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Inverted Quarantine: Individual Response to Collective Fear

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Oberlin College

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I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code.

Abstract

In his 2007 book *Shopping Our Way to Safety*, sociologist Andrew Szasz coined the term inverted quarantine to describe a phenomenon in the way that Americans react to the changing natural environment. Inverted quarantine, or the impulse to remove one's self from perceived environmental dangers, often manifests in consumption behavior such as consuming only organic food, drinking filtered or bottled water, moving from a city to a suburb, or even being enclosed in a gated community. Although inverted quarantine may result in some form of protection, in the long run it is unsustainable in the face of the changing natural environment. Through investigations in literature and in-depth interviews with Ohio farmers, Oberlin College students, and parents in Fairfield County, Connecticut, this study examines the different way that environmental dangers are perceived and addressed across three different demographics.

Introduction

On January 14th, 2015, the *Detroit Free Press* ran an article titled “Flint city councilman: We got bad water.” At that time, children were suffering skin problems from contact with the water, including rashes. That week, hundreds of people showed up to a meeting with the mayor to discuss the water quality. According to *The New York Times* (“The Future for Flint’s Children,” 2016), among many other sources Flint’s water supply was contaminated with lead for nearly two years. The children who drank that water are highly susceptible to neurological damage, as well as damage to “behavior and employment prospects, also lower I.Q.s, poor impulse control and decreased lifetime earnings.” In short, their lives could be substantially altered from water that was supposed to be safe.

Although situations like these are not thought of usual occurrences across the United States, especially for middle and upper class communities, the news coverage of Flint taps into two major themes: social justice for a low-income community, and fear of the safety of a public resource. There are several different ways that one could respond to this fear, including collective demonstrations and political action. However, there is also the likelihood that some individuals will respond not by trying to change the system, but instead by insulating themselves from it, perhaps acquiring water through other means such as buying it. This kind of response, also known as *inverted quarantine*, is the main focus of this study.

Literature Review

Background on Inverted Quarantine

In his 2007 book *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*, sociologist Andrew Szasz uses the term *inverted quarantine* to describe the process of removing one’s self from environmental harms through

selective consumption rather than collective action. He frames individual consumption as the opposite of social movements, which “embody the notion that solutions are achieved only through collective means” such as joining an organization, campaigning, or protesting (3). In contrast, someone who exemplifies inverted quarantine perceives danger such as widespread contaminants in public resources, but purchases niche products to insulate themselves rather than addressing the problem at large.

Inverted quarantine can manifest in a variety of ways, most notably in food consumption, water consumption, and air quality. Those who fear polluted public water might drink bottled water exclusively or use filters in their tap water at home. Those who fear toxic pesticides, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, and growth hormones in food may buy organic food, and those who fear poor air quality might install filters in their homes, move from the city to a suburb, or buy exclusively all natural home goods.

Inverted quarantine is not just limited to harm in the aforementioned ways; other examples include the desire to build personal fallout shelters during the Cold War, the mass exodus of white Americans from racially mixed cities in the mid 20th century, and the rise of gated communities in the suburbs. However, the primary focus of this study is on the way inverted quarantine influences how we deal with problems in the natural environment. In this section, I will cover the background of how inverted quarantine was originally conceptualized, the different possible motivations and influences of inverted quarantine behavior, the mechanisms in which it manifests, and potential consequences of inverted quarantine in the future.

According to Szasz, those who participate in inverted quarantine behaviors most likely engage in it in every single aspect of their lives. Not only does an inverted quarantine lifestyle require time to learn about potential dangers and seek out seemingly viable alternatives, but inverted quarantine products are also generally more expensive than

conventional alternatives. Purchasing water, organic food, all natural furniture, and other ‘safe’ lifestyle choices are more accessible to the economically privileged. Therefore, the dividing line between those who have the option to avoid perceived harm and those who do not is sometimes limited to class and wealth. Nevertheless, the possible influences of inverted quarantine behavior are nuanced and varied.

Fear

In 2007, Szaz cites fear as the major influence in why individuals engage in inverted quarantine behavior. But how much of this concern – that our water, food, and air are all unsafe – is legitimate? It is likely that the majority of these fears are somewhat based in truth. According to Szaz, public drinking water has been found to contain a variety of “volatile and semivolatile organic chemicals” such as pesticides from industrial agriculture, medicines, fire retardants, mineral deposits from pipes, and other contaminants (115-117). While the Environmental Protection Agency enforces about ninety different regulations on drinking water, the standards are all based on what is considered a safe amount of each contaminant individually – no regulations exist that cover how these various ingredients chemically interact. Moreover, increasing scientific understanding and analyses indicate that current USDA food standards on fertilizers and pesticides are not stringent enough, not to mention the growth hormones and antibiotics added to meat and dairy, and the unregulated water that animals drink. Finally, as of 2007 several cities and regions did not meet EPA standards for safe air.

More recent studies indicate that these concerns are not going away. As of 2010, 22% of samples from 932 public wells contained at least one contaminant at concentrations that were above water standards, and contaminants are still widespread in United States groundwater (Eberts 2014). Moreover, a 2012 study of genetically modified organisms

(GMOs) indicates that there are still unknown risks and potential safety hazards of genetically modified foods, despite the fact that many products sold in the United States, such as vegetable oil and sugar, frequently come from GMO crops (Bawa and Anilakumar 2012).

Environmental Consciousness

One's environmental consciousness, or the understanding that the natural environment is being degraded, is also a likely influence of inverted quarantine behavior. For example, someone who fears the effects of agricultural sprays in produce or antibiotics used in meat might also choose to consume alternatives because of the effect they have on the environment. This attitude often leads to what has been called "conscious consumption," defined by Willis and Schor (2012) as,

any choice about products or services made as a way to express values of sustainability, social justice, corporate responsibility, or workers' rights and that takes into account the larger context of production, distribution, or impacts of goods and services. Conscious consumption choices may include forgoing or reducing consumption or choosing products that are organic, eco-friendly, fair trade, local, or cruelty-free. (162)

Although inverted quarantine involves insulating one's self from harm, many inverted quarantine products such as organic food, organic cotton clothing, all-natural cleaners, etc, double as conscious consumer products that are portrayed as better for the earth than their mainstream counterparts. Conscious consumption could come into play just as much as concern for personal safety, and it is not mutually exclusive from fear-based choices; one could buy organic food both because they believe it is better for the environment and better for themselves.

Gender

Gender also plays a huge role in inverted quarantine behavior, as women are both more likely to care about environmental problems (MacGregor 2010) and carry what Norah MacKendrick (2010, 2014) calls the “chemical body burden” of environmental toxins that can be passed to their children during pregnancy or breastfeeding. According to MacGregor (2010),

Generally speaking, there is evidence to suggest that women express higher levels, and men lower levels, of concern, and this has been attributed to differences in gender roles and social status (including class). Just as women’s socially ascribed roles as carers and provisioners make them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, women tend to feel more responsible for and more concerned about the quality of the environment. (131)

Women take on both the responsibility of environmental well being in groups such as “EcoMoms” that focus on ethical consumption choices (Brown 2008) as well as the well-being of their children, much of which is evidenced in “precautionary consumption” (MacKendrick 2014). In her in-depth interviews of 25 mothers, MacKendrick observes that women who engage in precautionary consumption do so because they feel the responsibility to protect both their own bodies and their children’s bodies from exposure to toxins that could be present in food, consumer products, and the home.

This trend is also examined by Cairns, Johnston, and Mackendrick in their 2013 study of mothers from different class backgrounds who all feel responsible for feeding their children organic food and spending significant amounts of money on all organic clothing. As one participant noted,

Sadly, most families that I know, the mothers are the ones that mainly do the shopping or the childcare, cooking and that stuff. So they pay the most attention. I think most of the men that I know in that circle, though, they are still concerned about it. They just don’t spend as much time looking into it and doing as much research as the mothers do. (109)

Not only do women feel the pressure to monitor their children’s safety more than men, but the cost of “safe” alternatives also add heightened financial and class-based stress to women who can’t afford to completely shield their families, especially when this behavior is

seen as a qualifier for being a good parent. For those who can afford it, it is probable that women will participate in inverted quarantine consumption since they are both more likely to be the primary protectors of their family's health and more likely to be concerned about protecting the environment.

Conspicuous Conservation

Finally, it is possible that inverted quarantine is also influenced by cultural capital, or the expression of norms that elevate one's social status, especially in communities where protecting the environment is highly valued (Bourdieu 1973). Carfagna et al. use the term "eco-habitus" to apply Bourdieu's (2002) concept of habitus, which they phrase as "a set of tastes and dispositions operating according to class homology," (158) to the importance of ethical consumption choices among mainly white, upper-middle class demographics. Because "ethical consumption is regarded as an extension of lifestyle, social networks, and civic and political action," (159) those who engage in ethical consumption visibly also make a statement of their values and ideals to the surrounding community. Carfagna et al also cite Julie Guthman (2003) who describes alternative food options as "yuppie chow" and that its high prices make it exclusionary. The authors write that in demographics such as young professionals, high cultural capital consumers partake in an eco-habitus that is more than just care for the environment – it is also an expression of distinctive social values and trends.

Over the past century, a substantial body of literature has arisen on conspicuous consumption, or the expression of luxury, prestige, and power via consumption choices (Sexton and Sexton 2011). For example, one might drive a Mercedes or carry a bag with a designer label on it to signal specific tastes and wealth to others. In communities where high status is designated by demonstrating commitment to the environment, carrying a reusable grocery bag, wearing a shirt with the name of a farmer's market on it, or driving a Prius

could function in a similar fashion. Sexton and Sexton call this specific type of behavior “conspicuous consumption,” and write that in some cases, it is so extreme that, “homeowners are known to install solar panels on the shaded sides of houses so that their costly investments are visible from the street” (1).

The city of Aspen, Colorado is a particularly strong example of this phenomenon (Park and Pellow 2011). This small ski resort town has some of the most expensive real estate in the country and attracts celebrities, CEOs, and other affluent residents who place a high value on prestige. In addition, the Aspen community prides itself on environmentalism and visible demonstrations of sustainability. In Park and Pellow’s 2011 book, *The Slums of Aspen*, they observe the trend of motorized scooters in the town and how it is portrayed in the local publication *Aspen Magazine*:

But how green our town is extends beyond organic produce to the trend of environmentally friendly scooters... Not only are they the most stylish way to get around in the summer, they also make parking in our congested downtown considerably easier. In the summertime, Aspen proves that Rome isn’t the only place where scooters rule. ‘My Italjet gets a kabillion miles to the gallon. I never fill it up,’ says Maria DeGraeve, manager of the Aspen Bulgari store and avid scooter rider. “And it’s a lot more ecologically friendly than my SUV.” (37)

While some residents of Aspen may be genuinely committed to protecting the environment, it is clear from *Aspen Magazine* that riding a fuel-efficient scooter has just as much to do (or perhaps more) with style than actual desire to cut emissions. Many of the residents of Aspen only live there for part of the year and fly in from other parts of the country, using energy and labor to keep their seasonal homes pristine and enormous amounts of fuel to travel.

Furthermore, Maria DeGraeve who was quoted in the magazine mentions that she owns SUV in addition to her scooter, a vehicle that uses a huge amount of energy. Yet, participating in conspicuous conservation can definitely boost the amount of environmental activity that one believes they are doing.

When applying conspicuous conservation to inverted quarantine, solar panels and fuel-efficient vehicles are not necessarily going to protect someone from perceived contaminants and harms. Yet, in communities where cultural capital is tied to environmentalism, knowledge of toxins in mainstream consumer goods and tendencies to buy eco-friendly products can certainly serve as a form of conspicuous consumption. In addition, the expensive cost of many inverted quarantine products makes them more likely to become symbols of exclusive and wealthy consumers.

Mechanisms

Inverted quarantine primarily operates through the individualization of responsibility, or the idea that consumers are personally and individually responsible for making choices that protect themselves and the environment. In an individualist and capitalist society, it is unsurprising when solutions to widespread problems are framed in terms of what one does in their daily life (turning off lights, taking short showers, etc) and what one decides to consume. The media can have a strong influence in this mentality. In 2010, Fitzgerald and Baralt conducted a study that investigated “the ways in which harms to the environment and human health have been constructed” (342). By studying the depiction of mercury-contaminated fish in *The Globe and Mail* and *The New York Times* over five years, they observed that media attention focused on the responsibility of the state to inform consumers about risks, rather than the responsibility of the commercial fish industry to prevent those risks from happening in the first place. Framing the problem around providing information to consumers emphasizes the need to for consumers to inform themselves and protect themselves from harm (i.e. engage in inverted quarantine behavior), but it does not address changing the fact that the fish industry can still produce mercury-contaminated food and sell it.

In 2010, sociologist Norah MacKendrick also published a similar study in which she analyzed the way contaminants and the chemical body burden are portrayed in Canadian newspapers from 1986 to 2006. She noted that between 1998 and 2004 there was a spike in news coverage of potential toxins in consumer goods and that since this time, news stories reinforced the mentality of precautionary consumption and individual choices in avoiding risk. This can be especially impactful for women who, as mentioned previously, take a larger role than men in insulating their families and their bodies from contaminants.

When addressing environmentalism, individualization of responsibility is also widespread and, as Maniates (2001) notes, it is characteristic of the mainstream environmental movement. Maniates describes the individualization of responsibility as thinking of large problems such as worldwide climate change and acting in small ways to address them. He writes:

Thinking globally and acting locally means feeling bad and guilty about far-off and mega-environmental destruction, and then traveling down to the corner store to find a “green” product whose purchase will somehow empower somebody, somewhere, to do good. (44)

In both trying to save the environment from destruction and protect one’s self from bodily risks, the individualization of responsibility fosters inverted quarantine behavior and could distract from the possibility of targeting large, systemic changes.

Potential Consequences

In his article, Maniates (2001) warns against this possibility, that focusing on individual actions makes thinking in terms of larger solutions difficult:

Individualization, by implying that any action beyond the private and the consumptive is irrelevant, insulates people from the empowering experiences and political lessons of *collective* struggle for social change and reinforces corrosive myths about the difficulties of public life. (44)

When individuals do not engage in collective action, the status quo of continued consumption remains, and it is difficult for concrete change to happen from spontaneous change in the market demand that might lack unification, especially when marketing can lead to misinformation and corporations have hands in political lobbying. Gunderson (2014) also points out that the branding of certain eco-friendly products and perceived safer, ‘natural’ alternatives creates a new “commodity fetishism” (109) that only contributes to continued resource consumption rather than combat against it.

Inverted quarantine consumption also has direct, tangible environmental impacts, some of which are positive such as non-toxic cleaners and organic food, but some fear-based behaviors like drinking bottled water, clearly use resources and create waste. Aside from these immediate impacts, Szaz (2007) warns that inverted quarantine creates a false sense of security; those who can currently afford to pay more to insulate themselves will not always be able to do so with continued environmental degradation and possible worldwide crises. Moreover, inverted quarantine pulls potential resources of those who have money and power away from impacting larger solutions because they are more focused on protecting themselves and acting individually. Inverted quarantine, while creating psychological comfort for some, is ultimately unsustainable.

Data and Method

This research seeks to answer two main questions: 1) What are the different motivations for inverted quarantine behavior and how do they interact? 2) How do the inverted quarantine attitudes of those who produce food compare to those who only consume it?

In order to answer these questions, I collected qualitative data through a total of 30 in-depth interviews conducted across three different demographics: students at Oberlin College,

parents in Fairfield County, Connecticut, and agricultural farmers who were mostly from Ohio. Each group was chosen to increase the variety of perspectives in the study. Oberlin College students, who are generally young, independent, and liberal, are likely to have a different mindset than parents from a wealthy part of Connecticut who are older and possibly more conservative. Farmers, who were mostly recruited from Ohio, were chosen to weigh in on the methods of food production and how they perceive environmental dangers in their line of work.

Moreover, I was interested to see what differences and similarities exist across each demographic in their inverted quarantine influences. For example, Connecticut parents who have kids are likely less idealistic than college students and might be more likely to engage in fear-based precautionary consumption. On the other hand, Oberlin students might be more influenced by conspicuous conservation and environmental consciousness, given that the Oberlin community places a strong emphasis on environmental work. Farmers had the potential to be more varied in which theoretical influences have an effect on their behavior due to my lack of familiarity with their lifestyles. Nevertheless, because they have a hand in producing food to be sold, they are an important perspective in inverted quarantine consumption. Finally, convenience was also a large factor in choosing each population. I am a student at Oberlin, I have access to a multitude of nearby Ohio farms, and my permanent home is in Fairfield County, Connecticut; therefore, these three demographics were also the easiest for me to access.

Figure 1.

Pseudonym	Interview Group	Gender	Age
Christina	Connecticut Parents	Female	58
Leah	Connecticut Parents	Female	57
Morgan	Connecticut Parents	Female	55
Susan	Connecticut Parents	Female	49
Margaret	Connecticut Parents	Female	46

Heidi	Connecticut Parents	Female	54
Maria	Connecticut Parents	Female	51
Nancy	Connecticut Parents	Female	54
Donald	Connecticut Parents	Male	57
Sam	Connecticut Parents	Male	65
Erica	Connecticut Parents	Female	54
Sylvia	Connecticut Parents/Farmers	Female	32
GINNY	Connecticut Parents/Farmers	Female	49
Toni	Ohio Farmers	Female	77
Sasha	Ohio Farmers	Female	37
Ben	Ohio Farmers	Male	88
John	Ohio Farmers	Male	45
Chris	Ohio Farmers	Male	42
Nick	Ohio Farmers	Male	43
Hilary	Oberlin Students	Female	21
Patrice	Oberlin Students	Female	22
Tracy	Oberlin Students	Female	21
Cynthia	Oberlin Students	Female	21
Lisa	Oberlin Students	Female	20
Suzette	Oberlin Students	Female	22
Ellie	Oberlin Students	Female	22
Clara	Oberlin Students	Female	20
Dylan	Oberlin Students	Male	19
Henry	Oberlin Students	Male	20
Jason	Oberlin Students	Male	20

By the end of this study, I was able to recruit a total of 11 students, 11 parents in Connecticut, 6 farmers in Ohio, and 2 individuals who were initially recruited as Connecticut parents but also work on a farm and therefore overlap between the demographics. At Oberlin I recruited via social media (a post on two Oberlin Facebook pages) and an email sent out to the Environmental Studies list serv. I chose the Environmental Studies department specifically because it seemed likely that students in that department would be more likely to consider environmental harms and contaminants in their daily lives. In Connecticut, I used snowball sampling to get in contact with local parents, and in Ohio I contacted farmers in the area independently on the phone and via email.

The interviews ranged in length depending on how much the participant had to say; some were as short as 20 minutes and some ran over an hour. Aside from the Oberlin

students who were between ages 19 and 21, there was also a large age range among respondents. Parents in Connecticut were between 32 and 65 and the farmers who were interviewed also had a large age range, from 32 to 88. Moreover, the respondents from Connecticut and Oberlin College were overwhelming female; 9 out of the 11 parents in Connecticut were mothers, 8 out of the 11 Oberlin students were women, and the 2 participants who were both parents and farmers were also women. In contrast, 4 out of the 6 farmers in Ohio were men. Notably, only three respondents were non-white; one Oberlin student was Latino and two Oberlin students were Asian.

The interviews took place over the span of 3 months between December 2015 and early March 2016, and all interviewees were offered small incentives to participate (the choice between a \$5 Amazon gift card or a drink of choice from a local coffee shop) as a result of funding from the Jerome Davis Research Fund, although several participants politely declined the incentive. Unsurprisingly though, every college student who participated eagerly accepted the gift certificate or coffee. With the help of two transcription services, I then transcribed and coded all of the interviews to pull out general themes in the responses.

Analysis

Connecticut Parents

The attitudes among respondents in Fairfield County, CT were somewhat varied, likely because the community as a whole is large and the age of participants ranged from 32 to 58. In this demographic, I observed the most fear-based inverted quarantine behavior. It is important to note that nine out of eleven Connecticut parents were mothers, reflecting the gendered differences in time availability and interest in participating in a study about food, the environment, and consumption. This supports MacGregor's (2010) idea that women are more likely to care about the environment and take on responsibility for the health of their

families. Four respondents, including the two male participants, barely had any concern for environmental problems or any strong feelings about food production or bottled water, yet even these participants still exhibited some selective consumption choices based on information to which they had been exposed. For example, Leah, a middle-aged mother from New Canaan, commented on how she thinks about seafood when grocery shopping.

You hear so much about farm-raised versus the wild, and then also there's lake fish as opposed to ocean fishes, and sometimes you hear it comes from the Long Island Sound and you really don't want to eat that stuff... It's interesting that I pay more attention to the fish and not a lot of other things. I mean, I'm concerned but I guess I just haven't really done research into, 'oh, so I shouldn't buy eggs from Minnesota.' You know, I don't know the areas of great concern. [I] put it that way just because I haven't dug a little bit further into where are the bad areas.

When asked about her overall concern for the environment, Leah described herself as “not extremely concerned,” and she admitted that she has not given much thought into investigating the sources of food she buys. Nevertheless, Leah still considers herself a “label-reader” and cares about the nutritional content of what she eats. Furthermore, although she does not actively seek out more information about food, she is influenced by knowledge and ideas that come her way. Leah's description of being a “label-reader” mainly centered on nutritional content, a theme that arose in all Connecticut interviews, despite the fact that I never used language specifically prompting a discussion of nutrition. This shows that basic nutritional standards are still a main priority in consumption, not just inverted quarantine considerations, and precautionary consumption can still occur in someone who is a “label reader,” even if they do not see themselves as well-informed.

In addition, eight of the thirteen participants mentioned having water filters installed in their houses because it seemed like a logical thing to do. One father, Donald, talked about how he only drinks filtered water at home and Evian or Perrier at work because he assumes that it is healthier and safer, while a few others talked about the controversial presence of fluoride in municipal water in Connecticut and concern that it could be potentially dangerous.

Many parents in Connecticut were also inclined to look for convenience in making consumption choices that aligned with their health or environmental goals. Donald and his wife Christina exclusively shopped at Whole Foods and a regional grocery chain called Mrs. Green's Natural Market because they didn't trust the quality of other grocers. Christina noted that sometimes she didn't even trust Mrs. Green's because she worried that they left the produce sitting out too long. In her husband's interview, he described why he (and his wife) prefer Whole Foods: "I believe it's preselected so there's less (pause) shopping I have to do because it's already organic." Because Christina generally does the majority of the shopping, Donald mostly follows her guidelines of what to buy and where to shop. However, Donald's erroneous belief that all items at Whole Foods are organic reflects a wider mentality among respondents who are wary of misinformation and want an easier way to make choices. Five participants mentioned relying on certain brands that they trust and seeking that supplier for multiple cleaning or beauty products, rather than looking at each item individually.

The seven respondents that scrutinized the sources of food, or even clothing and cleaners, were either stay-at-home mothers or had full time professions that centered on food. Two of these respondents, Sylvia and Ginny, work at a community farm, and another respondent, Sally, does culinary and food justice work at her job. This upholds the limited access of inverted quarantine products; not only are grocery stores such as Whole Foods and Mrs. Green's generally more expensive than other grocery stores in the area, but the ability to learn about what one consumes is likely easier for those who have disposable time, money, and live in communities where discussions on food are encouraged. Maria, a stay at home mother from New Canaan, gave me book recommendations and described a video series she watches on YouTube about avoiding carcinogens in various food items, indicating a significant commitment of time to learning about potential contaminants. Moreover, two other mothers that I interviewed from Connecticut are connected to the same community

farm as Sylvia and Ginny, although their roles are more periphery and less time-consuming. Nevertheless, their connection to the farm community keeps them informed and engaged in conversations on food production.

One striking difference between mothers in my sample and those in the literature was that I did not observe women who engaged in inverted quarantine as a *direct* result of the chemical body burden, although the feeling of responsibility for their children still prominent. When asked whether or not their consumption choices were influenced by having kids, nearly every respondent said that they were more influenced by growing older and gradually become more knowledgeable; having kids simply coincided with that process. The one exception to this was Maria, who said that when she had her youngest child she was introduced to a brand of baby products (shampoos, diapers, baby powder, etc) that is, in her understanding, all natural and safer than other brands, though considerably more expensive.

Several mothers, such as Maria, Ginny, Sylvia, and Christina, said that shopping for a family definitely gave them more responsibility to make good choices and that they cared more about their children's health than their own. Ginny, Sylvia, and Christina also spoke about a difference they observed between the frequency of allergies, gluten intolerances, and lactose intolerances in today's kids versus their own childhoods, and Sylvia cited her son as an example of someone who acquired a sudden, seemingly random and severe intolerance to lactose when he was a teenager. Sylvia attributed this to the unknown processes that are used in mainstream food production, and commented that this is a particularly American phenomenon. Ginny added that she views GMOs as wild cards in food safety, making children in the United States "guinea pigs" for the rest of the world. For Ginny and Sylvia, the effects that food has on their children are particularly concerning, and they care more about what goes into their bodies versus their own.

Nevertheless, every participant, including Ginny and Sylvia, said that they would still shop the same way even if they had never had kids. Four participants also referred to their (somewhat grown) children as sources of information shopping responsibly and paying attention to ingredients in various food, cleaning, and other products.

Conspicuous conservation also came into play with the influence of kids on their parents; Donald cited his daughter as someone who convinces him that responsible consumption is in vogue. When describing the cars he owns, he mentioned driving a BMW because of the way it looks and the feeling of luxury – a clear example of conspicuous consumption. He and his wife also purchased a Prius for his daughter to drive because that was what she wanted and, “It’s cool to be environmentally conscious,” he noted with some cynicism, perhaps seeing environmental consciousness as more trendy than practical.

Ohio students

Oberlin students seemed to be the least self-oriented in inverted quarantine behavior. As a whole they showed consciousness of environmental harms and contaminants to which they could be exposed, but they also provided more variety in their answers and did not limit themselves to entirely consumption-based solutions. Buying organic food and responsibly sourced products was still something that students wanted to do, but no one viewed shopping choices as the most important way of addressing environmental problems. Yet, other individual, daily actions such as turning off lights or using a reusable water bottle were still mentioned across the board, clearly exhibiting an individualization of responsibility mentality.

Several students also added that group efforts are important to them, especially when given a few extra minutes to think, and four participants had already participated in collective environmental efforts. Interestingly, three out these four viewed their past environmental

projects as minimal, despite the fact that they were far more involved than the majority of interviewees. One respondent described having “lent my body to protests,” but that he believes he really should be doing more. Ellie, a senior politics and history major, noted that she spent a summer working for an environmental nonprofit that focused on anti-corporate activism, but this came as an afterthought to her daily individual choices. It appears that the Oberlin students interviewed are generally more inclined to participate in group efforts than Connecticut parents or Ohio farmers, yet their initial solutions to environmental degradation prioritize individualization of responsibility.

Oberlin students exhibited less personal concern over what contaminants or harms might be in food rather than water, clothing, household items, etc, understandably because most of them are not buying cleaning products for a house or providing for a family. Six out of the eleven participants expressed wariness and mistrust of the way that food is produced and marketed on a large scale. Cynthia, a senior Environmental Studies major commented,

Well, these days we've come up with this idea that we want food to look a certain way, so a lot of times, what we do to make it look a certain way is we'll add chemicals... And then trying to get foods – all the same foods all year round, you have to modify them so they can grow at any time of year. And we shouldn't be messing with food that much because it messes with our bodies.

This was a sentiment that was echoed to varying degrees by other students, although food contamination was often addressed as an environmental or ethical (political effects of corporations and worker conditions) concern first and a personal health concern second. When asked, six students speculated that there were probably harmful things going into their bodies when eating food that contains pesticides, GMOs, and other potential harms, but didn't dwell on it for very long. None of the students who were interviewed considered buying inverted quarantine products realistic at this point in their lives because they are either provided food from someone else (campus dining services, their parents when at home) or they lack enough discretionary income to seriously prioritize inverted quarantine food and

other products. “It’s those small costs that’ll get you,” noted Suzette, a senior biology major. Because most students don’t even consider inverted quarantine products a realistic option, it could be stressful to seriously think about all of the potential health effects of what they consume. Suzette also added that for her, hidden contaminants don’t seem serious because death feels very far away: “I have that 20’s syndrome where I’m like, I can’t die! ... But I don’t really think about it that much because it’s not something, death is not something that I can really understand even.”

While other participants did not show such explicit self-reflection with regard to age, this sense of invincibility is not unique to Suzette. For these students, bodily harm is not a major concern or more important than the environmental effects of consumption. Clara, a second year environmental studies major who conducted agricultural research on pesticides over the summer echoed the overall sentiment of Oberlin interviewees: “I guess I’m not super concerned about pesticides in terms of health. And maybe I should be more concerned about it, but I’m just not [laughs]. I don’t know.”

Moreover, because students at Oberlin often engage in dialogue about social justice and the environment, Oberlin participants frequently spoke about their own daily experiences as minimally concerning. Rather, five students put their own lives into perspective by commenting on communities around the country and the world, often low-income communities of color, who are more vulnerable than college students in Ohio. For example, when asked whether or not she was worried about environmental problems affecting her life on a regular basis, Ellie responded,

Not physically, in that I know that I have spent areas in high pollution and that kind of thing, but I also smoke, right? So like, whose fault is that if my lungs aren’t doing so well? But, I think that the toll that environmental practices take on me personally because I come from a life of relative privilege is almost exclusively emotional. Which is kind of a weird thing because environmental issues do really stress me out even though they don’t, they affect me more in a moral way than in a literal way... I think a lot of it is empathy for people who are affected by this kind of thing on a daily basis, and

I know that doing nothing is the worst thing I could do for, you know, people whose running water you can light on fire, for people who have weird stomach bugs because of poorly processed food and its waste systems and all that.

As this quote shows, Ellie thinks about her personal safety and health in relation to the world at large, rather than on an absolute level. She also recognizes paradoxes in her behavior, noting that she already smokes and creates her own damage to her body, so she doesn't feel that it makes sense to complain about environmental health risks.

In addition, a few Oberlin students showed self-awareness of how their social identities have contributed to environmental behavior, exhibiting Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Two participants, Patrice and Tracy, noted that rather than engaging in environmentally motivated consumption to fit in, they did so to stand out. Both of them mentioned environmentalism as something that set them apart from others in their hometown and made them feel unique. Patrice even described herself as "militant" in her attitude towards buying organic food and all-natural household products as a reaction to what she perceived as a general lack of awareness and care among other students at her high school. Neither Patrice nor Tracy explicitly mentioned wanting to show off their behavior to others, yet the feeling of uniqueness that each of them had in high school is certainly an example of conspicuous conservation and a cultivation of an environmental image among their peers, whether or not they did so consciously. Furthermore, although environmentally motivated consumption contributed to her self-concept at home, Patrice admits that now that she does her own shopping at Oberlin without her parents or a steady income, she usually prioritizes price over everything else. At Oberlin, there is definitely cultural capital in being environmentally conscious, yet what once set Patrice and Tracy apart from their peers is now commonplace in the community, and therefore they are no longer unique in that respect.

When asked about drinking water, participants from Oberlin were happy to drink tap water across the board. Some commented on the notable difference in taste between their

water at home and Ohio, but no one who was interviewed was averse to drinking it. Rather, there was a general antipathy against bottled water. Most respondents spoke of it as foolish to waste plastic bottles and pay for something that is otherwise free, while some expressed even stronger sentiments, such as Ellie who commented,

I think that private water is one of the most evil things in the entire world. Oh my god, I don't know where to begin with privatized water - it's so bad [scowl]. I think that municipally owned or regionally owned water is historically almost always better for the consumer, for the worker of the water system, and for the taxpayer. And yet these water companies come through and they make huge profits and they really make the system worse while they're running it and yet they collect money off taxpayers. It's terrible.

The taste of water was a more prevalent consideration for Oberlin students, and no one exhibited inverted quarantine behavior as a response to water safety. Overall, the lack of serious concern for their own safety came up as the most striking and ubiquitous attitude from Oberlin respondents. This is not to say that Oberlin students were entirely negligent – six students acknowledged bodily safety as something at least crossed their minds when consuming food or using hygiene products – yet as a whole they were significantly less concerned than Connecticut parents and Ohio farmers, and knowledge of potential harms in the food industry did not result in a strong, tangible effect on consumption behavior.

Farmers

Out of the three groups that were interviewed, farmers definitely showed the most extreme range in viewpoints, with two respondents who didn't believe that the environment was in any danger at all, and six who were extremely concerned about both the environmental impacts of agriculture and the health effects of mainstream food production. These farmers also had the greatest range in age, from 32 to 88 years old.

Three of these farmers, including Sylvia and Ginny from Connecticut, worked in nonprofit, community-oriented farms, and these three were also the most active in

environmental group initiatives. The interviewee who showed the most knowledge of health risks in agriculture and public water was John, a trained ecologist who works at a farm that acts as an educational model for agriculture using natural ecosystems. When asked about his concern for the environment, he described himself as extremely worried, stating that now is the time for “all hands on deck.” The farm at which John works is an organization that functions largely off of donations.

For the rest of the farmers though, the need to operate a profit-making business is a major hindrance to being as environmentally friendly as some of them would like. Nick, who runs a fruit farm, noted that he tries to use as few chemical pesticides and fertilizers as possible, but that if he got rid of them completely he would not be able to sustain the farm, especially due to invasive insects that are becoming more severe. Moreover, Nick is switching to a newer, more ecologically friendly pesticide this season because of his concern for the environment, yet the pesticide to which he is switching is far more expensive than less environmentally safe alternatives. Wanting to farm responsibly adds another challenge to what interviewees described as an already tough industry.

Ben, the oldest respondent who is 88 years old, has spent his entire life working in the farm industry and noted that it has changed dramatically since he was a kid. He recalled that when he was growing up, his family was mostly self-sufficient when it came to the food they ate, and they had both animals and crops.

It's all changed... we don't even have a family garden on our farm. I've always said I'd rather plant 100 acres of soybeans and take the profit. I have a brother and sister-in-law who almost live off of their garden. Also I like the food better when she makes it homemade that way than I do bought, but that's life.

Ben described himself as not concerned about the environment as a whole, but he has still had to make changes to his lifestyle in order to operate his farm in a way that he sees as realistic.

Personal inverted quarantine consumption, including attitudes toward water, clothing, and cleaners, were largely varied among the farmers. All of the farmers except for two believe that tap water is generally safe: John mentioned the possibility of contaminated water in other parts of the country, although he understands the water purification in Cleveland to be safe. Local farmer Chris explained that he gets all of his drinking water from a nearby artesian well because he doesn't trust the water that comes out of the tap, although he still uses tap water for his crops, and it was clear that this decision is motivated more by fear than anything else. Additionally, Nick and his wife Sasha mentioned that they raise their own chickens and are careful about the food they buy, mainly because they are wary of how major corporations process their products and they perceive major health risks, such as Alzheimer's and cancer, associated with packaged food. Sasha often buys local food so she has a better sense of how it is produced, as opposed to buying it just to support local businesses. Fear of hard to see risks and precautionary consumption undoubtedly drives this inverted quarantine behavior.

Although there were very different attitudes expressed by each interviewed farmer, the most consistent finding was that the farmers acknowledged, and sometimes lamented, that most consumers do not understand how food is grown and what it takes to make a crop succeed. It is likely that this discrepancy between producer and consumer, and the knowledge of how food is grown, contributes to inverted quarantine because of the sense of mystery that surrounds food production, adding to increased fear and precautionary consumption. Furthermore, a disconnect between suppliers and consumers can create room for brands and corporations to mislead shoppers on what is in the product that they are buying and whether or not it is safe.

Overlapping Trends

One interesting trend that came up in both Connecticut parents and Ohio farmers was the avoidance of food from Mexico and China – four parents and two farmers mentioned distrust of these countries because of questionable safety standards. Two parents in Connecticut, Donald and Christina, even talked about how they don't buy soaps, furniture, and other household items from Mexico or China as well. This avoidance due to safety standards is clear inverted quarantine behavior, and many of the items that they do purchase are from France or England and generally more expensive.

Furthermore, when participants were asked about what prevents them from doing more even if they are gravely concerned about the environment, the most common responses in each demographic were that they lack time, money, and information. Even respondents who appeared to have more disposable income saw environmentalism as costly, and primarily achievable through individual consumption choices, such as only buying organic food, clothes, all natural household products, installing solar panels on their homes, etc. Three Oberlin students and two farmers (Sylvia and Ginny) brought up environmentalism as a radical lifestyle change that involved rarely showering, buying new things, or traveling. This is an important distinction from those who approach environmentalism through consumption, and it does point to the fact that some participants, especially those from Oberlin, tend to think more in terms of large, societal systems and how consumption impacts the world. Those that brought up large lifestyle changes also dismissed them as impractical in our society. Yet, the seemingly different attitudes of looking to consume specific environmental products and trying to not to consume are both forms of conscious consumption. While consuming less, showering less, and generally changing one's lifestyle seems like a more radical shift than consuming 'ethical' products, both focus on consumption as a means for a solution to environmental dangers.

Discussion

It makes sense then, that in all three groups interviewed there was a notable desire to do more, yet the actual likelihood of action was less clear. Individualization of responsibility was present in each person interviewed, from recycling to turning off the lights to wanting to buy all organic food and a hybrid car. Yet, feeling the need to change individual behavior in order to save the environment, plus the inevitability of consuming resources in our society, makes it difficult to feel like one is being effective in combating environmental degradation. Not a single respondent, except for two farmers who did not believe that the environment was in any danger, felt that they were doing enough. In addition, every single participant who thought they could be doing more to be environmentally friendly spoke about their individual choices and actions first before thinking of group initiatives, if at all.

The majority of my respondents in all three demographics were not familiar with local environmental groups and initiatives, even though 28 out of the 30 interviewees expressed concern for the environment. While individual solutions are not bad, the fact that most respondents did not think beyond those behaviors indicates a problematic view of how to make solutions that affect the whole system, rather than one's personal impact separately. Moreover, respondents in all three demographics attributed behaviors that were less harmful than others as actively benefitting the environment, such as recycling or as two farmers mentioned, disposing of pesticide and chemical waste "properly." As mentioned before, small acts such as these are important to do, yet limiting one's thinking to individual behavior is the crux of inverted quarantine – if one doesn't even consider collective problem solving at all, inverted quarantine might seem like the only alternative from doing nothing.

Although the study was set up to investigate three different communities based on occupation and location, an important finding from the interviews is that age plays a large

role in attitudes toward the environment as well. As Suzette mentioned in her interview, college students are less likely to think very carefully about invisible, potentially unclear, and long-term health effects of what they consume because they are still young and have not necessarily experienced any bodily deterioration. This makes it easier to focus outward on the environmental effects of consumption first and personal health effects second. In addition, the two respondents who do not believe that the environment is any long-term danger are also the two oldest: ages 77 and 88. This points to the possibility that younger people might be more inclined to be care about the environment than older generations; a 2010 study from Yale Project on Climate Change indicates that people between 18 and 22 are slightly more concerned as a whole about climate change (Feldmen et al 2010).

Differences in attitudes may also be a result of different cultures and types of cultural capital in each community that was interviewed. The farmers who participated in this study did not belong to one unified group, so it makes sense that there were strong and contrasting viewpoints. Yet, at Oberlin College having knowledge about the environment and demonstrating care is definitely a form of capital, especially since environmental studies is often emphasized as a distinctive aspect of the school. In addition, “green” stores such as Mrs. Green’s Natural Market are becoming increasingly popular in Fairfield County, in addition to restaurants that emphasize local, farm-to-table sourced food, indicating that ‘ethical consumption’ is a social trend as well.

However, a limitation of this study is that conclusions from my respondents cannot be used to generalize about demographic groups until a larger, quantitative study is done on inverted quarantine. When moving forward, future research should study inverted quarantine from a broader, quantitative perspective in order to see how Americans as whole think about environmental harms and where sources of change can come from. This work serves as a

starting point to filling gaps in the literature and digging deeper into the ways in which inverted quarantine manifests in order to pave the way for further study.

Conclusion

It is clear that the motivations for selective consumption behavior can be mixed and influenced by more than just fear alone. Nevertheless, the lack of participation in collective action among most interviewees, many of whom are well educated, indicates a concerning possibility that many individuals are not likely to take strong action until their lifestyles are substantially altered, and based on the widespread individualist mentality, it is not unlikely that many people would resort to extreme inverted quarantine behavior as measures of self-protection.

That being said, conscious consumption was also present among participants, and individual measures of ‘doing good’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive with collective measures, as long as the intent is to create change. As Willis and Schor (2012) observed in their study of conscious consumption, “People who do more conscious consumption... are more engaged in activism in a variety of forms. We find that conscious consumption ‘crowds in,’ rather than ‘crowds out,’ political activism” (179). Given the good intent of the majority of my participants, there is undoubtedly potential for political activism that is currently untapped.

In order to effectively deal with current and future environmental damage, it is necessary to tackle agricultural practices, water regulations, and other widespread problems from a structural approach. Education on environmental degradation and its effects is often seen as the first step for preventing further harm. However, education is also necessary in changing how individuals understand their power to create change and the measures that need to be taken to do so, and much of what the interviewees said reflected the wider consumerist

culture of the United States. This is the crux of where education needs to start in order to change attitudes, and therefore, change the future of our environment.

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