

DRIVING FORCE: AN EXPLORATION OF  
TEXAN PRIUS DRIVERS

by

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## ABSTRACT

### DRIVING FORCE: AN EXPLORATION OF TEXAN PRIUS DRIVERS

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The purpose of this study was to examine what Prius owners use their vehicle to tell the world about themselves and to discover whether this varies by gender. This was explored through the lens of situational simulation, a blending of Baudrillard's (1983) theory concerning simulation and current literature concerning gendered consumption of environmental goods and awareness.

In-depth interviews with fourteen participants were the main source of data. The interview schedule was loosely based on the work of previous researchers (Heffner, Kurani and Turrentine 2007), though a unique questionnaire was included after interviews were complete. Participants were gathered using snowball methodology in two urban centers at opposite ends of Texas.

The interviews provided interesting clues into gendered consumption patterns and environmental awareness with females being more likely to illustrate environmental concern and less likely to consume. Trends in political affiliation, age and income were also discovered.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Theoretical Background .....	1
1.2 Contribution to Sociology .....	4
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	5
2.1 The Prius .....	5
2.1.1 The Prius as a Symbol of Frugality .....	5
2.1.2 The Prius as a Symbol of Economic Voting.....	7
2.1.2 The Prius as a Symbol of Environmental Concern .....	8
3. METHODOLOGY.....	10
3.1 Data Collection .....	10
3.1.1 Previous Methods and Adaptations for this Study .....	12
4. FINDINGS .....	15
4.1 Sample .....	15
4.2 Conceptualization.....	17
4.3 Frugality.....	19
4.3.1 Fuel Efficiency .....	19
4.3.2 Redefining “Need” .....	24
4.4 Economic Voting .....	29
4.4.1 Hope and Economic Voting.....	29
4.4.2 Spending to Save.....	31

4.4.2 Withdrawal from the Marketplace .....	34
4.5 Environmentalism.....	39
4.5.1 The Fringe Benefit Becomes the Focus.....	39
4.5.1.1 Non-Leftists and Environmental Concern.....	39
4.5.1.2 Leftists and Environmental Concern .....	40
5.4.2 Are You <b>Really</b> an Environmentalist? .....	42
4.5.2.1 How Environmentalism is Generated Through the Prius .....	45
4.6 Theory Revisited .....	48
4.6.1 Situational Simulation and Non-Leftists .....	48
4.6.2 Situational Simulation, Non-Leftists and Gender .....	49
4.6.3 Situational Simulation and Leftists .....	50
4.6.4 Situational Simulation, Leftists and Gender .....	51
5. CONCLUSION .....	52
5.1 Conclusions.....	52
5.2 Deviations from the Original Work .....	55
5.3 Implications for Future Research .....	56
APPENDIX	
A. INFORMED CONSENT .....	58
B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE .....	61
C. SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE .....	69
REFERENCES.....	72
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION .....	76

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
4.1 Pseudonym with Associated Demographics Information.....	16

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns. But we’ve discovered that owning things and consuming things does not satisfy our longing for meaning.”  
Jimmy Carter, 1979 “Crisis of Confidence Speech”

While the research literature on consumers has explored the way individuals use material goods to make statements about themselves, it has failed to address gender differences in how products are used to make statements or gender differences in the statements men and women strive to make through their consumer choices. Furthermore, because the conscientious consumer is a relatively new breed of shopper, the literature has neglected this type of consumer and how they may use purchases to make statements about themselves. When attempting to answer how gender affects what conscientious consumers believe their material goods say about themselves, the current literature falls short.

It is with this in mind that I explore how Prius drivers use their vehicles to say something meaningful about themselves. The Prius is an excellent product for such an investigation since, thanks to its environmental friendliness, it falls within the category of conscientious goods and little to no work has examined gender differences in its symbolic conceptualization by actual owners. Just what is it that Prius owners believe their vehicle tells the world about themselves and does this vary by gender?

#### 1.1 Theoretical Background

My theoretical grounding is based in Jean Baudrillard’s theory, specifically the idea of simulation, the process people engage in when ascribing symbolic meaning to material goods. For example, Baudrillard likens the Melanesian natives’ building of a branch-and-creepers



aircraft and crude landing zone to modern consumers' shopping habits. Both create an "array of sham objects" (Baudrillard 1998:31) in the hopes that their feigned reality will eventually attract the real thing. In the case of the Malenesians, this was an aircraft. For consumers it can be some sense of happiness or a real, and not simulated, meaning that they hope will develop in their lives. In this way, Prius owners can purchase their vehicle expecting the *sign* of some characteristic will "land" and *become reality*.

For my own purposes, Prius owners may ascribe various symbols and meanings to their vehicle based on their "situation" in society. Whether the characteristic is frugality, support for an idea, or environmentalism, the symbolism of their purchase – the meaning an owner ascribes to their Prius – is a sign that is exchanged for actual meaning. Using objects to signify meaning, or "substituting signs of the real for the real itself" is what Baudrillard calls simulation (1983:4). That being said, owners cannot truly express the characteristics they wish because "[t]here is no 'objective' difference: the same gestures and the same signs exist" because the Prius is a reproducible item with little variation (Baudrillard 1983:38-39). What I am interested in exploring is what Prius owners *believe* they are simulating.

Because gender is the main factor of interest to me in investigating Prius owners' use of simulation, I utilize literature that investigates the relationship between gender and the environment to fill in the gendered component neglected by Baudrillard. Previous research has theorized that a relationship exists (Zelezny, Chua and Aldrich 2000), but also that it does not exist (Hayes 2001). Increasingly, behaviors like altruism (Dietz, Kalof and Stern 2002), benevolence and universalism (Zelezny et al 2000) have been linked to both gender and environmental awareness with those individuals who display these attributes more likely to be pro-environment (Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson and Garling 2007) and women being more likely to engage in such behaviors. Naturally, it follows that, if women are more likely to be altruistic, benevolent and universalistic in their behaviors, and these behaviors lead to pro-environment choices, women will be more likely to display greener lifestyles. Unfortunately, little research

has been conducted to “fill in the hole” where gender is concerned, with some studies making small statements about gender or failing to draw any conclusion at all. For example, although Hughes’ (2005) research discovered no strong relationship between gender and vehicle choice or gender and willingness to act in the environment’s best interest, gender stereotyped statements were found. Only “a 42-year old single mother... wanted a small, compact car” (192) when participants were asked for their vehicle preference, while “a 44-year old public relations officer” touted the SUV as the new symbol of the “Marlboro man” (194). It may be that, as the author seems to suggest, “what becomes salient ... is how the car fits (or doesn’t fit) into the lifestyle of the participant” (198). This may be why the mother wants a small car and the Marlboro-man-to-be views SUVs as consistent with this sort of lifestyle.

Add to this Gilligan’s (1982) inspection of gendered morality, which lends itself well to examining potential gendered symbolism Prius owners ascribe to their vehicle. Women’s unique role as mothers and caregivers and the expectation that women be more communally oriented than men could lead to more altruistic and benevolent decision-making so that purchasing a Prius is seen as doing something good for many, including oneself. Recent research has suggested that this may impart a greater tendency toward conscientious consumerism (Heffner et al 2007, Hansla et al 2008). This growing canon’s relation to environmentalism cannot be ignored since individuals embodying these behaviors are more likely to show and act on their conscientious concerns (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano and Kalof 1999, Barr and Gilg 2006). Thus, it could be that gendered morality leads women to more often cite environmental concern as one reason for purchasing the vehicle when compared with their male counterparts (Heffner et al. 2007).

As a result, women’s distinct role as caregivers, and the conscientious mindset created by this responsibility, suggests gender’s relevance to an individual’s likelihood of purchasing a Prius. Because the signs individuals wish to convey, that which has been ascribed, changes from person to person, simulation may be related to gendered socialization. This is where

differences in women's and men's levels of altruism, benevolence and universalism meet an individual's simulation. I call this situational simulation: women and men using the same objects to "[substitute] signs of the real for the real itself" (Baudrillard 1983:4) in order to convey various symbols that may reflect gendered socialization. Gilligan and Baudrillard's combined theories are the starting point for my exploration of Prius owners' ascribed symbolism.

### 1.2 Contribution to Sociology

It is at this junction of simulation and gender that the gendered consumption of conscientious goods may be found - if it exists. As a result, my research adds to literature focused on consumption as well as the canon surrounding gendered values and beliefs, specifically altruism, benevolence and universalism that have been shown in the literature to potentially originate from gender. However, the larger inspiration for this project stemmed from a desire to expand the base of literature concerning the relationship (including whether it exists) between gender and the environment. In the end, the goal of this paper is to examine the intersectionality of pro-environmental consumption and gender.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 The Prius

Recent research concerning the Prius' popularity has significantly impacted our understanding of individuals' stated purpose for purchasing hybrid vehicles. This, in turn has developed a new area of study centered solely around the hybrid vehicle consumer which has examined several questions concerning how they are viewed by others, how they view themselves, and a myriad of reasons explaining why they purchase the vehicle. Because consumers' vehicle selection is positively and significantly associated with self-identity (Kressman, Sirgy, Herrmann, Huber, Huber and Lee 2006), it may be that owners purchase their Prius with an idea of how they view themselves in mind and, furthermore, how they want others to view them.

##### *2.1.1. The Prius as a Symbol of Frugality*

One of the most prevalent symbols ascribed to the Prius by owners, the media, celebrities, and perhaps even generally held by the public at large is the idea of the Prius as being fiscally responsible. The vehicle's fuel efficiency alone seems enough to have deemed the vehicle a sensible purchase if owners want to immediately communicate the idea of frugality. For example, recent studies found that one "momentary, but powerful confirmation of the vehicle's – and [the owner's] – frugality" came from checking the Prius' fuel monitor and seeing 99.9 mpg on the display (Heffner et al. 2007). As if this is not enough, the constant praise the Prius receives perpetuates frugal shoppers' interest. For example, the Prius was

named “best car value” in a 2009 report, an eye-catching reinforcement of shoppers’ assumptions (ConsumerReports.org 2009).

Moreover, consumers stated that during the selection process, they decided they did not really need a lot of *horsepower* (Heffner et al. 2007). The decision of what an individual truly needs is an often-debated subject; however, it may be that the current economic situation has accentuated this tendency so that vehicle consumers have a narrower, more conservative definition of need (Linn 2009). Mediating the current impact of the Great Recession with their expected future behavior is one way that consumers compromise their beliefs with action (Heffner et al. 2007, Shaw et al. 2006). It is important to note, however, that studies looking specifically for economic motivation or ascribed economic symbolism actually discovered that, while existent (Heffner et al. 2007, Turrentine et al. 2007), “it was usually as an aesthetic value rather than a financial one” and an enhancement to more valued symbols (Turrentine et al. 2007:18). In other words, Prius owners have been found to value frugality as something their vehicle will tell the world about themselves, but this usually takes the backseat to other things the owners wish to tell the world. This can range from the owner’s distaste for foreign oil to their love of new technology, as discussed below. What is important is not how accurate the “frugal” symbol is, but that it exists despite being debunked several times (Turrentine 2007). It is curious that inaccurate assumptions fuel Prius owners’ simulation process, maintaining a “frugal” meaning without the actual fact to support the symbolic ascription. This is what Baudrillard means when saying that our ascribed symbols exist as signs devoid of reality. In other words, owners *believe* this sign and so it is real (to them).

Finally, it may be important to note the conflicting gendered spheres behind the idea of frugality. Reason and logic have historically resided within the realm of “masculine” behavior (Gilligan 1982). However, admitting one does *not* need a lot of horsepower fails to conform with stereotypical ideas of masculine vehicles like muscle cars. So far as gender is concerned, males may have a more difficult time feeling a Prius accurately symbolizes them than a Ford F-

350. Females, on the other hand, should suffer no feelings of incompatibility with the Prius since women benefit from fuzzier lines that simultaneously allow them access to typically male and typically female behaviors. Another concession that may need to be made is that sending a “masculine” image could take a secondary interest for men who wish to project the “frugal” message. Only after inspecting gender’s role in deciding to purchase a Prius can a better understanding of its symbolic use be gained.

### *2.1.2. The Prius as a Symbol of Economic Voting*

Future oil prices and other such economic concerns are not the only concerns Prius owners may hold. Ethical, humanist, political and moral beliefs, as illustrated above, as well as beliefs about individuality and the need to support new technology, which will be talked about below, present a wide range of “reasons” given for purchasing a Prius. Perhaps one of the most interesting “reasons” consumers held was the notion of their dollar as being an economic vote (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho and Breivik 2007, Shaw et al. 2006, Stolle et al. 2005). In fact, recent studies have suggested that consumers see “market voting ... as more effective than representative democracy” (Shaw et al. 2006:1057) and a powerful tool to “punish those suppliers deemed unethical through boycotting and protest and to reward those displaying genuine ethical credentials” by purchasing their products (1050). Consumers’ distaste for the current war, their disgust with oil companies, and their disapproval of foreign oil are a few reasons that, for many, may make the Prius the correct purchase to reward an ethical company and punish those companies Prius owners find “guilty” (Heffner et al. 2007, Turrentine et al. 2007). As a result, it could be said that conscientious consumers may intend to hit companies where they think they will get the most attention: producers’ pocket books.

For these shoppers, the dollar represents not only a vote, but also a moral choice to “invest” in a company’s merchandise based on their ethical standpoint (Shaw et al. 2006, Stolle et al. 2005). Shah et al. (2007) dub these shoppers “consumer-citizens,” or individuals “who exercise their political values and concerns through their consumption patterns [and] view the

economic realm as an efficient and meaningful sphere in which to advance their deeper moral and social concerns” (232). Interestingly, in their study, gender was a significant predictor of environmental concern among these consumer-citizens (Shah et al. 2007) with women being less likely to talk about their political ideology and more likely act on these beliefs. Although fascinating, the scarcity of such studies examining this gendered behavior means that our understanding of gender’s role is tentative at best.

That being said, an individual’s desire to show their support for new technology is another reason for purchasing the Prius. This is like the above discussion of voting with one’s dollar, with one major difference. Techies have no or little interest in using the Prius to tell the world something about their morality or that they are conscientious when consuming. Their goal is to do nothing more than make sure they send a “techie” message and help fund research into future “techie” innovations. In fact, they may even be offended if others saw their Prius purchase as suggesting anything politically or morally-based (Heffner et al. 2007). In any case, sending a clear “I vote for innovative technology” message to producers by purchasing their products, thus “voting” for progress, is one of the only ways individuals can influence manufacturers.

How an individual’s technological commitment may play into gendered reasons for purchasing the Prius is not quite clear. It may be that males are more likely to cite technological advancements as their purpose, though females have certainly illustrated a love of new technology. What woman walks around without her cell phone or iPod? After all, women are a growing market for video and computer games (Jansz, Avis and Vosmeer 2010, Williams, Consalvo, Caplan and Yee 2009).

### *2.1.3. The Prius as a Symbol of Environmental Concern*

Finally, the Prius’ title as a green machine cannot be overlooked. The most interesting aspect of the environmental symbol is that, where the Prius is concerned, it is not an especially important reason for purchasing the vehicle in and of itself. Instead, the symbols of frugality and economic voting are far more likely to be cited as a *reason* owners made the purchase, while its

environmental-friendliness was considered more a side benefit or an obvious denotation (Heffner et al. 2007, Turrentine et al. 2007). In other words, purchasing the Prius for its decreased environmental impact was more an “Oh yeah, and ...” moment than the selling point.

Furthermore, where the literature has investigated individuals who stressed the vehicle’s environmental benefits, that person was often environmentally aware already or, interestingly, a mother (Heffner et al. 2007). This suggests that parents, and especially mothers, may wish to convey to their children certain values and beliefs without expressly stating the family’s stand on the environment or other political issues. Simply purchasing the Prius may be enough to teach some lesson about acting on one’s beliefs or how one should navigate their world (Heffner et al. 2007). It would make sense that mothers take this sort of lead since women are more likely to act on their beliefs rather than talk about them (Shah et al. 2007). Also, their unique role as care-givers may create additional pressure to be a good role model for their children and express their concern for others.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data Collection

In-depth interviews were used to explore the way female and male owners ascribe symbolism to their Prius. This method is particularly useful for exploratory research because its “goal is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg 2002:87). As a result, the researcher benefits from increased freedom and can investigate a topic while simultaneously maintaining sensitivity toward the notion that there may be signs unaccounted for in the little research that has been done. I am especially interested in this method because feminist scholars have suggested it is most useful for studying women, who are generally less likely to have opportunities to share their story in their own way (Esterberg 2002). Since gender is a main focus for my study, an interview schedule that is sensitive to both women’s and men’s interactive patterns benefits my study, as participants are able to add detail and insight that current literature lacks. Confidentiality is maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the elimination of overtly identifying information.

Furthermore, the original study that began work in this area suggested that the ascription of symbols to the Prius is too new for impersonal, quantitative studies (Heffner 2008). Because the original work was never intended to translate into quantitative studies, focuses on symbols and suffers from a paucity of research, it is most accurate to maintain the spirit of the original researchers by continuing to explore Prius owners’ ascribed symbolism.

Posters advertising my study were placed on campus to maximize exposure and hopefully encourage a diverse sampling of Prius owners. However, I also utilized snowball sampling because individuals are likely to know people like themselves (McPherson, Smith-

Lovin and Cook 2001). As a result, at the end of each interview, I asked the participant if they knew other Prius drivers and whether they would be willing to give them my contact information. Interestingly, not one of my respondents resulted from a recruitment poster. Instead, I posted a status on Facebook, a social networking site, which told my friends I was happy to have passed the IRB and posted my recruitment fliers. Within hours I was contacted by Prius driving “friends” and “friends” who knew Prius drivers. I also spoke about how strange I found this recruitment method to people I knew but who were not Facebook friends and this resulted in the recruitment of additional Prius drivers as well. With a small pool of three original individuals, only one of whom actually drove a Prius, I snowballed into all but one of the fourteen participants. The last was suggested to me by a faculty member when I was readying to place recruitment fliers on campus. This was the closest my paper fliers came to actually recruiting.

As previously stated, at the conclusion of an interview, I asked participants if they knew of other drivers they would be willing to tell about my study. Since the study began in the Northern area of the state, this is how I eventually moved to the Southern urban area. Northern individuals who found me either through the Facebook interaction (not necessarily on Facebook since we could have talked about it and not been “friends”) or who I had snowballed into recommended Southern participants.

When a potential participant contacted me, true eligibility was established. Sometimes I was emailed and sometimes potential participants would call on my cell phone. For participants to be considered for my project, they needed to currently own or lease a Prius. The pool of acceptable participants was also limited to those individuals currently residing within the same two metropolitan areas in the southern United States.

Interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon location. This was sometimes the participant’s home and sometimes her or his work office. It was more likely that I met participants at their home than at work, though one individual agreed to meet me at a restaurant and another came to the school campus. Because participants were doing me a favor by

agreeing to be interviewed, I was as flexible as possible in meeting them at a time and place that was most convenient for them thus minimizing the potential for canceling an interview appointment and maximizing the potential for participants' comfort level (Esterberg 2002).

### *3.1.1. Previous Methods and Adaptations for this Study*

This study began as an observation of a hole in current literature about gender and, more specifically, the application of gendered symbols to the Prius. As a result, I imitated the "parent" study as closely as possible using the same multi-step approach to interviewing. In the first two steps, open questioning is used to discover meanings. In the third step, expected meanings were investigated with the expectation that participants were able to introduce new ideas. In the final step, words and phrases were analyzed and themes formed. In the end, themes transcended single interviews and patterns of symbols and meanings emerged from the sample (McCracken 1988).

The original authors created five consistent sections on which to base their questioning: household vehicle history, a purchase narrative, a symbolic meaning assessment, the benefits and disadvantages and a stated tolerance exercise (Heffner et al 2007).

- 1) Household Vehicle History: Explores how the Prius is used, compares Prius use to other vehicles in the household (currently and formerly).
- 2) Purchase Narrative: Examine participants' story about buying their Prius, including why they bought, any relevant events about the purchase procedure and how this compares to their experience with purchasing other vehicles.
- 3) Symbolic Meaning Assessment: "Discussion of symbolic meaning participants perceive in their [Prius] and other vehicles; also examines communication participants had with others about [the Prius] before and after the purchase" (Heffner 2008:112).
- 4) Benefits and Disadvantages: Discussion of the main benefits and drawbacks to owning a Prius as well as the importance of these benefits and drawbacks (Heffner et al 2007).

- 5) Stated Tolerance Exercise: “Interviewers propose replacing the household’s [Prius] with another vehicle and households discuss the conditions that allow or prevent the substitution of this hypothetical vehicle for their [Prius]. Proffered vehicles are... hypothetical and are customized for each household based on prior information in the interview” (Heffner et al 2007:400).

Moderate changes were made to the original method for feasibility purposes but I maintained the spirit of the study. I did not conduct a pre-interview questionnaire or ask participants to find items they related to their Prius before the interview. Demographic information was asked only once, after the interview in a questionnaire, rather than in a pre-interview questionnaire and the interview as in the original study. Questions were updated to include the new Honda Insight (in addition to the already included Honda Civic Hybrid) and recent news concerning Toyota’s safety malfunctions. Finally, I noted further probing of participants’ stated symbols as well, since this is where the bulk of the original studies’ findings related to my own interests and may highlight gender differences.

Interviews were digitally recorded after the participant was shown how to pause or stop the device in case they became uncomfortable. No participant felt the need to pause or stop the device, though I did pause it if they took a personal phone call. Interviews were later transcribed mostly by me, though a transcriptionist was hired to complete the transcription of two interviews for the sake of time. Coding was completed by highlighting key words like “mileage,” “efficiency” or “savings” to indicate frugality, and by behaviors related to environmental commitment. This is when the word “mileage” first presented its unforeseen problem of having two meanings (I investigate this further in the findings section). I also used the “new comment” function to point to key words and behaviors that may represent one of the three key themes I was looking for but was either too long or I was unsure. I would denote this by stating the note’s purpose to remind myself for later use. Finally, I found it more efficient to tackle transcribed interviews by theme and I eventually cut and pasted all “frugal,” “economic voting,” and

“environmental” comments or behaviors into separate documents to keep them separate and help stay organized. This made it very easy to find the best examples and quotes to work with so I could simply rearrange similar quotes and behaviors to be closer to one another. I made sure to keep the participant’s name and age with the quote to remind myself of the individual who had actually said or done what I was interested in. Looking at the quotes and behaviors encouraged the analysis and the three themes were written and transformed in these separate documents by simply rearranging what was valuable and deleting what was redundant or less valuable. When I believed a theme to be complete I re-read it to make sure it accurately portrayed the participants and was sometimes surprised by what I found. Later, I re-examined transcriptions to make sure I had not missed a key quote or behavior from a single participant and, if I had, I attempted to incorporate that.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Sample

The final sample of fourteen participants generated three distinct “classes” of Prius drivers who were grouped by political ideology. This was based on comments, rather than personal identification since this year has had an unusual amount of political turmoil that may affect people’s willingness to identify with one party or another. Furthermore, many participants who would fall to the right side of the political spectrum simply identified themselves as “Independents.” As a result, participants were divided into categories that I called “Leftist” and “Non-Leftist.” Participants were distributed evenly between these categories with half being Leftist and the other being “Non-Leftist.” However, four individuals fell into a more centrist category due to small remarks about environmental concern. The centrist individuals posed a unique challenge for my study because they were not easily labeled. It seemed ironic that they could call themselves “Republican” or “Conservative” but hold traditionally “Democratic” views on issues like human impact on the environment, oil drilling and the need for alternative fuels. To simplify political ideology, I simply refer to participants as either Leftist or Non-Leftist but remind the reader when appropriate whether a certain individual has centrist leanings.

Another interesting finding that was immediately apparent was the variation in political ideology by location. This study focused on two large urban areas in Texas, one in the north and one in the south. Neither location was at the extreme end of this very large state, but they seemed worlds apart when speaking with the participants and even when driving on the road. In the northern part of Texas a Prius was not difficult to find when driving down the road. I did not realize that, however, until I went to the southern area and, catching myself looking for the vehicle, often failed to find one – or could find *only* one – on highways and other roads similar to

those in the north. The very far right participants were solely from the southern urban area, while northern participants were more likely, but not exclusively, leftist. Of the fourteen, five were from the south and nine were from the north. I do not think that my snowballing method can explain this political demarcation since different people from the north suggested all southern participants.

Table 4.1 Pseudonym with Associated Demographics Information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Political Ideology	Location
Audrey	38	Female	Leftist	North
Bret	34	Male	Leftist	North
Cathy**	27	Female	Leftist	North
Claire	27	Female	Leftist	North
Dan	54	Male	Non-Leftist	South
Eric	52	Male	Leftist	North
Gail	65	Female	Leftist	North
George	50	Male	Non-Leftist †	North
Hunter***	36	Male	Non-Leftist †	South
Janice*	59	Female	Non-Leftist †	South
Paul*	59	Male	Non-Leftist	South
Ruth	58	Female	Non-Leftist †	North
Tiffany***	36	Female	Non-Leftist	South
William**	37	Male	Leftist	North
* Denotes spousal relationship ** Denotes spousal relationship *** Denotes spousal relationship † Denotes centrist tendency				

The final consideration that should be pointed out was that, of fourteen participants, seven were female and seven were male. Also, there were three couples, so six of the fourteen individuals were interviewed together. This may have unintentionally helped the study stay balanced in terms of gender. In any case, after completing the interview process, there seemed to be a fair representation of Texan Prius drivers which was conducive to a gender-balanced base. This helped the study's main interest, which was to explore gender differences in Prius owners' decision-making process.

#### 4.2 Conceptualization

Qualitative methods allow for the meanings and choices of participants to be explored as offered in their own words to investigate the three themes (frugality, economic voting and environmentalism). Before interviewing, the environmental and frugal themes were expected to be independent of one another. For the purposes of my study, environmental consumers would purchase a Prius to lower their carbon footprint, reduce resource use or to achieve some other "green" goal. Frugal consumers would buy the Prius for fuel cost savings. The reality was far more complicated and less independent than I had predicted. Consumers interested in economic voting would express confidence that their purchase decision would send a message to someone about something. I expected this would range from the political sphere, including promoting reduced use of foreign oil and increased support for new technology, to the economic sphere, where consumers would believe their purchase would send a message to vehicle manufacturers and oil companies.

Early in the study, those on the left side of the political spectrum used one word or phrase, often "mileage", "good gas" or "fuel efficiency" to simultaneously indicate both environmental concern and an interest in their own wallet. As a result, these individuals were asked to prioritize environmentalism and fuel savings, with the result that many individuals placed environmentalism above financial concerns. In the words of Gail, a 65 year old, "I can afford the gas. For me, it's not about saving money. I like saving the money, but it's about...



doing something to help the problem.” Many participants felt this way, either at the point of purchase or after driving the Prius for a time and seeing their own positive impact. This double connotation means that there is some overlap between the “frugal” and “environmental” themes visited later in the Findings section. Also, Bret, a 34 year old, and Audrey, a 38 year old, were used to set the standard for purely environmental interests. Comments like “I’m doing it for the polar bears” (Audrey) and “It’s a good decision for the environment to drive a car like that” (Bret) helped sharpen already preconceived notions of environmentalism as a reason individuals would make such a purchase.

On the other hand, individuals like Ruth, Claire and Cathy helped define a more financially savvy, but still environmentally concerned individual. Cathy and Claire, both 27 years old, confessed that they originally purchased their Prius after owning larger, more wasteful vehicles to help the environment. However, after time, their reason for keeping the Prius, with its higher monthly payment and potential for expensive maintenance, was due to its low fuel cost. Ruth, a 58 year old who still prefers larger, more “cushy” vehicles and owns a Jeep that she also drives, could not decide whether the environment or fuel savings was more important. If our session took us to topics related to environmental issues, she would say that the vehicle purchase was to help the Earth. If, instead, frugality was explored, her vehicle was in line with other financially savvy pursuits. It is examples like these who will be considered as both frugal and environmental buyers.

Economic voting as a theme was designed to test participants’ willingness to pay. According to Potoglou and Kanaroglou (2007), individuals will pay more for a product if they see enough benefit. These authors used a narrower definition that reflected mostly financial savings and personal concerns; however, for the purposes of this study, their hypothesis is stretched to include political and economic concerns as suggested by the original research concerning Prius drivers (Heffner et al. 2007), especially since recent findings suggest that some consumers believe that a dollar is a sort of economic vote used to reward worthy

companies (Shaw et al. 2006). Participants interested in economic voting would express interest in the authority of the dollar or their own purchasing power.

### 4.3 Frugality

Frugality was by far the most commonly cited perk to owning a Prius. As discussed in the previous section, sometimes it was the only reason for purchase, sometimes it was conjoined with environmentalism in participants' phrasing or word use and sometimes it was the secondary benefit (as in the Heffner et al 2007 article). Differences varied mostly by whether or not a participant was considered "Leftist" in political affiliation, but its emphasis also differed based on age with younger participants more concerned with fuel savings than older, more established Prius drivers.

#### *4.3.1 Fuel Efficiency*

One commonly held impression of the Prius is as a money-saving machine. To explore how salient this was to my participants, they were asked to explain the benefits they saw to owning a Prius. However, more enlightening comments were made if respondents were allowed to simply think out loud about their Prius. Owners could often tell me how many miles they could get to a tank and how many times per week or month they had to fill up. Interestingly, they often could not tell me about their average miles per gallon, how many gallons would fit in their tank, what the advertised mileage on their vehicle was or what their best mileage was. Questions regarding these issues were answered in tones that rose at the end of a sentence, indicating that the respondent was unsure (Turrentine et al. 2007). Sometimes, they would make an obvious estimate and then ask for the answer immediately afterward. This seemed unusual because in the models owned by my participants, there is a very large screen with much of this information on it. Besides, if an individual found the Prius' mileage to be reason enough for the purchase, one would expect that they would know how big their gas tank is and what kind of mileage they get. Guesses ranged from 8 gallons to 12 gallons, though almost all participants expected around 400 miles per tank.

The first thing participants often did was learn about the car. This could be done over a series of years as in the case of Dan, who originally watched the EV1 and hoped that either it or the Prius would make it from California to Texas, to Claire, who simply had her husband look into the vehicle's ratings after her SUV was totaled. With the exception of a few owners, most respondents not only have very little knowledge about whether they are saving money or not, but also probably do not care. They decided when they bought their Prius that it would save them money and they never went back to ensure that it was doing so. One example is Bret, a 34 year old who believed his Prius would be friendlier on both the environment and his wallet:

When you are buying a new car you're really paying for the ability to make a statement – to say 'hey, I am green. I pay the extra money for this car.' I think that's kind of ridiculous to have to do that, um, but – I'm the kind of person that never bought a new car in my life and probably won't ever buy a new car. I think there's a big advantage to waiting a year and you'll find a car that's only got 20,000 miles on it and somebody to really good care of and you can get it for \$10,000 cheaper than what it was the year before. I did that with the Prius - I'll do that with pretty much any other car I buy.

[Did you figure out if I buy the Prius at this price, I will be able to save this much in the long term?]

Yes, but in my defense, I'm an accountant. I make those kind of spreadsheets for almost all major decisions that I do. I plotted out, you know, how many years would I have to drive this car if I did – I did look at a new one – how many years would I have to drive to offset the original premium that you pay for the car. ... I took my old car and said 'here is what it will cost me to fix this old car - to get it working again - you know, to repair the air conditioner, to repair the oil leak and I took a used Prius and said 'here's how much I'm going to save by having this car' and I found kind of the breakeven point. You know, it was only 4 years into the future average so I was just 'go ahead and, you know, go ahead and get this Prius because it makes financial sense.' I think this car is going to last longer than 4 years.

[OK. Did you come up with sort of a dollar amount that you were looking for like I want to save this much per year?]

No – I more had a dollar amount - this is what I want to pay total for the car - so when I... yeah I started looking about a year or so before I actually bought the Prius. I really did not see one that was in the price range I wanted until the gas prices came down and then, basically, I just hit upon one that was a bargain - several thousand dollars less than anything else I found at the time and actually pretty much drove it off the lot.

This is a typical story retold during several interviews with Prius owners. Notice the initial time investment, something that almost every participant could boast of, though some did research before they decided they were interested in a Prius and Bret had all but made up his mind at

this time. Also, the “I drove it off the lot” phrase often accompanied Prius storytelling, making the purchase sound almost like an impulse. Some participants were worried that if they did not buy it *that day*, when they first saw the good deal, someone else would come along and snatch it up. Even couples like Hunter and Tiffany did not take more than a month to get from selling their King Ranch Truck to buying a Prius, despite Tiffany’s utter distaste for the vehicle. The image of frugality is shattered by the impulsive, almost fear-based purchase Prius owners made. After all, another, better Prius could have become available the following day. When research intensive owners like Bret, above, or Dan who had been watching alternatively fuelled vehicles since at least 2000 (and had interest even as child) were asked whether their financial predictions had panned out, they often could not provide an answer or would say something along the lines of “well, I did those calculations when gas was at \$4 per gallon.”

Moreover, the higher gas prices are, the more frugal my participants reported they felt. This was expressed by explaining that friends often taunted them about their vehicle, but when gas prices were high, they could get a laugh in. Similarly, when asked “have you ever thought ‘I’m so glad I bought this car’?” every respondent, regardless of political affiliation, age, income, education or gender would immediately provide a response about filling up at the gas station. A particularly satisfying scenario occurs when a Prius driver is at the gas station with another, larger vehicle. For example Hunter, a 36 year old informed me “every time I swipe that credit card, I put gas in it, it’s like ‘damn!’ I see other people sitting there, filling up for an hour and I’m like ‘*dink*, I’m done, see you later.’” This could happen no matter what we were talking about beforehand; case in point, Claire was telling me she thought the Toyota recall was a hoax and had become very serious. To get us back on track, I asked her when she “felt so glad about her purchase” and she immediately perked up:

I drive from Fort Worth to Hurst – every day, and then some – and I do not like stopping at the gas station... Also, when you stop at a gas station, you are there for like 20 seconds because I only have a - usually have to fill up for 9 gallons and so people who have 15 gallon tanks, they usually are there *already* filling up. I pull up and I’m done before they are done and I love that.

It's the little things. It is! (Laughing) I'm like 'haha, I'm done!' (participant laughing) 'You're still here.'

This also illustrates the playful taunting Prius drivers engage in to highlight their frugality. With such a strong, frequent reminder of their “superior” spending habits, it is no wonder that, despite frequent debunking, the frugal symbol continues to stick. For example, Claire and Hunter drive long distances for days at a time to fulfill their work requirements and neither likes to stop for gas. However, they get a double reinforcement of their vehicle’s money-saving abilities when, at long last, they stop at the gas station, recall the last time they filled up (usually around 400 miles ago) and beat other vehicles out of the gas station, even when those vehicles were there first. They are a sort of hare to a tortoise and this simple pleasure supports their initial investment in a more fuel-efficient vehicle through visual support, which strengthens their own beliefs about their vehicle’s ability to save money. Since there was only one “hyper-miler” among my sample, I propose that this repeated reinforcement of one’s frugality helps maintain the money-saving symbol, despite the fact that both Hunter and Claire had confessed to having some hard financial times. For Hunter, the Prius was part of the solution, further confirming his thriftiness. Claire, on the other hand, sometimes struggled to make her monthly payment, but received validation of her sensible choice at the gas station frequently enough to maintain the frugal symbol.

Another important way that Prius drivers fail to simulate frugality is by not maintaining the highest miles per gallon ratio possible. Drivers often admitted that after about 65mph the Prius lost some of its edge over other cars. Since Non-Leftists were the most likely to state that frugality was their main reason for buying the Prius, it was expected that at least one of them would drive in a style that was more conducive to hybrid technology. All respondents could related that there was a right and wrong way to drive the Prius, especially when focusing on fuel economy, so it was unexpected to find that those who considered their purchase to be frugal did not work to make sure they were getting the best deal possible. This may be relative because most Non-Leftists were moving from a large vehicle like a truck or SUV into the Prius.

Hunter: 39, 40 (miles per gallon) I'm ... I don't care –

Tiffany: - good –

Hunter: - it's still good. Yeah.

Tiffany: - compared to my 13 (laughs)

Hunter: Yeah, it's just, I mean, I can not – if I started getting in the 20s or something, I'd start getting, uh, I'd take it back, say 'what's going on with my car.' But if it's close to 40, I'm totally fine with it because I do not drive it the way you're supposed to. There's a certain way you drive – when I first bought it, I did drive it a little more conservative, you know, I'd let go on the gas when I was going down hills and, just to see, because when you first buy it, you, you watch – there's like, a little thing in there that shows you, you know, what kind of mileage you are getting, so I'd watch to see and 'Do better! I can do better!' and, so now, it's like 'whatever'. I get 40, 41, what's another couple miles per gallon, you know? It really is not that much, so I drive it crazy now. I punch it when I need to punch it

However, in actuality, it was the Leftists who paid attention to their better gas mileage, calling themselves “slow” or relating how a spouse thought they had a “lead foot” if their gas mileage was lower than advertised. Oftentimes they could relay better routes, would explain easing into stops and starts or could name other Prius drivers as more or less serious about what they called “hyper-miling.” While none considered themselves to be an overly serious hyper-miler, they could still recount stories about their dedication to high mileage.

It shows you every 5 minutes what your average mile per gallon is. If you want to, then, you can work on finding different ways. I'm kind of the obsessed person who – I know that I can go two ways to work. I go 35 to 121 or I can go 820 to 30. Because of how many hills 30 has, you do not get as good gas mileage on 30 as on 121. However, 35 has traffic, so if you're sitting there, backed up in traffic for an extended period of time, then that also changes your gas mileage.

[So, which gives better gas mileage?]

Generally 121 because there's less traffic and it's flatter.

[So is that the one you prefer?]

[Yes]

I used to prefer 820 to 30, but there's 2 backups that happen from 820 to 30 and with the added hills, it's not worth it and 121 is actually shorter, too, so even with the back up on 35, you get - I get to work faster. But yeah, I know that you start measuring ways that are faster, better. I do. Maybe not generally, but I do. I also love it, too because I love to know how long it takes you to get places. You can actually tell people how wrong they are because they think in their head it only takes you 15 minutes to get somewhere but that's because they're traveling – they usually

tell you from highway to highway. The Prius starts telling you the minute you put the ignition on so, you actually know how long it gets you from A to B completely. Claire 27

This dedication not only to mileage, but also to knowing the duration of one's trip is in line with comments made about environmental concern being related to education. Leftists felt that the more educated they were, the better choices they could make. These choices often led to frugal benefits, but frugality was not the message they intended to send. By knowing more about their vehicle and paying attention to time and mileage, it is entirely possible that Leftists, while not focused on frugality, may be more successful at saving money than Non-Leftists. Some Leftists even tried to plot more fuel-efficient routes for me after the interview if they asked how I was going drive to a certain area or location, like to school.

In the end, participants' general lack of knowledge concerning their vehicle and assumptions based on (sometimes) years-old research makes it difficult to know whether or not Prius owners are actually getting a good deal when fuel efficiency and vehicle price are balanced. Since owners themselves could not provide proof that their purchase actually saved them money, they fulfill Baudrillard's feigned reality by substituting the *certainty* of savings for *perceived* savings. However, if any of the participants were successful at actually being frugal, it seems likely that Leftists individuals would have more success since they regularly searched for alternative routes and continued to educate themselves about their vehicle's mile per gallon ratio, sometimes every five minutes.

#### 4.3.2 Redefining "Need"

Previous literature has suggested that Prius owners have redefined what they "need" from a vehicle so that features like horsepower and speed of acceleration are seen as nice, but unnecessary and potentially wasteful (Heffner et al. 2007). Participants illustrated this in a number of ways by explaining their "need" to haul or pull heavy materials and have a lot of vehicle space. Hunter stated that, because he needed to haul only infrequently, he felt comfortable not having a large truck, which he had previously owned. He could simply borrow a neighbor's truck for the rare times he needed to bring something large home. On the other

hand, he “needed” good gas mileage as an individual who drove around 3,000 miles per week. The truck’s ability to overpower the Prius in areas of acceleration and size were weighed against the smaller car’s fuel efficiency. Driving so many miles per week, he had grown weary of rising gas prices and the effect his driving had on family finances. As a result, he decided that he ‘needed’ a more fuel-efficient car. Eric, a very masculine outdoorsy-type who had previously used his Sequoia to pull a boat explained his Prius purchase as based in reason because “it just was not logical for me to be driving a large vehicle and not pulling anything.” He no longer had the boat, but kept the Sequoia because its size was conducive to golfing and fishing.

My Prius, I tell people it’s green, it’s hybrid, it’s my fishing vehicle, it’s my golfing vehicle. I said, ‘even though people do not see it, it’s actually my little mini pickup truck’ and they go, ‘what do you mean?’ I said ‘I can pull the hatchback up, I can pull the seats down, I can move the passenger seat forward.’ I said ‘I have had big tall lumber in there. I have had bags of dirt in there’ and I said ‘I can put a lot of stuff in there... and I use it as a utility vehicle.’ People watch me when they are at Home Depot – I had a house built and they were just like ‘I did not think you can do all of that in there’ and I go ‘Oh yeah.’ Eric, 52

He redefined his need of size by explaining that if you folded the seats down, any leisure or household activity he wished to engage in could easily be accommodated. He sometimes seemed to take pride in this and boasted of his Prius’ capability to fulfill all of his lifestyle needs and still be less harmful to the environment. He even joked that he was trying to get the golf course he frequented to allow him to drive his Prius on the course since it could run on battery power alone and was not overly large.

Texans have a strong connection with size and space. This led to an interesting trend connected to Non-Leftists and older participants who had a harder time transitioning into the Prius due to its size than Leftists and younger participants. For Non-Leftists and older individuals (those above 55), size became synonymous with words like “cush,” “comfort,” and “luxury.” These participants often owned a large vehicle before purchasing their Prius; King Ranch trucks, Jeeps, and other such large automobiles were sometimes indicators that the transition from a very big vehicle to a Prius would produce some concerns by the owner about



size. One Non-Leftist who grew to tolerate her husband's Prius called it a "pizza, pizza" car and claimed her Expedition was much more "cush," especially on longer trips with her children. (Her husband backed up this belief during their joint interview.) An older woman wanted a more "luxurious" car, like an Avalon and kept her Jeep, though she rarely drove it. It seemed that Non-Leftists who were prone to favoring large vehicles viewed the Prius' size as inadequate, though only when not directly questioned about size. If I specifically asked about size, they answered with the positive first and then added their concerns later in a statement that sounded like "the size is ok, but..."

On the other hand, a young Leftist who went from an Xterra to a Prius called her new vehicle a good family car, a refrain repeated by another young female Leftist who moved into a Prius from a Tucson. She explained how, in about a year she moved from the SUV to a Prius:

I wanted to be up high and I was very much in that mindset of 'SUVs are awesome, everybody's getting one.' I knew my husband and I – we weren't married at the time – and I knew we were getting married, and I am such a planner, so I was like 'family car' eventually because you never know what is going to happen or when you're ready, so even at that time I was like "oh, it would be a good family car." And that's why – with the Prius, too, this is going to be my family car – you know, I could have gone out and bought anything... something really swanky and I was like, 'no I need a family car.' I know it's weird to go from an SUV to a Prius, especially when you're concerned about the environment, but ... I think especially in that year there was a lot of development and uh um and I got the experience of having a big, brand-new car and I was not as impressed with that as I thought I was going to be - like 'oh, it's just a new car.' Claire, 27

Interestingly, whether or not females had a child, they still believed the Prius was a good family car, indicating a focus on (sometimes potential) children. Only one male, a Non-Leftist, specifically saw the Prius as a good family vehicle at the time of purchase. He went on to confess that his wife said he could only get a new car if all their children could fit in it, and that if left to him, he would have purchased a sporty two-seater vehicle.

In this instance, the situation of gender coincides interestingly with simulation. Males and Non-Leftists were less likely to comment about the Prius as a "family car" and more likely to say it was a good size for themselves or for short trips, though they would prefer something more luxurious in the future. Women in general focused on the Prius' potential for family

outings, whether they had younger or adult children. Younger female Leftists (those under 55) saw the Prius as multifunctional, capable of hauling both large items (like tall lamps and household project materials from The Home Depot) and families no matter the distance. Males often wanted or borrowed larger, truck-like vehicles for such tasks. I was left with an impression that, for the majority of men, if he was doing “man work” he wanted a “man car” to do it in. Females, having no interest in telling the world how they used their vehicle to do “man work” like home repairs or hauling new household items, would simply fold down the back seats, load up and drive away. One young female even explained that she would have to convince her husband that the Prius would be sufficient for their Home Depot outings despite having successfully completed such tasks previously. This redefinition of “need” is situated almost entirely in gender. Women seem uninterested in using their Prius to do anything but be useful, making it unclear what they could be simulating. If the Prius is actually useful in fulfilling their needs, can it be called simulation? Men, on the other hand, often required a little convincing, being used to having (or borrowing) a truck to do their heavy work with. In this instance, what is being simulated is not necessarily as interesting as what’s *not* being simulated. In the words of a more androgynous male:

Every other person that owns a Prius is female – I’m the only male that I know that owns a Prius and I know about 5 or 6 people. I am the only guy. I do not know if that says anything. Maybe there is - you know being green is considered more of a feminine trait? That would be my guess. Men own a macho car and it is definitely not a macho car

[Do you not feel macho in your Prius?]

I would not say that. I like my car but I could see that would be why more women drive them than men. Bret, 34

The Prius may technically fulfill the needs of much of an individual’s heavy work, or even every day lifestyle, but it does not fulfill the accompanying need: being masculine. This is one of the clearer areas where situational simulation can be noticed and it is only remarkable in its

absence – what it fails to simulate based on gender. This became extremely clear in an exchange between Non-Leftist couple, Hunter and Tiffany:

Yeah, I mean, because people really do think – I think they do think – they might tend to think he’s gay. (laughs) Tiffany, 36

That’s so you. So you. Hunter, 36

It seemed that they had had this conversation before because Hunter was not surprised when she said it and Tiffany did not work to explain her point, expecting both of us to see her point of view. Hunter had originally driven a King Ranch truck and admitted that, although at the time he purchased his Prius he needed good gas mileage, he would return to his truck-driving ways in his next vehicle purchase. The only reason Hunter and Tiffany had bought the Prius was because the company Hunter worked for did not have a large enough stipend to cover his work expenses, the largest of which was his fuel cost. This was larger than the bill for his food and hotel costs. He had since changed companies and now worked for a business that would cover all of his work expenses. Since he no longer “needed” fuel efficiency to keep from harming his family finances, he could return to his old “needs.” In all fairness, there were two males who believed their Prius was adequate for such work; however, both were advocates of their vehicle and may have been choosing to simulate the utility of their vehicle and how they had redefined “need” in a new, frugal way, rather than how masculine they were. One was Eric, a large man who otherwise would have no difficulty in expressing his masculinity, and the other was Bret, a man who most likely had no interest in expressing his masculinity at all. Hunter perfectly illustrates a failure to redefine needs and conform to masculine expectations while Eric and Bret seemed to redefine both “masculine” and “need,” though in very different ways.

There was one other interesting “need” among male participants. Drivers like Eric, Dan, Paul, George and William had a Prius due in some part to their wives. This will be further explored in the section on environmentalism, but it seemed appropriate to point this out here because each found a way to take the Prius and fit it into their lifestyle by redefining their needs.

In this case, it was to please their wives. Although Eric and Dan had their own taste for the Prius, Eric saw it as a sort of culmination of green purchases he was making and Dan liked the Hybrid technology, both gave some credit to their spouse. For Eric, his wife's impact on him was credited because she valued the environment and making green choices together while Dan had only one household vehicle. He had wanted to show me his Prius but could not get his wife to come to our location because she had commandeered it for the day. Eventually, he wanted to get a Prius of her own, one of only a few times they had owned separate cars, because she thought the Prius they had lacked options that she valued. Paul's wife was the main Prius driver, though he was my main point of contact. Janice told me she loved her Prius and was so glad that they had it. She had no personal income and so, without her husband's job, could never have afforded a Prius. William said it in the simplest terms by explaining that buying a Prius "was pretty much just up to Cathy." Although a need to demonstrate masculinity through one's car has historically dominated men's relationship with vehicles (Redshaw 2008), these men illustrate a potential new "need" among husbands.

#### 4.4 Economic Voting

Of the three themes, economic voting was the least frequently cited. It was a major deviation from previous literature to find that participants had so little faith in the value of their financial power. However, the current economic downfall and torrential political climate could account for this variance between my own study and the findings of Heffner et al. (2007). When faith in economic voting was discovered, it was generally after it had intentionally been probed for it and tended to fall short of the discoveries made by others.

##### *4.4.1 Hope and Economic Voting*

I had expected to find some form of economic voting among my generally well-educated participants. Whether used to support alternative energies, new technology or ethical corporations, or, conversely, to deny support to oil companies or the war, it has been shown that individuals will participate in the marketplace by financially rewarding or punishing

companies (Shaw et al. 2006). When directly asked whether they thought their Prius purchase would do any of these things, answers were generally unsure and were often marked by comments that were high-pitched at the end or included the word “hopefully.” The only participant to specifically say that their dollar was like a vote (or even come close to saying it) still added on the word “hopefully” at the end.

I think it is kind of like buying food locally, you know. You are making a statement. It's kind of like you vote for something when you buy something. So, if you buy a car that is more economic – I mean environmentally friendly – you would hope as more and more people do that it is making a statement of moving in that direction not necessarily that model but in general. Hopefully. Gail, 65

Gail is an unusual case. Although she perceives spending as a vote and most eloquently verbalizes that belief, she does not practice this principle in an expected way, like the manner that Eric and Bret (below) have come to value. When she buys something, it is often to *separate* herself from conventional markets. I explore this below as a form of withdrawal from the marketplace since these individuals take money they save by not spending and use it to promote their own independence from corporations.

For the most part, however, when asked if participants thought that their Prius could send certain pro-environment messages or help reduce environmentally harmful human activity, I would receive a skeptical or unsure remark along the lines of “I hope so.” An example of this could come from almost any of my participants. The most startling and disappointing finding was the sparseness of respondents who believed that their purchase could send a message to car manufacturers, politicians or oil companies. Many believed that political and corporate entities were too closely aligned for any meaningful progress to be made through the acquisition of a hybrid vehicle. They believed that government and corporate officials were too powerful to be influenced by one purchase. Instead, Leftists hoped to send a message (mostly) that they were environmentally responsible and Non-Leftists (mostly) hoped to save a dollar. The lack of faith my participants had in their dollar's power defied previous research concerning market

voting (Shah, McLeod, Kim, Lee, Gotlieb, Ho and Breivik 2007, Shaw et al. 2006, Stolle et al. 2005). Still, as shocking as their lack of faith in economic voting was, their cumulative lack of faith in their own power as citizens and in their government was equally surprising. Even strong Leftists like Bret had little conviction in his own power or even in the power of Prius drivers as a group.

[Do you think your Prius sends a message to vehicle makers?]

Probably not. I would like to think that it does, but I doubt that it does. I do not think, you know - I think manufacturers make whatever people want. I do not think we are that big of a population yet to make a bunch of manufacturers start making only hybrids. I do not think it sends a message yet. Maybe it will someday.

He expressed the same doubt about sending a message to politicians and oil companies, but notice the hopeful ending of “maybe it will someday.” This was interesting because the Honda Insight had recently joined the market, the Hummer has been removed and Nissan’s new Leaf is due to begin taking orders soon. Furthermore, alternative fuels and hybrids have only increased in popularity, so that even American manufacturers had made commitments to move away from their traditionally marketed vehicles, something that, only a few short years earlier seemed unlikely (Paine 2006). Again, I am not sure if this stems from recent economic and political turmoil and, as a result, is temporary or if it means that, in some unforeseen way, my sample differed greatly from other studies.

#### *4.4.2 Spending to Save*

While a few participants admittedly utilized the power of the dollar to symbolize their commitment to a belief or value, it was generally in support of environmental pursuits. For the purposes of this paper, economic voting entails spending money, using your financial power, to send a message. Those who engaged in this behavior often chose to purchase green products that would save them money, much like their original purchase of the Prius. In this way, they could send their environmental symbol and reap some financial rewards. However, as with

mileage, the purchases these individuals made were not focused on saving money, but on lowering the individual's environmental impact.

I fixed the house up and it is situated where it is more... it is more energy-efficient for - you know, my electrical bills. Some of my neighbors are paying - some will pay up to between 400 and 800 dollars per month for electricity and here we are in the summer time, I am paying about 160 bucks and that is running the A/C, keeping it at 76 degrees... [I] sprayed inside the house and on the roof of the house when the house was built - insulation - all the way around the house. I had additional insulation put inside around the walls of the house, uh on the - the roof, the ceiling inside. I bought a house that had a pitch... so even during the summer time I've got air that goes through and then I put a solar and attic fan and manage to keep the flow going for those days where the wind is blowing strong enough to keep the circulation going so during the summer time it keeps the house cooler so it's not stuffy

[That's a lot of renovation to your house]

Well, it is worth a lot and that is why all products that are electrical appliances are energy-efficient - because it helps. Eric, 52

Eric's goal is to use his spending power to do several things. First, he wants to send a message to friends and family that being green can also be financially savvy. Second, he wants to support energy efficiency and uses his dollar to purchase what he sees as green products. Even the insulation and fans he buys are designed to increase his energy efficiency. When he receives the electric bill, it is far less than his neighbors' and his "frugal" symbol is reinforced. His Prius is just one of the many purchases he has used to tell friends, family and companies – like the ones that built his house or produce energy efficient appliances – that he supports a more efficient lifestyle. Finally, with his home renovations and his Prius he is telling manufacturers and personal acquaintances that efficiency does not have to come at the cost of one's chosen lifestyle. Although this is certainly a "frugal" and "environmental" pursuit, the fact that he sees his wallet as being able to send a symbolic message suggests that Eric has faith in his financial power and potentially enjoys spending to save. Whether his interest in saving was purely in the environment or in his banking account (or both) is unclear. What matters is that Eric perceives his power as a consumer of specific goods and utilizes that power to send a clear, concise message concerning his own influence in the marketplace. Notice that he says these modifications are "worth" a lot, not that they "cost" a lot. This is a symbol he finds

meaningful and valuable enough to invest time and money in. He, like Baudrillard suggests, hopes to build something that will encourage his desires to become reality. Eric finds energy efficiency valuable and has created an entire lifestyle focused on spending to save. It is entirely possible that, by having the many specialists visit his rural home to make these specific improvements and by investing in appliances and other technology that commonly receive hi-tech advances, he has done as much harm as good (Higgins, Matthews, Hendrickson and Small 2007, Wald 2009). These investments will most likely have to be replaced within a few years as greater efficiency and durability gains are made in the industry. What matters here, however, is that he *thinks* he's created a lifestyle that sends a specific message; it *simulates* energy efficiency and so he *feels* more energy efficient.

Along these same lines, Bret spends to save, confessing that “we buy food that is locally grown - does not necessarily have to be organic - but by it being grown locally, it has less transportation built into it so it's greener so to speak.” Bret appears to engage in conventional markets to promote his green lifestyle, unlike the local shoppers below who reject traditional marketplaces in favor of supporting local farmers or becoming more self-sufficient. This form of independence may be something he will move toward since he is starting a garden, but for now, he makes financial choices about what kind of products he will encourage. For example, he makes it quite clear that his financial choices send a meaningful message to energy manufacturers.

Our electricity is a 100% wind powered. That's – not something you can do to just make a statement. You have to pay more per kilowatt-hour to get pure wind. So, I actually have to pay more to make that statement – that we're not using oil-based fuels. We're using wind.

His willingness to pay more for an energy source that he finds agreeable is meant to tell others, specifically those in charge of making energy, that he wants to support alternative sources enough that a higher cost is not objectionable. Clearly, “voting” for wind energy is worth a small sacrifice if it saves the environment. This is a simulation, however, because Texas energy is all



fed into the same system. He is still, in part, paying for coal-powered energy, though he is paying more for it. In order to not simulate his support of wind energy, he would have to take action, like putting up a windmill in his backyard. Only Texan residents who do this are truly receiving 100% wind energy. These individuals even feed into the state's energy system because oftentimes more energy is produced than is needed by the household (www.greenmountainenergy.com). A purely wind-powered home cannot become reality for him at this time, so his greater financial contribution to Texas' power supply is entirely symbolic of his *support* for cleaner energy rather than actually *having* cleaner energy.

This form of simulation is clearly situational because no female valued sending this sort of statement and, in fact, women were uninterested in simulating a "spending to save" message. This was regardless of what an individual thought they were saving: the environment or money. This seemed odd because research has shown that, when it comes to pro-environment shopping, women have a higher willingness-to-pay threshold than men (Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence and Grice 2004). However, rather than paying to look like they were saving something, women actually *were* saving something. For the most part, this came from a rejection of conventional markets and an increased independence – a drive to be more self-sufficient rather than "plugged in" to existing expectations of what it meant to "be green" or "frugal." This is consistent with findings that women are more likely to act, and not just talk about, what they believe in (Shah et al. 2007).

#### *4.4.3 Withdrawal from the Marketplace*

One of the most frequent behaviors I saw was an attempt to totally withdraw from the conventional marketplace. This was entirely limited to female participants indicating, in and of itself, a strong situational circumstance. I found the trend curious because a do-it-yourself attitude conjures an image of males like Bob Villa. However, upon further investigation it became clear that, while some home projects were designated to husbands, most off-the-grid changes were highly gendered and restricted to those areas that have typically been considered

feminine. It is important to note the difference between choosing to engage in the marketplace strategically and consciously avoiding certain industries all together. Males tended to put their money in a place they could agree with. Females took their money from objectionable industries and kept it either at home or used it in an off-the-grid transaction.

Living off-the-grid means that a person participates in the conventional market as little as possible. Individuals make their own goods and produce their own energy, often because it is cheaper in the long run (Fine 2008). From a purely political standpoint, Non-Leftist rhetoric supports a platform of individualism and financial savings; however, interestingly, all of these females are strikingly Leftist in their beliefs and political motivations. The Prius is both an exemption from an off-the-grid lifestyle and an inclusion to it. It is an exception to living off-grid because it is a large purchased item that comes from and feeds (monetarily speaking) back into the conventional market. Monthly payments that go to a mysterious bank rather than a local financier and the initial search, which sometimes took Prius buyers to multiple cities in search of the perfect match, make the vehicle decidedly “in-grid.” However, its reduced fuel consumption signifies a lessening of living in-grid while its lowered emissions are in keeping with secondary off-grid goals to lead a lifestyle that is more “glocally” aware (Fine 2008). A good example of this is George, a Non-Leftist who liked that his lowered emissions helped local air quality while keeping more money his own pocket. For most of my male participants, this is as far as withdrawal from the conventional marketplace took them.

As far as females were concerned, the Prius was only one of several steps toward living off-grid. These choices toe the line between under-consumption and environmentalism. Each female made strong comments about how their off-grid choices helped both their pocketbook and the earth, with an emphasis on the environmentally friendly aspects. None of these choices are overly expensive, so it's not surprising that finances were not emphasized, though certain behaviors could potentially save these women and their families money. Still, it was clear that their engagement in these activities had more to do with the earth – and their own happiness

and fulfillment – than finances. While some overlap occurred, I have picked each female participant's favorite (or more prevalent) off-grid behavior to explore.

Claire, 27, has only just begun her investment in the environment. Although her mother had a large influence on her, youth and previous living arrangements like apartment living kept her from fully reaching off-grid goals. Now married, she has finally begun to take steps that lead her in this direction.

Well, I attempt to sew but I'm mostly – food wise – mostly I make almost everything from scratch. I try not to buy a lot of um, processed foods. I do buy them. I have fried chicken in the fridge waiting for me for lunch. But, um, I try to make what I can. I try to make everything as much as possible myself.

After our interview, she confessed an interest in becoming better at sewing so she could sew more of her own clothes and that she would enjoy consistently baking her own breads. Providing for herself in this way gave her a simple pleasure that made her feel both less detrimental to the environment and more beneficial to her own life.

Cathy, 27, was folding clothes when I first entered the home that she and William share with their children. William was outside with a wheelbarrow, working in a very large garden. Cathy said that the choices she made were for her young children and the she hoped they learned from her example. "Once they're old enough to see, it will teach them to act on their, um, beliefs. You know, you shouldn't just talk about your beliefs." As a result, she and William have a well-established garden, frequently eat organic food and support alternative technology. A few weeks after our interview, she informed me that they had just purchased another hybrid, a Toyota Highlander, because the Prius did not have enough room with two car seats for William's daughter. Their SUV had become old and needed replacement and the obvious choice was another hybrid.

Audrey, 38, is a vegetarian who could not bring herself to buy a Prius with leather seats. She told me "I do not eat the cow, I shouldn't sit on it." It never became clear whether she does not engage in the meat industry because she did not like animal cruelty or if it was because she

was environmental and, conscious of the harm animal farms do to our earth (especially cows), she could not financially support such a decision. Her withdrawal from the meat industry is only one way this backwards economic voting became apparent. She also promotes an off-grid lifestyle by participating in Community Sharecropping Agriculture (CSA). Members of CSAs pay a fee for a “share” of the farmer’s crop and in return receive weekly portions of what has been harvested. By getting her food directly from the farmer, she further reduces oil consumption, meaning that, with one purchase, she simultaneously fails to support conventional grocery stores *and* oil companies while supporting a local farmer of her choice.

Gail, 65, avoids supporting fast food, processed food, and oil companies. As illustrated above, she was one of the most conscious of her dollar’s power and how she chose to use it to influence markets in a way she could agree with.

I am much more conscious since I got my Prius about thinking about mileage and, um, wasting trips, you know. It is kind of like I made it more acute in my psyche thinking ‘well, I am not going to’ - even though I know I am getting better mileage - you know, using my gas more effectively, I will try to reduce the number of trips and the length of trips I am making with my car. so I think it has kind of given me an overall awareness of the way I, you know, in a way you think it would be just the opposite. You would think ‘I have a car with good mileage so I can drive further,’ you know what I’m saying? But I feel like it has brought me back the other way of being more conscious and wanting to do things as local as I can.

This conscious refusal to fund non-local producers and oil companies, as well as those who make unhealthy food, is directly related to her decision to purchase a Prius. Her car is a constant reminder of her everyday choices and encourages her to make the right choice more often. She even gave up going to “cooler” stores because they were not as close to her home as other options, like farmer’s markets and a farm that allowed her to pick her own foods, because she felt these alternative could offer her the same products, without the shopping “prestige.” This quite likely was a difficult decision to make since the local area is known for its prestigious shopping and the opportunity to “be seen.” Still, it may be Gail’s age, and the confidence that comes with this, which allowed her both to separate from her old “scene” and feel more confident about the power of her dollar.

As clearly illustrated above, the majority of off-grid behaviors focuses on historically feminine activities, especially food. I believe these female participants looked at money they had saved by not engaging in the marketplace and thought “how can I use this money to better support *myself*.” Their definition of “myself” often extended to their family and lessons they had either learned or wished to teach. These women (and others who under-consume to live off-grid) use their money to punish and reward industries; however, they do it in a way that makes themselves more independent entities. While males may take their financial support from, for example, the oil industry by driving a hybrid, they do not necessarily invest it in becoming independent. Rather, these men, if Leftist, will put that money somewhere else to show what they are willing to support (like wind energy or “green” appliances), while Leftist women bring that money home by investing in self-sustaining behaviors. If Non-Leftist, it is unclear where they choose to put that money; however, it is unlikely they re-invest it in self-sustaining or pro-environment choices because none of them talked about doing so. They may buy more energy efficient light bulbs, but these are soon to be mandatory (Lavelle 2007), so this could be more financial or oriented to future-planning than anything else.

It is interesting that, although Non-Leftist rhetoric promotes the power of locality and fiscal responsibility, not one of my participants who self labeled as “Republican,” or “Conservative,” or otherwise fell to that end of the political spectrum, engaged in behaviors conducive to such idiom-intense beliefs. I argue that the expression of protesting markets by *removing* one’s dollar from the conventional economy and engaging in alternative behaviors that often deny monetary flow, through gardening or making one’s own food from scratch, may be the beginning of a movement that emphasizes under-consumption. This could be a backlash against the indulgence of previous decades or may become a standard behavior for individuals dedicated to a pro-environment lifestyle.

## 4.5 Environmentalism

Environmental concern, my primary curiosity regarding simulation, revealed as much about a participant when supported as when denied. Left-leaning individuals could provide strong evidence of environmentally friendly choices. As discussed previously, this varied greatly by gender with women more likely to abstain from the marketplace in an effort to be green and men more likely to consume green products or engage in manual labor. Non-Leftists either denied environmental concern or, as illustrated by previous research, spoke about it, but failed to consider it a reason for purchasing a Prius (Heffner et al. 2007).

### *4.5.1 The Fringe Benefit Becomes the Focus*

Earlier works suggested that environmental concerns were secondary to goals of frugality or economic voting. This most definitely was not the case in my own study. Certainly, this was dependent on political ideology, but with fully half of my respondents being decidedly Non-Leftist, I had expected a more balanced result concerning frugally- and environmentally-related purchasing decisions.

#### 4.5.1.1 Non-Leftists and Environmental Concern

With even Non-Leftists being concerned about local air quality, beauty or emissions, it seems possible that the nation as a whole has moved “left” on such issues since the data gathering of previous studies. This is even more striking when one considers that the findings of this study are being compared to data from California and Canada, which are considered more progressive in areas concerning the environment than Texas. For example, Paul - and especially his wife Janice – bought the Prius for its “mileage.” When asked whether she meant fuel savings or environmental benefit, I received an exasperated reply that she meant both. When expressing this, it sounded like there was an implied “duh” when she responded. When later asked what other green choices they made, Paul and Janice explained that the Prius was their biggest commitment, though they offered a few other, smaller and infrequent attempts. That they considered the Prius to be pro-environment at all (despite their lack of other

noteworthy green activity) was not in line with the more extreme Non-Leftists I met with who made it clear that they either did not care about the environment or did not believe in global warming.

Other Non-Leftists indicated localized concern related to beauty (Ruth) or air quality (George). This seems to complement Republican interest in small government and a focus on local issues. While Non-Leftist commitment to pro-environment goals were small-scale and individually focused, it was interesting to find any concern for environmental issues since Texas has a reputation for lax expectations with business ethics and has, within the last two decades, only begun on a city-by-city basis to make real progress in the realm of recycling and water quality.

#### 4.5.1.2 Leftists and Environmental Concern

By and large, Leftist participants indicated that environmental concerns were their number one reason for purchasing a Prius. After this often came fuel savings, followed by the unique look of the car, its roominess, or some other model-related benefit. One of the most goal-oriented participants explained that she did it “for the polar bears” after seeing Arctic Tale and kept a stuffed polar bear in her Prius to remind her about her commitment. Other leftists were less focused in their environmentally-related purchase and hoped instead to contribute to some greater good by not driving a larger, more harmful vehicle. The Prius was seen as one of a series of choices made to impact the Earth for the better. As previously stated, even Leftists sometimes needed probing into phrases like “mileage,” “fuel efficiency” and “good gas,” but once it was made clear that their double meaning of helping the environment first and wallet second needed clarification, they typically went to great pains to separate the importance of these two “reasons,” often using stories or examples to explain that theirs was an environmental purchase that happened to help their finances.

[Can you remember a time when you thought I'm so glad I bought this car?]

I still feel that way. I am so glad I bought the car. I love it I am still so glad.

[What prompts that]

Well, mileage for one. I think the peak mileage we ever got was 51.2 miles per gallon, which was just amazing. My husband tells me I have a lead foot if I go into like 44 because, you know, when you drive in town you get the best mileage. But, we were driving back from Iowa we were like 51. I think 51.9 is what it was because we were like 'can we get to 52, can we get to 52?' What was the question?

[What prompts that 'being so happy?']

Oh I mean again I think it comes back to – I feel like, you know, I am using  $\frac{1}{2}$  as much gas as a lot of cars - or  $\frac{1}{4}$  as much as some of these guzzlers. It's like you are making your own minor contribution to sustainability and - I mean, I really do like it. In fact, I do not want to drive the other car I just want to drive it.

[Sometimes when you are talking about mileage I think it seems like you have two meanings. One meaning is financial and one meaning is green?]

[It's both because you're saving money. When gas is it that expensive, it is really... like we probably cut our gas bill in half the Prius - I mean versus another car. it is also I feel better because I am using less gas. So there's a twofold thing.

[Which one do you think is more, like, prevalent – or are there times - ]

I would say the environmental one... And I say that only because I could afford - it is not like I am really - *couldn't* afford to spend more on gas. I mean, I do not *want* to spend more on gas but I feel like I am making a bigger, better impact in my own little way, on environmental things so it is more important to me to help the environment than it is to spend less money. Gail, 65

Gail was the first participant I specifically noticed this with and took measures to clarify her meaning. This was early in the interview process, only two other Prius drivers had been interviewed and their priority – financial or environmental – was quite clear. This probing with Gail benefited the study later because many of the remaining Leftist drivers employed the same double meaning strategy to explain why they liked their car and why they had purchased it in the first place. Some, like Gail, could provide estimates about what an excellent job they were doing decreasing their negative impact when compared to other drivers while others would explain based on previous vehicles they'd owned.

Most participants commuted to work and even came home for lunch, so financial savings were welcome, but not necessarily *the* reason they owned a Prius. Participants in their 20s emphasized that, although they had made the purchase to lessen their negative environmental impact, gas savings were currently something they were grateful for as they raised a young



family or tried to get by on the earnings of a non-profit job. These financial concerns took precedence over their original intention to make an environmental investment; however, they felt higher monthly payments were worth helping the Earth, especially since they already had the car to do it with.

When I got my job and found out that I was going to be commuting 60 miles roundtrip, um, that was when I was super glad I got the car, because I get about 450 miles a gallon, I mean a - a tank, so I only have to fill up once a week, and if I had been driving the Xterra I'd have to fill up like 5, if not, like 3, times a week. Cathy, 27

I fought for it and I still fight for it every single time I write that stupid check to pay for it. You know, its like... it was - it was a decision to buy a more expensive vehicle than maybe I should have because, um, I wanted it

[What made it important to you?]

The fact that there weren't any other really good options out there for hybrid vehicles and I - I decided to make the choice that I wanted to do something proactive instead of buying just another vehicle that's not proactive. Claire, 27

These were my youngest participants. They were willing to sacrifice for what they found important. Both valued hybrid technology as capable of helping, rather than hurting the environment and both saw the car as a family vehicle. When it came to finances, they did admit that, while their initial goals were noble, the fuel savings reinforced how grateful they were for their original purchase. This may be a trend that auto manufacturers can capitalize on since other, older and more financially stable participants admitted to having similar feelings.

#### 4.5.2 Are You **Really** an Environmentalist?

The confusion about words with double meanings and current or historical concerns about fuel prices and finances made me wonder whether Leftist participants were providing biased responses in an attempt to report what they "should" be saying rather than relate reality. After asking for the "stereotypical Prius driver," however, it was obvious that there was a sort of "response bias line" that would not be crossed. Leftists refused to stereotype unless absolutely pushed for it, and even then they did so reluctantly. This reluctance was interesting in and of

itself and, in later interviews with Leftists I tried only once or twice, as opposed to four or five times, to get a stereotype before moving on. Concerns about response bias were lessened as respondents showed obvious facial and verbal discomfort when asked for a stereotype. As a result, mannerisms of respondents when they were absolutely providing biased answers was made clear, which was comforting when later questions with the potential for bias were asked. As a result, since this portion of the interview came before asking about environmental activities, there was some preparation to note bias which was in the end unnecessary since environmentally concerned participants offered a plethora of pro-environment behaviors, many of which could be directly observed if they were interviewed at their house.

It was interesting to hear the way they connected their Prius to other green behaviors in their own words.

I'm probably exactly what people think drives the Prius. I do have a garden. I bake a lot of my own foods. I buy organic when I can. Recyclable, reusable grocery sacks. I recycle everything at my house when I can. The only thing I do not have is a compost pile, but I want one. I probably am exactly what people think drives the Prius. But I think also that the Prius helped me become that, too. When I drove the SUV, I did not recycle, I did not – I did try to make little changes in my life, but I think – I think being reminded that you drive a hybrid and you try and do things that help encourage you to do more. This is your step one. Where do you take it from there? It's like once people start recycling, they start learning about other ways they can help out or give back or contribute. Claire, 27

Many participants saw their purchase as being part of a larger lifestyle focus on becoming greener and better educated. In many cases it was a “step” as Claire calls it or one of a series of “commitments” the owner had gradually come to. By seeing the Prius through the eyes of Leftist participants, I came to believe that it was only one piece of a puzzle. For some, like Claire, the full picture was not yet created as they still struggled to construct their lifestyle. For older participants, like Gail the picture seemed very clear.

While it was apparent that some attempts to be green had good intentions, but were more simulations than actuality, like spending to save, it was striking that all attempts were

considered genuine and real by the participants themselves when they explained environmental activities they engaged in. For example, if a participant explained that they recycled and had a garden, although one activity is far more energy intensive than another, both received equal credit. Most Leftists preferred the Prius because they knew it sent “the right” message about their lifestyle choices, but other hybrid drivers were viewed as environmental equals.

I think the same about somebody that drives a Honda civic – I think they’ve made a very good choice – a Civic Hybrid – they’ve made a good choice; they’ve made a good decision. Even one of those little smart cars, I think those – even though it’s not a hybrid, it’s a good choice. You’re doing something to save the environment save – use less oil. I would think that other drivers in other cars would think the same thing about Prius drivers. Bret, 34

This obvious focus on the environment, even while answering questions not intended to probe for environmental commitment, illustrated how important Leftist Prius drivers believed eco-friendly choices to be.

When exploring other green lifestyle choices made by these drivers, I often received an education about the participant in list form.

[For you, it was basically the environment. What other behaviors do you do?]

The CSA – the community supported agriculture and I was already a recycler, but I think I’ve, you know, maybe tried to recycle even more. Like, going down to like the toilet paper roll. That little thing, maybe before I just threw that in the trash and I’ve become more aware of what all can be recycled. I switched to a green dry cleaner’s and – you buy a bag for \$5 – but they never use the plastic bags. You just take in your bag – it’s like a hanging hamper – you just tie up the end and clean your clothes and then hang them back in it. It’s like a canvas bag that way you eliminate the need for plastic bags. Those are the main ones. The big ones. Especially that community supported agriculture. Audrey, 38

Audrey offered only environmentalism as her reason for purchasing a Prius. She did not mince words when it came to relating this like some of the other drivers who vaguely replied “mileage.” Instead, it was very clear that she did this so that polar bears could have ice caps and to reduce her harmful emissions. Audrey also takes other people’s trash home to recycle or makes sure that co-workers put their waste in the proper place at work. She was not alone in doing this and

similar Leftists often confessed that others in their office would humorously amuse their recycling wishes by doing as they were told.

#### 4.5.2.1 How Environmentalism is Generated through the Prius

As illustrated in the section regarding Prius drivers' redefinition of "need," one major factor in a male's environmental commitment is his wife's happiness.

[So, were these green ideas in the back of your mind?]

There is one big factor that really probably got me started. I'm not as with it as my wife because she is into the environment. As the years have gone by and she probably is – as a matter of fact she has a had a big influence on me - and probably has gotten it in my mind. And even though I say 'hey, I am not worried about that,' I wasn't one of these type of people that want to go and destroy things anyway. I am just not that type, but probably the more I hung around with her, the more I became more aware of myself - and it wasn't that I really had to make a big change or anything like that, because I think that was always inside of me, but I... you know, just... I just did not really pay much attention does that make sense? Eric, 52

Interestingly, this did not happen in reverse. Rather, wives either had this impact on their husbands or it was considered a joint concern, something the couple did together, like Cathy and William's garden, with her providing the drive and him providing the "man power," or pro-environment choices in general like Bret and his wife:

We just did not instantly start doing this. We both feel the same way. We started 5 years ago ... just little things along the way – we just keep adding stuff, like the garden - that is this year. That's something new we've done. And the Prius was the year before. Whenever we see something else that we think we can do, that's going to have a benefit on the environment, then we'll do it.

From a situational perspective, the effect wives have on their spouses is considerable, especially in the realm of environmentalism. Husbands either want to keep their wives happy, credit their wives with their personal growth or are partners in going green. Perhaps due to traditional expectations that men lead households, it was surprising to hear how husbands viewed their wives and how crucial wives were to their happiness and lifestyle. Recall William's comment about pro-environmental choices being up to Cathy and how high-earning husbands respected their wife's wishes for family-friendly – or specifically hybrid – cars. Even Bret was

worried he might end up “in the doghouse,” as he put it, if he bought the Prius, which was in line with choices they had been making for years as a couple.

Another very important way environmentalism was generated in individuals was during childhood. Many respondents could provide back-stories to their environmental concern, even when not a Leftist. For example, Dan told me that he couldn't remember whether he'd “seen [hybrid technology] in an article – or, more likely a comic - but [had] always thought it [was] a good idea.” This happened during his younger years and had always stayed with him, into adulthood. As a result, he had followed hybrid technology and could tell me about vehicles exclusive to other parts of the world, timelines concerning the Prius' move from California to the rest of the country, and even the EV1's emergence and eventual destruction. While other participants guessed that Toyota was the first to produce a hybrid, Dan knew about, and had considered purchasing, the 2-seated, original Honda Insight. Ruth decided that her environmental awareness began with Lady Bird Johnson's environmental attempts, which she recalled from her own earlier days.

This sort of storytelling was even more prevalent in Leftists, who often considered education to be one of the most important commonalities among Prius drivers. This emphasis on education was illustrated in two different ways: one being completion of college and the other being family – especially mother – related.

My mom's always made recycling a big thing for us so I think that is why - there is more family influence about that than anything else. Um, yeah I do not really think I did anything. I mean reusable grocery sacks weren't really a thing. There wasn't really a movement. I mean, I always snipped my soda bottle wrappers so the birds - to make sure the birds wouldn't get stuck in them ... My mom's just kind of always been like that 'that goes here,' or we try and reuse it if we can. Like, we always, um, if you have milk cartons you fill them back up with water and use them as many times as you could - just reusing things was really - her thing. How can we take this trash and turn it into something else? And, and I grew up with that. Yeah, I think that is what I was trying to touch on with education level. It's not really - you have to have good awareness of taking it to another step on another level. Claire, 27

You can see how, even though her early exposure was during a time when she did not think there was a real movement to be environmentally concerned, Claire took those early lessons of

thinking about how her choices could impact animals and the planet and began acting on them as an adult. She believed that for individuals to be environmentally sensitive, they had to be aware of the consequences of their actions; however, this wasn't enough. To be able to change that awareness and concern into physical behaviors, it took a family-based learning structure, like her mom, to make issues relevant and worthy of action.

Mothers were especially interested in teaching their children concern and appropriate behaviors, a responsibility that did not necessarily stop when the child left the house. Gail often bought her sons sensible green items and encouraged them to use hybrids. Her son who less financially well-off received bags, light bulbs and other goods as well as the opportunity to drive her Prius. Since he could not make the kind of choices she supported, she helped him reach those goals. Mother's Day had recently been celebrated when I interviewed Gail. For the holiday, her sons gave her cards that talked about how they respected her for acting on her beliefs and they were proud she was so "passionate." Claire's respect for her mother came through in our interview as she spoke about how she learned to care about consequences. She believed that they could learn together from this point forward how to be even greener. The only father to speak about teaching his children at all was Dan who told me he had tried to encourage one of his sons to buy a Prius or other hybrid as a family vehicle due to its excellent fuel savings.

Still, I think it is important to point out that parental encouragement is not necessary for environmental concern, though education may be. George jokingly told me that, while his greatest environmental interest took on a local basis, his 13 year-old daughter was "crunchy." Apparently, she encouraged recycling and other such green behaviors in the household, much to his amusement. It could be that, with recent media attention and greater involvement, youth can learn to be pro-environment without adult guidance. It may even be that young people learn environmental concern in the classroom, from the media or from peers.

#### 4.6 Theory Revisited

Situational simulation, based on Baudrillard's belief that people use goods to simulate "reality" and send a message that is not entirely accurate, needs to be expanded to suggest that women and men simulate reality in different ways, with different goals. When trying to apply the theory to Prius drivers, I often caught myself thinking of the Wonderbra and other such "false advertising." Like a woman wearing a padded bra, individuals use products to tell the world they have something that they in fact lack. For many of my Leftist participants, attempting to apply this theory to their choices simply cheapened their very real attempts to have a more "glocal" lifestyle. They were not telling the world something false about themselves; instead, they seemed to become ever more adamant about a green lifestyle after their Prius purchase, their vehicle being a sort of catalyst for future growth (which was in the present in terms of the study). It was challenging to apply situational simulation because sometimes males showed environmental concern and females did not, confounding my "situational" considerations. Still, at other times, people were not simulating anything; they were using a series of very real actions to promote and encourage real change in their own lives and the lives of others, thus defying the basis of simulation. Sometimes, they told me their car said nothing about them at all and it seemed impossible to link their Prius purchase to other lifestyle choices. After questioning the validity of my theoretical lens, I took another look at this Wonderbra theory.

##### *4.6.1 Situational Simulation and Non-Leftists*

Political conservatives posed a unique challenge to the study's theoretical base. However, Non-Leftists' defensive responses to the question "who drives a hybrid like yours" (the response often being "I do not care") suggested that those who follow the political right do use situational simulation, just not in a way that was originally expected. This is most apparent through the lens of 'practicality.' These people may not tell the world something about the values of their gender or their political affiliation or their interest in the environment, but they are still saying something about themselves that was not always true. I posit that what they are

saying is that, despite stereotypes – that assessment they ‘do not care’ about – they become defensive and, in response, over-rationalize their purchase as a purely frugal investment. This fits within the theming structure (frugality, economic voting and environmentalism). However, as previously stated in the methods section, these people were more likely to self-label as an Independent than a Republican or Conservative. In the current political climate, some conservatives have been linked to the tea party movement, which values, among other things, fiscal responsibility. It may be that their frugal purchase, which admittedly came before the tea party movement or during its beginning stages, has helped frame their “situation,” creating an air of financial logic as a symbolic meaning. When challenged about their ‘green’ purchase (they often admit to being made fun of by conservative friends) their response centers around the logic of their purchase, financially speaking. It could even be that they are using their vehicle to simulate their lack of “caring” about what other people think. These individuals could provide a stereotype for Prius drivers, but often, whether out of a defensive mechanism or a “maverick” mindset, had little interest in speaking about such things. If asked what their car said about them, one such participant, Ruth, a self-proclaimed “conservative Independent” 58 year old female divorcee replied that, although she saw other Prius drivers as “pretentious”, her own vehicle symbolized that she did not mind doing something to help the general public and that she was conscious of the wastefulness of non-hybrids and the need for alternative fuels. She even said that the Prius sends a message to vehicle manufacturers that “the Prius is not the stopping point.” She is one of the respondents considered to be more centrist, politically speaking, but due to her self-labeling, she was among the seven Non-Leftists. Interestingly, all four “centrist” participants were over 55, with both similarly aged and younger participants falling to the right and left.

#### *4.6.2. Situational Simulation, Non-Leftists and Gender*

Fully half the participants were Non-Leftist. Of these, two were female. Looking at the numbers, there was a better chance of getting a respondent concerned about the environment



who was male than female. However, the same number of Non-Leftist males claimed any interest in environmental issues, though they were confined to his own local region's air quality or related to his wife's concern. They showed no concern about water quality or litter and no interest in local foods (a trend that ran throughout the Non-Leftists). Both Non-Leftists illustrated varying concerns about the environment. Ruth reported that she valued the environment by saying "I like nature." This was supported by her use (however frequent or infrequent) of reusable grocery bags, recycling, picking up trash when she walked and her curiosity about composting. Janice, a 59 year old female, had environmental concerns as well, though to a lesser degree. When asked if she thought gas mileage was good for her wallet or for the environment, she made it clear that she saved two things at once: waste and money. Leftists usually touted this refrain and when probed further for environmental awareness, she could only provide the Prius and small interests about wind energy, attempts to use reusable grocery bags and replacing household lights with more energy-efficient bulbs. For the purposes of this study, Janice clearly fulfilled my expectations of situational simulation by being female and showing greater concern than male participants, including her own husband who was jointly interviewed, and by simulating concern rather than engaging in environmental behaviors. Ruth, too, fit into the situational simulation expectations by being female and having greater environmental concern than male counterparts and by having behaviors that may or may not be consistent.

Males also fulfill my theoretical beliefs by being male and having little to no concern for the environment. Instead of environmental concern, they claimed other reasons explained their Prius purchase, as predicted.

#### *4.6.3. Situational Simulation and Leftists*

Many Leftists practiced what they preached so that it seemed they were simulating nothing. How can an individual advertise falsely if they *are* what they seem to be? I wanted to have a theory that fit my facts, not facts that I had cookie-cut to fit an already existing theory. So far as many of the Leftists are concerned, their actions may or may not be simulated, but their

actions are, as they often admitted, symbolic. These individuals are making choices and engaging in behaviors that they purposefully use to tell the world something about themselves. Although it is easy to see how consuming can lead to simulating, it is difficult to see how actions and behaviors can do the same thing. One trait that was gleaned about these individuals was that they started slowly. It may be that, in Baudrillardian style, Leftist participants built a sort of branch-and-creeper likeness; however, the proverbial plane actually landed. Many Leftist participants admittedly took things slowly with the Prius being the first of many big choices, but not the first of such choices in general. For example, it is easier to buy a car than start a garden; however, before they purchased the vehicle, they often used reusable grocery bags, recycled consistently or frequented local farmer's markets. This was a progression of actions that lead up to the Prius, which began a new "starting point" and daily reminder of one's commitment. The Prius becomes a symbolic extension of their everyday lifestyle rather than a hollow mockup of feigned choices. Still, some simulation was discovered.

#### *4.6.4. Situational Simulation, Leftists and Gender*

Gender was by far the most difficult situation to explain when examining the lives of Leftists. Half the respondents were Leftist in nature with four Non-Leftists joining their ranks periodically. Four Leftists were female and three were male. All indicated some concern for the environment, though to varying degrees and in different ways. Men appeared to have a greater focus on physicality and spending while women seemed to emphasize under-consumption, especially in regard to environmental themes. So far as financial and economic voting concerns were involved, other factors like age, income and education were greater situational indicators for both Leftist and Non-Leftist participants alike. However, environmentalism became the easiest theme to explore the appropriateness of situational simulation.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

[So, who drives a hybrid like yours?]

I think there are probably - I do not know if there are two different categories, but I think there are people who ... are leaning toward the car because of the environmental aspect - because of the low emissions and fuel savings. And then I think there are people... maybe who buy it thinking that they're going to save a lot of money on the gas and that will make up the difference, which I think there are studies that show – or reports from Toyota that show – that if you have the car for so many years, the amount you save in gas would offset the cost of the car. Because you could get a car that has good gas mileage that costs less than the Prius but you wouldn't get as good of gas mileage, so they've done these studies that - or charts – that if you were to compare paying a lower amount for the car with the gas mileage, versus the Prius, over time, you would earn that money back. Audrey, 38

#### 5.1 Conclusions

In the end, Audrey's assessment of Prius drivers sufficiently summarizes the different reasons people buy a Prius. Some individuals are lured to the vehicle with the hope of saving enough to offset the original purchase price while others find its lowered environmental impact attractive. The goal of this paper was to explore symbolism that Prius owners ascribed to their vehicle. Because these symbols are meaningless in and of themselves, Baudrillard's theory concerning simulation, replacing reality with an "array of sham objects," was used to examine how individuals use objects to tell the world something about themselves that is not necessarily true. Gender differences were expected based on previous literature and found in the data. Other "situations" like age, education and income corresponded with former studies as well, though were not the main focus of this work. Simulation, on the other hand, seemed inappropriate at times for those who successfully aligned their intentions with reality, namely Leftist females. It could be that those interests found in Leftist females are the easiest to act on, rather than simply simulate, and that as time and awareness make green choices more

acceptable for males, their stereotypical gendered behaviors will move toward becoming more like reality and less like simulation. However, Non-Leftists largely supported the theory of situational simulation by revealing a feigned reality in which they were frugal and environmentally aware.

Non-Leftists who purchased the Prius did so with their pocketbook in mind. They saw their acquisition of a hybrid car as an investment that would provide a return, especially when gas prices are high or if they drive a lot of miles. During these times, their desire to emit a “frugal” message receives reinforcement as they listen to their friends complain about gas prices or notice that they can arrive at a gas station, refill their fuel tank and drive away before other, larger vehicles that were being filled before they arrived have not completed their refueling. These scenarios support their belief that they are frugal. However, because few individuals actually know how many gallons are in their tank, can relate what the advertised mile per gallon ratio is and do not care to drive in a fashion that is conducive to maximizing their hybrid benefits, it is difficult to credit these individuals with moving beyond sending or internalizing a frugal symbol. Their thriftiness is almost entirely simulated since commitment to frugality stopped at their purchase. This may reflect current gas prices, which are significantly lower than in recent years, when Non-Leftists purchased their Prius. It could also be relative since Non-Leftists are comparing their Prius’ 45 to 50 mpg rating with other vehicles they owned in the past or may even own in the present. Like Hunter and Tiffany, who compared their Prius to their Expedition’s 13 mpg average, when contrasted in such terms, the Prius, even when driven the “wrong way” over-achieves.

The Leftists on the other most likely maintain a frugal message by balancing hyper-miling with less sensitive driving. However they never intended to be frugal in the first place. Instead, their interests lie in preserving the environment and lowering emissions. Importantly, these findings do allow for some “grey” area. Four of the seven Non-Leftists did state some interest in their environmental impact. As indicated in previous research, this was more of a

fringe benefit for these individuals and not the main reason for buying a Prius. It was more of an implied improvement over earlier choices like buying energy efficient light bulbs. The goal is to save money in the long run by using fewer bulbs; of course that helps the earth. It's less wasteful. On the other hand, while Leftists purchased the vehicle with a clear intent to make pro-environmental choices, they did admit to enjoying lowered fuel costs. For Leftists, being green is important to expressing their values. The fact that they save money is an added perk. While Non-Leftists failed to create a lifestyle around frugality, Leftists viewed their Prius as only one of many green choices they could make. By raising gardens, joining local farming operations, and withdrawing from conventional markets, environmentally motivated individuals successfully moved beyond simulation to reality. Their many green choices worked together to support one another and create a web of commitment that was meaningful. It is in environmental concern that gender became salient. Of the seven Non-Leftists, three were female, two of which expressed some green value when purchasing their Prius. The two male Non-Leftists who did the same cited their wife as influential to their green attitude. Moreover, female Leftists were decidedly greener by choosing to withdraw from the marketplace altogether, rather than move their financial support to eco-friendly businesses. By becoming a vegetarian, denouncing fast food and using a garden or local farmer, women's lack of spending probably has a greater positive environmental effect than their male counterparts who engaged in green consumption. Furthermore, the majority of environmentally concerned participants were female and males often gave credit to their spouses. Theoretically speaking, this could support my earlier assumption that women will be more likely to engage in pro-environment behaviors due to their unique social situation as women and mothers. This new information referring to their role as spouses who encourage husbands to participate in green behaviors could reflect gains in women's education (since more educated individuals were more likely to show environmental concern) or income (because green choices can be costly).

The greatly differing methods of economic voting, one intended to redistribute financial support to innocuous businesses and the other designed to support self-sufficiency and an off-the-grid lifestyle, are polar opposites. For both genders being green and spending were important but incongruous. I suspect that as the green movement matures, withdrawal from the marketplace, especially from chain shopping, may become more prevalent as women control the majority of household spending, an estimated 80 percent in fact. This uniquely feminine answer to the over-consumption and indulgence of previous decades could be a backlash from the opulent Wall Street years and may have a connection to women's increased power in the marketplace. That women choose to lead more independent lifestyles is interesting since they have historically been labeled more communal in nature (Gilligan 1982). This could be an instructional tool women use with their children, as Cathy confessed she hoped it would be, or could be related to some other, unexplored value. Still, it could simply be that women who choose an environmentally friendly lifestyle find these behaviors and withdrawal from the marketplace to be meaningful and provide purpose.

### 5.2 Deviations from the Original Work

Previous research has provided weak support for gender differences in regard to environmental values. However, my own research has shown a clear deviation from this trend. Women's heightened environmental awareness was coupled with strong lifestyle choices intended to create a very clear commitment to a green life rather than simulate one. Heffner et al. (2007) suggested this could exist, but failed to find conclusive evidence. It is unlikely that this discrepancy is due to location since Texas is not as liberal as California, where the parent study took place. Instead, I suggest it is related to time and increased awareness. Also, many participants were young, which may account for differences in findings. These participants belong to the Millennial Generation and were most likely not interviewed in any previous qualitative studies concerning Prius drivers. A cohort that has grown up with environmental issues and spent their youth learning about the extinction of species, deforestation and global

warming would understandably express greater concern than previous generations. Gender's effect on upcoming cohorts may become evident with women's increased power, the least of which may be increased financial control and decreased participation in the marketplace. The Generation X participants, even Non-Leftists who cared nothing for the environment, still indicated disgust with oil companies, perhaps from early exposure to the Exxon/Valdez spill which is currently being replicated in the Gulf. Thus, earlier works may not have discovered environmental reasons for purchasing a Prius due to greater awareness brought on by recent disasters, natural or otherwise, which have been linked to the Earth. As environmental awareness and women's capacity to influence family finances amplify, it could explain why prior literature has failed to find meaningful variation in green behaviors.

### 5.3 Implications for Future Research

Future research should explore the intersectionality of gender, generation and environmental concern to better understand the phenomenon of withdrawal from the marketplace. Is this a sampling issue or does it reflect a growing trend that could gain momentum as new generations, wary of Wall Street and the ethicality of big corporations, grow to adulthood. Further inspection into the relationship between lifestyle choices and gender should be explored. Is it "feminine" to care about the environment as suggested by Bret? If so, this could explain why husbands cited their wives when explaining some of their environmental commitment. That fathers never commented on teaching their children about caring for the Earth suggests this could be the case.

Also, although women's power in the home has been extensively studied, my participants presented new insight into the needs of husbands to please their wives. Historically speaking, women have been expected to please or obey their husbands, suggesting a role reversal. As interviews were being conducted, Wall Street was being put together by a series of women (Scherer 2010), CEOs of large corporations – mostly male – were being charged with collapsing our economic structure and highly respected men like Tiger Woods and John

Edwards were scandalizing the American people with adultery. Women and men alike may have unconsciously lost faith in “tradition” and adopted a new way of life, continuing a growing trend that increases women’s power in the home. Subsequent studies could examine how husbands view their wives and their own power, especially in relation to traditional expectations.

Interestingly, environmental awareness and eco-friendly choices among all political ideologies seemed greater than anticipated. If this is the case in Texas, a historically “red state,” does it signify a move to the left on the subject of environmental concern? After all, out of fourteen participants, only three showed no interest in the environment. This could be a result of the Prius itself; however, its status as a money-saving machine has been hard to dispel.

Curiously, only one non-White participant could be found to join my study. More research into the relationship between race and environmental concern is needed. This is especially pressing since race and environmental justice recently received exposure during the flooding after Hurricane Katrina. Why could more non-White Prius drivers be found? Do they prefer other hybrids, prefer conventional vehicles or can they not afford a hybrid at all? It is difficult to believe that non-Whites cannot afford a hybrid when we have an African-American president. It may be that non-Whites are not taught to concern themselves with environmental awareness, which is startling since many environmental justice issues are race-based.

Finally, the intersectionality of gender, race, age and environmental concern needs more exploration as green choices become more prevalent and environmental detriment continues to harm more impoverished people than wealthy ones. Studies suggesting new methods to encourage environmental awareness in young non-Whites would be beneficial to future research about how individuals use green purchases, or withdrawal from the marketplace, to send a message.



APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## INFORMED CONSENT

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**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR NAME:**

Heather Champeau

**TITLE OF PROJECT:**

Driving Force: An Investigation of the Toyota Prius

**INTRODUCTION**

*You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.*

---

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this research is to explore meanings and assumption Prius owners hold toward their vehicle.

**DURATION:**

The interview should take approximately one hour.

**PROCEDURES:**

I will ask you a series of questions, use a digital recorder to document your responses, transcribe our session, compile all participants' interview data and write a final analysis for my Master's thesis. All participants will be asked the same series of questions and will only be interviewed on a voluntary basis.

**POSSIBLE BENEFITS:**

You may benefit from your participation by developing a greater understanding of your vehicle purchasing habits and talking about what's important to you in a vehicle. The research may enhance our understanding of what Prius owners find important and may later lead to a more general understanding of what owners of alternative vehicles like and dislike about the new technology.

**COMPENSATION:**

There will be no compensation for participation in the study.

**POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:**

There are no known risks.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY:**

You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty

**NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:**

I aim for 50 participants to enroll in this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Every attempt will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your involvement in this study. Our digitally recorded interview session will be coded during transcription so that no personally

identifying information is visible on them and will be kept in a secure place. My associates and myself will use your interview solely for research purposes, and, once transcribed, your interview will be erased. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings and thus used for possible future analysis without naming you as a participant. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research (individual or department) have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. For at least three (3) years after the conclusion of this research, a copy of the records from this study will be stored at:

University Hall 601 Nedderman Way #430  
Arlington TX 76019

If, in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, then The University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

**CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:**

Questions about this research or your rights as a research subject may be directed to Heather Champeau at 254.718.275. You may contact the chairperson of the UT Arlington Institutional Review Board at 817.272.3723 in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.

**CONSENT:**

Signatures:

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

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Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent      Date

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and the you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

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SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER

DATE

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

## Interview Schedule

Case ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Demographics Information*

- How many people live in this household?
- Could you tell me each person's age, occupation (to include student), gender and whether or not they drive the Prius.
  - PERSON \_\_\_\_\_ Years. \_\_\_\_\_ (occupation). M / F . Is / Is not a Prius driver
  - PERSON \_\_\_\_\_ Years. \_\_\_\_\_ (occupation). M / F . Is / Is not a Prius driver
  - PERSON \_\_\_\_\_ Years. \_\_\_\_\_ (occupation). M / F . Is / Is not a Prius driver
  - PERSON \_\_\_\_\_ Years. \_\_\_\_\_ (occupation). M / F . Is / Is not a Prius driver
  - PERSON \_\_\_\_\_ Years. \_\_\_\_\_ (occupation). M / F . Is / Is not a Prius driver
  - Anyone else? \_\_\_\_\_

### *Household Vehicle Details*

- Please tell me a little bit about previous household vehicles:
  - What was the Make/Model/Year for each?
  - CARONE: Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
  - CARTWO: Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
  - CARTHREE: Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
  - CARFOUR: Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
  - Any others (OTHER)? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What were their main uses?
  - CARONE:
  - CARTWO:
  - CARTHREE:
  - CARFOUR:
  - OTHER
  - How long did you have them?
  - CARONE:
  - CARTWO:

- CARTHREE:
- CARFOUR:
- OTHER:
- Please tell me about the make/model/year of any vehicles you own other than your Prius.
  - OPONE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - How long have you had it? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is its main use? \_\_\_\_\_
  - OPTWO: \_\_\_\_\_
  - How long have you had it? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is its main use? \_\_\_\_\_
  - OPTHREE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - How long have you had it? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is its main use? \_\_\_\_\_
- Now could you tell me a little about how you use your Prius?
  - Mileage
  - Main user/uses
- Did you wait for your Prius?

*Hybrid Purchase (storytelling)*

- Could you tell me about buying your Prius?
  - What initially interested you?
  - Could you tell me about the specific point in time when you decided to make the purchase.
  - Were there any options added?
  - What kept you from purchasing one earlier?
- What was the make/model/year of other vehicles that were considered during the purchase process? (see chart)
  - CONSONE: Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
    - How far along in the purchase process did you get?
    - What made you consider this vehicle?
    - Could you tell me a few of the advantages you saw in it?
    - What disadvantages did you notice?
      - ❖ Is this what kept you from ultimately purchasing the vehicle?

- ❖ Does the Prius have this as an advantage?
  - CONSTWO: Make\_\_\_\_\_ Model\_\_\_\_\_ Year\_\_\_\_\_
    - How far along in the purchase process did you get?
    - What made you consider this vehicle?
    - Could you tell me a few of the advantages you saw in it?
    - What disadvantages did you notice?
      - ❖ Is this what kept you from ultimately purchasing the vehicle?
      - ❖ Does the Prius have this as an advantage?
  - CONSTHREE: Make\_\_\_\_\_ Model\_\_\_\_\_ Year\_\_\_\_\_
    - How far along in the purchase process did you get?
    - What made you consider this vehicle?
    - Could you tell me a few of the advantages you saw in it?
    - What disadvantages did you notice?
      - ❖ Is this what kept you from ultimately purchasing the vehicle?
      - ❖ Does the Prius have this as an advantage?
  - Any others (CONSOTHER)\_\_\_\_\_
- Did you consider any of the following vehicles during your hybrid purchase?
- Did you consider another Hybrid?
  - Why or why not? (Explore associations with other vehicle types like Insight.)
  - How about a Compact Non-Hybrid?
  - Why or why not? (Explore associations with other vehicle types like Civic.)
  - How about a Mid/Full size Non-Hybrid?
  - Why or why not? (Explore associations with other vehicle types like Accord.)
  - How about a Pickup or SUV?
  - Why or why not? (Explore associations with other vehicle types.)
  - Were there any other kinds of cars you considered? \_\_\_\_\_
  - Why or why not? (Explore associations with other vehicle types.)

*Symbolic Meanings*

- Who buys a hybrid like yours?
  - How do you differ from these people?
  - Do the same types of people buy a Civic Hybrid?
- How about a Civic Insight?

- Does your car say anything about you?
- When people see you in this car, what do they think?
  - Would the owner of a Civic Hybrid say something different?
  - How about a Civic Insight?
- Can you remember a time when you thought “I’m so glad I bought this car?”
- Do others (friends, family, etc) know what kind of car you drive?
  - Who?
  - How?
- Have you talked to strangers about your car?
- What do you think about SUVs in general?
- Would you own a non-hybrid SUV?

*Benefits and Disadvantages*

Benefits

- Please state your reason(s) for selecting the Prius. (Priority is important.)
  - REASONONE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - REASONTWO: \_\_\_\_\_
  - REASONTHREE: \_\_\_\_\_
  - REASONFOUR: \_\_\_\_\_
- How do you feel about the stereotypes related to your Prius? (Probe for the following if not offered by participant.)
  - Reduced Pollution
  - Less Global Warming Emissions
  - Fuel Cost Savings (now or in the future)
  - Reduced Resource Use
  - Helps owner(s) act on their values
  - Sends a message to vehicle manufacturers, politicians, oil companies
  - Promotes national independence from foreign oil
- How does your vehicle’s “ratings” on these subjects (remind owner of above subjects) compare to a Civic Hybrid or an Insight?

*Evaluating Purchase Drivers*

**Driver One**

- What made purchasing this Prius important to you?



- You said that [REASONONE] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONTWO] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONTHREE] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONFOUR] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- Are there any other reasons for purchasing your Prius that are important to you? (ROTHER1)
  - What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- What set the Prius apart from other vehicles for you?
- Why were other alternatives excluded? (To include other fuels and body styles.)
- How much did you know about hybrids/Prius before you made the purchase?
  - What have you learned since (esp most important thing learned)?
- What do you think this purchase tells (your) children about the choices your family makes?

**Driver Two (spousal situations only)**

- What made purchasing this Prius important to you?
- You said that [REASONONE] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONTWO] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONTHREE] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- You said that [REASONFOUR] was important to you. What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?
- Are there any other reasons for purchasing your Prius that are important to you? (ROTHER2)
  - What other behaviors do you engage in that are along the same lines?

- What set the Prius apart from other vehicles for you?
- Why were other alternatives excluded? (To include other fuels and body styles.)
- How much did you know about hybrids/Prius before you made the purchase?
  - What have you learned since (esp most important thing learned)?
- What do you think this purchase tells (your) children about the choices your family makes?

Disadvantages

- When purchasing this vehicle, what problems did you see with it?
  - Driver One
    - DISONE1: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISTWO1: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISTHREE1: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISFOUR1: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Driver Two (spousal situations only)
    - DISONE2: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISTWO2: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISTHREE2: \_\_\_\_\_
    - DISFOUR2: \_\_\_\_\_
- How do you feel about the negative stereotypes associated with the Prius? (Probe for the following typically-cited hybrid issues if not provided by the participant):
  - How did you feel about the Vehicle Size (passenger/cargo room)
  - How did you feel about the Vehicle styling/body
  - How did you feel about the Price (more expensive than comparable non-hybrid cars)
  - How did you feel about the How did you feel about the Failure to attain advertised mileage
  - How did you feel about the Performance (Poor acceleration/handling)
  - How did you feel about the Safety (collision with larger vehicle concerns?)
  - How did you feel about the Long-term Durability (battery replacement fears?)
  - How did you feel about the Reliability (technology proven yet? Response to recent Toyota problems?)
  - Would a Civic Hybrid or Insight have the same issues?

#### Driver One

- You said DISONE1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know?

#### Driver Two

- You said DISONE1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- You said DISTWO1 was an important disadvantage to you. Could you explain this to me a little bit more?
  - How do you cope with this issue?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know?

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research! Do you happen to know any other Prius owners who may be interested in joining my study and you're willing to give my information to?

APPENDIX C  
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

## Survey Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in my interview! I'd like to know a few more things about you for my study. This will only take a few moments and will remain confidential. Please place your survey in the envelope provided when finished.

*Please check the most appropriate response to the following questions:*

- What is your sex?
  - Female
  - Male
  
- What is your current marital status?
  - Married
  - Divorced
  - Widowed
  - Single, Never Married
  - Separated
  - Cohabiting
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  - No Schooling
  - Elementary to 8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 11<sup>th</sup> grade
  - High School Diploma or Equivalency
  - Some College, No Degree
  - Associate Degree
  - Trade School Degree
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - Professional Degree
  - Doctorate Degree

*Please fill in the following:*

- What is your political affiliation?

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- Please write your religious affiliation below?

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*Please check the most appropriate response to the following questions:*

➤ What is your personal yearly income?

- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$29,999
- \$30,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$69,999
- \$70,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$89,999
- \$90,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more

➤ What is your household income?

- Same as above
- Less than \$10,000
- \$10,000 to \$19,999
- \$20,000 to \$29,999
- \$30,000 to \$39,999
- \$40,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$59,999
- \$60,000 to \$69,999
- \$70,000 to \$79,999
- \$80,000 to \$89,999
- \$90,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 or more

Thank You

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