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Honors Thesis: Sociology
Cultural Capital Among Zero Waste Consumers

Abstract

Ethical consumption has emerged as a prominent alternative consumption strategy designed to address the negative impacts of mass consumerism. The zero waste movement has been observed to be a distinct segment of this trend. While research has been done to address the context and motivations of the zero waste movement, there is a gap in our knowledge around the impact of socioeconomic class. Alternative consumption movements have been criticized on the basis that the cost of consuming alternative products is prohibitive, yet the zero waste movement emphasizes restraint from consumption, making it an ideal example by which class boundaries can be analyzed. Using a mixed methodological approach, this research aims to investigate how economic and cultural factors shape the opportunities and constraints that individuals face when living a zero waste lifestyle. Analysis of the data illustrates that we can understand the differences in how people participate in the zero waste movement with the concepts of cultural capital and habitus. The data reveals that those with lower cultural capital displayed a habitus that favored these actions while those with higher cultural capital had more difficulty. This counters previous claims of ethical consumption being exclusive to those with more cultural resources. By analyzing the dynamics of zero waste consumption empirically through this study, we can better understand how cultural and economic factors impact consumption practices. This research advances the literature on ethical consumption by exploring the ways that alternative consumption practices can expand beyond, or be hindered by, class boundaries.