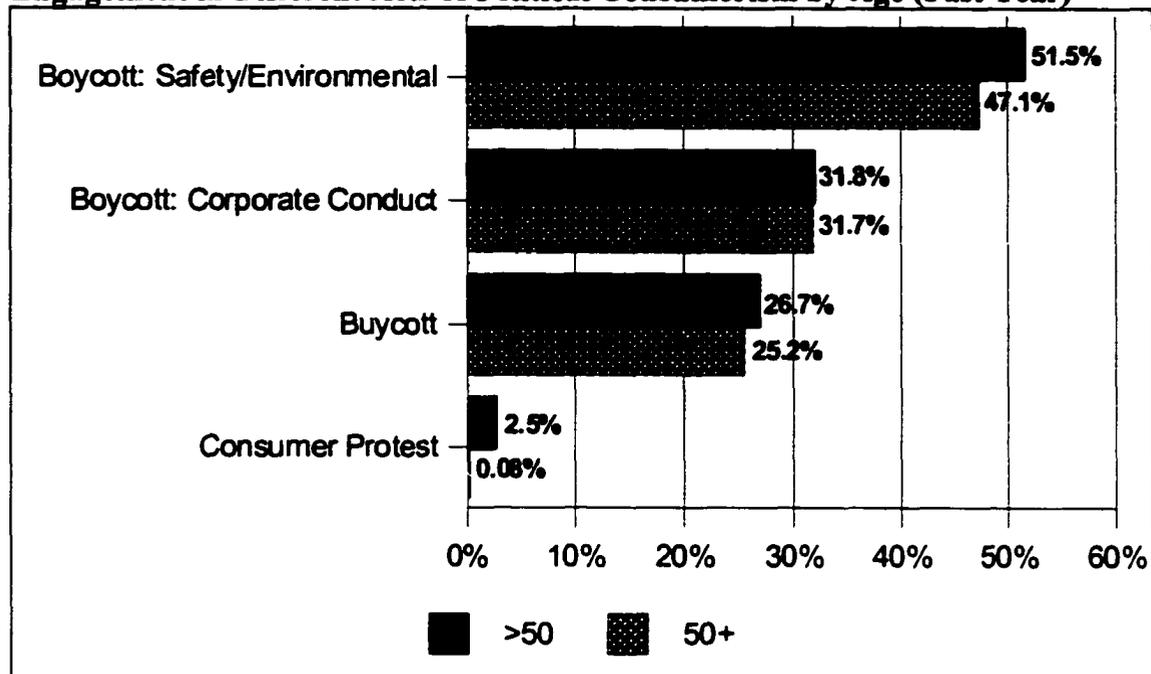
Another way to test this hypothesis is to analyze combinations of engagement in political consumerism and conventional participation among women in the sample. Seven percent of female respondents did not initiate either type of participation, while

six-in-ten (61%) initiated both political consumerism and conventional participation in the past year. Twenty-one percent of women in the sample engaged in conventional participation but not political consumerism, and 12% report the opposite. Women report initiating an average of 1.15 acts of political consumerism in the past year compared with an average of 1.27 acts of conventional participation ( $p=.000$ ). This evidence indicates that the null hypothesis, that women are not more likely to engage in political consumerism than conventional participation, is accepted. Political consumerism is not generally used as a “weapon of the weak” -- an alternative to conventional participation -- by female respondents in this sample.

#### **Political Consumerism and Age**

The third “who” hypothesis ( $H_6$ ), that a greater percentage of respondents ages 18 - 49 engaged in political consumerism in the past year than respondents ages 50 and older, is tested using frequency distributions and a comparison of means. As shown in **Figure 4.6**, significant differences in rates of engagement in different types of political consumerism are not found in this sample.

**Figure 4.6**  
**Engagement in Different Acts of Political Consumerism by Age (Past Year)**



Approximately equal percentages of respondents 18 - 49 and 50 plus initiated each type of political consumerism measured in the survey, although a slightly greater percentage of younger respondents report initiating each activity. Additional tests are needed to determine whether this is the case with overall rates of political consumerism.

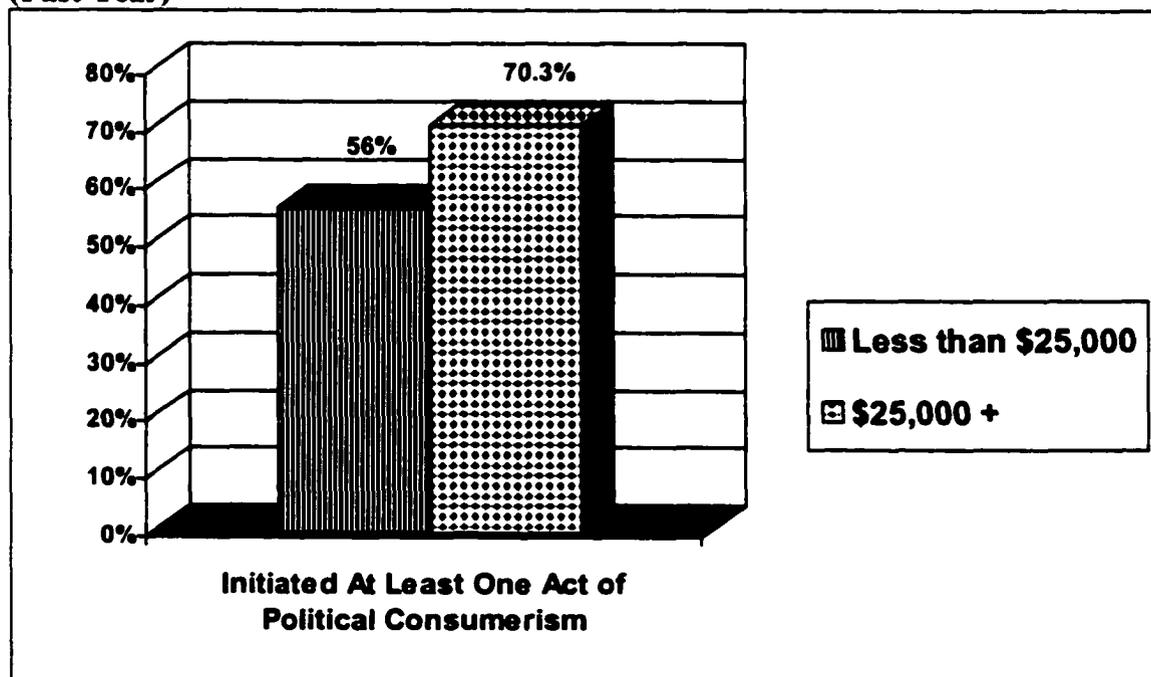
Age differences do surface in the probability of engaging in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year. Three quarters of respondents ages 14 - 49 (72.2%) report engaging in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year compared to 65% of respondents 50 and older, but this difference is not statistically significant ( $p=.109$ ). One last analysis was conducted to determine whether an age gap exists with this political behavior. The mean number of acts was also tabulated for each group. Respondents ages 18 - 49 initiated an average of 1.13 acts of political consumerism in the past year compared to an average of 1.05 acts for respondents ages 50 and older ( $p=.000$ ). Here a significant age difference is found. In light of the consistent

trend toward younger respondents being more active, and the significant difference in average number of activities initiated, the null hypothesis is rejected. Younger respondents initiated a greater number of acts on average than their older counterparts.

### Political Consumerism and Income

The fourth “who” hypothesis ( $H_7$ ), that respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were significantly less likely to have engaged in political consumerism than other respondents, is examined with frequency distributions and a comparison of means for each group. This analysis is compromised by the fact that only 25 (out of 325) respondents report an annual household income of \$25,000 or less. **Figure 4.7** presents the analysis for this hypothesis.

**Figure 4.7**  
**Engagement in at Least One Act of Political Consumerism by Annual Income (Past Year)**



Despite the small number of respondents who report annual household incomes of less than \$25,000, the difference in political consumerism in this figure is almost significant ( $p=.105$ ). I suspect that the difference would reach statistical significance if the sample included a greater proportion of respondents with incomes less than \$25,000 annually. Further examination of the differences between these two groups is needed to accept or reject the null hypothesis.

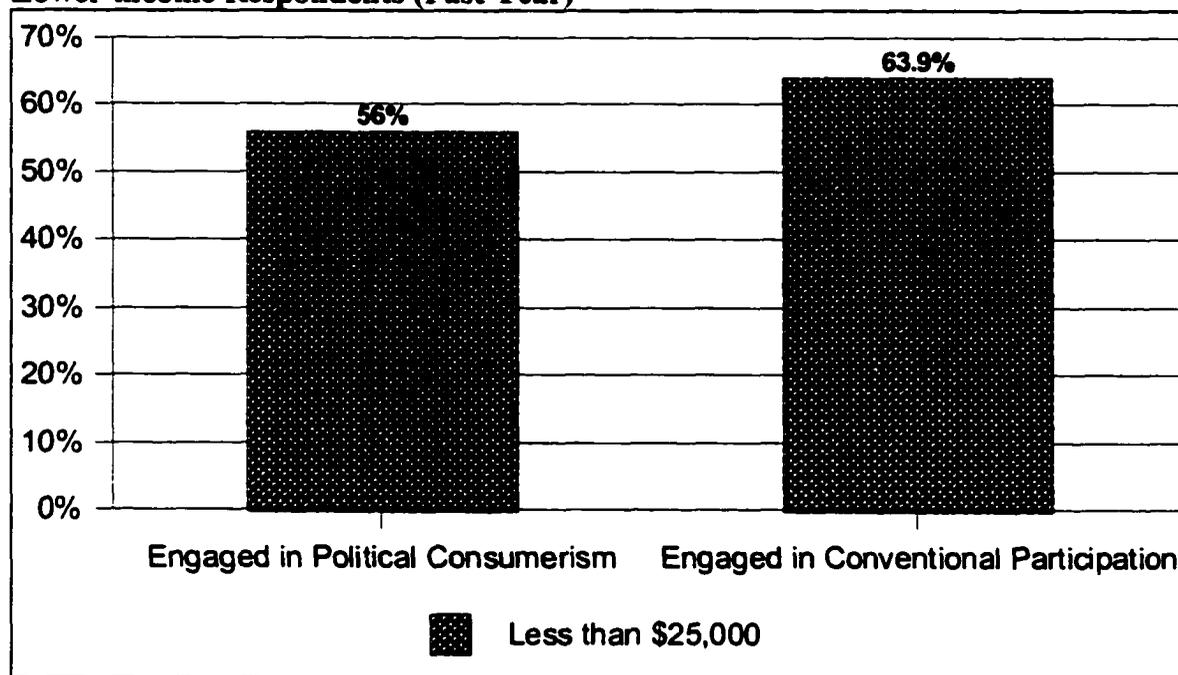
When it comes to specific types of political consumerism, a clear pattern is found: low-income respondents participate at a much lower rate than other respondents. About three-in-ten (28%) respondents with income less than \$25,000 engaged in a boycott for safety or environmental reasons in the past year compared to 51% of respondents with higher incomes ( $p=.004$ ). Twenty percent of low-income respondents engaged in a boycott for reasons of corporate conduct, while 33% of other respondents did the same ( $p=.031$ ). One-in-four (25%) survey participants with incomes less than \$25,000 boycotted in the past year compared to 27% of other respondents; not a significant difference. Lastly, no respondents in the lower-income category engaged in a consumer protest in the past year, while 2% of respondents making more than \$25,000 participated in a consumer protest, (also not significant).

A difference is also found between lower-income respondents and others when it comes to the average number of political consumerism activities in the past year. Survey participants with income of less than \$25,000 reported an average of .68 acts of political consumerism in the past year as compared to 1.12 acts by respondents with higher income. This difference is statistically significant ( $p=.025$ ).

The analysis of income thus far has centered on poor respondents versus other respondents, and the results have generally found a difference. The last analysis pertaining to this hypothesis is a correlation between income and the number of different types of political consumerism initiated in the past year. These two variables are significantly correlated at the .01 level with a coefficient of .192. As income increases, so does the likelihood of engaging in political consumerism. Based upon this finding, the previous significant difference found in the average count of activities, and a general pattern of difference by income, the null hypothesis, that political consumerism does not vary by income, is rejected. Respondents with annual income of less than \$25,000 engage in political consumerism at a lower rate and with less frequency than other respondents.

The fifth “who” hypothesis ( $H_5$ ) also relates to respondent income: Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year are more likely to have engaged in political consumerism in the past year than conventional participation. This “weapon of the weak” hypothesis, measuring whether poorer respondents turn to political consumerism instead of conventional participation, is examined by comparing engagement in different acts of political consumerism versus conventional participation among the poor, looking at the mean number of each act initiated by this group, and assessing the relative likelihood of engaging in each type of participation. **Figure 4.8** shows the percentage of lower-income respondents who engaged in political consumerism and conventional participation in the last year.

**Figure 4.8**  
**Engagement in Political Consumerism and Conventional Participation Among**  
**Lower-income Respondents (Past Year)**



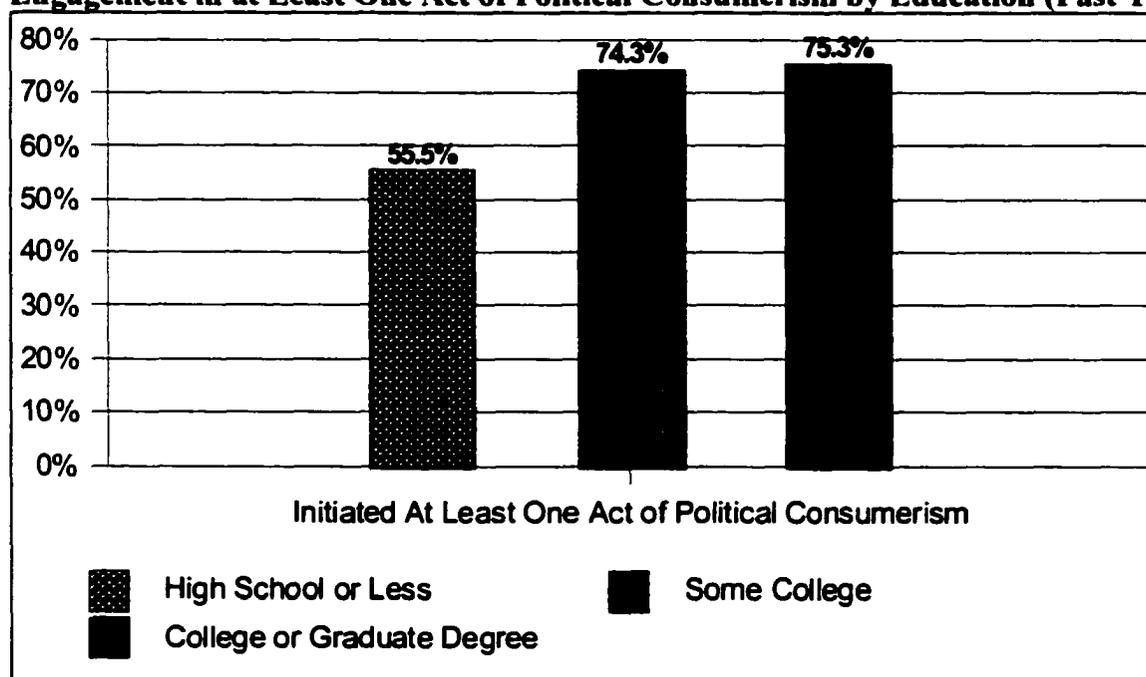
This figure indicates that a significantly greater percentage of respondents with income of less than \$25,000 per year report engaging in conventional participation than political consumerism ( $p=.036$ ). This finding suggests that lower-income survey participants are not more inclined to pursue political claims through market than governmental channels, but further analysis of the average number of each type of act initiated is needed.

The relationship between household income and conventional participation carries a larger correlation coefficient (.266) than the relationship between political consumerism and household income (.124), both of which are significant at the .05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that political consumerism is not more popular than conventional participation among respondents with annual income of less than \$25,000, is accepted. Political consumerism is not used as a “weapon of the weak,” an alternative to conventional participation, by lower-income respondents in this sample.

### Political Consumerism and Education

The sixth “who” hypothesis ( $H_6$ ), that respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in political consumerism than respondents with lower levels of education, is tested with frequency distributions and a correlation analysis. **Figure 4.9** shows the percentage of respondents who engaged in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year by education.

**Figure 4.9**  
**Engagement in at Least One Act of Political Consumerism by Education (Past Year)**



As shown here, fewer respondents with a high school education or less engaged in at least one act of political consumerism in the past year than respondents with higher levels of education ( $p=.063$ ). It appears that education is a determinant of political consumerism, at least at the lower educational levels. Having completed at least some college

significantly increases the chance of participation in political consumerism. Additional analysis is needed to further specify this relationship.

A correlation analysis is used to determine whether education and political consumerism are positively related as hypothesized. Educational level is correlated with a count of different acts of political consumerism initiated in the past year. The count variable runs from "0" to "4" with "0" indicating no activities and a "4" indicating engagement in all four different acts of political consumerism measured in the survey. Education and political consumerism are significantly correlated at the .01 level with a coefficient of .147. Furthermore, the average number of acts of political consumerism initiated in the past year steadily increases from .50 among respondents in the eighth grade or less category to 1.375 in the postgraduate training category. (Average acts initiated falls slightly to 1.24 in the postgraduate degree category). This difference is significant ( $p=.061$ ) and verifies that education is positively related to political consumerism. Therefore, the null hypothesis, that respondents with higher levels of education are equally or less likely to engage in political consumerism than respondents with lower levels of education, is rejected. Engagement in political consumerism increases as education increases among respondents in this sample.

### **Political Consumerism and Black Americans**

The last "who" hypothesis ( $H_{10}$ ), that African-American respondents were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism in the past year than conventional participation, is the last of three "weapons of the weak" hypotheses. Unfortunately, since only 14 respondents identified themselves as African-American, it was not possible to

test this hypothesis. This topic will have to be addressed in future studies that include a more representative sample of Black Americans.

### The “Why” Hypotheses

Respondents were asked several questions about why they engage in political consumerism. The concept of “why” is operationalized with an assessment of the policy topics involved and a self-report of motives for involvement. Each of these topics is analyzed in turn.

#### Policy Focus of Political Consumerism

The first “why” hypothesis ( $H_{11}$ ), that environmental concerns were the primary policy focus of political consumerism in the past year, is tested using frequency distributions of different policy issues reported by respondents. About half the sample (47%) reports engaging in a boycott for safety or environmental reasons in the past year, and of these respondents, 63% say they did so for environmental reasons. This question irrevocably taints the analysis because it specifically asks about environmental policy boycotts, so only subsequent questions about boycotting for corporate conduct and buycotting that do not specify an environmental topic will be used. With this said, the mere mention of an environmental motivation for engaging in political consumerism may have tainted the data as respondents were told to think about this in the first question on the subject.

Among respondents who initiated a boycott activity in the past year for reasons of corporate conduct, 17% reported environmental reasons for doing so. This policy area

was the only topic with enough responses to receive its own category. Other categories produced from open-ended responses to this question involved a variety of policy areas or did not specifically identify a policy domain (e.g., offensive advertising, executive affiliations). This finding supports the popularity of environmental concerns as a basis for boycotts among respondents in the sample.

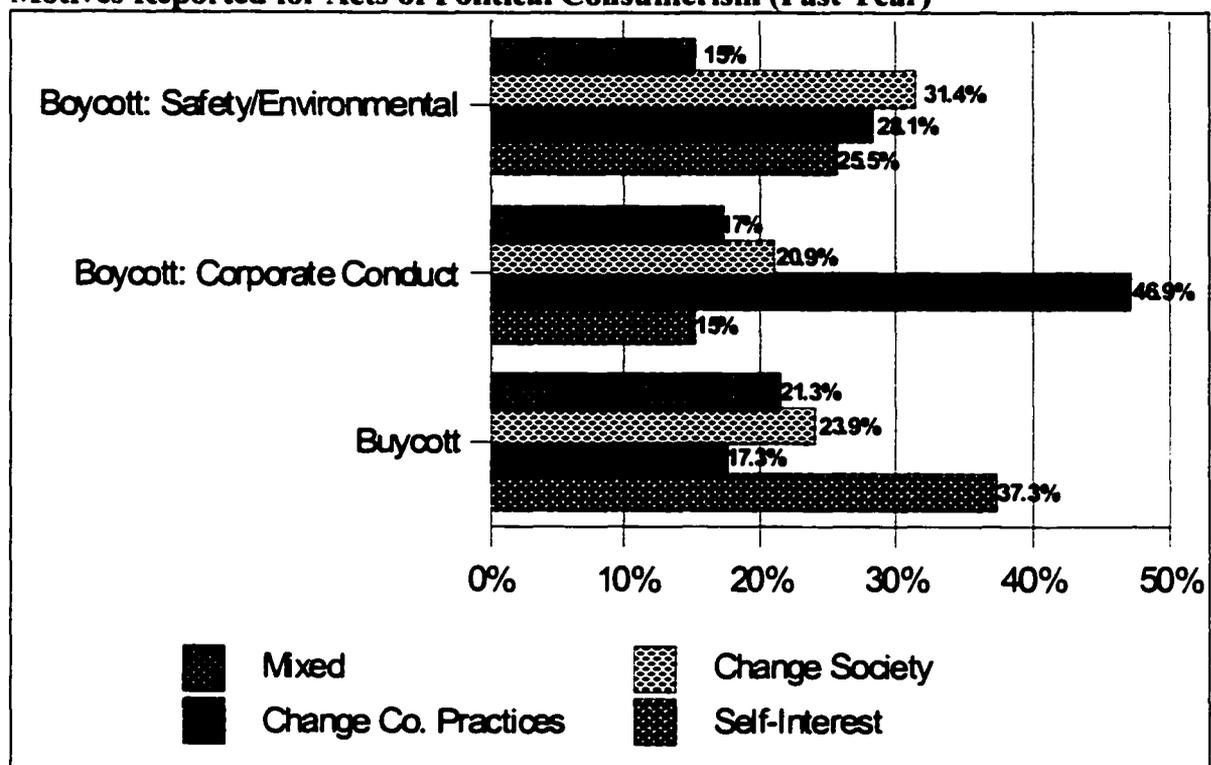
According to respondents who boycotted in the past year, 16% did so for environmental reasons. Again, environmental concerns top the list of policy issues addressed with this political activity. The only other policy issue with enough of a critical mass to garner its own category was employment (sweatshop) issues; 9% of respondents gave this reason for boycotting in the past year. Considering the consistency of this finding across all these types of political consumerism examined here, it is safe to say that the null hypothesis -- environmental concerns are not the primary motive for political consumerism -- is rejected. Environmental concerns are the most popular reason given for both boycott and boycott activities among respondents in the sample.

### **Motives for Political Consumerism**

The second "why" hypothesis, that self-interest is not a primary motive for political consumerism, is examined with frequency distributions of different motives for engaging in this behavior. For each type of political consumerism measured, survey participants were asked "Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit that might come to you or someone you know, or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what corporations do or how society functions?" Interviewers were instructed to accept more than one response if multiple motives were reported. Most respondents gave

one primary reason for their activity. Motives reported for the four different types of political consumerism, initiated in the past year, are reflected in **Figure 4.10**.

**Figure 4.10**  
**Motives Reported for Acts of Political Consumerism (Past Year)**



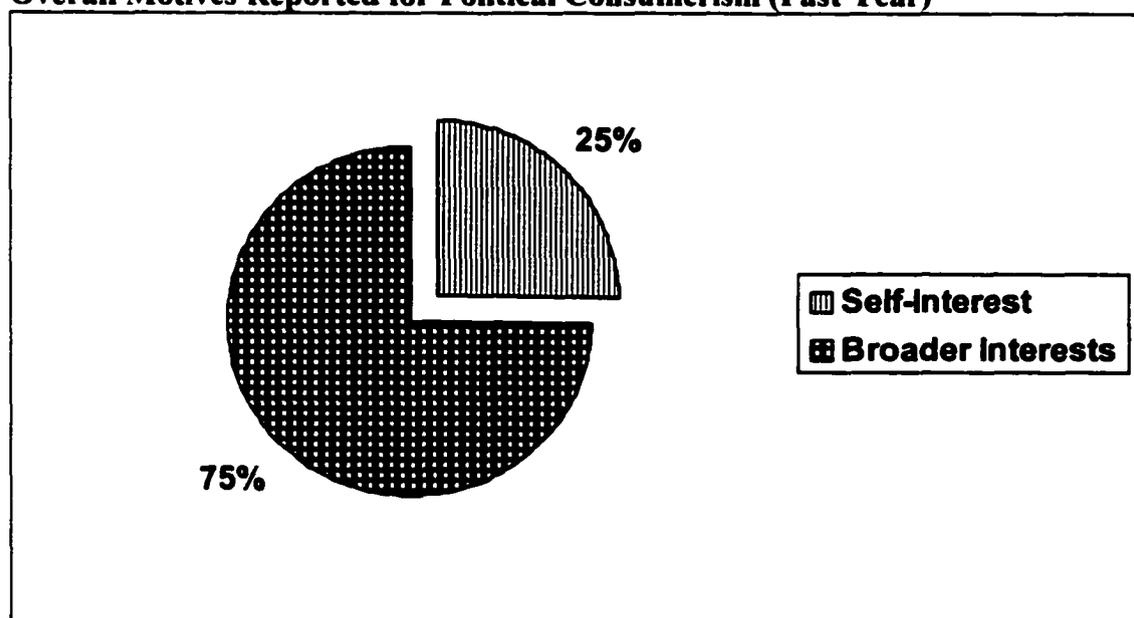
Respondents report several motives for boycotts for environmental/safety reasons. The sample is divided among those who say they initiated this activity for personal benefit, to change corporate conduct, and to change society. The primary interest reported for boycotts based on corporate conduct is to change corporate behavior. The principal motive for buycotting was social/political by definition because of the way the question was asked, although 37% of the sample also reported personal benefit as a motive for initiating this activity.

Most respondents who engaged in boycotting during the past year did so for reasons other than self-interest; their motives extend to broader social/political issues.

Six-in-ten (59%) respondents who boycotted for reasons involving the environment or safety did so to change corporate policies or effect broader social change. About the same number of respondents who boycotted for reasons of corporate conduct report the same (68%). The broader societal interests reported for these actions illustrates the political character of boycott activities which, on the surface, involve very self-interested issues (e.g., personal safety).

The results of the analysis for the second “why” hypothesis are mixed thus far. Self-interest is not the primary motive for boycott activities, but it is the most popular motive reported for boycotts of a social or political nature. Analysis of the combined reasons for engaging in political consumerism is in order. **Figure 4.11** shows a breakdown of self-interest versus broader (societal, company change) interests for political consumerism.

**Figure 4.11**  
**Overall Motives Reported for Political Consumerism (Past Year)**



As shown in this pie chart, self-interest is reported as the primary motive for one-fourth of political consumerist activities. Respondents report a desire to change corporate practices along political lines, or to bring about societal change, 75% of the time. Therefore, the null hypothesis that self-interest is the primary motive reported for political consumerism, is rejected. According to respondents in this sample, self-interest is not the basis for most political consumerism.

### The “How” Hypotheses

The largest group of hypotheses address the question of how political consumerism and conventional participation compare to one another. Seven “how” hypotheses are tested here using multiple methods. This analysis is certainly the most original contribution of this dissertation to the body of knowledge about political consumerism, and in some ways, extends our knowledge of more conventional forms of participation.

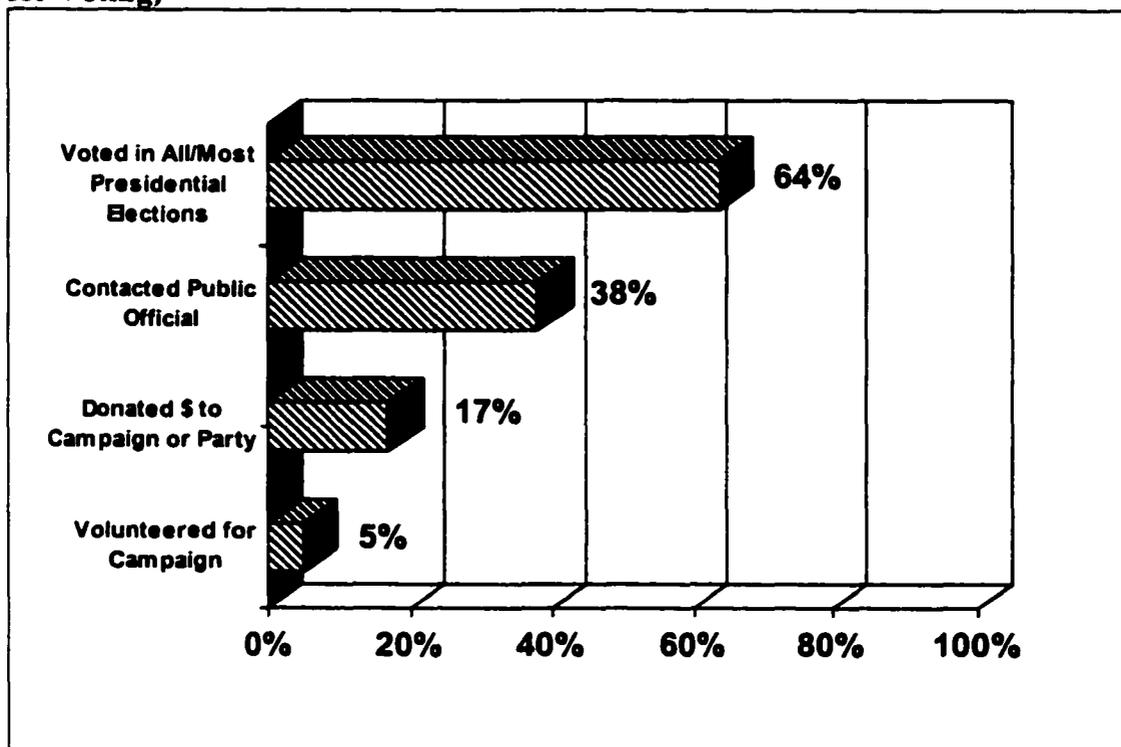
### **Rates of Engagement**

The first “how” hypothesis ( $H_{13}$ ), that a greater percentage of respondents engaged in conventional participation than political consumerism in the past year, aims at uncovering the relative popularity of these two forms of political participation. The comparison here is based on the number of different types of each activity, not the overall frequency of engagement. I fully expected that conventional participation outpaces political consumerism, but I also anticipate findings that political consumerism is nipping at its heels considering its heightened popularity in recent years. This hypothesis is tested

by examining rates of engagement in different types of political consumerism and conventional participation, and an assessment of overall rates of engagement.

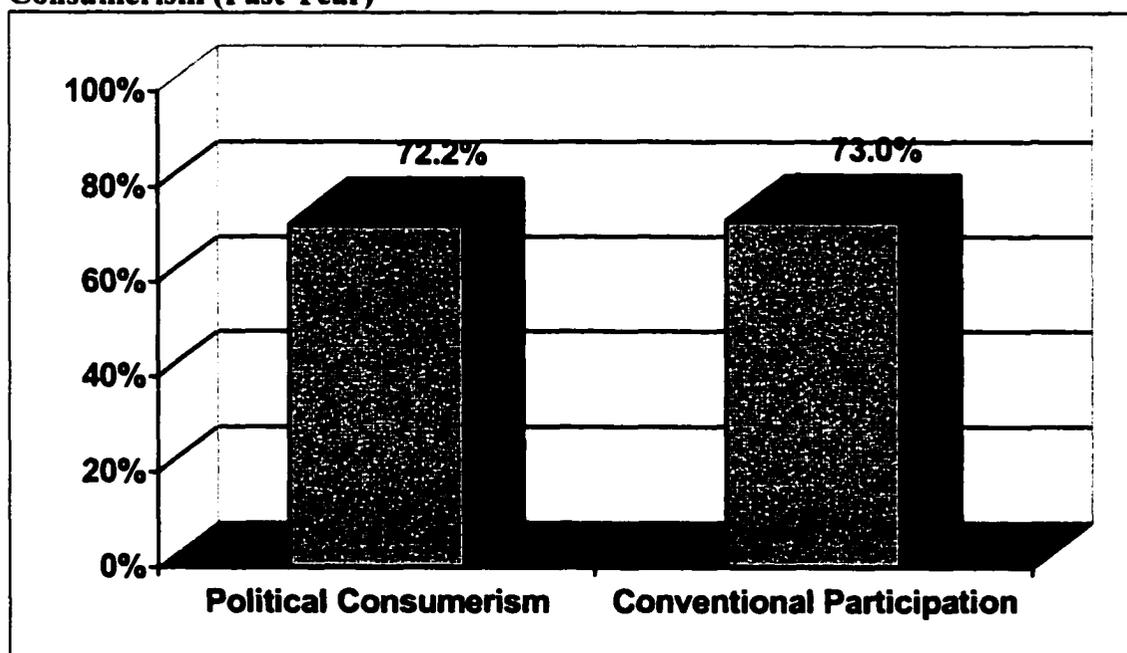
As shown in **Figure 4.3** earlier in this chapter, 64% of respondents initiated a boycott activity for safety or environmental reasons, and 52% did so in response to corporate conduct. Four-in-ten survey participants (38%) say they boycotted a product or company in the past year for political reasons, and 10% were involved in a consumer protest. When it comes to engagement in different acts of conventional participation, voting is the most popular form of participation, followed by contacting a public official, making a campaign contribution, and volunteering for a political campaign, as shown below in **Figure 4.12**.

**Figure 4.12**  
**Engagement in Different Types of Conventional Participation (Past Year, Lifetime for Voting)**



About four-in-ten respondents voted in all presidential elections and contacted a public official. Seventeen percent of survey participants donated money to a campaign or political party, and 5% volunteered for a campaign. Comparing these figures to those for political consumerism, we find roughly similar levels of participation. About two-thirds of survey participants report engaging in the most popular activity in each category -- boycotting and voting. Fewer but sizable numbers of respondents engaged in other types of political consumerism and conventional participation. A more precise way to assess the relative engagement in these activities is to look at the percentage of respondents who engaged in at least one act of each in the past year. **Figure 4.13** shows the comparison.

**Figure 4.13**  
**Engagement in at Least One Act of Conventional Participation and Political Consumerism (Past Year)**



This figure indicates that the same percentage of respondents engaged in conventional and consumerist activities in the past year. Seven-in-ten survey participants initiated at least one act of political consumerism and one act of conventional participation in the last

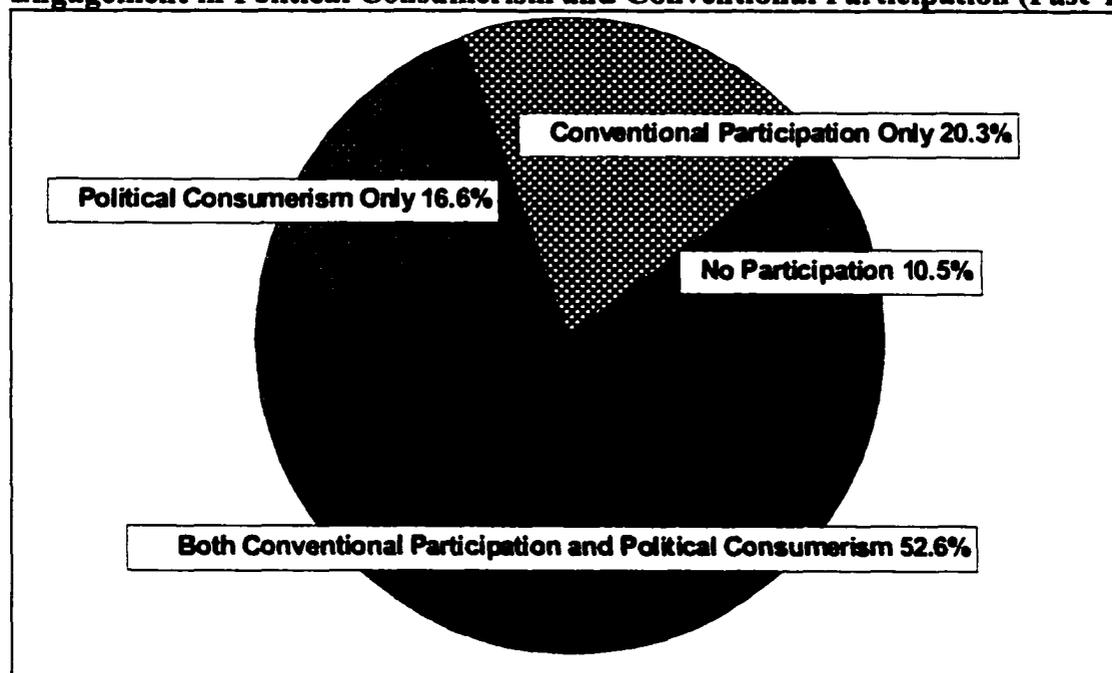
year. When it comes to the number of different activities initiated in each category, the figures look about the same. No statistically significant differences are noted.

Another way to determine whether respondents are more likely to engage in conventional participation versus political consumerism is to calculate the average number of each activity in the past year. Survey participants engaged in 1.09 acts of political consumerism and 1.18 acts of conventional participation during this time, a difference that is not significant at the .05 level. Ample evidence exists to accept the null hypothesis that rates of conventional participation do not surpass rates of political consumerism in the sample. Respondents engage in conventional participation and political consumerism with equal frequency.

### **Engagement in Both Forms of Political Participation**

The second “how” hypothesis ( $H_{1d}$ ), that respondents who engaged in conventional participation in the past year were more likely than others to also engage in political consumerism, is tested with a crosstab and correlation analysis of the two activities. **Figure 4.14** provides a graphical representation of different combinations of engagement in conventional participation and political consumerism in the past year.

**Figure 4.14**  
**Engagement in Political Consumerism and Conventional Participation (Past Year)**



In this pie chart, almost all respondents initiated at least one act of conventional participation or political consumerism (89.5%). One-in-five respondents (20.3%) initiated at least one conventional act in the past year but did not initiate political consumerism. This group of respondents participated in politics through a governmental channel, but did not press their political concerns in the marketplace. A slightly smaller group (16.9%) used the market as their sole avenue for participation without conventional participation. Over half of the sample (52.6%) initiated both conventional participation and political consumerism.

A correlation analysis was conducted to further substantiate what appears to be a positive relationship between political consumerism and conventional participation. These two variables, measured by a count from 0 to 4 for each, are significantly correlated in the positive direction with a coefficient of .192 ( $P < .010$ ). This analysis suggests that the null hypothesis -- that respondents who engaged in conventional

participation in the past year were not more likely than others to also engage in political consumerism -- is rejected. A positive relationship does exist between these two types of participation that requires further discussion and analysis.

It appears that political consumerism is much more popular in combination with conventional participation than alone. While not discounting the idea that political consumerism can be an effective "weapon of the weak," or dismissing numerous case studies indicating that it has been used in this fashion, this analysis shows that political consumerism is not generally used as an alternative to conventional participation. A small group of respondents use political consumerism as their only political tool, but a much larger group of respondents use political consumerism as a complement to conventional participation. One explanation for this may be that political consumerism requires fairly sophisticated knowledge about corporate involvement in the public policy process, knowledge that more politically informed citizens are likely to possess. Past research indicates that people who are politically active are more likely than others to be politically informed, and vice-versa (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997). As with conventional participation, politically informed citizens have the tools necessary to engage in political consumerism that less informed citizens do not.<sup>17</sup> Another explanation may be that conventional participation empowers citizens politically, and this empowerment somehow carries over into their relations in the marketplace. Yet another explanation involves mobilization: politically active citizens are more likely to be members in national organizations that mobilize their membership to engage in political consumerism. The mechanisms at work in the relationship between conventional

participation and political consumerism require further explication in future research that includes measures of political knowledge and group membership.

Two new variables were created for an additional analysis of the relationship between conventional participation and political consumerism. The Conventional Activist scale is a count of the number of conventional political activities respondents engaged in during the past year out of a possible four: volunteering for a campaign, making a financial contribution to a party or campaign, contacting a public official, and voting.<sup>18</sup> Respondents who engaged in at least two of these activities in the past year are classified as Conventional Activists. Using this criteria, one-third of the sample (33.2%) fit the bill. A similar Consumer Activist scale was also created to identify respondents who engaged in multiple acts of political consumerism in the past year out of a possible four: boycotting for safety or environmental reasons; boycotting for reasons of corporate conduct; boycotting for social or political reasons, and being involved in a consumer protest. Respondents who engaged in at least two of these activities in the past year are classified as Consumer Activists. Thirty percent of respondents are Consumer Activists according to these criteria.

These two new variables are used to further explore the question of whether Conventional Activists more likely to be Consumer Activists than other respondents in the sample (non-activists). Indeed they are. **Figure 4.15** shows that 39% of

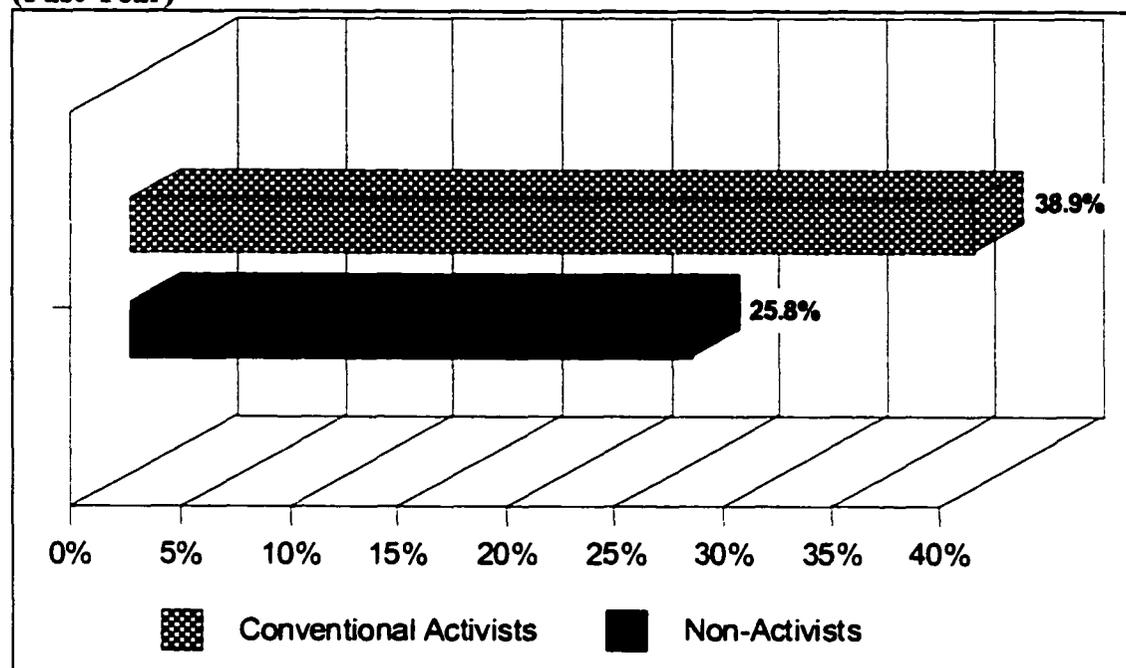
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<sup>17</sup> Political knowledge was not included as a measure in the survey, so its relationship to consumer activism can only be speculative at this point. Future research can address this issue by looking at whether political knowledge is a significant predictor of political consumerism.

<sup>18</sup> The voting variable measures frequency of voting in presidential elections during the respondent's lifetime.

Conventional Activists are also Consumer Activists, compared to only 26% of other survey participants ( $p=.011$ ).

**Figure 4.15**  
**Percentage of Consumer Activists among Conventional Activists and Non-Activists**  
**(Past Year)**



When it comes to the relationship between conventional participation and engagement in specific types of political consumerism, a greater percentage of Conventional Activists report boycotting for safety or environmental reasons in the past year than other respondents. A significantly greater percentage of Conventional Activists also report boycotting for reasons of corporate conduct, buycotting, and participating in a consumer protest than other survey participants. Respondents who engage in conventional political channels with some frequency are more likely than others to also engage in political consumerism with some frequency.

### **Shared Predictors**

The third “how” hypothesis ( $H_{1,5}$ ) compares demographic predictors of political consumerism and conventional participation. I expect to find that age, education, race, gender, and income are significant predictors of both behaviors, despite some contrary findings reported earlier in this chapter (e.g. gender was not found to be a predictor of political consumerism). Following the deductive method of inquiry, hypotheses were established with existing research and theory *prior* to the start of the analysis and will not be altered in the middle of the process.

#### *Age*

Age is the first potential shared variable of interest. The sample is split into those two groups for this analysis: respondents 18 - 49, and respondents 50 or older. An age difference does exist with political consumerism, as discussed in a previous section of this chapter, with younger respondents being slightly more participatory than older respondents. Age turns out to be a significant predictor of conventional participation, but in the opposite direction. Older respondents are more participatory when it comes to conventional activities: 73.2% of younger respondents and 91.9% of older respondents report engaging in at least one activity in the past year ( $p=.000$ ). It is safe to say that age is not a shared predictor of conventional participation and political consumerism. Younger respondents are more likely to engage in political consumerism, and older respondents are more likely to engage in conventional participation.

### *Education*

The second potential shared variable is education. Educational level is positively correlated with both conventional participation (.198) and political consumerism (.147) at the .01 level. The average number of activities increases significantly as educational level increases for both political consumerism ( $p=.061$ ) and conventional participation ( $p=.010$ ). Education acts in similar ways for both activities which indicates that this variable is a shared predictor.

### *Race*

Race is another potential shared predictor for conventional participation and political consumerism. Black respondents engaged in 1.36 average acts of political consumerism in the past year compared to 1.21 acts of conventional participation, while Anglo-White respondents participated in 1.11 average acts of political consumerism and 1.40 acts of conventional participation. The mean number of conventional acts does vary significantly by race ( $p=.000$ ), but significant variance is not found with political consumerism ( $p=.357$ ). This finding suggests that race is not a shared predictor of both types of political participation, but further analysis is needed as so few Black respondents completed a survey. This variable will be included in the regression equation below, but the fact that only 14 respondents are Black Americans should be kept in mind.

### *Gender*

The last potential shared predictor is gender. As discussed earlier, significant gender differences are not found when it comes to political consumerism. Seventy-three

percent of women report initiating at least one activity in the past year compared to 65.6% of men ( $p=.102$ ). Likewise, a significant gender difference is not found with conventional participation. Eighty-two percent of female respondents engaged in at least one conventional act of participation in the past year compared to 79.4% of men ( $p=.361$ ). Considering the near significance of gender as a predictor of political consumerism, further analysis is needed to determine whether this variable is indeed a shared predictor or both political consumerism and conventional participation. At this point, its status as a shared variable is questionable.

### **Regression Analysis of Shared Predictors**

The previous discussion uncovered at least one shared predictor for political consumerism and conventional participation (education), one possible shared predictor (gender), and two predictors that do not appear to be shared (age and race).<sup>19</sup> An ordinal logistic regression analysis allows us to assess the determinants of the respective dependent variables once again to verify that the pathways to each behavior are indeed quite different. The dependent variables used in this regression analysis measure rates of engagement in different types of conventional participation and political consumerism in the past year. The dependent variable measuring conventional participation is a discreet variable with a range from “0” to “4.” A score of “0” indicates that the respondent has not participated in any conventional acts of participation measured, whereas a score of “4” indicates that the respondent has initiated all four different conventional participatory

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<sup>19</sup> Race is a significant predictor of conventional participation but not political consumerism, and age is a significant predictor of both types of participation but in opposite directions. As age increases, the likelihood of engaging in conventional participation increases while the likelihood of engaging in political consumerism decreases.

acts possible. **Table 4.1** shows the distribution of this dependent variable. The mean number of different conventional political activities initiated in the past year is 1.18 activities with a standard deviation of .99 activities.

**Table 4.1**  
**Frequency of Engagement in Conventional Participation**  
**(Past Year, Lifetime for Voting)**

<b>Number of Conventional Political Activities Initiated</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
0	27.1%	27.1%
1	39.7	66.8
2	24.0	90.8
3	6.7	97.5
4	2.5	100.0

The dependent variable measuring political consumerism is a discreet variable with a range from 0 to 4. Respondents with a score of “0” have not participated in any of the political consumer activities measured in the past year and respondents with a score of “4” initiated every type of political consumerism measured in the survey. **Table 4.2** shows the distribution of this dependent variable. As with the measure of conventional participation, respondents generally initiated only a few different activities in the past year. Respondents engaged in an average of 1.09 acts of political consumerism in the past year, with a standard deviation of .95 acts.

**Table 4.2**  
**Frequency of Engagement in Political Consumerism (Past Year)**

<b>Number of Political Consumer Activities Initiated</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
0	30.8%	30.8%
1	39.1	69.8
2	21.1	91.1
3	8.3	99.4
4	.6	100.0

Two ordered logistic regression models are produced to compare the determinants of conventional participation and political consumerism. Ordered logistic regression is used because the dependent variables are discrete ordinal variables with a limited range (from 0 activities to 4 activities). Both models are displayed in **Table 4.3**. The factors and covariates are grouped into three categories: background variables (gender, race, age, age<sup>2</sup>, education, household income), two measures of political predispositions (political ideology and partisan intensity (party identification folded at the middle)), and one dummy variable measuring consumer empowerment (whether the respondent has complained to a company or manager at some point in their life). The indicator of consumer empowerment is included in both models to test for a general disposition toward complaining. Consumer empowerment is a rough measure of consumer efficacy, one aspect of a new consumer citizenship identified by previous researchers. As argued in Chapter 1 and addressed more extensively in Chapter 5, this new model of citizenship colors citizen relations with each other, government, and private institutions (e.g., corporations). I expect to find that respondents who are empowered consumers are more likely to engage in both conventional participation and political consumerism because

they feel as though they have power in the producer-consumer relationship, regardless of whether the producer is a corporation or the government. All of the independent variables should have positive signs in the regression models.

**Table 4.3**  
**Ordinal Logistic Regression Analysis:**  
**Determinants of Conventional Participation and Political Consumerism (Past Year)**

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Conventional Participation</u>		<u>Political Consumerism</u>	
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>
<b><i>Background Variables</i></b>				
Female	-.008	.275	-.313	.259
Non-White	.884*	.383	.298	.344
Age	.139*	.056	-.002	.050
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.000	.001	.000	.000
Household Income	.252*	.135	.122	.125
Education	.272*	.112	.196*	.105
<b><i>Political Predispositions</i></b>				
Liberal/Conservative (Lib. Hi)	.234*	.094	-.005	.088
Party Intensity	.006	.092	-.004	.086
<b><i>Consumer Indicator</i></b>				
Consumer Empowerment	.759**	.283	.721**	.265
N	214		214	
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.305		.088	
* p < .05				
** p < .01				
*** p < .001				

According to **Table 4.3**, the ordered logistic regression model for conventional participation is far more potent than the model for political consumerism. The pseudo  $R^2$  indicates that nearly one-third (30.4%) of the variance in conventional participation is explained by the factors and covariates in the first model, compared to 9% of the variance in engagement in political consumerism shown in the second model. It should be noted that these models include only 214 respondents due to some respondents not answering demographic questions.<sup>20</sup>

Age, race, household income, education, and consumer empowerment are all significant determinants of engagement in conventional participation, while education and consumer empowerment are the only significant determinants of political consumerism. As with earlier analysis, education is a shared predictor of both types of political participation. Unlike previous analysis, income and age are not significant predictors of political consumerism.<sup>21</sup> It appears that conventional participation and political consumerism share only education and consumer empowerment in common. Therefore, the null hypothesis that these two types of political participation do not share many determinants, is accepted.

The finding that political consumerism and conventional participation have few predictors in common suggests a few things. First, political consumerism differs from conventional participation in ways that have yet to be explored. Demographic indicators that allow us to predict conventional participation cannot simply be mapped onto political

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<sup>20</sup> A similar model was run with imputed values for political ideology, party identification, education, and income, netting a sample of 280 respondents. The findings did not change with this larger group of respondents.

<sup>21</sup> This is likely accounted for by differences in the modes of analysis. The crosstab analyses compared two groups in the sample (e.g., those with income of less than \$25,000 and those with higher incomes; respondents 18 - 49 years old and respondents 50 and older) and significant differences were found. The

consumerism to predict why people engage in this behavior. Further research is needed to tailor models to political consumerism that better describe who engages in this activity and why. A second explanation for the lack of shared determinants in the models above is that the sample is flawed to the point where otherwise significant determinants appear as non-significant. In addition to the drop-off in respondent numbers, the undersampling of different races and the income bias in the sample may be mediating the actual influence of these background variables on political consumerism. A larger, more representative sample is needed to fully determine where the pathways to political consumerism and conventional participation cross.

### **Self-Interest, Conventional Participation, and Political Consumerism**

The fourth “how” hypothesis ( $H_{16}$ ), that self-interest is not the primary reason for engaging in political consumerism or conventional participation in the past year, aims at assessing similarities in motives for these two types of political participation. Previous analysis in this chapter indicated that self-interest was not the main motive for engaging in political consumerism. One quarter of political consumerist activities were motivated by self-interest. The question remains as to whether self-interest is the prime motive for engaging in conventional participation, or whether respondents seek to affect society more broadly with these actions.

A variety of motives were reported for the four conventional political activities measured, as shown in **Figure 4.16**. Among respondents who volunteered for a political campaign in the past year, 29% volunteered for a particular benefit that might come to

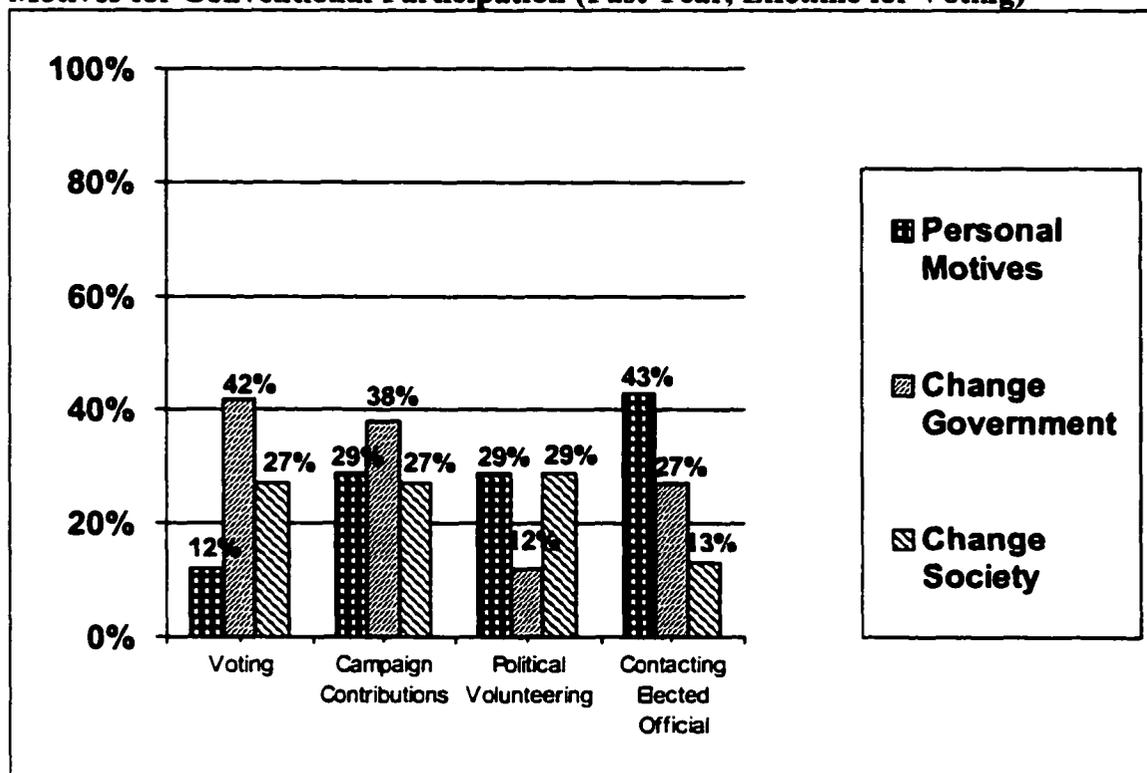
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logistic regression analysis above assesses differences across multiple age and income categories which are more difficult to detect.

them or someone they know, and 29% did so to change how society functions. Fewer respondents (11.8%) say they volunteered for a political campaign to bring about a change in government. Respondents report mixed reasons for contributing money to a political campaign or party organization. Many respondents contributed to bring about a change in what government does (37.8%); 29% did so for a particular benefit to them or their family, and 27% made a contribution to influence how society functions. Unlike campaign volunteering, many respondents use campaign contributions as a way to change what government does. A substantial number of survey participants also cite self-interested and societal reasons for their campaign contribution in the past year.

The primary reason given for voting in all or most presidential elections is to change what the government does (42.3%). A smaller but sizable portion of the sample voted consistently in an effort to change how society functions (27.3%). Only 12% of survey “voters” did so for a particular benefit that might come to them or someone they know. Receipt of a particular benefit was the primary motive mentioned for the fourth act of conventional participation, contacting an elected official in the past year. Forty-three percent of respondents who contacted a public official say they did so to receive a particular benefit for them or someone they know. Respondents apparently consider personal contact with public officials as the proper or most effective avenue for pursuing personal claims. Fewer respondents who contacted an elected official in the past year did so to change how government functions (27.3%), and only 13% of those who contacted an elected official in the past year did so to change how society functions.

**Figure 4.16**  
**Motives for Conventional Participation (Past Year, Lifetime for Voting)**



A primary motive emerged for three of the four conventional political activities examined. The principal reason given for voting and campaign contributions was to bring about a change in government. Self-interest was the primary motive for contacting elected officials in the past year, and mixed motives were at play for political volunteering. Respondents seem to match their goals with the appropriate channel when they participate through formal governmental channels. When it comes to the overall breakdown of motives reported for conventional participation, 23% of respondents report engaging in these behaviors for reasons of self-interests compared to 77% of respondents who report broader societal interest. As noted previously, only one-fourth of respondents who engaged in political consumerism in the past year report a self-interested motive. Thus, the null hypothesis that self-interest is the primary motive for conventional

participation or political consumerism, is rejected. Only a small percentage of political consumerist and conventional participatory acts were initiated for self-interested reasons.

### **Consumer Empowerment**

The last two “how” hypotheses concern the influence of consumer empowerment on political consumerism and conventional participation.  $H_{17}$ , that empowered consumers are more likely than others to have engaged in political consumerism in the past year, is measured with a bivariate analysis of consumer empowerment and political consumerism. The last “how” hypothesis ( $H_{18}$ ), that empowered consumers are more likely than others to have engaged in conventional participation in the past year, is tested with a similar analysis. Crosstab analysis shows that consumer empowerment is positively associated with both conventional participation and political consumerism. Consumer Activists – respondents who initiated two or more activities in the past year -- are far more likely than other respondents to be classified as empowered consumers (62.2% compared to 42.9%;  $p=.000$ ). A greater percentage of Conventional Activists are also classified as empowered consumers (69.4%) than other respondents ( $p=.000$ ). These findings lend cursory support for the last two “how” hypotheses.

Another way to determine whether consumer empowerment influences engagement in political consumerism and conventional participation alike is to regress these behaviors on the measure of empowerment. The logistic regression analysis presented in **Table 4.3** shows that consumer empowerment is a statistically significant determinant of both conventional participation and political consumerism. If consumers are empowered in the consumer-producer relationship, they are more likely to press their

political concerns in both the marketplace and government. The last two null hypotheses – that consumer empowerment is not an influential predictor of conventional participation and political consumerism – are rejected.

### Conclusion

This data analysis produced an abundance of useful information about political consumerism, most of which will serve as the basis for even more interesting questions to be addressed in future research. Eighteen hypotheses were tested using frequencies, bivariate analyses, comparison of means, correlation analysis, and the ordered logistic regression analysis. The results of each hypothesis are summarized in **Table 4.4** and discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

**Table 4.4**  
**Summary of Findings**

Hypothesis Category	Hypothesis	Outcome
"What" of Political Consumerism	H <sub>1</sub> : At least 50% of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>2</sub> : At least 30% of respondents engaged in political consumerism during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>3</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents engaged in boycotting than buycotting during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
"Who" of Political Consumerism	H <sub>4</sub> : A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism than male respondents during the past year.	<i>Null hypothesis is accepted.</i>
	H <sub>5</sub> : A greater percentage of female respondents engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.	<i>Null hypothesis is accepted.</i>

"Who" of Political Consumerism (Continued)	H <sub>6</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents ages 18 - 49 engaged in political consumerism than respondents ages 50 and older during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>7</sub> : Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were less likely to have engaged in political consumerism than other respondents during this time.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>8</sub> : Respondents making less than \$25,000 in the past year were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during this time.	<i>Null hypothesis is accepted.</i>
	H <sub>9</sub> : Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than respondents with lower levels of education during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>10</sub> : African-American respondents were more likely to have engaged in political consumerism than conventional participation during the past year.	Too few African-American respondents to test hypothesis.
"Why" of Political Consumerism	H <sub>11</sub> : Environmental concerns were the primary policy focus of political consumerist activities during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>12</sub> : Self-interest was not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
"How" Political Consumerism Compares to Conventional Participation	H <sub>13</sub> : A greater percentage of respondents engaged in conventional participation than political consumerism during the past year.	<i>Null hypothesis is accepted.</i>
	H <sub>14</sub> : Respondents who engaged in conventional participation were more likely than others to have engaged in political consumerism during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>15</sub> : Age, education, race, gender, and income were significant predictors of both conventional participation and political consumerism during the past year.	<i>Null hypothesis accepted.</i>

"How" of Political Consumerism (Continued)	H <sub>16</sub> : Self-interest was not the primary reason given for engaging in political consumerism or conventional participation during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>17</sub> : Empowered consumers were more likely than others to have engaged in political consumerism during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.
	H <sub>18</sub> : Empowered consumers were more likely than others to have engaged in conventional participation during the past year.	Null hypothesis is rejected.

Out of the eighteen hypotheses tested, twelve were supported by the data, and one could not be tested with the data available. This analysis presents a fairly detailed picture of political consumerism among respondents in the sample. Arguably the most consequential finding of this analysis is that a majority of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life and during the past year. Almost two-thirds of the sample boycotted for environmental or safety reasons, and just over half avoided products at some point in their life due to corporate conduct. Furthermore, a majority of respondents engaged in these activities for social or political reasons that go beyond their self-interest. These findings are meaningful because they establish political consumerism as a prevalent political behavior, worthy of study by political scientists.

A second finding of note is that survey participants engage in conventional participation and political consumerism at fairly even rates during the past year. With this said, it should be noted that the survey measured *different* acts initiated, not the *number* of times each act was initiated. Furthermore, the opportunity to participate in political consumerism and conventional participation are not equivalent in terms of opportunity for engagement, required involvement on the part of the respondent, and

possibly, impact. Future research can pursue a more sophisticated comparison of these political behaviors.

Widespread political consumerism found here speaks to an important debate about participatory decline. If political consumerism is included in the count of participatory activities, it compels political scientists to reconsider the current health of democracy in the United States as measured by citizen interest and input. If respondents are engaging in conventional participation and political consumerism at roughly similar rates, are we currently in the participatory malaise so oft proclaimed in our publications? The data presented here suggest that we are not. This topic is explored further in Chapter 5.

Another noteworthy finding is that consumer empowerment is positively related to political consumerism and conventional participation. It appears that respondents who feel that they have power in the consumer-producer relationship are more likely than other respondents to approach both the marketplace and government with their political concerns. This finding is in line with claims that consumer empowerment is a key part of citizen identity that extends beyond conventional consumer-producer relationships in the marketplace, a topic discussed in the next chapter. Consumer empowerment matters in the political arena in ways that have yet to be discovered, and further research is in order to fully explicate the political mechanisms at work here.

Another finding presented here, most useful for business readers, is that while many respondents engage in consumer activism, most do not communicate their political concerns directly to the “offending” company. In other words, many respondents go out of their way to avoid certain products for political/social reasons, but they do not take the time to inform the company about this. A silent mass of respondents are engaging in

boycott activities, many of which have expired or do not receive much media attention. This finding has important implications for the effectiveness of political consumerism. If corporations were more responsive to this “silent mass,” citizen power in the consumer-producer relationship would be strengthened at the same time companies would be strengthening their bottom line.

Another compelling finding of this research is that political consumerism usually complements, not supplants, conventional participation. Few respondents participate in the marketplace exclusively, and most respondents who engage in political consumerism also practice conventional participation. Generally speaking, respondents are not attempting to circumvent conventional political channels with their political consumerism, rather, they are supplementing their conventional participation with these activities. Political consumerism is just another tool in a box of political activities. This does not undercut the idea that political consumerism is a “weapon of the weak” in some situations, rather, it indicates that this is not its most common use.

The next and final chapter of this dissertation takes up several questions brought up by the data in this chapter. It begins with a discussion of what political consumerism means for political science, and concludes with thoughts about how these findings call for a reframing of the participatory decline debate.

## **Chapter 5: The Democratic Implications of Political Consumerism**

### **Introduction**

This is the final chapter of the dissertation and it goes well beyond a simple summary of what has been discussed in the last four chapters. I begin with brief description of findings and move on to an examination of the implications of these findings for political science and American politics more broadly. More specifically, I address the topics of what political consumerism means for debates in political science involving corporate power, how we decide what is political, participatory decline, and the health of American democracy. The final section of this chapter is devoted to areas for future research on political consumerism.

### **Summary of Findings**

This description of political consumerism is drawn from existing research and original analysis from Chapter 4. Eighteen hypotheses were analyzed in this dissertation pertaining to current rates of political consumerism, who engages in this activity, why they engage in it, and how respondent engagement in political consumerism relates to conventional participation. Findings indicate that political consumerism is a widespread behavior that has grown in popularity over the last decade. A majority of respondents in the sample discussed here engaged in at least one act of political consumerism during the past year. Some groups who lack political power have been known to turn to political consumerism as a last resort, but for the most part, citizens who engage in political consumerism also address their concerns through governmental channels. Therefore,

political consumerism is generally a complement, not an alternative to, conventional participation. Younger, educated people of middle- or upper-income levels are more likely than others to engage in political consumerism. Black Americans are equally likely to engage in political consumerism as Anglo-Whites; the participatory drop-off found with conventional participation does not surface with political consumerism. Most people who initiate political consumerism cite reasons other than self-interest for doing so. They are primarily concerned about changing the government, society, and corporate practices. Environmental concerns top the list of policy domains addressed through political consumerism, although issues of labor (e.g., sweatshop use) and customer treatment (e.g., racial discrimination) are also relatively popular. A majority of people believe that political consumerism is effective as a political tool, and citizens who feel empowered in their relationships with corporations are more likely to engage in this activity than others. Likewise, empowered consumers are more likely than others to engage in conventional (governmental) participation. These findings have implications for the study, conceptualization, and practice of politics in the United States as discussed in the next section.

### Implications of Political Consumerism

Political consumerism speaks to several debates in political science, including how we classify institutions and behaviors as political, the issue of corporate influence as a threat to democracy, and the participatory decline debate. Each of these topics is examined in turn.

### **Classifying Institutions and Behaviors as Political**

Researchers within and adjacent to the sub-field of political participation have called for an expansion of what is considered as political, beyond an exclusive focus on the government, for about three decades. It has been argued that the electoral/governmental focus of research on political participation has led to a lack of consideration of participation by women (Andersen, 1975, Acklesberg, 1997) and people of color (Hardy-Fanta, 1993). When the scope of political participation is extended to include the activities of these groups, unconventional acts of participation are added to the mix, including grassroots organizing, informal mobilizing, demonstrating, protesting, foot-dragging, alternative organization-building, and legal mobilization, to name a few. This dissertation provides yet another critique of the electoral focus of much participation research from a different angle. It presents a political behavior that is widely practiced across groups that does not involve the government or electoral process directly.

If political consumerism is indeed a political behavior, an idea persuasively argued here and in previous literature, its existence and prevalence challenge classification of political institutions and behaviors as solely governmental. The fact that so many citizens target corporations for political ends suggests that they recognize the political character of corporations and the political influence of their activities. Political participation via corporate channels has long been identified by researchers outside of political science (Vogel, 1978; Smith, 1990; Friedman, 1999), and more recently, by researchers within the discipline (Kirchner, 2001; Brown, 2001; Micheletti, 2001; Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2000; Bennett, 2001).

Studying political consumerism as a form of citizen participation targeting non-governmental but politically powerful and politicized institutions forces the process of defining what is “political” wide open in a way that has not been done before. This opening would create a new arena of debate about what unconventional activities are truly political and why, a logical next step for the political participation sub-field. For example, is shoplifting to protest corporate practices a political activity or simply an illegal act? Are acts of political consumerism still political when they are not communicated to the target? Where and how do we draw the line between political and non-political acts? The answer to this question would apply to unconventional actions beyond political consumerism. Serious consideration of political consumerism as a form of political participation also highlights the politicization of modern corporations in the United States, the topic of the next section.

### **Corporate Influence and Democracy**

The political nature and popularity of political consumerism has important implications for the on-going debate about corporate influence in American politics. The influence of business interests in the political process has been a cause for concern among some scholars (Lindbloom, 1977, 1982; Dahl, 1989; Greider, 1992; Gaventa, 1982). Lindbloom (1977) writes that corporate influence in politics is anti-democratic in that it squelches citizen representation, the basis for American democracy. He argues that the market is a “prison” in that producers have more success in the political system than any other constituents, and that business interests are able to keep issues of fundamental importance off the agenda. Lindbloom argues that because businesses play such a major

role in the economy, their interests are often interpreted as the national interest and the voice of the people goes unheard. He states that "The large private corporation fits oddly with democratic theory. Indeed, it does not fit" (356). According to Lindbloom, corporate interests dominate the political scene and do not allow for representation of the myriad of interests at play in the United States, thereby eroding democratic representation.

Greider (1992) notes that only those interests with a strong and direct financial stake in policy outcomes will invest the amount of money needed to provide the quality and level of information required to influence the policy process. Average citizens are not an influential part of policy making according to Greider because they cannot invest the money and time needed to provide "useful" information. Citizens are further removed by the fact that they cannot speak the expert language of political debates. "Modern technologies of persuasion have created a new hierarchy of influence over government decisions -- a new way in which organized money dominates the action while the unorganized voices of citizens are inhibited from speaking" (36). Citizen voices in politics are thus muffled because they do not have the necessary currency -- information -- and they do not speak the technocratic language of political elites.

Gaventa (1980) and Freire (1972) cite a less visible but more damaging assault on democracy than direct representational inequalities. They argue that citizens are prevented from even developing their interests, let alone getting them heard. These scholars argue that a "culture of silence" is promulgated by the powerful that precludes development of "consciousness" -- "self-determined action or reflection upon their actions" -- that in turn eliminates the possibility of true democratic participation

(Gaventa, 18). According to these authors, citizens are essentially automatons, espousing the values and language of the dominant elite. With this “culture of silence,” the interests of elites dominate the political scene, and citizens are denied the possibility of exploring, identifying, and pursuing their own interests. Gaventa, citing Mueller, writes that “Since citizens have been socialized into compliance, so to speak, they accept the definitions of political reality as offered by dominant groups, classes, or government institutions” (18). According to these authors, replacement of true citizen interests with corporate interests prior to citizens entering the political arena is more damaging to democracy than the issue of group inequalities in representation. Under this theory, even if these inequalities were extinguished, citizen interests would still go unrepresented because their supposed interests are actually the interests of elites, in this case, corporate interests.

On the other side of the corporate power/democracy debate, neo-pluralists acknowledge the great power of business interests in government and politics, but they argue that “countervailing influences in government, among producers themselves, and exerted by organized public interest groups keep the system balanced” (Bykerk and Maney, 1995: xiii). McFarland (1976), Berry (1989), and Vogel (1989) are confident that despite the great power of corporations in American society, their power is adequately “checked.” Corporate influence in policy making and politics, and involvement in de facto policy making, is not cause for alarm according to these researchers because the government, competition, and interest groups are powerful countervailing forces.

The topic of this dissertation speaks to the question of whether corporate power supersedes citizen representation to a point that it threatens democracy. The fact that many citizens use their consumer dollars to bring about political change via corporations

can be applied to the debate in a variety of ways. I am choosing to straddle the pluralist/neo-pluralist divide. Based upon the preponderance of evidence that corporations have privileged influence in the policy making/political process, and further evidence that corporate power extends to shaping public opinion in ways that benefit business interests (e.g., materialist values), corporate influence in American politics is an obvious threat to democratic representation. Citizen interests are dwarfed by corporate interests in the political process, both in terms of resources and outcomes. However, this threat is not without a "fix." Little evidence is available that countervailing forces are currently in place to effectively challenge corporate interests in the political arena, but the potential for meaningful contestation does exist. Citizens hold the power to check corporations directly through political consumerism, and their presence could be much stronger -- to the point where citizen interests are equal to or surpass corporate interests in the political process. The choir of citizen voices in government and policy making may presently be drowned out by an overbearing corporate tenor section, but citizen voices directed at corporations are multiple, high-pitched, and cannot be ignored. The existential goal of corporations is to make money, and consumer dollars are the measure of achieving this goal. Because of this, corporations have little choice but to listen to consumers so political consumerism has great potential to be a countervailing, democratic force in American politics. I hypothesize that the potential of political consumerism has not been fully tapped, whether measured by citizen participation or the influence of these activities. Future research can further examine this topic.

## **Participatory Decline and Democracy**

The most important implication of studying political consumerism is its challenge to the terms of the participatory decline debate. I wrote about political consumerism and participatory decline in the late 1990s, and since this time, several other researchers have also noted the connection (Micheletti, 2001; Bennett, 2001). In this section I briefly describe the participatory decline, how political consumerism challenges the existence of a decline in participation, and more speculatively, discuss connections between the half-century drop in conventional participation and the recent rise in political consumerism.

### *Civic Participatory Decline*

Voting, the hallmark of political participation, has seen double-digit declines in the United States starting as early as 1952. In 1978, Brody identified a paradox of electoral participation, that the “shrinking level of participation in American national elections confounds our expectations and is at odds with the explanations of turnout offered by available theories of political behavior” (287). Several authors have paid particular attention to this paradox over the past 20 years, each coming up with different reasons for electoral decline in spite of overall increasing levels of education.

Abramson and Aldrich (1982) explore why voter turnout is in decline, despite such trends as rising levels of education, enactment of less restrictive voter registration procedures, and the enfranchisement of Blacks Americans in the South. The authors analyze eight presidential election surveys from 1952 and 1980, and six congressional surveys from 1958 to 1978, and conclude that “declines may result largely from the combined impact of two attitudinal trends: the weakening of party identification and

declining beliefs about government responsiveness, that is, lowered feelings of 'external' political efficacy"(502). Abramson and Aldrich compare current turnout to expected turnout levels based on educational, voter registration, and enfranchisement trends, and conclude that the decline can be attributed to the combined impact of declining party identification and feelings of political efficacy.

Miller (1992) "transformed" the puzzle of participation by attributing turnout decline to "changes in the generational composition of the electorate. In particular, he focuses on the post-New Deal generation (first presidential vote in 1968 or later), which continues to grow in size, and votes at a rate well below that of older generations" (1). Miller writes that a minor part of generational differences in turnout can be attributed to party identification and social connectedness, but these variables do not explain the bulk of generational differences. Furthermore, such differences cannot be accounted for by a declining sense of political efficacy (Abramson and Aldrich's argument), less interest in election outcomes, or differences in preelection participation. He concludes that generational differences cannot be explained with ANES data, and that further research is in needed.

Putnam (1995a, 1995b) picks up where Miller left off in an attempt to explain the "extraordinary" inter-generational differences in civic participation. Putnam finds that social capital -- networks, norms, and trust -- that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives," has been shrinking for more than a quarter of a century (1995b: 644). This drop in social capital corresponds with declining voter turnout. Putnam examines many possible reasons for declining social capital and identifies television as the primary culprit. He argues that the timing of the mass

introduction of television fits with declining social capital, and that television now absorbs 40% of the average American's disposable free time, a 33% increase since 1965 (1995b: 677-78). Putnam determines that the increase in television viewing over the last four decades "might directly account for as much as one-quarter to one-half of the total drop in social capital. . ." (678). He posits that television destroys social capital through time displacement, viewer outlook, and childhood socialization. Television is the only leisure activity that seems to inhibit participation outside of the home. In this regard, "television watching comes at an expense of nearly every social activity outside the home, especially social gatherings and informal conversations" (678-79). Putnam concludes that the evidence against television is pretty damning, but not enough for a full conviction. "[T]he defense has a lot of explaining to do" (680). He encourages scholars and others to consider how technology is privatizing our lives. I address the issue of whether technology is privatizing our lives, or whether the values transmitted through new informational/entertainment technology are the culprit, later in this chapter.

Many authors have noted that the decline in civic participation is eroding democracy in the United States. These arguments generally employ a model of democracy that proscribes active civic participation, such as Barber's (1989) idea of "strong democracy" that requires self-governance through participation. Barber believes that democracy cannot be served with a passive citizenry whose primary civic role is to hold elected representatives accountable. Rather, citizens "should participate at least some of the time in at least some public affairs" (xvii). Barber argues that "democracy can only survive as strong democracy, secured not by great leaders but by responsible, competent citizens" (xvii). This requires active political participation on the part of the

citizenry, what Barber terms “self-governance.” Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1996) propound similar ideas when they write that “citizen participation is at the heart of democracy. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process” (1). Without citizen participation, the “interests, preferences, and needs” of “the people” will not be communicated to elected officials. According to Lijphart (1997), theorists such as Barber (1984), Pateman (1970) and Arendt (1958) regard political participation as an “intrinsic democratic good,” whereas others regard it as a representational instrument (Verba, 1996; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady, 1996). Either way, widespread civic participation is thought to be the basis for a healthy, representative democracy by many scholars. Recent trends in civic participation thus threaten the health of democracy.

### *Reframing the Debate*

Political consumerism has many lessons for political scientists who study the decline in conventional participation. First, the popularity of political consumerism empirically challenges claims that overall participation is in decline. Secondly, the prevalence of political consumerism tells us that citizens may be more astute about power and politics than existing research indicates. Lastly, the concurrent decline in conventional participation and rise in political consumerism in the past decade suggests that the two phenomena are related. The first two “lessons” for participatory decline scholars are addressed in this section, and the last “lesson” is addressed in the next section dedicated entirely to the topic.

## Challenging the Numbers

First and most obviously, if political consumerism is included as a form of participation in the overall count of such activities, participation may not be in decline, or the decline may be much less steep than imagined. Several political scientists have noted that instead of a participatory decline, we may be experiencing a period of social and political change that is giving rise to new forms of political participation (Nolan, 1998), including political consumerism (Bennett, 1998). If the data presented in this dissertation, other data from the U.S. (Keeter, Zukin and Andolina, 2001), and data from other advanced nations are any indication, a sizable percentage of the U.S. population is engaging in this behavior. Additional research is needed to determine national rates of engagement in different types of political consumerism, and to gather data from the same respondents on their conventional political activities for purposes of comparison. It is safe to say that inclusion of political consumerism in the participatory equation will net quite different results than simply measuring voting and other conventional activities. Aside from telling us that participation may not be in decline, political consumerism tells us that citizens are perhaps more perceptive than previously thought, the topic of the next section.

## Savvy Citizens

In addition to minimizing or possibly reversing the declining participatory trend in the United States, the recent rise in political consumerism tells political scientists something important about the American citizenry: people in this country may be more savvy than we give them credit. It is a favorite pastime of scholars to talk about the

uninformed masses who know little about their government and political decisions that greatly influence their lives, and indeed, survey research shows that these statements are generally accurate. However, widespread engagement in political consumerism displays some unexpected foresight. It would appear that the American public now view corporations as the primary locus of power in American society instead of government, and citizen challenges to corporate power are a reflection of the declining legitimacy of the state in society (Vogel, 1978: 9). This idea is not original. According to Vogel (1978), a decline in governmental participation and a corresponding rise in political consumerism makes sense. Expanded political consumerism reflects the public's general lack of trust in government to represent the public's interest (9). Citizens see the overbearing influence of corporate interests in politics, and they realize that power has shifted to corporations, and their voices are less acknowledged in the halls of Congress and the oval office. Thus, according to Vogel, it is rational for citizens to target channels where their voices are heard.

Akin to shifts in participation, it is an interesting fact that while political efficacy has steadily declined since the 1970s, consumer efficacy has steadily increased during this same period (Brobeck, Mayer, and Herrmann, 1997). Citizens are increasingly less likely to believe that their voice is being listened to by government officials, but more likely to believe that their consumer voice has an audience.

It would appear that as locations and modes of political power have evolved, so have forms of political participation and possibilities for self-governance. Citizens have recognized a shift in power from the state to corporations, and they now consider the marketplace to be a legitimate political target. Vogel points out that corporations are

being subjected to the same democratic pressures experienced by the American states 150 years ago. I am not suggesting that government institutions and representative are without power, rather, that corporations have trumped governmental power in the eyes of the public. Recent examples, such as the Enron debacle and subsequent citizen push for campaign finance reform to limit corporate involvement in government, confirm this, but further research on perceptions of business versus government power is needed to say for sure.

Implicit in this discussion thus far is the idea that the verified decline in conventional participation and rise in political consumerism are somehow related. I discuss this more speculative hypothesis at length in the next section.

### **Participatory Decline and Surge**

This discussion is admittedly the most speculative part of this dissertation. In short, I hypothesize that the half-century decline in conventional participation and recent increase in political consumerism are related, caused by the same cultural shift. This shift is the advent of consumerist culture and the ensuing birth of the citizen-consumer. While I am not able to test this hypothesis with data, I can explore the possibility with existing research and critical thinking on the subject. In this section, I examine the advent of consumerist society, the birth of the citizen-consumer, and the ways in which this shift has affected both conventional participation and political consumerism. I conclude this section with an evaluation of popular remedies for conventional participatory decline in the literature in light of the apparent causes.

*Description of Consumerist Society*

Much has been written about the current consumerist society in the United States. It is loosely characterized by an exchange model of relations and materialistic values. The exchange (producer-consumer) model of relations is the widespread notion of citizenship wherein people perceive the world as though they are at the receiving end of an exchange. This model of citizenship permeates relationships with government, other institutions, and other citizens. Bennett (2001) writes that "Consumerism is becoming the core of the relationships between citizens, representatives, and governments in a number of nations"(2). The advent of consumerist society has "broadened the scope of consumer behavior to the point that the distinction between citizen and consumer roles in public life is increasingly difficult to establish (Scammell, 2000; Bennett and Entman, 2000)"(2).

In addition to the exchange model of interaction that characterizes consumerist society, materialism has become an overriding social value. Citizen desires and demands are driven by the social norm of obtaining material wealth. Gailbraith (1985) argues that advanced industrial nations have become consumer societies, societies "in which the possession and use of an increasing number and variety of goods and services is the principal cultural aspiration and the surest perceived route to personal happiness, social status, and national success" (3). Materialism is thus the basis for personal and national identity. On the surface, consumption as the basis for shared identity seems antithetical to the self-actualization, the pursuit of "higher order" needs, made possible with the postindustrialist shift. But producers have adapted and continue to convince the public that meaning in life can be found through purchases. Corporations have capitalized on

post-materialist affluence and technological advances that allow for expansive mass marketing campaigns to present this idea on a larger scale than previously possible. The postmaterialist shift altered the shared identity of consumption with the identity of socially conscious consumption, such as recycling, but citizens still view their relationships as an exchange in which they are on the receiving end. They continue to think of personal and national identity in terms of shared experiences with consumers, but the element of social consciousness in this shared experience has been introduced.

Consumption as the basis for shared identity in America is of great benefit to producers and is not likely to wane anytime in the near future. This shared identity is constantly communicated through marketing and advertising campaigns that espouse materialistic values. Advertising reaches every corner of America. It is even found in grade schools where school administrators allow in-school advertisements and sign exclusive deals with one producer, such as Coke, in exchange for school funding from the company (Bomann, 2000). Shared national identity based on consumption and driven by materialism is propped up by two societal messages that benefit producers. The first message is that acquisition of material goods will bring happiness. This message is pervasive in advertising: Pontiac “builds excitement”; Coca-Cola makes “life taste good”; GE “brings good things to life.” Consumers are also banked the flip side, that they will be unhappy if they do not have or use certain products. Certain demographic groups, such as teenagers, are particularly susceptible to the idea that they will not fit in unless they are sporting certain labels, the newest fashion, or the right accessories.

Consumption as the basis for happiness is marketed in all corners of America, starting at a very early age. According to Schlosser (2001), many companies now target

children in an effort to promote life-long consumption (42). James McNeal, a professor at Texas A & M University, has identified seven major categories of whining or ways in which children nag their parents (44). Advertisers are taking full advantage of this and similar information to tailor their advertising to children to gain maximum “pester power.” McDonald’s identified children as their target customers in the 1950s (40-49). Ronald McDonald is identified correctly by children second only to Santa Claus. A 1991 study from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that recognition of Joe Camel was as high as recognition of Mickey Mouse among 6-year-olds (43). The surge in marketing the idea that consumption buys happiness to children started in the 1980s. “The growth in children’s advertising has been driven by efforts to increase not just current, but future consumption” (Schlosser, 2001: 43), driven by materialistic values.

The second belief that undergirds materialism in the United States is the somewhat mythical idea that all citizens start with similar opportunities, and if we only work hard enough, we can all achieve the riches that will bring happiness. The success of Dan Rather’s recent book *The American Dream: Stories From the Heart of Our Nation* (2001), speaks to our desire to uphold this notion. This societal myth supports the idea that wealthy people deserve their socioeconomic standing, and poor people also deserve their position, despite ample data indicating that wealth begets wealth, poverty begets poverty, and race and gender play a part in economic opportunities (Parenti, 1977; Miliband, 1989; Hochschild, 1995). With the pervasive myth of the American dream, differences in “happiness” (material accumulation) can be attributed to personal shortcomings and not to larger societal tides of inequality. The Dream also establishes

material acquisition as the yardstick for success. If the social origins of economic inequality were more fully understood, material gain would likely not be the universal measurement of success. Materialism, propped up by the idea that consumption brings happiness and that all Americans have the same opportunities to achieve happiness (consume), is a major part of contemporary consumer culture.

### *Roots of Consumerist Society*

Researchers disagree about the causes and timing of the rise of consumerist society, but there is much agreement that modern American culture can be described in these terms. Some scholars believe that our consumer society originated in the Progressive Movement at the turn of the last century (Sandel, 1996; Mayer, 1989). Others claim that our contemporary consumerist society is a product of later societal trends (Inglehart, 1990, 1997; Craven and Hills, 1973; Chalmers, 1996; Brobeck, 1997; Yankelovich, 1981).

Sandel (1996) argues that American consumerist society has its roots in cultural shifts from the turn of the last century during the Progressive era. According to this author, Americans were struggling to find a shared identity as previous bases for identity were scattering under the weight of the newly nationalizing economy. Americans were searching for an identity that would transcend ethnicity, class, and occupation; a point of commonality. Wilson Progressives capitalized on this struggle for identity and developed new mass politics based on the idea that everyone faces “high prices, defective products, and unresponsive politicians” (221). Here we see the producer-consumer model of exchange applied to citizen relations with their government. The Progressive movement

brought citizens together as consumers “in opposition to the old politics that was based on ethnic and producer identities” (222). The producer notion of citizenship wherein Americans thought of themselves as contributors to government and society was replaced with identities based on the shared experience of consumption. Citizens were now bound together by their shared goal of material acquisition that necessitated a shift from societal contributors to consumers, from citizen-participants (citizen-producers) to citizen-consumers.

Mayer (1989) also places the advent of our consumerist society during the Progressive era. He writes that “Progressivism in general and consumerism in particular can be interpreted as attempts on the part of both society and individuals to reconcile the traditional American values of thrift, restraint, refinement, and concern for one’s fellow citizens with increasing affluence afforded by an industrial society” (31). According to Mayer, the consumer notion of citizenship reflects personal and societal schisms between increasing affluence and conflicting republican value of looking out for others. Consumerism patches the gap between self-interested affluence and altruistic republican citizenship by establishing a norm of consumption with positive connotations. Consumerism “normalizes” the idea that wealth and acquisition of material goods are positive endeavors. The obligation to look out for fellow citizens, a mainstay of producer notions of citizenship, fell by the wayside as citizens began to define themselves as consumers in exchange relationships.

Many of the scholars who place the appearance of consumerist society later than the Progressive era explicitly reference or allude to the postmaterialist shift during the mid-part of the century. According to Smith, Moschis, and Moore (1987), the

prominence of consumerism in American society has arisen with the advent of postindustrialism. The cultural shift is characterized by higher relative levels of affluence, education, and income; technological advances; and the rapid expansion of mass communication and “information” (Inglehart, 1990:2). Greater relative affluence, along with the expansion of mass marketing and the proliferation of an “information” society, heighten consumerism and its core elements of materialism and exchange relationships. Americans have a “higher” standard of living in modern society when material items and household luxuries are taken into account. The bulk of “information” we receive in our contemporary “information” society pertains to the buying and selling of products. In line with ideas about postmaterialism, Mitchell (1978) locates the roots of consumerism in “a post-1945 society in which comparative affluence presented a significant segment of the population with problems of choice” (4). According to Craven and Hills (1973), consumerism did not come into “sharp focus” until the end of the 1960s when consumers were better educated, more affluent, and had more leisure time than consumers at any other point in the history of the nation. “Moreover, they were offered a complex assortments of goods and services, one result of postwar technology. Mass communications, particularly television, made the buyer more aware of the proliferation of economic goods as well as, eventually, the existence of problems related to products and services” (234).

Postmaterialism likely amplified consumption and materialism as societal norms and entrenched the consumer notion of citizenship. The postmaterialist shift also brought with it the ability to look beyond daily subsistence needs to “higher order” needs on Maslow’s hierarchy. The consumer, women’s liberation, environmental, and civil rights

movements are all a reflection of citizen's ability to look beyond their daily functioning to broader societal and long-term issues. Friedman (1999) notes that the content of boycotts evolved from primarily economic and labor issues to "higher-order" motives on the Maslow hierarchy, perhaps indicating that the comfortable standard of living enjoyed by many Americans is allowing them to go beyond survival concerns to wrestle with quality-of-life issues" (218). On the surface, this shift to "higher order" or altruistic thinking appears to run counter to the materialistic values of consumerist society. However, expanded public support for altruistic policies has not replaced the pervasive societal norm of materialism, nor has it challenged the consumer notion of citizenship. Citizens now hold materialist and postmaterialist values "such as those for esteem, self-expression, and aesthetic satisfaction" simultaneously with ease (Inglehart, 1990: 68). In fact, the selling of postmaterialist values has become big business as baby boomers are seeking the meaning of life en masse. The postmaterialism in modern consumer society can be found in advertisements for "self-expression" through the right automobile purchase. The advertising campaign for the "new" Volkswagen Beetle embodies the congenial relationship between materialistic and postmaterial values. Volkswagen introduced its new beetle in commercials that rebuked modern materialism and presented its product as an alternative. Higher order postmaterial values complement the ubiquitous materialism of modern consumer society so much so that this new value orientation is used to further materialism. The two are conflated.

It seems plausible that the consumer notion of citizenship that is such a big part of American politics and society today did indeed have its roots in the Progressive era when citizens were searching for a shared identity in the new national economy, and that

materialism and consumer consciousness developed later in the century as a result of greater affluence and information. Materialism and exchange relationships were a part of the new citizenship during the Progressive era, but affluence and mass communication were necessary to get these values to their current elevated form.

### *Birth of the Citizen-Consumer*

Consumerist society with its materialistic and exchange-based relationship components dictated a new model of citizenship that has been explored by many researchers. Boyte characterizes (1989) the pervasive consumer notion of citizenship as people thinking of themselves as clients and consumers in every relationship, including their relationships with corporations and the government. Sandel (1996) also writes that citizens think of themselves primarily as consumers. The citizen-consumer has garnered some less than positive descriptions, including the “Mc Generation,” the “Culture of Narcissism,” and the “Inner Directeds” (Ray, 1997: 56). The citizen-consumer views her interactions with other citizens and institutions as an exchange. She no longer thinks of herself as a producer in any interaction, whether it be in relation to corporations or elected officials. The classic clarion call for civic duty, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,” is turned on its head. All relations are considered an exchange with the underlying questions of “what will I get out of this?” “What can my country and everyone else do for me?” The citizen-participant of yesteryear has been replaced by the citizen-consumer of today.

With exchange relations as the basis for personal and civic identity, the citizen-consumer holds a strong rights-orientation. Friedman (1985) writes that Americans in

our consumerist society have internalized two “super-principles”: an entitlement to justice, and an entitlement to recompense. The citizen-consumer expects “total justice,” and when he has suffered a wrong, he feels entitled to full compensation for his damage. The citizen-consumer feels entitled to “total justice” in his relations and interactions with the government, corporations, and others. When this rather impossible expectation is not met, the citizen-consumer demands compensation for his loss or deficit from the producer in the exchange. This exchange model of citizenship permeates every aspect, every relationship, in the citizen-consumer’s life. It has been said that attorneys wake up in the morning and view each moment of their day through a legal lens. Analogously, we all wake up in the morning and view each moment of the day through the lens of an exchange in which we are the consumers, on the receiving end. Higher divorce rates and increases in rates of inter-personal civil litigation may be a result of this lens.

The citizen-consumer has unreasonably high expectations for all her relationship, including government (O’Connor and Sabato, 2000). Friedman (1985) finds that the citizen-government relationship has evolved in tandem with evolution in the consumer-producer relationship. That is, as producers have become bigger and more distant from consumers, consumers have increasingly demanded considerations from both corporations and the government. The citizen-consumer unreasonably expects the government to provide total justice and total recompense in all aspects of life. The government cannot possibly live up to these expectations, and when they are not met, the fire of citizen apathy is fueled.

The advent of consumerist society, and the subsequent birth of the citizen-consumer, have generally had negative effects for conventional participation and positive

ramifications for political consumerism. The ways in which societal shifts have influenced both types of participation are discussed in the following sections.

### *Consumerist Society and Conventional Participation*

Boyte (1981) acknowledges that consumerist society is the basis for the decline in conventional participation. He attributes widespread ignorance of American politics to the consumer model of citizenship that has replaced an ethos of active citizenship with a consumer notion of citizenship. Boyte finds that Americans used to view themselves as practical agents in a civic world, working together to solve collective problems, but now, as citizen-consumers, people have discarded previous notions of civic responsibility. Citizens no longer vote for the most part or engage in other forms of political participation because they view the world as an exchange in which they should receive something rather than contributing. According to Boyte (1981) and Barber (1984), this new model of citizenship threatens democracy's very core. The cornerstone of democracy – self-governance -- is lost in the shuffle. Citizens are not interested in or informed about government because they do not get anything from it according to the exchange lens through which they view the world.

Consumer advocate and often presidential candidate Ralph Nader, who “made ‘consumer’ synonymous with ‘citizen’” (Smith, 1990: 206) also finds that consumerism and its self-interested citizenship is the cause for diminished civic participation. Sandel (1996) identifies the rise of consumerist society as having significantly altered conceptions of citizenship and the “vision of democracy underlying it” (224). He posits that the shift from producer-based identities to consumer-based identities in the political

arena was more than simply a new rallying point. It permanently altered the way citizens view their relationship to government:

The shift to consumer-based reform in the twentieth century was a shift away from the formative ambition of the republican tradition, away from the political economy of citizenship. Although they did not view their movement in quite this way, the Progressives who urged Americans to identify with their roles as consumers rather than producers helped turn American politics toward a political economy of growth and distributive justice whose full expression lay decades in the future (225).

The advent of consumerist society in the United States brought about significant changes in how citizens view themselves in relation to government, and this in turn has led to the decline of conventional participation. Barber (1984) notes that democracy is undermined by “complacency in the guise of privatism” and “irresponsibility in the guise of individualism” (xvii). “Privatism” and “individualism” are two characteristics of the consumer model of citizenship. The citizen-consumer is more self-interested than the citizen-participant of yesteryear, and coupled with other societal experiences, such as information overload and shrinking disposable time, is disinterested in politics. The citizen-consumer sees little value in becoming informed about or engaging in politics as the pay-off is low.

Citizen-consumers are also wary of government officials because they hold them to the unattainable standard of “total justice.” This standard is imparted on individual politicians as well as the government more generally. And since the citizen-consumer is not particularly informed about politics, he can easily write off all politicians as “crooks” and “liars” because the government does not (cannot) deliver “total justice.” This belief is maintained with little reevaluation as citizens do not seek out information about politics. Likewise, the citizen-consumer does not believe that participating in politics will make a difference. Low political efficacy can also be traced to the impossible

standard of “total justice.” General distrust of government officials and low political efficacy play a part in the participatory decline of recent decades.

The consumer model of citizenship is likely the root cause of the precipitous decline in voting, political efficacy, trust in government, and political knowledge since the 1950s. The citizen-consumer goes to the polls only sporadically, although her parents voted religiously. She is not interested in writing letters to public officials or joining in protest at the capital building because it will likely not make a difference.

Getting back to Putnam’s ideas about civic decline, he has adeptly identified that citizens are no longer interested in the republican traditions of engagement, participation, and looking out for their fellow citizens. These values have been replaced with exchange-oriented consumer citizenship. As noted above, one of the major reasons Putnam gravitates towards television as the culprit is its timing. But a closer look indicates that the expansion of television viewing, arguably the more influential postmaterialist technological advance, corresponds with the rise of consumerist society and adoption of the consumer model of citizenship. The “privatizing” of lives in America is partially accomplished *through* television, but it seems unlikely that television is main reason *why* citizens are privatizing their lives. I believe that the consumer model of citizenship more accurately explains the drive for privatization; television is one of the primary mediums, not the cause, of this cultural shift. Television communicates the consumer notion of citizenship, but did not create it. If the producer or participatory model of citizenship were still at work in American society, and consumerism/materialism were not prevailing social norms, television viewing would likely not be as widespread. Americans would be less dependent on entertainment media for their

personal and national identity. It would be interesting to correlate consumerist values with television consumption to see if these two variables move in tandem. Television is not simply a form of entertainment. If it were, it would continue to experience stiff competition from other forms of entertainment. Television is the primary tool for communicating societal values of consumption, materialism, and entitlement. Americans find out how they are supposed to dress and act from television. Citizens get to see how the “other half” consumes, depending upon their social vantage point. Television defines and constantly redefines the end goal of materialism in the new consumerist society. It sends messages about what buys happiness this season. Television plays a major role in communicating the values of consumerist society, but I argue that the values, not the technology through which they are transferred, are the root cause of civic decline in America. This expansion of Putnam’s ideas is pithy and not nearly as thoughtful and supported as it should be. Rather, I am proposing a topic for future research: exploring the relationships between television, consumerist values, and conventional participatory decline.

### *Consumerist Society and Political Consumerism*

While consumerist society and the rise of the citizen-consumer have likely brought about the decline of conventional political participation, they have had the opposite effect with political consumerism. The postmaterialist values of consumer consciousness and anti-corporate sentiment have propelled political consumerism to the fore in American politics. Each of these values is addressed in turn.

## Consumer Consciousness

Brobeck et. al. (1997) make the argument that the consumerist society of the 1980s and beyond is somewhat different from previous points in history. These authors posit that heightened political consumerism is a product of a mass internalization of the values of the recent consumer movement of the 1960s and 1970s. One of the main elements of the consumer movement was the fostering of “consumer consciousness,” an awareness that buyers have interests distinct from sellers, and that consumers have enforceable rights in transactions with vendors (Brobeck, Mayer, and Herrmann, 1997). An increase in consumer consciousness is a logical result of exchange-based relationships in which citizens envision that they are empowered consumers, on the receiving end of exchanges. Consumer consciousness on a national scale has resulted in altering the fabric of American culture as people are now more aware of and willing to assert their power as consumers. Mayer (1989) also notes the mass internalization of the values of the most recent consumer movement. Chalmers (1996) argues that the federal government played a key role in the development of consumer consciousness. “With the federal courts willing to give standing to public interest and class-action suits and accept oversight responsibilities, the new laws had opened up the economic system and culture to organized citizen activism” (183) Government involvement in the marketplace to further consumer interests solidified citizen power in the exchange relationship that undergirds the consumer model of citizenship.

Citizen-consumers are empowered in their relationships with producers and have adopted higher-order post-materialist values that they now expect corporations to address, such as environmental protection. Consumer empowerment coupled with expectations of

corporate social responsibility have produced higher rates of political consumerism, especially in an environment characterized by a flood of information about corporate practices and an overwhelming variety of product and service alternatives. The objectives of the past consumer movement are now being carried forth at the individual level. It is reasonable to suspect that the values of the consumer movement of the 1960s and 1970s took a greater hold in the 1990s after marinating in these broadly established societal values for two decades. Political consumerism has been “mainstreamed” in American life in the form of socially conscious purchasing and investment decisions (Mayer, 1989; Smith, 1990; Friedman, 1999). According to Mayer (1989), the consumer movement of 30 years ago “so transformed institutions and consciousness that many proconsumer actions now occur as a matter of course and without fanfare” (viii). Everyday acts of consumer resistance routinely take place for many Americans.

#### Anti-Corporate Sentiment

Many researchers have identified recent surfacing of an anti-corporate, anti-capitalist, anti-materialist undertow in American culture that has something to do with the rapid increase in political consumerism in recent years (Cienfuegos, 2000; Ray, 1997). A study by Ray (1997) finds that one-quarter of the American population, termed Cultural Creatives, now share a new set of anti-corporate values. Cultural Creatives are concerned about the environment, women’s status in society, global issues, and “spiritual searching.” According to Ray, this category breaks down further into Core Cultural Creatives, 11% of the population or 20 million people, who “combine a serious concern with their inner lives with a strong penchant for social activism” and Greens -- 13% of

the population whose “values center on the environment and social concerns from a more secular view” (31). Both groups frequently consider social and political issues when making purchases. Cultural Creatives differ from Modernists (47% of the population) who “place high value on personal success, consumerism, materialism, and technological rationality” (29). Cultural Creatives also differ from Heartlanders (29% of the population) whom Ray describes as “country folks rebelling against big-city slickers [who] believe in a nostalgic image of small towns and strong churches” (29). Cultural Creatives represent the coming together of the consumer notion of citizenship (citizens who are empowered consumers in their relationships) and post-materialist values that makes for increased rates of political consumerism.

Cienfuegos (2000) documents recent heightened citizen interest and activity in limiting corporate power. According to this author and activists, new groups were formed in the mid-1990s across the United States to challenge what he describes as corporate usurpation of citizen authority. Cienfuegos argues that recent citizen activities challenging corporate power “represents a profound shift beginning to take place in the consciousness of citizens” (4). This shift in consciousness reflects greater willingness on the part of citizens to challenge corporate power directly in the past decade.

Cienfuegos (2000) provides many examples of governmental and political consumerism across the United States as evidence of emerging citizen interest in curbing corporate power. The 1998 Wayne Township and Thompson Township Ordinances in Pennsylvania prohibit corporations from establishing or doing business in the township if it has a history of regulatory law violations (e.g., environmental, labor). These ordinances also prohibit corporations from doing business in the respective township if

any of the corporate directors sit on other corporate boards that consistently violate regulatory laws. In November of 1998, over 200 organizers from campuses across North America attended the Campus Democracy Convention and formed the 180 Degree/ Movement for Democracy and Education that calls for “a 180 turn toward democracy.” Hundreds of campus chapters of 180 are currently in operation across the United States. They conduct teach-ins and strikes and have been highly instrumental in the university movement to end sweatshop production. Farming laws passed in Nebraska (1982), South Dakota (1998), and Pennsylvania (1999) prohibit non-family-owned corporations from owning farmland or engaging in farming or ranching in an effort protect smaller businesses. In April of 2000, the city council of Point Arena passed a “Resolution on Corporate Personhood” that disavows the personhood status of corporations and encourages citizens and other townships to discuss this issue. This resolution came about from citizen pressure in the community.

Cienfeugos was directly involved in one of the plainest examples of self-governance involving citizen challenges to corporate power in recent years. In 1998, *Measure F: The Arcata Advisory Initiative on Democracy* passed by 58% of the vote in the northern California town. It called for two town hall meetings to address the question “Can we have democracy when large corporations wield so much power and wealth under the law?” About 600 residents attended nine hours of town hall meetings in 1990. They passed an initiative demanding that the city “ensure democratic control over corporations” doing business in Arcata. The City Council then established a standing committee on Democracy and Corporations that began reviewing and limiting the “authority and privileges of large corporations doing business in Arcata” (11). Rates of

political consumerism have likely been helped along with anti-corporate postmaterialist values, a defining element of modern consumerist society.

### **Political Consumerism: A Democratic Remedy?**

In the last section I outlined how the consumer model of citizenship has been detrimental to rates of conventional participation in the United States. The new consumerist society and the rise of the citizen-consumer dramatically altered the rules of the citizen-government relationship. The negative democratic consequences of the consumer model of citizenship seem obvious: lack of interest and participation in conventional political activities and citizens who are disconnected from each other and their local community save for a superficial connection with others in an Internet chat room or through watching *Friends* on Thursday nights. While this environment threatens democracy on the surface, I believe that the erosion of strong democracy brought about by the consumer model of citizenship has been overstated, and the potential to resolve these issues through proposed remedies has been overestimated because they fail take into account the role of consumerist society in conventional participatory decline.

Not all hope is lost for self-governance and democracy in contemporary consumer society. In our zeal to hold up electoral modes of participation as the only form of civic contribution, political scientists have failed to identify a potential remedy: direct challenges to corporations and corporate power. Barber (1984) hints at the participatory and democratic possibilities that lie beyond the electoral arena when he writes that

Like all political constructs, strong democracy has a prescriptive edge, but it also gives theoretical expression to what a great many Americans are actually doing. It holds up a mirror to citizens and urges them to appreciate the profoundly democratic political implications of a wide range of civic or protocivic activities in which they are

regularly engaged. I am less anxious. . . to call for new political behavior than I am to get Americans to call what they are already doing *political* behavior. I am less concerned to expand democracy than to expand our understanding of what counts as democratic. . . .(xiv)

Political consumerism fits with Barber's expansion of the political; a less recognized path to strong democracy. When citizens press their concerns through the marketplace, they are influencing decisions that affect their lives, engaging in self-governance. Citizen challenges to corporations, such as boycotts and socially conscious investing, are forms of self-governance. Fewer Americans are engaging in governmental political participation, but an increasing number of citizens are seeking political redress through the marketplace. Sandel (1996) alludes to the idea that the new consumer model of citizenship carries significant political power for citizens in American democracy:

By the early twentieth century, the citizen as consumer was a growing political presence. '[T]he real power emerging today in democratic politics is just the mass of people who are crying out against the "high cost of living"' wrote Walter Lippmann in 1914. "That is a consumer's cry. Far from being an impotent one, it is, I believe, destined to be stronger than the interest either of labor or of capital. (222)

Lippman's prediction, that the consumer voice will eventually hold more power than the interests of capital, has yet to be realized, but political consumerism holds this potential. The citizen voice is trumped by producer interests in government, but the consumer is king in the private marketplace.

There are certainly issues with political consumerism substituting for conventional participation in American politics. Brown (2001) argues that "Consumer purchasing decisions, of course, are no substitute for more collective forms of political action. Public-interest consumerism also risks obscuring the need for more fundamental political change." (64). Likewise, there is merit to the argument that political consumerism gives power and legitimacy to the very institutions whose undue influence

in the political process is cause for alarm. By approaching corporations with political concerns, citizens are possibly sending signals that the government cannot be trusted, and that deep corporate involvement in politics is legitimate. Political consumerism could be concentrating more political power in the hands of businesses.

Another critique of the rise in political consumerism and decline in conventional participation is the lack of legitimacy accorded to the government. Political theorists have long noted that the legitimacy of the government ultimately rests with citizens, and logically, a decline in conventional participation signals an erosion of government legitimacy that political consumerism cannot possibly replace. Democratic theorists who wax nostalgic about a time when citizens connected with each other and with their government in a contributory fashion suggest that there was some inherent good in this producer model of citizenship, and this may well be the case. Citizens learn to be “good” citizens by participating in conventional political channels, but do they learn anything positive by engaging in political consumerism? Is this an empowering or informative activity? These are questions for future research.

Despite potential shortcomings in political consumerism relative to conventional participation, the possibility that these activities are forming new roots of strong democracy is positive. Further research delving into the differences between political consumerism and conventional participation is needed prior to determining whether waxing nostalgic for the consumer-participant model of citizenship is justified. The next section is devoted to a discussion of how consumerist society and the citizen-consumer come into play with democratic remedies that have been proposed to get us out of our current democratic malaise.

*Evaluation of Democratic Reforms*

When discussing proposed democratic reforms, it is important to note that the consumer model of citizenship is here to stay, at least until the next major cultural shift. This new model of citizenship is strongly rooted in the values of the new consumerist society, including materialism, exchange-based relationships, and rights-orientated entitlement. The citizen-consumer is not going to disappear anytime soon. Her existence and meaning is firmly grounded in widely-accepted societal norms and values, and alterations in the consumer model of citizenship will require broader societal change. A recurring theme in existing research is a longing to return to yesteryear when civic participation was alive and well. Because we have not fully acknowledged new models of citizenship at work, existing literature continues to suggest that a few tweaks here and a tuck there will somehow revive civic participation in the United States. Models frequently prescribe remedies that operate under the producer model of citizenship. These models assume that citizens will return to bring producers in the citizen-government relationship if institutional barriers are removed (Lipjhart, 1997; Piven and Cloward, 1988), if citizens are forced to be “producers” through compulsory voting (Lipjhart, 1997), or if we teach citizens to be “producers” through civic education (Neimi and Junn, 1998).

Increases in political participation may be massaged through a variety of institutional reforms. Lijphart (1997) recommends a “combination of voter-friendly registration rules, proportional representation, infrequent elections, weekend voting. . . holding less salient elections concurrently with the most important national elections” and

compulsory elections (1). However, institutional reforms do not work with the exchange relationships of the citizen-consumer. Citizens no longer consider themselves producers in their relationship to government, and unless the remedy recognizes and works within this new exchange relationship, it will not succeed.

Democratic remedies through civic education do not necessitate revival of the citizen-participant, although existing models typically propose this move. Several political scientists present the idea that civic education is the answer for achieving strong democracy (Barber, 1984; Neimi and Junn, 1998). The idea is that civic education strengthens democracy through heightened citizen participation, that citizens can be taught to be producers in their relationship with government. Neimi and Junn (1998) conclude that “civic knowledge is necessary and useful for citizens in a democracy and, indeed, that democracy is incompatible with widespread ignorance about government and politics on the part of the citizen” (9). If citizens are informed about government and politics, so the story goes, they will be more inclined to engage in civic life.

The civic education remedy asks citizens to adopt a producer model of citizenship in the realm of politics without challenging the consumer model of citizenship. These theories suggest that citizens can return to a producer model of citizenship (“What can I do for my country?”) through civic education while living in a consumerist society (“What can my country and everyone/thing else do for me?”). Considering that the consumerist paradigm prevails in American culture, permeating more than just the political domain, it seems implausible to change the consumer model in this one area and expect greater rates of self-governance without altering society more broadly. As a glass of hot water added to a cool swimming pool does not increase the temperature of the

pool, so the “producer” effects of civic education will rapidly dissipate when mixed with the entitled consumerist norms of broader society. Americans can learn about the importance of participating in their own governance through grade school and high school courses, but when they operate in the “real world,” they will be functioning under exchange-based relations in every domain. Friendships, work relations, work environments, dating relationships, interactions with corporations and leisure time activities will continue to run on a consumer model. Attempts to move away from the consumer model to a producer model of citizenship via civic education will fall short without a shift in the underlying societal consumerist paradigm.

Civic education models that encourage adoption of a “producer” identity in the citizen-government exchange will not be successful because they will come up against the prevailing consumerist tide in society. However, the idea that civic engagement can be increased through socialization is a good one. If civic education were to somehow work within the consumer model of citizenship to increase engagement in politics, it could be effective. If researchers recognized that citizens think of themselves as entitled consumers in their relations with government, civic education curricula could be built around this new model of citizenship. Further research and thought is needed to determine what a “consumer” model of civic education would look like.

A second obstacle to increasing rates of conventional participation through civic education or any other democratic remedy with any likelihood of success is a heavy-handed corporate, and by extension, government, interest in maintaining the prevailing consumerist paradigm in American society. The idea that the government upholds consumerist models of citizenship to benefit corporations was readily apparent after the

terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> when President George W. Bush urged citizens to hit the malls as a display of their patriotism. Consumer patriotism shows the dual role of government and business in maintaining the citizen-consumer, despite the fact that government legitimacy may be threatened by lack of civic participation in its institutions.

Corporations will oppose any serious attempts to return to a producer model of citizenship because this would be a big step away from consumerism and would threaten their preeminent position of power in American society. Corporations directly benefit from the present consumerist society, first and foremost, in that there is overriding pressure to purchase products and services. American society is saturated in the societal myth that the path to happiness and fulfillment is accumulation of material goods. This idea is a key element of consumerist society, and would be shaken if the consumer model of citizenship were replaced with a producer or other model of citizenship. Even small cracks in the foundation of the perceived benefit of material accumulation would threaten the position of many corporate bottom lines. Democratic remedies that do not take into account corporate, and by extension, governmental, interest in maintaining the consumer model of citizenship will not be effective in reforming civic participation. It is not clear how those seeking democratic remedy should process this information. This is another topic for future research, a good segue into the next section on this subject.

#### Future Research on Political Consumerism

The potential for future research on the topic of political consumerism seems endless at this point as so little has been written about this political behavior. The list of

possible topics is enough to fill up a few careers, and hopefully research in this area will blossom in coming years as more American politics researchers jump on board.

The first project for political consumerism should be a representative survey of the nation that includes questions on the following: frequency of all types of political consumerism, perceptions of its effectiveness overall and in relation to conventional participation, measures of citizenship and civic values, a sophisticated measure of consumer empowerment, questions about group membership, measures of consumer mobilization, sources of information about political consumerism, respondent feelings of exclusion from formal politics, use of political consumerism as a “weapon of the weak,” more detailed information about motives, and information about opportunities for political consumerism (purchasing and investment patterns). In addition to addressing these questions, a national survey with an overrepresentation of Black Americans and other racial minorities would allow for a more thorough analysis of political consumerism by race.

Longitudinal survey data, focus groups, and a carefully designed experiment can shed light on whether conventional participation is a precursor to political consumerism, another interesting topic for future research. National and longitudinal data can also give us a more accurate picture of the overall rate of political participation and health of democracy in the United States, and tell us whether we are truly in a participatory decline when unconventional actions like political consumerism are considered.

Another area to study is the effectiveness/ influence of political consumerism in the political/public policy process. A small number of studies do address this topic, but not systematically with a representative sample of consumer actions. Studies of the

effectiveness of political consumerism should take the different forms of this behavior into account (boycotting, buycotting, socially conscious investing, shareholder activities, protests, disruptive/illegal tactics) as there are bound to be differences in the effectiveness of each.

The sub-field of political participation has recently turned its focus to the effects of political participation for those who engage in it. A similar line of inquiry can readily be applied to political consumerism. Do citizens who engage in political consumerism learn from this behavior, and if so, what do they learn? Is there an appreciable increase in political knowledge, political efficacy, or the likelihood of engaging in political participation in the future? Existing models of learning can be applied to this unconventional political behavior.

The research agenda for political consumerism must include a chapter on high-profile consumer protests that have arisen in recent years. Pertinent topics could include the demographic composition of protesters, how they were mobilized, the role of the Internet in organized consumer protest, the motives/interests of protesters, the perceived effectiveness of protest activities, levels of information about the protest activity, and government/corporate response to consumer protest activities. Along these lines, it would be useful to know the goals of consumer protest activities and their effectiveness. Are these meaningless displays of citizen action, or do they lead to immediate or long-term political change?

Elite mobilization of political consumerism is another topic for future study. Consumer organizations and other organizations (labor, pro-life, environmental) mobilize their membership to engage in political consumerism, but aggregate information is not

available on which groups employ this tactic, how they mobilize their membership along these lines, and the effectiveness of their efforts. It would also be useful to know where organizational leaders rank political consumerism in terms of effectiveness in comparison to conventional types of participation.

Another study of interest pertaining to political consumerism is an elite survey of opinions about this behavior. Do governmental and corporate leaders consider various types of political consumerism to be effective? Legitimate? Have they recognized its increase in recent years, and where do they think it is headed in the future? Elite perspective of why citizens are increasingly engaging in political consumerism would also be useful for understanding this political behavior. Along these lines, it would be useful to know how business leaders are currently responding to heightened political consumerism, and what they plan to do about this in the future.

It would also be interesting to look at the use of political consumerism as a tool against consumerist values. Political consumerism in the form of boycotts, shareholder activities, and protests, are staples of anti-global/anti-materialist groups. Consumerist society brought about political consumerism at its present levels, and some citizens are now using this to change the materialist values of consumerist society.

A closer look at the relationships between television viewing, consumerist values, and conventional participatory decline is in order. Putnam's findings pertaining to the role of television in this decline require further analysis, as he suggests, and this analysis is a logical next step. Do consumerist values explain the fairly recent decline in conventional participation, or is some other element at play? What role has television played in communicating consumerist values and notions of citizenship?

Another topic for future study is whether the public is engaging in political consumerism at increasing rates because they believe that power has shifted from the government to corporations in American politics. This shift would be easy to measure with a few questions on a survey of the general public. Ideas about shifting power could be analyzed with data on engagement in conventional participation and political consumerism to determine whether respondents who believe power has shifted to corporations are more likely to press their political concerns in the marketplace.

These are but a few topics for future research on political consumerism. A comparative focus on this topic at some point would net information about global politics and power. Research on the willingness of consumers to engage in political consumerism, and under what conditions – market research – would also expand our knowledge of this behavior.

### Conclusion

Heightened political consumerism in recent years represents an important shift in American politics. Citizens are disaffected, distrust government, and are less and less likely to engage in conventional participation. At the same time, citizens are increasingly pressing their political concerns in the marketplace. If we are to believe Vogel's explanation for this, citizens are savvy. They see modes of power shifting in American politics, and they are tailoring their modes of participation to follow the power.

This dissertation presented an overview of political consumerism from existing research and an original regional sample. The finding that a majority of respondents have engaged in political consumerism at some point in their life and in the past year, coupled

with similar findings in existing research, suggest that this behavior will be an important part of the political landscape for years to come. Political science models and research can further the understanding of the actual and proper role of political consumerism in American politics. Inclusion of this political behavior in the strong democracy equation produces a different picture of democracy. Political consumerism is an important tool of self-governance in American democracy as corporations gain an increasingly powerful foothold in American politics. If democracy is measured by the amount of citizen input in policy decisions, and the ability of citizens to hold their leaders accountable, political consumerism improves democracy on both counts.

**Appendix A:**  
**Survey Instrument**

ID \_\_\_\_\_

CONSUMER ACTIVISM QUESTIONNAIRE

Good evening. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling from the Rutgers University Department of Political Science. We are conducting an important research project and I need to speak to one of the adults living in this household. Is there more than one person 18 years old or older who is living in this household?

Yes  
(1)

No  
(5)

No adults living  
in household  
(8)

Not a  
Residence  
(9)

Am I speaking to that person?  
[IF NOT]: Could I please speak to them?

We have to randomly select one of the adults in your household, and I must speak with the Adult whose birthday is coming up next. May I speak to that person?

[ONCE THE TARGET RESPONDENT IS ON THE PHONE, REPEAT YOUR NAME AND YOUR AFFILIATION WITH RUTGERS UNLESS IT IS THE SAME PERSON WHO ANSWERED THE PHONE]: I would like to ask for about 10 minutes of your time to help us with an important research project. The topic of this survey is consumer behavior and how it relates to politics. All of your answers will be kept completely confidential. Do you have about 10 minutes right now?

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_

End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

I will be asking you some questions about your purchase decisions and how active you are in politics. But first I want to ask you about some more conventional forms of political behavior.

Q1. In the past year have you worked as a volunteer – that is, for no pay at all or for only a token amount – for a candidate running for national, state, or local office?

Yes  
(1)

No  
(5)

Don't Know  
(8)

Refused  
(9)

*Skip to Q2 (next page)*

Q1a. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit that might come to you or someone you know, or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what government does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit

(1)

What government does

(2)

How society functions

(3)

Mixed

(4)

Don't know

(8)

Refused

(9)

Q2. In the past year did you contribute money -- to an individual candidate, a party group, a political action committee, or any other organization that supported candidates?

Yes  
(1)

No (5)	Don't Know (8)	Refused (9)
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→ Skip to Q3



Q2a. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what government does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit (1)	What government does (2)	How society functions (3)	Mixed (4)	Don't know (8)	Refused (9)
---------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------	--------------	-------------------	----------------

Q3. People are sometimes unable to vote because they're not registered, they don't have time, or they have difficulty getting to the polls. Think about the presidential elections since you were old enough to vote. Have you voted in all of them, in most of them, in some of them, rarely voted in them, or have you never voted in a presidential election?

All (0)	Most (1)	Some (2)
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Rarely (3)	Never (4)	Not old enough (5)	Never eligible (6)	Don't know (8)	Refused (9)
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→ Skip to Q4



Q3a. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what government does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit (1)	What government does (2)	How society functions (3)	Mixed (4)	Don't know (8)	Refused (9)
---------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------	--------------	-------------------	----------------

Q4. In the past year have you contacted an elected official on the local, state or national level -- a member of a city or town council, a governor, a mayor, a member of the state legislature, or someone in a White House or congressional office?

Yes  
(1)

No (5)	Don't Know (8)	Refused (9)
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→ Skip to Q5 (next page)



Q4a. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what government does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit (1)	What government does (2)	How society functions (3)	Mixed (4)	Don't know (8)	Refused (9)
---------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------	--------------	-------------------	----------------

Now I am going to ask you some questions about your purchasing behavior.

Some people choose not to buy certain products because the products, even when properly used, can cause harm to people or to the environment.

Q5. Have you ever done this?

(1) Yes

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

↓  
Skip to next page

Q5a. Was this in the past year?

Yes (1) No (5) Don't Know (8) Refused (9)

→ Skip to next page

Q5b. Can you briefly tell me what companies or products and why you did this?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Q5c. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit (that might come to you or someone you know) or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what the company does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit	What company does	How society functions	Mixed	Don't know	Refused
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(8)	(9)

Some people choose to avoid certain products or services, not because of the product itself, but because they dislike the *conduct* of the company that produces it.

Q6. Have you ever done this?

(1) Yes

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

Skip to next page

Q6a. Was this in the past year?

Yes (1) No (5) Don't Know (8) Refused (9)

Skip to next page

Q6b. Can you briefly tell me what companies or products and why you did this?

---

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Q6c. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what the company does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit (1)	What company does (2)	How society functions (3)	Mixed (4)	Don't know (8)	Refused (9)
---------------------------	--------------------------	------------------------------	--------------	-------------------	----------------

Now shifting gears slightly, some people try to *buy* certain products or services because they *like* the social or political values of a company, quite apart from the products or services that company provides.

Q7. Have you ever done this?

(1) Yes

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

↓  
Skip to next page

Q7a. Was this in the past year?

Yes (1)

No (5) Don't Know (8) Refused (9)

→ Skip to next page

Q7b. Can you briefly tell me what companies or products and why you did this?

---

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Q7c. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what companies do or how our society functions?

Particular benefit	What companies do	How society functions	Mixed	Don't know	Refused
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(8)	(9)

Now I want to ask a few questions about other ways that people sometimes pursue consumer issues. By consumer issues, I mean problems or concerns that involve products, services, or companies.

**Q8. Have you ever contacted a government official about a consumer issue?**

(1) Yes → **Q8a. Was this in the past year?**

(5) No	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
(8) Don't know	(1)	(5)	(8)	(9)
(9) Refused				

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

**Q9. Have you ever voted for or against a candidate for public office because of their stance on a consumer issue? [REPEAT DEFINITION OF "CONSUMER ISSUE" AS NEEDED]**

(1) Yes → **Q9a. Was this in the past year?**

(5) No	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
(8) Don't know	(1)	(5)	(8)	(9)
(9) Refused				

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

**Q10. Have you ever attended a protest involving a consumer issue?**

(1) Yes → **Q10a. Was this in the past year?**

(5) No	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
(8) Don't know	(1)	(5)	(8)	(9)
(9) Refused				

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

**Q11. Have you ever been involved in the filing of a lawsuit involving a consumer issue?**

(1) Yes → **Q11a. Was this in the past year?**

(5) No	Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
(8) Don't know	(1)	(5)	(8)	(9)
(9) Refused				

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

↓  
Skip to Q12  
(next page)

Q12. Have you ever contacted a company or complained to a manager about a consumer issue?

(1) Yes

(5) No  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

← Skip to  
next  
page

Q12a. Was this in the past year?

Yes (1) No (5) Don't Know (8) Refused (9)

→ Skip to  
next page

Q12b. Can you briefly tell me what company you complained to and what you complained about?

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Q12c. Did you do this primarily for some particular benefit [that might come to you or someone you know] or were you motivated primarily by a desire to change what the company does or how our society functions?

Particular benefit	What company does	How society functions	Mixed	Don't know	Refused
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(8)	(9)

Now I have just a few more questions so we can classify your answers.

**Q13. In politics as of today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?**

(1) Democrat  
(5) Republican

(3) Independent  
(7) Something else/ Other  
(9) Don't know/ Refused/ No opinion

**Q13a. Do you lean more toward the Democratic Party or more toward the Republican Party?**

(2) Democratic Party  
(4) Republican Party  
(3) Other Party  
(7) Neither  
(9) Don't know/ Refused/ No opinion

**Q14. Regardless of the political party you might favor, do you consider yourself to be a liberal, conservative, or somewhere in between?**

(1) Liberal  
(5) Conservative

(3) Somewhere in between  
(9) Don't know/ Refused/ No opinion

**Q14a. Do you lean more toward the liberal side or more toward the conservative side?**

(2) Liberal  
(4) Conservative  
(3) Other/ Neither/ Moderate  
(9) Don't know/ Refused/ No opinion

**Q15. What is the highest educational level you have completed and received credit for?**

(1) 8th grade or less  
(2) Some high school  
(3) High school graduate  
(4) Some college  
(5) College graduate  
(6) Some graduate training  
(7) Postgraduate  
(8) Don't know  
(9) Refused

Q16. I am going to read to you a list of household income categories. Please tell me which income group includes the total 1999 income before taxes of all members of your family living in your home? Please include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income. [If uncertain: What would be your best guess?]

- (1) Under \$25,000
- (2) \$25,000 to less than \$50,000
- (3) \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
- (4) \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- (5) \$100,000 or more
- (8) Don't know
- (9) Refused

Q17. In what year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_

Q18. Are you an American citizen?

Yes	No	Don't Know	Refused
(1)	(5)	(8)	(9)

Q19. What is your race or ethnicity?

Black	White	Asian	Hispanic	Other	_____	Don't know	Refused
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)		(8)	(9)

Q20. Respondent gender (Note: Don't ask respondent unless you really can't tell)

- (1) Male
- (2) Female

ASK respondent if they would like a copy of the results. If "yes", get their name and address:

**Appendix B:**  
**Interviewer Training Materials**

## **Political Consumer Activism Project Telephone Interviewing Instructions**

A survey is only as good as the quality of its procedures. Our project is a small but high quality survey. This will be true only because of your cooperation in completing the survey in strict accordance with the instructions contained in this document. Please read these instructions carefully and make sure that you understand them prior to starting any interviews.

### General Guidelines

- Arrive 15 minutes before your interviewing shift begins.
- Practice reading the questionnaire out loud until you can move through it efficiently and conversationally. You should talk to your respondents, not read at them.
- Always use a pencil to fill in questionnaires.
- Put a watch on the table or desk in front of you while completing interviews. Make sure to record the time you start and end each interview.
- Before you start an interview, make sure that you aren't missing any pages in your copy of the questionnaire.
- Always be courteous to the people you are calling. Never hang up on a respondent in anger. Do not use foul or inappropriate language. Do not argue with a respondent. If a respondent becomes abusive, politely thank them for their time and get off of the line as soon as you can.
- The survey instrument contains a number of open-ended questions, questions where the respondent is asked to describe their behavior in their own words. Make sure that you record these responses verbatim. If the respondent is speaking too rapidly, ask them to slow down so that you can record every word that they are saying. Write as legibly as possible.
- If you have any questions, please see the on-site supervisor for assistance.

### Starting your Calls

Have your interview log forms handy and understand how to use them. Filling out these forms correctly is essential for you to get full credit for your interviews.

### Log Forms

Interview log forms allow us to keep track of what respondents have been contacted. You will be given a stack of interview log sheets at the beginning of your interview session. Each log sheet will have a telephone number listed. It is very important that you immediately and accurately record what happens with each and every number you call. The following table outlines some of the situations you will encounter.

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Correct Response</b>
The number dialed is a business or commercial number	Apologize for having dialed the wrong number. <b>DO NOT</b> interview people at a business or commercial number. Note that you reached a business number on the interview log sheet.
The number is clearly not in service. You know a number is not in service when a message tells you that: "The number you have reached is no longer in service (or has been disconnected)."	Note that you reached a non-working number on the interview log sheet.
The number has been changed and a new number has been assigned.	Note that you reached a changed number on the interview log sheet. <b>DO NOT</b> call the new number.
The number rings but no one answers	Note the time you called and that no one answered. Set the survey aside and call again in half an hour.
The line is busy	Note the time you called and got a busy signal. Set the survey aside and call again in half an hour.
Your target respondent has refused to be interviewed, despite your best efforts to gain cooperation.	Note the reason why the respondent refused to be interviewed (e.g., "no time," "wasn't interested," etc.) on the interview log sheet.
Your target respondent doesn't have time to do the interview now, but would like to do it at another time.	Schedule a day and time to conduct the interview. Give the interview log sheet to the on-site supervisor.
A child answers the phone.	Try to get an adult on the line. If you cannot get an adult on the line, note this on the interview log sheet.
You reach an answering machine.	Leave a message describing the project. Let them know that you will be calling them again in the next few days.

### Refusals

Refusals are a serious matter, and you should do everything you can to avoid them. A refusal is when a person clearly refuses to participate in the survey, not when a person

indicates that he or she will participate but not at the time you are calling. All refusals will be contacted by the on-site supervisor to attempt to complete the interview. If, however, a person refuses to be interviewed in such a way that you are convinced that they will not change their mind, you should note that on your interviewer log sheet.

Many people are too busy, suspicious, or uninterested to participate in the survey. It is very important that as many people participate in the survey as possible. If a potential respondent initially refuses to participate, try to determine why they are unwilling. If they are too busy, try to get them to schedule a better time. If they are suspicious, assure them that this is a legitimate project; you are not trying to sell them anything. If they are uninterested, try to convince them that this project is very important in terms of understanding their impact on the political process.

### Miscellaneous

Respondents will frequently provide you with information not fitting nicely into the response categories provided. In general, try to get respondents to use those categories. Always record respondent qualifications. For example, a respondent could indicate that they have contacted a member of Congress in the past year, but that this person is their neighbor. Note that connection in the margin of the survey.

In those instances where the word SPECIFY appears, you must provide additional details that explain the answer.

In the main body of the survey instrument, read the questions as they are written. Words underlined in questions should be emphasized. Words appearing IN ALL CAPS should not be read to the respondents. Use PROBES as suggested. Follow all "skip" procedures carefully.

Respondents will frequently want to discuss topics that are not part of the survey or do not apply to the specific question at hand. Try to steer the respondent back to the task at hand without being rude. An easy way to do this is to ask the next question in the survey when you get a chance.

### Verification of Work

Interviews will be verified by contacting respondents who have been interviewed to ensure that they provided the information listed. Anyone found guilty of academic misconduct should expect disciplinary action under the University code of student conduct involving academic integrity. Falsification of data will also result in failure of the course.

### Troubleshooting

The following is a list of common problems you might encounter in the interview process, and what steps you can take to remedy these problems.

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Correct Response</b>
Respondent does not speak English well enough to complete the survey	Kindly thank them for their time and go on to the next interview.
Respondent suspects you are a salesperson.	Assure them that you are calling from the Rutgers Political Science Department. Tell them to contact Caroline Heldman at (732)932-9484 if they have further concerns.
You've called at a bad time.	Arrange a time to call the respondent back. Be sure to get a specific time and write it down on the log form.
The respondent asks what a question means.	Repeat the question just as it is written. Say "Whatever the question means to you." If they still don't know, mark "Don't know" and move on.
The respondent asks if their answer is correct.	Assure them that "There are no right answers. We just want to know what you think."
The respondent does not want to answer a question.	Go on to the next one. Each item is completely voluntary.
The respondent wants to talk about the survey during the interview.	Say "I'll be happy to talk about it at the end of the interview, but it's important to continue with the questions right now." (Don't bring up the subject again unless the respondent reminds you of it).
The respondent wants to talk about subjects other than the survey.	Finish the interview first. Be polite, but try gracefully to get out of the conversation.
The respondent wants to call or meet you after the interview.	Tell the person no. Be polite but firm. You should never initiate social contact with a respondent. If they have further questions about the project, tell them to contact Caroline Heldman at (732)932-9484.
A caller is verbally abusive.	Thank them for their time and get off of the phone as quickly as possible. Do not use foul language or respond to verbal abuse in any way.
The respondent has to stop an interview after their have started it.	Schedule a time to complete the interview. If they are unable to schedule a time, tell them that someone from the project will call them in the next few days in order to complete the interview. Stress the importance of their participation.

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## **Curriculum Vita**

**Curriculum Vita**  
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Ph.D., Rutgers University, Political Science, May, 2002  
 Dissertation: *Political Consumerism in American Politics*  
 Comprehensive Field Exams: American Politics, Women and Politics, Public Law  
 M.A., Rutgers University, Political Science, 1999  
 B.A., summa cum laude, Washington State University, Business Administration, 1993

**PUBLICATIONS**

"Gender Gap or Gender Gaps? New Perspectives on Support for Government Action and Politics" (with Mark Schlesinger). *The Journal of Politics*, February 2001.

"The Effects of Negative Political Advertisements: A Meta-Analytic Assessment" (with Richard Lau, Lee Sigelman, and Paul Babbitt). *American Political Science Review*. December 1999.

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**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Instructor**, Rutgers University, Political Science Department  
 -- Introduction to Political Science Methods, Fall, 2001 and Spring, 2002  
 -- Public Opinion, Fall, 2001 and Spring, 2002  
 -- Public Policy Formation, Fall, 2001

**Visiting Instructor**, Fairfield University, Politics Department  
 -- Public Policy, Fall, 2000  
 -- Introduction to American Politics, 2 sections, Spring, 2001  
 -- Weapons of the Weak: Political Tools of the Disadvantaged, Spring, 2001

**Instructor**, Rutgers University, English Department  
 -- Expository Writing (English 101), 2 sections, Fall, 1999

**Instructor**, Rutgers University, Political Science Department  
 -- Introduction to American Government, Summer, 1999  
 -- Courts and Public Policy, Spring, 1998 and Spring, 1999  
 -- American Party Politics, Spring, 1997, Spring, 1999, and Spring, 2000  
 -- Elections and Participation, Fall, 1996  
 -- New Jersey Politics, Summer, 1995 and Summer, 1996

**PRIMARY TEACHING INTERESTS**

American Politics  
 Research Methods

Women and Politics  
 Political Participation

Public Policy  
 Public Opinion

**OTHER PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE****Statistical Consultant**, The Empower Program, 2000 – present

Designed and established an evaluation process for this non-profit youth violence prevention program from start to finish. Designed several survey instruments and produced reports for funders and the press.

**Research Manager**, Consumer Health Sciences, 1998 - 1999

Managed a research team, oversaw every aspect of the survey research process, and managed 5 disease-specific databases. Presented findings to medical professionals, co-authored publications.

**Research Assistant**, Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 1996 - 1998

Analyzed a wide variety of survey and focus group data for public departments and programs. Produced reports that were disseminated to agencies across the state and to the general public.

**Researcher**, Health Values Study, Yale University, 1995 - 1996

Interviewed congressional staff regarding the health reform debate. Co-authored a publication using data gathered.

**Project Director**, Citizenship and Service Education Program, Rutgers University, 1994 - 1995

Developed community service placement sites for student volunteers. Managed several databases. Oversaw staff training and development and computer instruction.

**Campaign Manager**, Carroll for Congress, 1994

Managed all aspects of a congressional campaign, including GOTV efforts, public relations, platform development, debate preparation, and candidate scheduling.

**Legislative Correspondent**, Office of Jolene Unsoeld, U.S. House of Representatives, 1993

Responded to constituent mail and telephone calls. Recommended issue positions to member. Assisted in the development and passage of legislation.