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Building common cause towards sustainable consumption: a cross-generational perspective

Abstract

The notion of sustainable consumption has gained significant traction in recent decades, in parallel with unprecedented growth in global consumption and recognition of its catastrophic environmental impact. In this context, there is a predominant generational narrative of frugality versus excess, with younger generations often negatively stereotyped as increasingly consumer-driven and environmentally-destructive. We argue that it is important to develop a more nuanced understanding of generational difference, drawing on findings from a cross-generational study in Sheffield, UK, involving participants from the ages of 16 to 96. The aim of this research was explore how citizens relate to the idea of sustainable consumption across generations, acknowledging but also seeking to look beyond the common tropes of thrift and the throwaway society. We draw on theories of intergenerational value change (Inglehart, 1971; 2008) and consider how insights from the Common Cause framework, which encourages pro-environmental campaigners to make broad appeals to engage a range of intrinsic values (Crompton, 2011; Crompton and Kasser, 2010), may be applied to sustainable consumption. In doing so, we reflect on the merits of adopting an expansive definition of sustainable consumption that encompasses the 'three pillars' of sustainability – economic stability, environmental protection and human wellbeing (Micheletti and Stolle, 2012) – and identify insights from our research for campaigners and policy makers interested in working with intrinsic values to build common cause across generations.

Key words

Sustainability, consumption, generations, values

Introduction

The notion of 'sustainable consumption' has gained significant traction as an aspiration for individuals, businesses and governments in recent decades, in parallel with unprecedented growth in global consumption and recognition of its catastrophic environmental impact. Sustainable consumption and production is the focus of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12, which emphasises "doing more and better with less" while improving quality of life for all (UN, 2015). This is linked to concerns about the inequitable global distribution of consumption and production activities, and also to ideas about intergenerational fairness in terms of past, present and future resource-use. In this context, there is a predominant generational narrative of frugality versus excess, with younger generations often negatively stereotyped as increasingly consumer-driven and environmentally-destructive (Robins 1999; Carr et al 2012). Evans (2011a: 42) describes the "throwaway society thesis" as one which contrasts the "excessive, wanton nature of contemporary consumerism as compared to an earlier time in which our thrifty forebears were (imagined to be) far less profligate". In other words, narratives of sustainable consumption characterise generations in particular ways, often invoking a halcyon past. In doing so, they also draw distinctions between different generations alive today, comparing the consumption practices of older and younger people to ascertain the direction of travel.

This paper reports on an intergenerational research project that examined people's views on consumption and sustainability in the city of Sheffield, UK, involving participants from the ages of 16 to 96. The aim of this research was explore how citizens relate to the idea of sustainable consumption across generations, acknowledging but also seeking to look beyond the common tropes of thrift and the throwaway society. To begin, we situate this project within the wider field of sustainable consumption research and justify our focus on citizens as opposed to, say, the corporations and governments that are largely responsible for overconsumption. We then consider how intergenerational value change and generational difference has been characterised in previous research. We also discuss how insights from the Common Cause framework, which encourages pro-environmental campaigners to make broad appeals to engage a range of intrinsic values (Crompton, 2011; Crompton and Kasser, 2010), may be applied to sustainable consumption. In doing so, we reflect on the merits of adopting an expansive definition of sustainable consumption that encompasses the 'three pillars' of sustainability – economic stability, environmental protection and human wellbeing (Micheletti and Stolle, 2012). Following an overview of our methodology and sample, we identify various ways that people in Sheffield relate to the idea of sustainable consumption, and reflect on cross-generational differences and similarities. To conclude, we identify insights from this research for campaigners and policy makers interested in working with intrinsic values to build common cause across generations.

The role of citizens

A burgeoning field of sustainable consumption research has advanced various theories as regards its key actors, definitional parameters, analytical frameworks and political

possibilities, drawing on diverse disciplinary perspectives. For some, sustainable consumption represents "a new politics of consumption" and citizen engagement (Micheletti and Stolle., 2012; Seyfang, 2005), for others it is a "meaningless" oxymoron (Peattie and Collins, 2009; Probyn, 2016) that has proved ineffective in challenging expanding consumerism (Connolley and Prothero, 2003; Kalmus et al., 2009). There is a vigorous debate among sustainable consumption scholars about the relevant unit of analysis, in particular the extent to which research has focussed on individual consumers and experts who might change their behaviour (Maniates, 2014). Attitude-behaviour research rooted in influential disciplines such as economics and psychology has tended to focus on the factors and motivations that underpin consumer choice, thus reinforcing an individualised and somewhat de-politicised understanding of sustainable consumption as limited to consumer decision-making.

The attitude-behaviour-choice or 'ABC' approach has been criticised following a 'practice turn' in consumer culture studies, with scholars highlighting how consumption is embedded in routines, sites, habits, institutions and infrastructures (Ariztia, 2016; Barr et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Pearce et al., 2014; Shove, 2010). Social practice theories suggest that the inconspicuous or mundane nature of everyday consumption is less the result of conscious decision-making, more habitual, ingrained and shaped by social norms, meaning that people are to some extent "locked in" to unsustainable lifestyles (Evans, 2011a; Jackson, 2005a; Sanne, 2002; Shove, 2010). Overemphasis of consumer choice has also been criticised from a power perspective, as neglecting the real drivers of overconsumption and structural barriers to making consumption sustainable (Dolan, 2002; Fuchs et al., 2016; Maniates, 2014). A well-rehearsed critique of sustainable consumption initiatives is that too much weight is placed on consumer choice and voluntary behaviour change, while too little is put on public policy and the institutional contexts that shape possible courses of action (Barnett et al., 2010; Crompton and Kasser, 2010; Evans et al., 2017; Hobson, 2004; O'Rourke and Lollo, 2015; Prothero et al., 2011; Sanne, 2002; Seyfang and Paavola, 2008; Shove, 2010).

Our understanding of the role of citizens in this debate is influenced by those scholars who see sustainable consumption as an expression of citizenship through "individualised collective action", potentially enabling elite-challenging modes of political engagement (Michelleti and Stolle, 2012; Stolle et al., 2005; Trentmann, 2007). For example, Young's (2003: 39) analysis of anti-sweatshop protests on US college campuses highlights the movement's role in "educating consumers and criticizing executive indifference" and how: "[t]hese activities achieved significant successes in creating better monitoring organizations… and forcing corporate manufacturers to acknowledge what goes on in the factories to which they have subcontracted much of their production." She argues that this exemplifies a particular form of "political responsibility" that is collectively shared and enacted, that questions whether 'normal' market conditions are morally acceptable, and that is global in scope. Whitmarsh et al. (2011) similarly advocate for a theory of change that encompasses both the notion that institutions and governance structures ought to shoulder responsibility for sustainable practice, and that citizens have a role to play in enacting change.

A cross-generational perspective

Within sustainable consumption research, as in consumer research more broadly, there have been numerous attempts to sketch the habits and preferences of different generations for marketing purposes (Ramsey et al., 2007). Underpinning much of this analysis is some (often oversimplified) variant of the generational hypothesis (Manheim, 1952), whereby people born and socialised in the same era are posited to share similar values, motivations, and civic practices (Hume, 2010). As noted above, thrift and the throwaway society are popular motifs in discussions of generational difference, with every generation since the Baby Boomers characterised as more consumer-driven and wasteful than older people who grew up in times of scarcity (Carr et al., 2012; Evans, 2011a). For example, Robins (1999: 14) argues that "traditional values of frugality and caring for nature have been… replaced by the current consumer culture". In the UK, this characterisation of the Baby Boomers and subsequent generations as careless consumers is connected to wider societal discourses of intergenerational fairness, which suggest that the 'intergenerational social contract' is being undermined by selfish individualism and short-term thinking (House and Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2016; Howker and Malik, 2010; Little and Winch, 2017; Willetts, 2010). In this context and especially during the recent period of neoliberal austerity that has followed the 2008 financial crisis, scholars have noted the emergence of "new thrift" – exemplified by the resurgent popularity of wartime slogans such as 'make do and mend' – as an idealised sustainable consumption practice (Evans, 2011b; Forkert, 2014; Jensen, 2013).

The throwaway society has thus emerged as a key moralising discourse and a pervasive and popular "myth of consumerism" (Evans, 2011a; Gregson et al., 2007), reflecting a broader societal tendency to cast social, political, economic and environmental concerns as 'generational' problems (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015). This 'myth' owes much to theories of intergenerational value change, which have been employed both to diagnose problems and speculate on possible solutions in relation to current consumption trends. In the early 1970s, Inglehart (1971) hypothesised that intergenerational value changes were taking place in Western societies as a result of "changing existential conditions – above all, the change from growing up with the feeling that survival is precarious, to growing up with the feeling that survival can be taken for granted" (Inglehart. 2008: 131). He characterised this as a shift from 'materialist' values that emphasise economic and political security, towards 'post-materialist' values that emphasise autonomy and self-expression, which seemed to be becoming increasingly common among generations born after World War 2. Bennett (1998) similarly observes a post-war rise of 'lifestyle politics' characterised by new forms of self-expression and elite-challenging modes of political engagement. Most significantly for sustainable consumption research, the notion of lifestyle politics includes the "growing number of citizens… turning to the market to express their political and moral concerns" (Stolle et al., 2005: 248). The intergenerational value change hypothesis suggests that older generations value thrifty consumer behaviour and being careful with limited resources, while younger generations might be less cautious consumers, but also more attracted to sustainable consumption as a mode of political expression.

There are two important caveats in Inglehart's theory of particular relevance to sustainable consumption research. The first is whether value differences are stable over time, i.e. whether they reflect generational values, or prevailing socio-economic conditions, or changes over the life course. For instance, the observed emergence of "new thrift" during a period of recession and austerity suggests that people of all generations are more focussed on material concerns when money is tight. Inglehart's longitudinal analysis (2008) suggests that there are short-term "period effects" at times of scarcity, but that overall generational values are relatively stable. Likewise, he argues that there is no longitudinal evidence for life course effects such as people getting more materialist as they get older. The second important caveat is that the value gap between generations is closing over time as the post-war generations age: Inglehart argues that today's older generations are increasingly post-materialist compared to those of the 1970s. This suggests that rhetorics of sustainable consumption have proliferated and awareness has increased in parallel with a societal shift towards post-materialist values (Bieser, 2015; Kuoppamäki et al., 2017).

Many research studies, often in consumer-focussed and marketing journals, have sought to test some variant of this theory about generational differences in consumption practices with variable results. Empirical research often affirms the trope of the thrifty and careful older consumer, for example suggesting that older generations are more likely to practice energy-efficient behaviours (Carlsson-Kanyama et al., 2005), to reuse products (Bulut et al., 2017), and to exhibit higher levels of ecologically conscious consumer behaviour (Sudbury Riley et al., 2012). Anxieties about the throwaway society are evident in studies that characterise younger people as "fascinated by material consumption" (Kanchanapibil et al., 2014: 528), "the most consumption orientated of all generations" (Bucic et al., 2012: 114), the most competitive consumers and the most debt prone (Carr et al., 2012). Others however highlight the increasingly post-materialist values of younger generations, suggesting that Millennials exhibit the highest levels of awareness and concern for the environment (Fien et al., 2008: Heo and Muralidharan, 2017; Hwang and Griffiths, 2017; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014), are "less invested in obsessive consumerism as a way of life" (Rifkin, 2014: 224), show signs of reducing key forms of consumption such as car ownership (O'Rourke and Lollo, 2015), and are more likely to engage in collaborative consumption of goods and services through the sharing economy (Hwang and Griffiths, 2017). There are also studies that have found very little overall difference between generations on self-reported measures of sustainable consumption (Bulut et al., 2017; Huttenen and Autio, 2010).

Some studies tease out subtler nuances in how different generations relate to sustainable consumption, rather than attempting to measure whose practices are 'better' or 'worse'. Bieser (2015), for example, found that Millennials tend to define sustainable consumption as making conscious consumption choices, while Baby Boomers tend to define it more generally in terms of responsibility to the environment. Kalmus et al. (2009) suggest four distinct consumer typologies. They note that while teens and young adults more often fall into the brand-orientated and pro-consumerist "lavish" category, young adults also exhibit a "green consumerist" identity, characterised by the highest levels of environmental awareness and related consumption practices. In contrast, late

middle age is more strongly associated with the "saving" or thrifty consumer, and retirement age with an "indifferent" consumer type characterised by low engagement with both environmental issues and consumer culture. This study refers to age cohorts rather than generational descriptors, but is framed overall as a study of 'generational groups' in the context of post-socialist transition in Estonia, illustrating how life course and generation are sometimes conflated in cross-generational consumption research. Similarly, in a study of consumption at home and on holiday, Barr et al. (2011) identified a higher proportion of retired people committed to environmentally friendly actions, while young adults tended to buy more ethical products. Several researchers contend that Millennials may be paradoxically both the biggest consumers and the most ethically conscious (Bucic et al., 2012; Heo and Muralidharan, 2017; Hume, 2010; Kanchanapibil et al., 2014; Panzone et al., 2016; Stanes et al., 2015), consistent with the hypothesised shift towards postmaterialist values.

Of course, such studies and their implications for current and future consumption should be interpreted cautiously. They can overstate the extent to which there are shared generational values and norms (Hitchings and Day, 2011) as there are often substantial differences within generations. Research has shown how (un)sustainable consumption practices are also influenced by sociodemographic factors such as household size, income, education and gender (Brough et al., 2016; Bucic et al., 2012; Bulut et al., 2017; Gibson et al., 2011; Pearce et al., 2014; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014; Roberts, 1996, Sudbury Riley et al., 2012), and transmitted intergenerationally through families and households (Cotte and Wood, 2004; Grønhøj and Thøgersen, 2012). It is also important to distinguish between generational trends and common experiences of cohort ageing (Vanderbeck and Worth, 2015) and to consider how changing circumstances across the life course, including factors such as dependents, personal disposable income and health, might influence people's practices (Kalmus et al., 2009; Kuoppamäki et al., 2017).

A Common Cause perspective

Many scholars have noted that sustainable consumption is a somewhat "ambiguous", "slippery" or "fuzzy" concept due to the diversity of disciplinary perspectives and approaches that contribute to its definition (Evans 2011b; Hinton and Goodman, 2010; Maniates, 2014; Robins, 1999). This is well illustrated by our brief review of cross-generational comparative research above, where researchers have measured various practices from boycotting to ethical purchasing to energy conservation. Researchers, businesses and policy-makers attach a variety of meanings to sustainable consumption, and in doing so differently prioritise the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability (Hobson, 2004). Many focus solely on the environment, and even then quite narrowly on measures such as energy conservation, household recycling and product efficiency (Barr et al., 2011; Bulut et al., 2017; Connolley and Prothero, 2003; Hanss and Böhm, 2012; Peattie and Collins, 2009). Indeed, some researchers apply specific definitional parameters to sustainable practice as pro-environmental, resource-conserving activity (Evans et al., 2017; Klocker et al., 2012). However, others employ 'ethical', 'conscious', 'political' and 'sustainable' consumption interchangeably,

associating sustainable consumption with broader environmental concerns such as biodiversity and animal welfare, as well as economic and social goods such as supporting local businesses, workers' rights, and health and wellbeing (Ariztia et al., 2016; Carr et al., 2012; Francis and Davis, 2015; Iles, 2006; Michelleti and Stolle, 2012; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014). There is also a tension between the idea of sustainable consumption as ethical purchasing, and approaches based on a puritan or pro-environmental ethic of non-consumption, restraint and frugality (Cherrier et al., 2010; Evans, 2011b; Kalmus et al., 2009; Neo, 2016; Pepper et al., 2009). Moreover, much of the cross-generational comparative research on sustainable consumption is published in consumer studies and marketing journals, and as such focuses on people as consumers rather than citizens.

In this paper, we adopt a broad definition of sustainable consumption that is inclusive of concerns about economic stability, environmental protection and human wellbeing (Micheletti and Stolle, 2012), and also encompasses the collective consumption of public goods and services – for example, the NHS. In doing so, we draw on two key ideas associated with the theoretical framework known as Common Cause. This framework influentially introduced insights derived from psychological research to UK environmental campaigning in the early 2010s (Crompton, 2011; Crompton and Kasser, 2010; Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009), specifically:

(i) Appeals to 'intrinsic' or self-transcendental values (e.g. concern for others, connection with nature) are more effective in motivating citizens to act, than appeals to 'extrinsic' or materialistic values based on reward and approval (e.g. financial incentives, social status).
(ii) Experiences and communications that engage intrinsic values can increase support for seemingly unconnected social and environmental causes.

In particular, we are concerned with how citizens relate to the idea of sustainable consumption across generations, what aspects of sustainable consumption they prioritise and where there might be common ground for working with intrinsic values.

The study: cross-generational Sheffield survey and interviews

This research is part of a larger, multi-site project that explored the themes of intergenerational justice, consumption and sustainability with people living in urban areas, including the former 'Steel City' of Sheffield in the UK. Sheffield is an interesting case study site as a former manufacturing centre now more focussed on the service industries and culture-led regeneration, typifying the transition of many Western European cities from a landscape of production to a landscape of consumption (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Jayne, 2004; Holmes and Beebeejaun, 2007; Hubbard, 1996). Sheffield's parkland and proximity to the Peak District National Park have been instrumental in its strategic re-branding as "the greenest city in Europe", emphasising healthy urban living and connection with nature (Barbosa et al., 2007; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Winkler, 2007).

The research involved both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection via a local survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey explored possible generational trends in how people relate to the idea of sustainable consumption, while the interviews offered a more in-depth perspective on the nuances of this relationship. Quantitative data were gathered via a survey conducted with 751 adults age 16 and over between April and May 2016, with questionnaire design informed by preliminary interview findings. Survey topics included perceptions of the impact of personal consumption, sustainable consumption behaviours, and what people prioritise when they think about sustainability, as closed-response questions including multiple choice and likert scales. Survey interviews were carried out face-to-face using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) by accredited market researchers at seven locations across Sheffield, including central and out-of-town shopping centres, residential areas and a transport hub. Quotas for age, gender, employment status and ward (location) were based on ONS local population data accessed through the Neighbourhood Statistics web platform (now subsumed within the ONS main website). As a relatively small scale survey employing nonprobability sampling, its purpose was not to generalise to the entire Sheffield population, but as an exploratory study of local and generational perspectives.

The qualitative data are drawn from 140 semi-structured interviews with Sheffield residents from the ages of 16 up to 96, some as standalone participants and others three-generation families. Interviewees were recruited through local advertising, snowball sampling and gatekeepers such as directors of community centres, interest clubs and local employers, and were broadly diverse in terms of gender, socio-economic status, education and place of residency. Interviews were conducted between September 2015 and December 2016 by the first author, usually in people's homes or at local cafés. They typically lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour and were audio-recorded and transcribed. All quotations used in this paper are verbatim and have been anonymised.

The interview guides included questions that prompted interviewees to reflect on their own consumption and broader sustainability concerns, such as:

- What are the main ways that you think you, as a consumer, have an impact on the environment?
- Do you do anything to try to reduce your consumption, or its impact on the environment?
- What about the older/younger generations of your family?
- What do you think it is important to save for the future?

We also asked interviewees to give examples of things they consume that they think are sustainable, and unsustainable 'guilty pleasures'. The interview guide prompted for concerns about consumption and the environment, but replies tended to be wide-ranging. The semi-structured nature of the interview provided insight into how participants themselves responded to the research topic, enabling us to explore their views about sustainable consumption in detail (Periera Heath and Chatzidakis, 2012). Interviews were coded and analysed with the computer-aided qualitative data analysis software Nvivo, initially into thematic 'parent' codes focussed on the economy, environment and human-

wellbeing, with subsequent coding informed by close reading of the data. The aim of this thematic coding was to identify and explore salient themes, drawing out both points of convergence and sustainable consumption concerns that appear to be especially prominent for particular generations. While this approach includes an element of 'pattern recognition', our analysis of this data is descriptive in nature, as statistical generalisations are inappropriate from such a small sample, and the advantage of a mixed-method approach is that it enables us to engage with different way of seeing, knowing and interpreting (Greene, 2007; Maxwell, 2010).

Table 1 summarises the number of people from each generational grouping included in the final sample of each phase of the research. These generational groupings are based on UK population analysis by Rae (2015). We acknowledge that there are "many arguments about generational definitions and cut-off points" (Ipsos-MORI, 2012: 2), that birth cohort boundaries are often unclear, and that society plays a role in interpreting and (re)shaping generational groupings over time; therefore we see these categories as a useful though imperfect shorthand for exploring cross-generational perspectives on sustainable consumption. Table 2 shows the percentage of men and women in each generational grouping recruited to take part in either the survey or an interview, and how this compares with the most recent ONS Annual Population Survey estimates for Sheffield. There is some notable under-representation in the survey sample, most significantly women under 30 and elderly people over the age of 85, despite the intercept methodology involving some door-knocking in residential areas. Women are overrepresented in the interview data at 56% of the final sample, as are Baby Boomers and the over 70s. The latter is broadly in line with our interviewee recruitment strategy, which aimed for similar numbers of participants in each generational grouping.
Whilst every effort was made to ensure that our interview and survey samples included the diverse perspectives of Sheffield's general public, participation was voluntary and we offered no incentive to participate. Interviews in particular were more likely to appeal to people with some interest in the research topic, thus we suspect that people who are completely unengaged with issues of sustainable consumption may be underrepresented in the qualitative data. Furthermore, social desirability bias is a major issue in sustainable consumption research (Defra, 2008; Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis, 2012), so it is important to be clear that self-reported concerns tell us more about people's perceptions of sustainable consumption than actual sustainable practice (Pepper et al., 2009).

Table 1: Generation sample size

Generation	Interviews	Survey responses
Over 70s b. before 1945	35	80
Baby Boomers b. 1945-1964	46	213

Generation X b. 1965-1984	29	236
Millennials b. 1985-2000	32	222

Table 2: Demographic summary

	Survey (%)			Interviews (%)			ONS Estimates (%)		
Generation	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Millennials (16-30)	35.7	23.6	29.5	25.4	20.3	22.5	32.9	30.5	31.7
Gen X (31-50)	27.6	35.1	31.4	12.7	25.3	19.6	30.7	30.1	30.4
Baby Boomers (51-70)	26.5	30.1	28.3	30.2	35.4	33.1	25.0	24.9	24.9
Over 70s (70+)	10	11.3	10.6	31.7	19.0	24.6	11.4	14.6	13.0

"What we mean by the word sustain"

Our interview guide prompted people to discuss the environmental impact of consumption, but we found that Sheffielders of all ages tended to hold a more holistic view of sustainable consumption encompassing economic and wellbeing as well as environmental concerns. These 'pillars' of sustainability were often connected in their accounts, rather than viewed as discrete categories. For instance, Gwynth, a disability campaigner in her late 50s, was asked to name something sustainable that she consumes and replied:

"Well it's a matter of what we mean by the word sustain. So can it keep going, like can the NHS [National Health Service] keep going and can the world keep going, can I keep going, whatever it is, both economically and in terms of survival, or energy, whatever."

Table 3 summarises various interconnected aspects of sustainable consumption highlighted by people in Sheffield. These include scepticism about endless economic growth, valorisation of thriftiness in personal consumption, and a preference for local and

national suppliers and manufacturers. Environmental concerns include avoiding waste, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, conserving finite resources and ethical farming, relating both to animal welfare concerns and the environmental impact of the meat and dairy industries. Human wellbeing concerns include, on a personal level, making healthy choices that support self-sustenance and recognising when you have 'enough', as well as concern for the wellbeing of others, particularly in relation to human rights and labour practices. Previous research has shown that people connect environmentally conscious behaviour with ethical purchasing choices such as Fairtrade (Hanss and Böhm, 2010; Sudbury Riley et al., 2012), and with moral discourses on saving, not wasting (Barr et al., 2011; Evans, 2011b). Our findings additionally suggest concerns not typically captured by studies focussed on 'consumer' behaviour, for example relating to the use of public resources and responsibility for keeping healthy.

Interpreted within the Common Cause framework, these multiple framings of sustainable consumption may be considered a strength in efforts to broaden its appeal. Crompton and Kasser (2010: 31) argue "…it is a mistake to segregate 'environmental' issues and hope to address these in isolation from a range of other challenges." Thøgersen and Crompton (2009) similarly suggest that such issues can be addressed by appealing to environmental concerns or other intrinsic values such as connection to nature, or concern for future generations. To give a concrete example, interviewees rarely talked about pro-environmental behaviours such as reducing or reusing as a direct response to climate change (Barr et al., 2011); but they did talk about disliking waste, conserving resources, human rights violations associated with mining the raw materials for smartphones, the animal welfare and environmental impact of the meat and dairy industries, and also the idea of having 'enough'. These issues may prove useful entry points for engaging intrinsic values such as concern for nature, non-humans and distant others, and for finding common ground across generations.

In the following sections, we draw on survey and interview data to explore cross-generational differences and similarities in terms of which aspects of sustainable consumption are prioritised, discuss how the key themes identified relate to Sheffielders' narratives of thrift and the throwaway society, and finally consider some examples of post-materialist concerns and political consumption from across the generational spectrum.

Table 3: Aspects of sustainable consumption

The three pillars	Key themes:	Summary	Example quote
Economy	Limits to growth	Scepticism of limitless economic growth and recognition that this has a negative impact on the planet	*"Capitalism is based around infinite growth* on a finite planet... If we carry on the way that we are it's unsustainable, more people *need to start realising that."* (Lizzie, early 20s)
	Thrift	'Make do and mend' attitude valorising personal economising, reuse, saving and careful management of household resources	*"I came from a reasonably poor family from* a poor area in Wakefield and we used to make do and mend. It's not spread as much to my kids as I thought it would, certainly not to my grandkids." (Les, early 60s)
	Thriving local economy	Preference for and pride in produce from Sheffield and surrounding areas; desire for thriving local businesses and high streets	*"It's about supporting local industry and* local farms, local businesses and sustaining that character of the area that you live *in*... That's sustainability really, I'd like to see *those places thrive."* (Susie, late 60s)
	Thriving national economy	Preference for and pride in produce from the UK; connected with concerns about employment, labour laws and quality	"Whenever we need something, we look at what there is available and in the main will buy something made in Britain *because it's* keeping British workmen in work. If you buy something that's made by a foreign company, then all the money goes back to *that country"* (Dennis, early 90s)

Environment	Avoiding waste	Concern with visible signs of waste and its environmental impacts, in particular overuse of plastics, products with built-in obsolescence, excess litter and landfill	*"I try to buy things that are not multi-*wrapped in thousands of layers of packaging and to recycle all the packaging if possible. I *mean, I'm very strict on that."* (Dale, early 40s)
	Biodiversity	Concern with the protection and preservation of wildlife, ecosystems and natural environments	*"I regret the way in which certain species of* wildlife are diminishing and also the countryside is - well parts of the world are *just deteriorating because… we use the world in ways that are not good."* (Francis, early 80s)
	Conserving finite resources	Concern with conserving finite resources, particularly high energy intensity, rare and non-renewable resources. Related to consumption of energy and electronic goods.	*"I don't feel as bad buying clothes as I* would, say, a boatload of consumer *electronics…* because a lot of the metals that they use are quite rare and they're quite *difficult to find."* (Wes, late teens)
	Ethical farming	Concern with animal welfare and/or the environmental impact of farming; preference for reduced meat and dairy consumption	"Beef, cow, dairy products is something I'd really like to give up, but I find it so hard to *give up totally…* [because of] how much it takes to rear cows, how much energy, food, water it takes and just how bad for the environment that is." (Hailey, early 20s)
Human wellbeing	Being healthy	Making choices that support self-sustenance, both mentally and physically, for yourself and for family members	*"It's saving your*self for the future in terms of trying to keep fit, healthy, active and engaged. So you go into older age as an active, fit, healthy person. So that you're not

			taking resources." (Cassie, late 60s)
	Having 'enough'	Belief that greed is harmful and people are happier when they can recognise what is sufficient for their needs	*"I think about using what I need, not what I* think I should have. I just try to live sensibly and feel grateful that I have enough. There's people in other countries who don't have enough food or don't have clothes or don't have somewhere to live. So I try to think *about all that… and not overconsume."* (Roxy, early 30s)
	Human rights	Concern with the wellbeing and human rights of others; often connected to labour practices and identification of (ir)responsible brands	*"I'd never ever buy anything from Pr*imark, I have got some thoughts on that about it's all right for me to have a t-shirt for whatever it costs, but what about the poor sod who's *made it?"* (Sandra, late 60s)

Generation, life course or norm?

Data from the Sheffield survey presents a mixed view of generational patterns of consumption and sustainable consumption priorities, and also highlights why it is sometimes important to distinguish between generational, life course and societal trends. Figures 1-3 illustrate the difference in perceived environmental impact of water, food and home energy consumption from oldest to youngest generation, with more Millennials saying that their consumption has a big impact on the environment compared with older generations, particularly the over 70s.[1] We observed a similar pattern when we asked

Perceived impact of consumption, by generation (Figures 1-3)[2]

Figure 1: Water

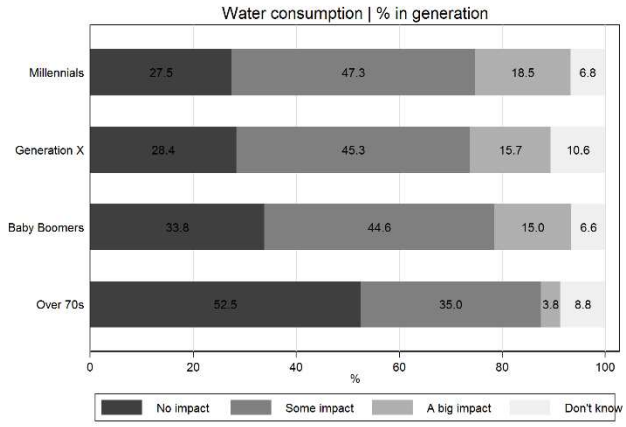


Figure 2: Food

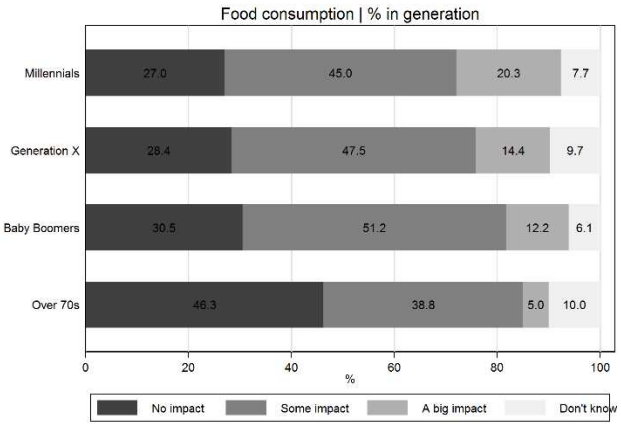


Figure 3: Home energy

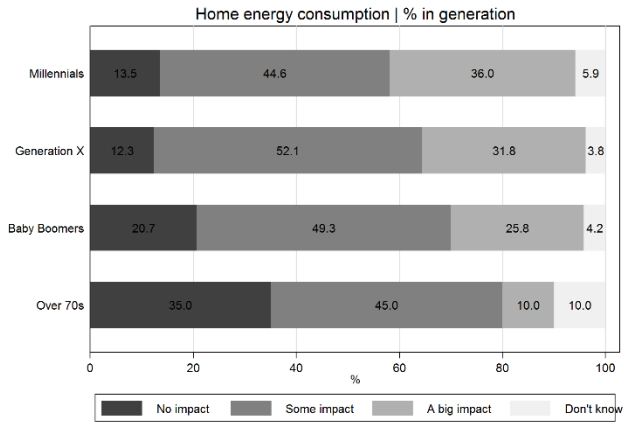
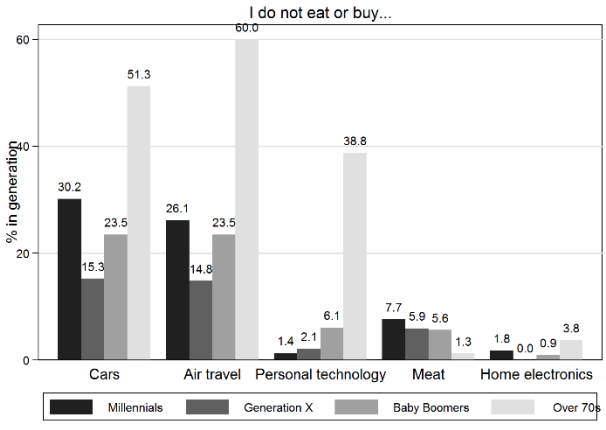


Figure 4[3]: 'I do not buy/eat/use'



[1] The Kruskal-Wallis test indicates that the differences in perceptions were significant between the four generations: water consumption: $H(3)=23.2$, $p<0.001$; food consumption: $H(3)=17.2$, $p<0.01$; home energy consumption: $H(3)=34.5$, $p<0.001$.

[2] For Figures 1-3, survey respondents were asked: How much do you think your consumption of the following essentials has an impact on the environment?

[3] Survey respondents were asked: Do you buy or use any of the following consumer goods?

about specific energy-intensive consumer goods: meat, personal technology, home electronics and air travel. However, Figure 4 shows some interesting distinctions with regard to reported consumption practices[4]. For all categories except meat consumption (where there was no statistically significant difference between generations), the over 70s were the biggest non-consumers, less likely to own a car, use air travel or buy personal and home electronics.

This data could be interpreted as supporting a view of younger generations as more environmentally conscious and more conspicuous consumers, more likely to think about the environmental aspects of sustainable consumption such as avoiding waste and conserving finite resources, while not necessarily taking action as a result of these concerns (Bucic et al., 2012; Heo and Muralidharan, 2017; Hume, 2010; Kanchanapibil et al., 2014; Panzone et al., 2016). However, closer reading the data suggests that life course and other factors are also relevant. Reported car ownership and air travel is highest among Generation X and Baby Boomers, with almost a third of Millennials saying that they don't own a car and over a quarter that they don't use air travel. Does this reflect a shift towards pro-environmental values and declining interest in car ownership (O'Rourke and Lollo, 2015), for example, or simply the affordability and accessibility of these choices at either end of the generational spectrum? In the context of household sustainability, Stanes et al. (2015: 56) argue that it is important to attend to "generational geographies" and material practices such as living arrangements as well as generational values. Sheffield interviewee Karen, a family support worker in her early 40s, identified as an ethically conscious consumer, and felt that she had compromised on her values in purchasing a car when work and family circumstances changed:

"We didn't have a car till about four years ago, so before we had a car, I did all my shopping locally. Since we've had a car, I've done the whole supermarket thing, which I never thought I would do. Since the birth of [my son], this - so there's nothing cheap and it's very hard to go back in terms of weekly shops."

In this account, unsustainable consumption is equated not only with car ownership, but with other practices that this enables such as the convenience of supermarket shopping. This illustrates how, even if values are, as Inglehart argues, relatively stable throughout the life course, material circumstances change and consumption practices change as a result. Reportedly lower car ownership among the Millennials who took part in our survey might thus reflect the convenience of inner-city living, work and family patterns rather than (or as well as) pro-environmental sustainability concerns.

[4] Generational differences were statistically significant for all categories except meat consumption. The chi-square test results below compare the distribution of those who said they do vs. do not consume each type of product between generations.
Meat: chi2(3) = 4.4, p =0.221
Personal technology: chi2(3) = 145.1, p = 0.000
Home electronics: chi2(3) = 8.1, p= 0.045
Cars: chi2(3) = 43.62, p = 0.000
Air travel: chi2(3) = 64.9 p = 0.000

Our survey also asked about whether people engaged in pro-environmental practices such as active travel and using public transport, buying less, growing their own food, recycling and using renewable energy. Recycling was by far the most common cross-generational practice, with 85.6% of survey respondents saying that they recycle regularly. This was also a prominent theme in interviews, often connected with concerns about thrift and avoiding waste, with many interviewees eager to explain their recycling practices. For example, June, a homemaker in her late 60s, said:

"My husband goes mad because I've got a box here, I've got this box here, I've got my rubbish bin. At the side I've got my recycling bin. Then I recycle plastic tops for Cancer Research. Then somewhere else, clothes go to Salvation Army, Archer Project."

In this account, recycling is framed as a practice that has a positive social impact as well as an environmental one. June mentions health and homelessness charities that will benefit from things she might otherwise have thrown away, connecting recycling and reuse with concern for the wellbeing of others. Just over half of our survey respondents who recycle said that they do so for environmental reasons (57%), highlighting an opportunity to emphasise a range of intrinsic values (e.g. helping others) as a way of broadening its cross-generational appeal.

June's account is also interesting in highlighting how recycling has become more of a priority for her in later life. When asked if she has always recycled, she replied:

"I think since it's been - you know like the council, I mean no, not when we were younger because it wasn't done, it wasn't done. It's only since they started saying you can save this or you can save the environment by doing this or by doing that."

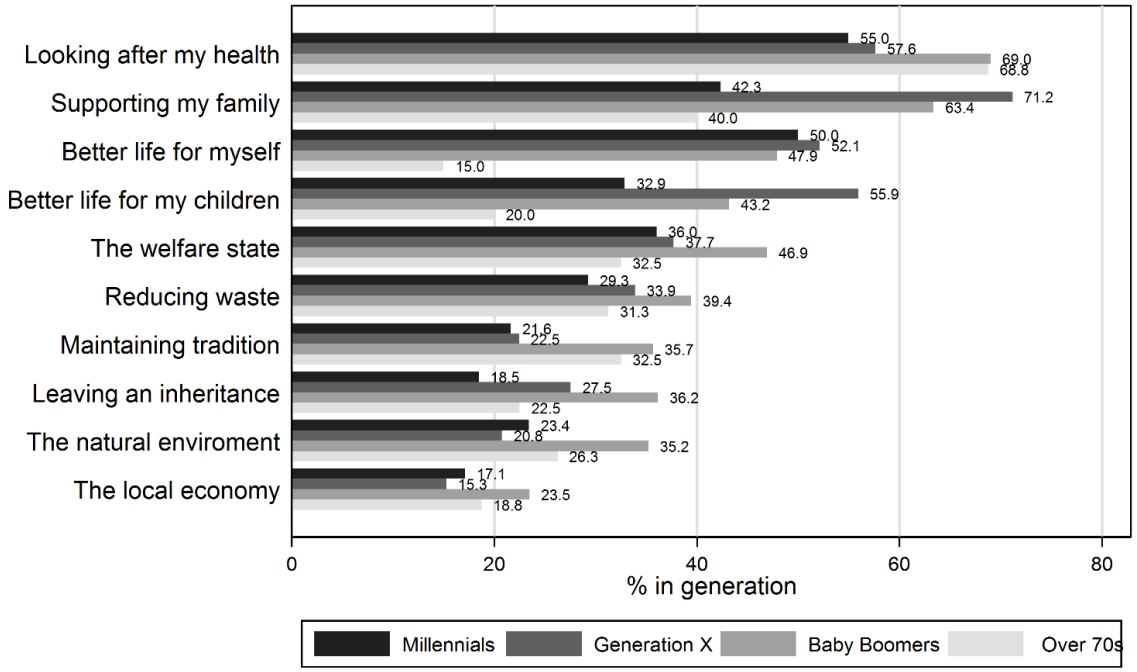
This illustrates the relevance of social practice theories in understanding how some aspects of sustainable consumption can become embedded cross-generationally. In recent years the UK's waste policy landscape has "demonised landfill and promoted recycling" (Gregson and Crang, 2010: 1027). Changing waste disposal infrastructure and providing public information has established a new social norm and drawn householders' attention to what they are throwing away, resulting in a threefold increase in English household recycling rates since 2000 (Defra, 2015). In this context, our data suggests that people of all generations are mindful of waste and what they ought to recycle.

Sustainable consumption priorities

Whilst our interview data highlights a wide range of concerns that citizens identified in relation to sustainable consumption, our survey data highlights a more intimate scale of everyday sustainability priorities. We asked people what they consider to be 'a top priority' and 'not at all a priority' when thinking about sustainability. The response categories for this question were derived from preliminary interview data, as those things most often raised when interviewees were asked what it is important to save for the future. As Figure 5 illustrates, overall, cross-generational priorities focus on a cluster of wellbeing-related goals: personal health, achieving a 'better life', and supporting one's

family. There are generational differences in emphasis consistent with life course: Generation X and the Baby Boomers prioritise supporting family and achieving a better life for their children more than the bookend generations, Millennials prioritise those aspects that concern themselves more than children or family, and the over 70s prioritise health and are less concerned with the aspirational goal of a better life. From a Common Cause perspective, the prioritisation of oneself and next of kin seems more immediately associated with extrinsic values. This highlights the possibility of mixed motives and inherent contradictions in thinking about sustainable consumption across different scales (Jackson et al., 2009). Aritzia et al. (2016) suggest that people focus foremost on issues such as thrift and health at the household scale, then social issues such as labour rights at the national and international scale. Miller (2001: 124-5) similarly observes how altruistic

Figure 5: Things people consider a priority when thinking about sustainability, by generation[5]



[5] Generational differences were statistically significant for all categories except supporting the local economy and reducing waste. The chi-square test results below compare the distribution of those who said 'it is a priority' vs those who said otherwise between generations.
Supporting family: chi2(3) = 51.8, p = 0.000
Looking after my health: chi2(3) = 12.3, p = 0.006
Supporting the local economy: chi2(3) = 5.4272, p = 0.143
Conserving the natural environment.: chi2(3) = 13.4, p = 0.004
Maintaining tradition: chi2(3) = 15.01, p = 0.002
Reducing waste: chi2(3) = 5.3, p = 0.152
Leaving an inheritance: chi2(3) = 18.2, p = 0.000
Better future myself: chi2(3) = 36.2, p = 0.000
Better future children: chi2(3) = 42.5 p = 0.000
Welfare state: chi2(3) = 8.0, p = 0.046

attitudes towards the environment or distant strangers are mixed with a self-interested concern for the health and well-being of one's own family. The Common Cause framework suggests that mixed-message communications that appeal to extrinsic values (e.g. cost saving, financial security, personal reward) alongside intrinsic values (e.g. conserving the natural environment, caring for others) are less effective than communications that appeal to intrinsic values alone (Crompton, 2011; Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009). In other words, that despite the prominence of self-interested concern in how citizens relate to the idea of sustainability across generations, it would be a mistake for campaigners to emphasise these concerns in seeking to build common cause.

Figure 5 also illustrates that a sizeable minority of the Baby Boomer generation in Sheffield – almost half – considered the welfare state to be a sustainability priority. In interviews, many Baby Boomer interviewees emphasised the quality of life and "privileges" their generation has had, that they fear might not be passed on. Diane, an English tutor in her early 60s, discussed sustainable consumption in terms of what legacy her generation will leave behind:

"I guess my generation aren't leaving a very wonderful legacy for the future for people coming after us but not only in terms of the environment. In the mid-20th century we were on trend for a lot more equality and social justice and sharing and collective facilities. When I was thinking about these generation questions here… there was a lot of collective stuff like the National Health Service and the nationalisation of utilities and social responsibility and things like that. What seems to be on offer for young people now is being aspirational and individual stuff, climbing a ladder, not evening things out."

This runs counter to the popular portrayal of Baby Boomers in UK public discourse as a selfish generation that has short-changed their children and grandchildren through greed and excess (Howker and Malik, 2010; Willetts, 2010). Our data suggests a generational anxiety among Baby Boomers – perhaps partly in response to the way their generation has been portrayed – about the intensification and individualisation of consumption and the impact this has on younger generations. As we discuss below, this sometimes manifests in concerns employing the familiar trope of the throwaway society, but it is also suggestive of a more collective view of sustainable consumption as the fair sharing of public resources to support wellbeing, an important aspect of sustainable consumption that it perhaps overlooked in consumer-focussed research.

Thrift and the throwaway society

A recurring theme among the over 70s and Baby Boomers that we interviewed was the thriftiness of either themselves or their parents' generation, the changing consumer culture that they have witnessed in their lifetime and anxieties about the so-called throwaway society. Their narratives of thrift emphasised conditions of scarcity such as wartime rationing, being careful with limited personal resources and the capacity to save, reuse and manage on a budget. Jeanette, a retired nurse in her late 70s, was one of many older people who reflected on how her upbringing instilled thriftiness:

"I've always wanted a little bit of a margin, as we used to call it, between what we have and something in the bank for a rainy day. Yes, I've always wanted to have something put by. I suppose that's why the cellar is full of stuff because I think it might be useful sometime. Maybe that's not necessary. So I think my generation kept stuff because it might sometimes be useful, whereas I think modern generations buy new… I think there was such a lot of make do and mend after the War - it makes me sound old but indeed I am old, so yes. So one was brought up with that and that's hard to release, I think. But the next generation, that wasn't necessary."

These narratives often alluded to an endemic problem with greed and moral decline across the generations, linked to increasing prosperity (Fockert, 2014; Jensen, 2013). Sally, a retired secretary in her early 80s, reflected on sustainable consumption by contrasting her own upbringing with that of her son:

"It was suddenly - so the mid - about 1954, 1955 I think we finished with coupons - food coupons - altogether. Then if you could get it, if you could afford it, it was available… It was 10 years after the end of the War before things became reasonably plentiful again. I think this is why in the 1960s everything became so plentiful that everybody had excess. I wonder if it was our generation that went wrong. Because we'd grown up in our formative years being restricted. So did we - when we got the freedom - let our children - by that time my son was in his teens - did we let them do things that we couldn't do because they were not there? I do wonder if we started off this decline."

This illustrates the pervasiveness of thrift and the throwaway society in moralising about sustainable consumption through everyday narratives of intergenerational value change and, as one Sheffield resident described it, "consumerism gone mad".

We also found evidence of "new thrift" appealing to older and younger generations alike, with Sheffielders suggesting that it is important to be able to recognise when you have 'enough' and drawing on idealised images of past generations' more sustainable lives. In the interview extracts below Faith, a PA in her early 50s, suggests modelling sustainable consumption on past generations, and Tyler, a university student in his late teens, reflects on which generation of his family is most likely to think of their environmental impact:

"The generation below are going to have to almost revert to how my parents and grandparents thought. There is that thing of make do and mend and recycling or pre-loved stuff coming back in, isn't there? I think that's almost going back to the '50s."

"After the War had ended, because of the rations and things like that, everyone was watching out what they were doing. Then as we've gone away from the War, because we've been more well off, people have been less concerned about it… Because my Nan-Nan grew up in a more difficult time, she watches out what she's doing more."

New thrift has been criticised for its problematic portrayal of generational difference, romanticising what it is like to live through austerity, demonising younger generations' "bad wanting" of consumer goods (Jensen, 2013) and reinforcing conservative social

norms with “the guilty sense that we have ‘lost our way’ and are living less virtuous, healthy and authentic lives… and so must now repent and return to a worthy modest existence” (Fokert, 2014: 42). This is a perceptive critique, especially in the current context of neoliberal austerity in the UK, with the rising cost of living and cuts to social security, nonetheless it is important to acknowledge the prominence of this narrative in ordinary people’s accounts of what consuming sustainably means to them.

Previous research on thrift and reuse has questioned whether it ought to be characterised as a sustainable practice, as it is more clearly linked with economising (Evans, 2011b; Gregson et al., 2007; Pepper et al., 2009). From a Common Cause perspective, this suggests that thrifty consumption is motivated by extrinsic values based on personal reward: people are being thrifty to save money, not because they care about their environmental or social impact. However, our data suggests a more nuanced perspective. Among Generation X and Millennials in particular, interest in vintage, reused and handmade products from charity shops, eBay, Freecycle, family and friends was framed as an ethical lifestyle choice, as opposed to a habit or necessity. Gemma, a homemaker in her early 30s, described herself as “a make-do-and-mend sort of person” motivated by aesthetic and environmental considerations:

“I'm happy to have second-hand clothes, second-hand - our house is second-hand furniture, clothes. I am a make-do-and-mend sort of person. I'm - charity shops and vintage shops - quite happy to shop like that. I like my old lady furniture anyway, so when we actually move it will be kitted out like 1950s or something like that. That will be my aim… I think as long as you have got people like us willing to accept second-hand stuff, then I think that's a good - it's less impact on the environment.”

More generally, reflections on thrift from interviewees of all ages emerged in response to questions about the environmental impact of consumption and which generation(s) have the most/least environmental impact. This suggests that people consider thrift to be a pro-environmental practice, connected with environmental concerns like avoiding waste and conserving finite resources. This alternative perspective on thrift is consistent with the idea of a societal shift towards post-materialist values, as a means of expression of sustainable citizenship (Micheletti and Stolle, 2014) and lifestyle politics (Bennett, 1998).

Post-materialist values and political consumerism

Inglehart’s (2008) theory of intergenerational value change suggests that we should see more convergence in generations’ sustainable consumption values today than in the past, as the proportion of older people who grew up in times of scarcity reduces. Thus we would expect to see evidence of post-materialist values, not only among Millennials and Generation X, but also Baby Boomers and older people whose formative years were influenced by post-war economic growth. Indeed, many of the older people that we interviewed offered examples of sustainable consumption related to identity and lifestyle politics. This included lifestyle choices such as voluntary simplifying (Alexander and

Ussher, 2012) and reducing consumption of animal products, as described by Helen, an environmental campaigner in her late 60s:

"I eat sustainable fish and animals that have had a happy life. Now and again, no more than about once a fortnight. A healthy planet diet. So, you're - there's very little meat or fish really and local, local and organic, because we know the dangers of industrial agriculture. If you are eating fish or meat, for fish it's sustainable, not farmed. Meat, for me it's high welfare meat or wild."

Here, Helen highlights biodiversity, animal welfare and corporate social responsibility concerns relating to large-scale agriculture. Older people's accounts of sustainable consumption also included practices such as boycotting and buycotting, often connected with concerns about human rights and how particular companies treat their suppliers. Daniel, a retired miner in his early 70s, described how, in his view, citizens are responsible for holding unethical businesses to account:

"I think you can hold up things that are actively doing something wrong. I mean it's like when people advertise, when it comes to light that somebody is working in sweatshops producing something, you see that their brand very often gets - disappears, do you know what I mean? Whatever it is that they're selling, because people suddenly become aware and say - no thank you. That personal involvement most people can do."

Similarly, Sandra, a retired counsellor in her late 60s, said she won't shop at Primark because the clothes may be cheap but "what about the poor sod who's made it?" This suggests that ideas and practices connected with sustainable consumption as a mode of political expression can have cross-generational appeal.

Generation X and Millennial interviewees also discussed acts of political consumerism and lifestyle choices such as vegetarianism. For example, several interviewees in their 20s and 30s talked about cutting down on meat and dairy after watching a Netflix documentary called Cowspiracy (2014). Hailey, a theatre manager in her early 20s, said:

"Oh, something you think you could or should give up for environmental reasons, beef, cow, dairy products is something I'd really like to give up, but I find it so hard to give up totally…. There's a lot of really good strong points [in Cowspiracy] just about how much it takes to rear cows, how much energy, food, water it takes and just how bad for the environment that is. So supporting that is supporting a huge amount of waste."

While some who were reducing meat and dairy emphasised animal welfare first (Francis and Davis, 2015; Sudbury Riley et al., 2012), recent consumer awareness campaigns have focussed more on the health and environmental benefits of reducing meat consumption (Neo 2016) and this was often reflected in younger people's narratives. Of course, neither concern is mutually exclusive and this is a good example of how cross-generational communication about sustainable consumption can be strengthened by appealing to a range of intrinsic values.

While exhibiting high levels of awareness and understanding of various aspects of sustainable consumption, younger interviewees also highlighted how this awareness did not necessarily translate into consuming less. Pete, a politics researcher in his late 20s, initially described himself as a "post-materialist" who values things like spending time in nature and with friends as "what I do for happiness quite often". However, as our interview progressed he reflected on the mismatch between his professed values and his consumer habits:

"I think materialism is something that still dominates even my life as someone who sees themselves as not particularly materialist… [T]he unfortunate reality, the more I talk about stuff the more I realise that although I could be worse, I still have a phone and a tablet and a laptop and a TV and all these sorts of things."

He and other interviewees like Hailey above reflected critically on their understanding of what it means to consume sustainability, their view of themselves as relatively responsible in their consumption choices, and the fact that oftentimes they are still consuming unsustainably (Francis and Davis, 2015; O'Rourke and Lollo, 2015). This signals the possibility of a growing value-action gap across the generations (Stanes et al., 2015), with young adults demonstrating a heightened awareness of what they 'ought' to do to consume sustainably and an affinity with post-materialist values alongside an acknowledged immersion in consumer culture (Kalmus et al., 2009).

Scales of sustainable consumption

While many Sheffielders expressed views about consuming sustainably that could be connected with intrinsic values such as concern for others, nature and non-humans, there was an interesting scalar politics at play. Across the generations, there was some evidence of responsibility-taking for the lives and working conditions of distant others to whom Western consumers are connected through commodity chains (Young, 2003). This was expressed, for example, in "feel[ing] awful about the way things are made overseas" (Sally, early 80s), feeling guilty about "horrible mines" in the Congo where the raw materials for smartphones comes from (Karen, early 40s), and boycotting Primark after the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 (Mackenzie, late teens). Simultaneously, there was a prominent narrative around supporting British and especially local businesses. Concerns about sustainable consumption thus encompassed poor labour conditions elsewhere, juxtaposed with the benefits of making consumption choices that support jobs for domestic workers (Aritzia et al., 2016).

Sheffield is a former major industrial centre still involved in manufacturing, its suburbs adjacent to former mining villages and farmland. Many of the city's residents felt strongly about supporting and reviving domestic industries they perceived as threatened by globalisation, connecting sustainable consumption with employment, pride and place-making. Stacey, a retired teacher in her late 50s, argued:

"There are [UK] farms standing empty and farmers are being paid hundreds of pounds per acre to not farm anything. I don't understand that and I feel that's misusing our environment, I think to not use it productively is wrong."

Older people spoke nostalgically of "Little Mesters", craftspeople who used to make cutlery and tools in small workshops in the city centre. Cassie, a semi-retired arts commissioner in her late 60s, explained how, in her view, this history still influences the high street and her support of Sheffield artists: "…that kind of handmade thing is very linked to Sheffield - people in Sheffield make things." Jemma, in her late 20s, had recently lost her job and described sustainable consumption as:

"…putting money into the community and not into, not having it look like everywhere else… if it keeps the community alive and with strength, and it keeps the local economy rich because it's going back into it."

These views on buying British and especially from Sheffield businesses illustrate what Neo (2016: 205) calls the "spatial and scalar contingency" of ethical consumption. Such assertions present a moral quandary when thinking about sustainable consumption, neglecting how 'local' production and consumption draws on resources and knowledge from elsewhere. Both Ariztia et al. (2016) and Neo caution against such a narrow focus. The assumption that buying British means better labour conditions, for example, might overlook the exploitation of migrant workforces by British firms, foreign producers' need for patronage and foreign workers' labour rights. Yet the appeal of localism and self-sufficiency as sustainable consumption aspirations is undeniable. From a Common Cause perspective, in connecting sustainable consumption with concern for others, it is important to consider how ideas about political consumerism and responsibility-taking intersect with the politics of scale-making (Jackson et al., 2009).

Conclusion

This wide-ranging research project set out to explore how citizens relate to the idea of sustainable consumption across generations, and to identify insights for campaigners and policy makers interested in working with intrinsic values to build common cause. Drawing on Inglehart's theory of intergenerational value change and a societal shift towards post-materialist values, we have suggested that it is fruitful to explore cross-generational touchstones and the shifting emphasis of sustainable consumption over time, rather than dwell on generational difference and debate which generations are 'better' or 'worse' consumers. We have considered the pervasiveness of thrift and the throwaway society in characterising generational difference in consumption practices, but also highlighted the cross-generational appeal of various sustainability concerns. For example, we have considered how thrift is reworked by younger generations from a practice rooted in conserving household resources in times of scarcity, to an ethical lifestyle choice rooted in "commonsense environmentalism", deeper notions of frugality and treating resources with care (Barr et al., 2011; Evans 2011b).

We have also highlighted how generational difference can sometimes be overstated or conflated with changes of circumstance across the life course and societal trends. This includes consideration of how "generational geographies" can shape sustainable consumption practices and priorities (Stanes et al. 2015) – for example, how having children can influence shopping habits, or the extent to which a person might consider their health when making consumption choices. Our data underlines the relevance of social practice theories in understanding how sustainable practices can become embedded cross-generationally, using the example of household recycling as a now well-established cross-generational norm.

In outlining various ways that citizens relate to sustainable consumption through concerns about economic stability, environmental protection and human wellbeing, our data suggests multiple entry points for engaging intrinsic values. This includes concerns relating to the collective consumption and preservation of public services, inviting a broad perspective on sustainable consumption that considers where people have power as citizens rather than consumers (Maniates, 2014). While some scholars maintain a distinction between different aspects of sustainable consumption – Bryant and Goodman (2004) for example argue that "conservation-seeking" and "solidarity-seeking" practices are premised on different motivations and values - we contend that environmental and social justice concerns need not be mutually exclusive. We do however recognise the scalar contingency of sustainable consumption ethics and moralities (Ariztia et al., 2016; Barnett et al., 2010; Jackson et al, 2009; Miller, 2001; Neo, 2016). This was reflected in our survey data in the priority given to oneself and one's family, and in our interview data in the juxtaposition of the (imagined) exploitation of foreign workforces with the valorisation of localism and protecting British jobs.

Relating these findings to Common Cause messaging, we recommend that campaigners and policy-makers should focus on cross-generational appeals where possible rather than segmentation. In particular, communications should emphasise intrinsic values associated with the economic and wellbeing benefits of sustainable practices alongside environmental benefits. We also recommend appealing to people as citizens rather than consumers, to foster a view of sustainable consumption as a collective practice that can be influenced by coming together, for example in campaigns for greater corporate social responsibility, or to save public services for the next generation. Our research highlights a particular challenge in framing sustainable consumption in a global context, with intrinsic and extrinsic values conflated when "altruistic attitudes towards the environment or distant strangers are mixed with a self-interested concern for the health and well-being of one's own family" (Jackson et al., 2009: 20). As such, though we have identified health, localism and protectionism as prominent sustainability concerns, campaigners should pay careful attention to how such issues are framed in the context of sustainable consumption, so as not to inadvertently undermine appeals to intrinsic values.

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