Corporate Greenwashing and Canada Goose: Exploring the Legitimacy–Aesthetic Nexus

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Abstract

Public discourse on environmental responsibility and sustainability continues to pressure corporations, especially those that have been portrayed as key contributors of environmental harm. *Greenwashing* is a strategy that companies adopt to engage in symbolic communications with environmental issues without substantially addressing them in actions. This paper aims to raise awareness of corporate greenwashing, drawing attention to issues that progress the trend of individualized responsibility and consumption, while concealing the social and (eco)systemic issues in the process. By drawing on the case study of winter apparel company Canada Goose, this paper questions whether businesses can 'go green' in good faith, if corporate responsibility and environmental responsibility can ever be reconciled, and if there is considerable need to clarify the intended effects and unintended consequences of corporate greenwashing.

Keywords

Corporate greenwashing; green criminology; Canada Goose.

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Introduction

Public discourse on environmental responsibility and sustainability continues to put pressure on corporations, especially as many "have been portrayed as one of the key causes of … environmental problems" (Walker and Wan 2012: 227). This has led companies to consider taking active roles in environmental management or deal with environmental issues strategically. In the case of the latter, *greenwashing*[1] is a strategy that companies adopt to engage in symbolic communications with environmental issues, without substantially addressing them in action (Walker and Wan 2012).

Many scholars have identified corporate greenwashing in the literature (e.g., see Dahl 2010; Laufer 2003; Nurse 2015; Ramus and Montiel 2005; Todd 2004; Walker and Wan 2012). While generally this research has been focused on environmental performance, marketing and consumer consumption, green criminological inquiry has made inroads into understanding how state (in)action regulates or incentivizes corporations and firms to commit illegal or harmful actions towards particular environments and ecosystems (e.g., see Hasler, Walters and White 2019; Nurse 2015; Walters and Westerhuis 2013; White 2009, 2018a, 2018b). Green criminology, as a continuously blossoming field of criminological inquiry, recognizes and examines behaviours that are both illegal and legal (yet detrimental), and in varying ways has made great efforts to provide insight into such harms in a more fulsome manner (e.g., see Brisman and South 2013; Gacek 2018, 2019; South 2014; White 2008, 2009, 2011; Wyatt 2011). It spans the micro to the macro, from individual-level environmental crimes to business/corporate violations and state transgressions. As an 'umbrella concept', green criminology has broadly conceived its place within the criminological main, spanning a wide field of 'green' crimes, and maintains its concern with mainstream criminology's neglect of ecological issues (Brisman 2017; see also Gacek 2018, 2019). Indeed, what was once thought as criminology proper—said differently, the focus of crime, criminals and criminality that we generally teach students in our criminology courses—is no longer the case, given green criminology's focus on the study of crime, harm and justice "related to the environment and to species other than humans" (South 2014: 8). In turn, the planting of green perspectives into the criminological field has produced a bounty of fruitful outcomes and deliverables, spanning several decades of extensive and thought-provoking inquiry at its best (for early considerations, see Halsey 2004; Halsey and White 1998; Lynch and Stretesky 2003; South 1998; White 2003).

Despite Nurse's (2015) lone green criminological study investigating the activities of multinational oil companies in sub-Saharan Africa, green criminological research of corporate greenwashing remains underexplored. Indeed, what has eluded green criminological discussions so far has been an attempt to question the strategies inherent to managing environmental issues and the processes by which corporations do or do not engage in substantive action. In terms of process, the ways in which non-human species are not fully protected through legislation or regulatory schemes matters not only to the internal and external legitimacy of corporate actions, but also to how it affects the meanings consumers' create in the choices they make—in other words, the personal and social legitimacy that influences and becomes tied to conceptions of environmental responsibility—when purchasing products that are 'environmentally friendly' or do not use animal[2] testing or experimentation. Especially given corporations' efforts to win over consumers by 'going green', one must question the extent to which they are authentic.

Further, promoting species justice allows us to begin to question why concern about animals and other species are erroneously left out of greenwashing debates. A species justice approach recognizes that non-human animals bear rights just like their human counterparts (Gacek 2018), yet for too long legal regulations, particularly in common law jurisdictions like Canada, "often administer animals as mechanistic property, to be utilized by human beings" (Gacek and Jochelson 2017a: 338). Excluding animals from these debates of corporate greenwashing allows corporations, as property owners, to use their property as they see fit. Species justice also constructs harm so that non-human animals have the inherent right not to suffer abuse from humans, "whether this be one-on-one harm, institutionalized harm, or harm arising from human actions that affect climates and environments on a global scale" (White 2011: 23). Recognizing that animal welfare remains a public good (Nurse 2016), I suggest corporations must genuinely acknowledge the harm they cause towards non-human species, if we are ever to see corporate responsibility and environmental responsibility truly move towards reconciliation.

This paper is structured, as follows. First, a brief literature review of corporate greenwashing is provided, followed by examination of the three main reasons why corporations decide to move towards 'going green', addressing the challenges inherent to each reason. Concern about corporations 'going green' is then supplemented by the issues of *internal* and *external legitimacy* of corporations and their practices (Walker and Wan 2012), as well as reconsidering how *personal legitimacy* (i.e., how 'buying green' makes us feel) and *social legitimacy* (i.e., how 'buying green' upholds community values) come together to progress the trend of individualised responsibility, concealing the social and (eco)systemic issues in the process. Third, corporate concerns over 'going green' are connected with the larger socio-economic and cultural contexts of consumption. While the intent may be to appeal to consumer demands for environmentally friendly products, there exists a gap in discussing the ethics and effects of 'buying green'—a lacuna that further green criminological attention fills. Fourth, by drawing on the case study of Canada Goose Holdings (the latter more commonly known as 'Canada Goose', the Canadian winter apparel company), the paper suggests the existence of a 'legitimacy–aesthetic nexus', which aptly describes the eco-marketing undertaken by the company to promote its goods. Further highlighted are the challenges of Canada Goose's animal trapping methods, connected to concerns of species justice, as well as their effect on both human and non-human victims. Recognizing the need to clarify the intended effects and unintended consequences of corporate greenwashing concludes the discussion.

Corporate Greenwashing

Global environmental problems continue to expand with alarming speed, "exceeding the worst case scenarios predicted only a few years ago" (Walker and Wan 2012: 227; see also Pacala and Socolow 2004). Public discourse continues to shift in favour of substantial action to address these problems. Changing perceptions on the environment have rapidly grown in the last decade, especially given the mounting problems our world is facing, including (but not limited to) climate change, ozone depletion, pollution, resource scarcity and habitat destruction (Agnew 2012; MacManus 2016; Ruggiero and South 2010; Walters 2010; White 2018b). Conceptions of human–animal relations are beginning to shift in a similar direction. Given the research suggesting animal sentience is possible (Gacek and Jochelson 2017a, 2017b), that animals feel pleasure and pain and can lead emotionally rich lives (Holdron 2013, cited in Gacek 2019), and the deleterious effects that govern the lives of animals through testing, experimentation, entertainment and (il)legal trading and trafficking (e.g., see Morin 2018; Wyatt 2011, 2014), corporations are now being asked to critically reflect on their practices of production, especially if their methods lean towards poor environmental performance, denial of crime or cover-up of criminal activity (MacManus 2016; South 2016) against non-humans and the environment.

Dahl (2010: A247) indicates that since the mid-1980s, the notion of corporate greenwashing "has gained broad recognition and acceptance to describe the practice of making unwarranted or overblown claims of sustainability or environmental friendliness in an attempt to gain market share". While 'corporate greenwashing' is not a relatively new phenomenon (Dahl 2010), there are few definitions to consider empirically. Per Walker and Wan (2012: 228), corporate greenwashing represents an area of research inquiry that has escalated sharply in the last few years "because of the increased prevalence of environmental concerns and the attractiveness and effectiveness of marketing and advertising oneself as being green" (see also Laufer 2003; Ramus and Montiel 2005). One definition offered by Ramus and Montiel (2005: 377) is that greenwashing is "disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image", where disinformation refers to deliberately misleading information. However, Walker and Wan (2012: 231) take issue with this definition, viewing greenwashing not as "disinformation', but "information that is not backed by substantive actions". Accordingly, they suggest that greenwashing should be construed as "symbolic information emanating from within an organization without substantive actions. Or, in other words, discrepancy between the green talk and green walk" (231).

I see significant purchase in Walker and Wan's (2012) definition, especially as the difference between a firm's symbolic and substantive actions (i.e., solely talking the 'green talk' versus green talking *and then* walking the 'green walk') remains a pressing concern for the public interested in good corporate conduct and the 'environmentally friendly' products a corporation allegedly produces. A firm that engages in both symbolic and substantive actions (on the same issue) would not be classified as greenwashing, "as the symbolic action is not "disinformation" because it is backed by substantive action" (231). In contrast, a firm that demonstrates symbolic actions without substance would see this discrepancy. In this light, corporate greenwashing becomes a "strategic communication tool to camouflage a firm's lack of efforts in engaging in true environmental performance" (231). Moreover, corporate greenwashing potentially masks over serious contemplation of corporations' practices of production specifically, and conceals social and (eco)systemic issues that capitalism (green or otherwise) creates generally. Corporations attempting to engage in either symbolic or substantive actions are attempting to gain legitimacy among stakeholders, most notably their shareholders and the general public. Legitimacy is a multifaceted, ongoing and dynamic process, yet, as discussed in the following section, a corporation's move to 'go green' may not be in good faith. Rather, it recognizes the significance of corporate profit generation and a continued supply and demand from consumers to see environmentally friendly and ethical products on store shelves and in store windows. Such reasons to 'go green' might appear as good 'corporate responsibility' at first glance, but are far more nebulous and nefarious upon closer examination.

Why 'Go Green'?

There are three main reasons why corporations decide to move towards 'going green'. These include (1) questions of 'environmental performance'; (2) motivations tied to internal and external legitimacy and, as I suggest, how personal and social legitimacy of the public works together with these motivations; and (3) recognition of how capitalist systems 'doing business' may reflect a sign of the times, fostering greater attention towards 'green' movements.

Questions of 'Environmental Performance'

Regarding the first reason, prior research indicates and typically discusses environmental performance "as an all-encompassing construct", similar to reputation (Walker and Wan 2012: 228; for a review of this literature, see Walker 2010). However, as Walker and Wan (2012) suggest, environmental performance is composed of multiple, separate issues brought together in distinct ways, including (but not limited to) greenhouse gas emissions, environmental conservation and restoration, stakeholder engagement, product innovation, lifecycle analysis, technological development, waste management, recycling, and independent environmental reviews and audits. Therefore, according to the authors, instead of simply demonstrating changes (positive or negative) across one measure of environmental performance (especially as corporations tend to focus on emissions and neglect other measures), research needs to examine multiple measure categories in various contexts. It becomes important to know how corporations construct 'environmental performance', and which environmental issues firms are (or are not) actively engaging to provide a comprehensive understanding of environmental performance as a multifaceted phenomenon (Walker and Wan 2012).

Motivations and Legitimacy

The second reason speaks to motives to attain legitimacy. Suchman (1995: 574) refers to legitimacy as "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions". Legitimacy, or the building of legitimacy, is a crucial process to attaining trust in stakeholders across varying vantage points of society. It has a potentially unstable or fluid quality, which means that one may just as easily attain legitimacy as lose it, and so it should never be taken for granted (for a further discussion of legitimacy's liquidity, see McNeil and Robinson 2013; for a discussion of legitimacy in various criminal justice contexts, see Crawford and Hucklesby 2013). What makes this focus of legitimacy so compelling is how it is attained through corporate actors themselves (i.e., management and workers), and how legitimacy converges with sociocultural and ecological movements of the day. Especially in the last two decades, public interest in corporate practices and eco-responsibility has been mounting; now, people want to know both the method used to create a product and from where a product originates, and the environmental effect it will have in the short- and long-term interests of our social and ecosystems. The public wants further transparency and accountability on the part of corporations, especially if their products are not ethically or environmentally friendly, as advertised.

In an attempt "to cash in on the green movement many firms with poor environmental performance sell themselves as being green" (Walker and Wan 2012: 228). Walker and Wan (2012) suggest there are two motives for corporations to engage in greenwashing—(1) to attain confidence by workers of a company's business practices (what is otherwise known as *internal legitimacy*); and (2) appearing to conform to green norms by engaging in symbolic actions or 'green talk', which can be effective at signalling to external stakeholders a firm's values concerning green issues (referred to as *external legitimacy*) (see also Ramus and Montiel 2005). In terms of internal legitimacy, attaining legitimacy is significant for corporations, as it can lead to stronger exchange relationships between company workers and business partners, greater access to resources from business partners, stronger morale within the company itself, and better job applicants (Walker and Wan 2012). Taken together, internal legitimacy can subsequently lead to a stronger company workforce. In terms of external legitimacy, corporations are under increasing pressure to perform ethically and environmentally. No public confidence and trust in a company means no public consumption of company goods and services. Whether companies respond symbolically with little to no substance, or take substantive actions to address their environmental performance, it is clear that both internal and external legitimacy remain key influences in how corporations strategically manage (or perhaps resolve) environmental issues on the one hand, and attempt to (re)gain public trust and support on the other.

While linking greenwashing to firm performance (financial, environmental or otherwise) remains a significant concern (Walker and Wan 2012), a recent examination of legitimacy by Bitektine (2011: 152, emphasis added) described it as an "*actor's perceptions or judgments* manifested in behavioural actions". In a sense, there are more than two motives at play. We can also link greenwashing to legitimacy beyond the organisation itself—notably, the sociocultural public perceptions of the personal and social need to 'buy green'. Put differently, personal and social legitimacy (influenced by corporate interests through green marketing and advertisements) legitimize individual responsibility to save the planet. Especially in an era in which individual environmentalism is increasingly trendy, "what are the implications for an environmental ethics infused with a sense of aesthetics?" (Todd 2004: 86). While this issue is explored later in the paper, here we can connect legitimacy to aesthetic, particularly through eco-marketing and green consumption. It is standard fare to say social actors make a host of choices every day that reflect and refract sociocultural phenomena. Yet, when corporations intermingle consumption with environmentalism, one must question whether environmentally and ethically friendly products are corporations' genuine attempts to 'go green' or if they are merely misleading consumers by producing more of the same goals that capitalist systems have always disseminated—notably, profit generation, a surplus population of dispensable workers, the exploitation of workers and resources (natural or otherwise), and cost-cutting methods that walk a fine line between illegal and legal corporate behaviour.

Therefore, *personal legitimacy* (i.e., how 'buying green' makes us feel) and *social legitimacy* (i.e., how 'buying green' upholds community values) must be included in discussions of corporate motivations. We as humans are all part of social and ecosystems in various ways, shapes and forms; we form communities, regions and nation-states upon values of morality, honesty and integrity. Undergirding these social interactions and fomentations is trust and accountability—in other words, our belief and reliance upon each other to maintain functional relationships, and to be held accountable when relationships become dysfunctional. Yet, our connections to each other are not immune to the larger ecosystems we inhabit, meaning that questions on how we feel about the environment, more so than ever, influence how we feel about the current ecological state of affairs and whether we need to 'go green' further than we have previously accomplished. Consumption remains "a necessity of human existence" (Todd 2004: 92). Especially given corporate interests, we must now ask how consumers interrelate with a company's advertised 'environmental consciousness' (Todd 2004). In terms of personal legitimacy, such questioning critically reflects on the emotive aspects of how 'buying green' makes us as consumers *feel* (i.e., happy, content, altruistic, etc.) when a company advertises their product as ethically or environmentally friendly. In the case of social legitimacy, we must reflect on the effects that 'buying green' will make us feel in relation to social structures and institutions pushing for every individual to 'do their part' and 'take responsibility', to give back to their communities and save flora, fauna species and the planet as a whole. This is not to suggest that individuals taking part in greening activities and initiatives are all for naught: on the contrary, all efforts are significant to preserving the planet we inhabit. Nevertheless, it is the actions and practices of corporations that produce the most harm against non-human species and our ecosystems. When I as a consumer legitimize my individual responsibility to become ethically and environmentally friendly by 'buying green', I allow corporations to continue to sell me products that symbolically engage with 'going green' without genuinely making substantive eco-friendly changes. I will return to ethics and the effects of 'buying green' later in the paper.

Just 'Doing Business'?

The final reason that companies 'go green' may reflect particular aspects of the corporate sector. That is, 'doing business' now may coincide (or not) with current governmental or corporate interests shifting in a particular direction, and that the company in question is simply following suit. Walker and Wan (2012) examined over 100 top Canadian firms in visibly polluting industries to question the relationship between corporate actions and communications on environmental performance and their financial implications. The authors contend that these top firms tend to focus on particular environmental issues while ignoring others (Walker and Wan 2012). In particular, management of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental conservation were of significant importance, regardless of the industry (Walker and Wan 2012). According to the authors, this may be because governments (as large, essential, external stakeholders) are particularly concerned with these issues (especially if their constituents rally for these issues to be addressed), as attempts are made to deal with climate change, environmental destruction and degradation. In turn, this has led to "greater regulations, and a greater threat of future regulations, in these areas as opposed to other such areas like lifecycle analysis or employee training" (Walker and Wan 2012: 237).

Another key observation is the relative success in certain environmental areas and relative failures in others (Walker and Wan 2012). Said differently, corporations may only be able to deal with one or several environmental issues or environmental performance measures at a time because, as Walker and Wan (2012: 237) suggest, it is "extremely difficult for a single firm to perform well in all environmental categories". Therefore, it might be a regulatory issue that is causing concern for how corporations are to satisfy (and potentially exceed) expectations for environmental performance measures. In so doing, governments should reassess the environmental issues of greatest importance to allow corporations "to make quick progress in these areas without overburdening them by enforcing all environmental areas simultaneously" (237).

The final observation of 'doing business' is that in terms of environmental measures (and their associated harms), differences exist across industries that must be further interrogated, especially as they relate to financial performance. For example, in Walker and Wan's (2012) study, they found that product innovation was of high importance in the chemical industry, but of little significance in energy and mining sectors. Therefore, "the strong environmental performance in certain areas is likely an indication of the financial incentives that exist in the area" (238). Indeed, Walker and Wan (2012: 238) indicate that in terms of the chemical industry, "the relationship between environmentally friendly product innovation and financial performance is … positive", but, based on the low levels of stakeholder engagement, a negative relationship between that and financial performance may exist. In effect, we must reconsider the relationship between corporate environmental and financial performance (Walker and Wan 2012), with a keener eye towards particular industries and the environmental issue(s) they are facing. This is especially important if they are attempting to substantively address issue(s) by their own accord, or as a result of mounting pressure from governmental or civil society interests. Overall, there are various justifications for why a corporation attempts to 'go green', especially in the area of governmental regulations; internal and external pressure from stakeholders; the sociocultural shift in recognizing environmental concern; and the current state of 'doing business' in particular industries. However, there remain serious ethical concerns and effects of 'buying green' that ironically play into corporate eco-marketing, green consumption and, unfortunately, corporate greenwashing.

Eco-Marketing and Green Consumption: The Ethics and Effects of 'Buying Green'

Green consumerism is on the rise, yet questions remain around the ethics of marketing and what constitutes good corporate conduct (Todd 2004; Ramus and Montiel 2005; Walker and Wan 2012; see also Stoll 2002; Wulfson 2001). Green consumers share common concerns in the current state of the environment, the effect of overconsumption potentially leading to environmental devastation, and the practices by which companies incorporate the environment into their product lines and services (see Todd 2004). Indeed, environmental organisations and consumer groups continue to "[criticise] companies for false advertising, claiming that corporations use misleading environmental claims to create "green" images in the minds of the public" (Ramus and Montiel 2005: 378–379; see also Table 1 for examples of corporate greenwashing).

Table 1: The Seven Sins of Greenwashing[3]

1. Sin of the hidden trade-off	Committed by suggesting a product is 'green' based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues (e.g., paper produced from a sustainably harvested forest may still yield significant energy and pollution costs)
2. Sin of no proof	Committed by an environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by reliable third-party certification (e.g., paper products that claim various percentages of post-consumer recycled content without providing any evidence)
3. Sin of vagueness	Committed by every claim that is so poorly defined or broad that consumers are likely to misunderstand its real meaning (e.g., 'all natural')
4. Sin of irrelevance	Committed by making an environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products (e.g., 'chlorofluorocarbon-free' is meaningless given that chlorofluorocarbons are already banned by law)
5. Sin of the lesser of two evils	Committed by claims that may be true within the product category, but that risk distracting consumers from the greater health or environmental effects of the category as a whole (e.g., organic cigarettes)
6. Sin of fibbing	Committed by making environmental claims that are simply false (e.g., products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified)
7. Sin of false labels	Committed by exploiting consumers' demand for third-party certification with fake labels or claims of third-party endorsement (e.g., certification-like images with green jargon such as 'eco-preferred')

Does green marketing contribute to the greening of societal consciousness or does it create the conditions for corporate greenwashing to occur? This sort of question continually arises in various ways throughout the research (Dahl 2010; Ferguson 2009; Laufer 2003; Todd 2004). It may be the case that both occur; while there have been instances of the latter for several decades (Dahl 2010), how corporate interests shift sociocultural influences in the former cannot easily be ignored. Corporations make it their business to know their user base, strategizing how to build brand loyalty with consumers they retained, and attempting to expand and recruit potential consumers through marketing initiatives. In some cases, greening these plans is the only way some consumers in society recognize that environmental ethics could be fostered (i.e., 'we' as the corporation care about *both* our customers *and* the environment, while 'those' other corporations do not). However, while it may be the case that the greening of societal consciousness is a noble endeavor (and rightly so), we should not be so easily persuaded that corporations are promoting 'going green' out of the kindness of their organisational hearts. Capitalism generally and corporations specifically are guided by their own set of values and beliefs: profit generation and shareholder trust take precedent. 'Corporate responsibility', then, is predominately reflected in this mindset, while environmental responsibility lags behind (if it is even thought of at all).

Therefore, rather than concern ourselves with the question of the intention of green marketing, it is more beneficial to recognize the connection between legitimacy and the aesthetic. Evidently, there are multiple reasons why corporations attempt to 'go green', yet through their promotion of 'buying green' we begin to see how legitimacy, as a multifaceted phenomenon, connects to consumers at both the personal and social level. While environmental ethics may arise in the consciousness of consumers, once again we see how legitimacy creates an aesthetic and atmosphere conducive for corporate greenwashing to occur.

Environmentally aware individuals "are already guided by personal ethics" (Todd 2004: 86), yet in trying to attract new consumers and grow their base, environmentally minded businesses (or businesses trying to shift their appearance from unsatisfactory to satisfactory environmental performance) attach an aesthetic quality to their goods and services. Ethical motivations of environmentally aware consumers become reflected in the social and environmental consciousness of a company; the consciousness of a company, through advertisements and the products themselves, attempts to connect to the values of consumers, who then "express these ethics through the products they buy" (Todd 2004: 92). Todd (2004) provides an insightful examination of how environmental ethics are infused with aesthetic through case examples such as Burt's Bees and The Body Shop, two companies that arguably advertise their environmental consciousness and respective lines of ethical and environmentally friendly products. Interestingly, Todd (2004) suggests that, in part, attempts to sell products to consumers based on a set of ideological values sees companies employ two specific discursive strategies: (1) they create "enhanced notions of beauty by emphasizing the performance of their natural products" (90); and (2) they also "convey ideas of health through community values, which in turn enhances notions of personal health to include ecological well-being" (90).

It is in Todd's examination of corporate discursive strategies in which we see the connection between legitimacy and aesthetic, specifically how personal and social legitimacy not only work together to legitimize consumers' purchase of environmentally and ethically friendly products, but also potentially carve open a space for greenwashing to occur. In terms of the first discursive strategy, enhanced notions of beauty suggest to consumers that through the purchase of this particular product, the naturalness (or eco-friendliness) imbued in its performance helps to fulfil their personal wellbeing (i.e., to feel happier). Moreover, through connecting health to community values, the purchase of said product 'gives back' to the community *and* the environment, as suggested in the second discursive strategy. Purchasing this product, then, is good for *your* health *and* the health of the ecosystem; you as a consumer become individually responsibility for saving the planet, instead of questioning the social and (eco)systemic issues and corporate interests at play or that led up to this point. In other words, such claims persuasively incentivize consumers to buy—thus, legitimizing the product's creation, sale and distribution, while maintaining its appearance on the market, even if the *practices* of the product's creation, sale and distribution only symbolically, rather than substantially, address environmental issues.

Taken together, personal and social legitimacy have the potential to progress the trend of individualised responsibility and, in various ways, legitimize the processes of 'green' product creation and consumption. Yet, commercial strengthening of the legitimacy–aesthetic nexus neglects a deeper dive into corporate responsibility, especially as it relates to non-human animal use. Discussed in the following section, the winter apparel company Canada Goose continues to fight social and legal allegations of animal cruelty in its use of coyote fur and goose down (i.e., a bird's fluffy undercoat)[4] for its winter jackets. This company, whose methods of trapping have gained Canadian media attention, has received scarce consideration in the literature (Gacek 2017). Further, to the author's knowledge, no scholarly attempts have been made to understand Canada Goose's methods as they relate to corporate greenwashing, thus, warranting further attention to this under-researched area. This case study speaks to several of the issues examined throughout the paper. Foremost, it reveals another unique connection between legitimacy and aesthetic, especially how we consider the fur industry and the harm imposed on non-human animals in the process.

The Case of Canada Goose[5]

Founded in Toronto, Canada, in 1957, Canada Goose has grown in popularity since its expansion into the international market in 2013. Indeed, “the company has even become something of a status symbol, with everyone from Emma Stone to Bradley Cooper spotted in Canada Goose coats” (Watling 2019: para. 1). In 2018, its stock price rocketed to USD$56 a share, and when it opened its first store in Beijing later that year, there were lines of customers waiting to purchase Canada Goose apparel (Watling 2019). Yet, the company’s growth has not been without controversy, as the increasing popularity of their jackets has given rise to an anti-Canada Goose movement in the West (Harris 2016; Stevens 2015; Watling 2019).

One of the main concerns with Canada Goose apparel has been the use of coyote fur to line jacket hoods. While the company has claimed that real fur helps to better protect faces from frostbite and extreme cold temperatures than synthetic fur, animal activists such as Animal Justice (2015) adamantly disagree. The Canadian animal rights organisation argues that the winter jacket manufacturer continues to engage in false and misleading advertising related to the welfare of animals trapped for their fur (Animal Justice 2015, 2016). Further, Animal Justice objects to the synthetic fur claim, retorting that no such evidence exists to validate that real fur provides greater protection; indeed, synthetic fur and other materials are regarded as highly warm and functional for winter jacket lining without the cause for animal mistreatment (Animal Justice 2015; Gacek 2017; The Canadian Press 2015).

According to Camille Labchuk, Director of Legal Advocacy for Animal Justice (2015: para. 4), Canada Goose’s claims of ethical and ‘humane’ trapping fly in the face of federal animal cruelty legislation, as it is well documented that “the fur trade engages in practices that most consumers do not consider humane”. This includes the use of traps that cause coyotes significant injury and suffering. On its website, Canada Goose “falsely describes killing coyotes for fur as humane, ethical, and responsible, and claims Canada is a world leader in humane trapping”; however, “this couldn’t be farther from the truth” (Animal Justice 2016: para. 2). In fact, the leg-hold traps, which are designed to hold but not kill the animals, have a plethora of issues, including:

> the serious injuries animals obtain from being held within the trap (severe bleeding, fractures, spinal cord injuries, etc.); the lack of traps checked by hunters, leaving animals to suffer from thirst, hunger, exposure to the elements and to other predators; the non-discriminatory nature of the trap, meaning that on occasion endangered species can be caught in them. (Gacek 2017: para. 4)

Further, there remains an inconsistency of cruelty provisions across provinces. That is, there are no requirements in some jurisdictions to check traps, meaning that animals injured but not killed can suffer indefinitely (Animal Justice 2015). Therefore, by claiming that fur trim on the jackets is an outcome of ‘humane’ animal treatment, “Canada Goose is preying on ethically-conscious consumers” (para. 4), according to Labchuk.

As a result, we can see how eco-marketing connects to a particular aesthetic at play. In the case of Canada Goose, enhanced notions of beauty, prestige and luxury (these jackets range between CAD$600–1000; Animal Justice 2016) become tied to personal wellbeing—that is, a better-looking, expensive jacket will warm and protect you and enhance your personal fulfilment. Personal legitimacy is evidenced here, given the increased demand for the company’s winter apparel (Watling 2019). Additionally, regarding its policy on fur and down, Canada Goose connects consumers' health to the environment. By outlining its ethical and 'humane' trapping measures, and further reassuring us that "all animals are entitled to humane treatment in life and death" (Canada Goose 2020: para. 2), this gives consumers permission to legitimize the company's products. In turn, and through social legitimacy, consumers then legitimize the commodities in question, as they believe the company, in 'good faith', upholds community values of morality, honesty and integrity.

Nevertheless, referring to these trapping methods as 'humane' is misleading and provides misinformation to consumers (Animal Justice 2015, 2016). A 'humane trap' does not mean an animal does not suffer, just that the animal "is suffering less than it would in another trap" (Watling 2019: para. 15). Yet, consumers will see 'humane' and believe that it refers to a cruelty-free process of creating winter apparel. As Watling (2019: para. 23) bluntly (and rightly) states:

> strip away all the nuance, though, [and] you're still left with one unavoidable fact: coyotes have to die to make Canada Goose jackets. And even if that's not an issue for you, there's no way to know exactly how much the animal suffered in the process.[6]

Evidently, the legitimacy–aesthetic nexus connects to the eco-marketing of Canada Goose products. Personal and social legitimacy become tools to enable green consumption of products; we see neoliberalism in action in the form of humane animal traps, yet the host of issues pertaining to such harmful instruments suggest that corporate practices do not come without costs to animal species. Given these concerns, perhaps now we must increase our efforts to challenge "sites and institutions in society where epistemologies of harm towards animals are naturalized and made possible" (Gacek 2019: 341; see also Morin 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper attempts to raise awareness of corporate greenwashing, highlighting how green criminological inquiry and species justice contributes to this discussion. Green criminology is a dynamic field that reflects how the social and natural environment is changing as we speak. As a harm-based discourse, green criminology includes not only violations of the law, but also individual, institutional and socially accepted activities, behaviours and practices. One major effect of greenwashing is the concern for both public confusion and public health, especially the harmful effects greenwashing can have on social and ecosystems alike (see Dahl 2010). While recognition and growing concern for the environment exists, many in the public still have a hard time navigating the "eco-babble" (Dahl 2010: A250). As a result, they are not properly or well-equipped to sort out authentic 'green' ad campaigns from the misguided or misleading ones, resulting in the purchase of products that do not carry the environmentally friendly or human health performances that they expect.

Corporations are continuously described as one of the key instigators of environmental problems; how they manage 'going green', whether on their own or through coercive legislative, regulatory or public influence, remains an ongoing challenge. As this paper demonstrates, while companies fortify a connection between legitimacy and aesthetic, they inevitably conceal large-scale concerns for human societies and ecosystems alike, and allow corporate greenwashing to persist. The case example of Canada Goose speaks to these very issues. The harm imposed on animals remains a pressing concern for species justice, a contemporary justice issue we must all face.

Perhaps 'humane' trapping is nothing more than oxymoronic—a set of activities, described as a series of fancy buzzwords, all of which are strategically designed to appeal to public sentiments towards green movements, yet devised to glaze over ostensible contradictions and incongruous elements of the methods and practices humane trapping permits. Unfortunately, the practices of Canada Goose to create jackets are not dissimilar from concerns witnessed in the farming or fur industry (Watling 2019; see also Morin 2018). In effect, "it comes down to how high your tolerance is for animal suffering" (Watling 2019: para. 30; see also Gacek 2019). Recognizing the rights of animals to be free from these harms speaks to the need to clarify the intended effects and unintended consequences of corporate greenwashing. The discussion in this paper truly begs the question: do you know what you are buying?

'Buying green', while upholding individual responsibility to preserve the planet, our natural resources and species other than humankind, does not fully solve the environmental problem. Until corporate responsibility completely and comprehensively encapsulates ecocentric principles and goals, it will be difficult to discern whether we will see corporate and environmental responsibility reconciled.

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[1] It is noteworthy that scholars interchange 'corporate greenwashing' with 'greenwashing' (e.g., see Laufer 2003; Ramus and Montiel 2005; Walker and Wan 2012). Individuals themselves may engage in their own attempts of greenwashing, but literature continues to recognize the severity and effect of greenwashing and ecologically and socially destructive corporate practices to the point that 'greenwashing' becomes synonymous with the corporate sector (e.g., see Ferguson 2009). Notwithstanding terminology, the heart of the matter remains the strategies in which corporations engage to demonstrate to the public their concern about environmental issues, without substantively acting upon them. Similar to Walker and Wan (2012), use of these terms depends on the context of discussion.

[2] Reference to animals in this paper concerns non-human animals, distinct from human beings.

[3] Drawing from Dahl (2010), adapted from TerraChoice Environmental Marketing (2009).

[4] In terms of coyote fur and goose down, debates have generally focused on the former more than the latter. For the sake of brevity, I too only focus on coyote fur in this discussion. Notwithstanding, the use of goose down in jackets remains a serious concern for the industry, and future research should direct attention to this pressing matter.

[5] Aspects of this discussion can be found in Gacek (2017). However, this paper builds on earlier concern of Canada Goose's practices with updated theoretical concepts and discursive analysis.

[6] While beyond the scope of the paper, consideration of animals used in the clothing company's jackets also calls into question the animal cruelty laws Western countries have in place, and whether such laws would be appropriate to safeguard these animals from unreasonable harm, injury and stress (Gacek and Jochelson 2017a, 2017b). Countries such as Great Britain and New Zealand have taken measures to update or enact effective animal cruelty legislation, yet Canada's anti-cruelty laws (introduced in 1892 with little to no actual amendments) ensure that even today, Canada "is no safe haven for animals" (Sankoff 2012: 294). Unfortunately, current federal anti-cruelty laws in Canada are 'antiquated and narrow' (Pask 2015), and "while other countries may consider Canada as one of the more social progressive and socially conscious countries, legal safeguards and protections for animals are qualified at best" (Gacek 2017: para. 5). Even official transcripts of Canadian parliamentary debates shed light on the government's failure to bring its nineteenth-century animal cruelty criminal laws into the twenty-first century (Verbora 2015). In fact, animals in Canada are arguably less safe than in developing countries like Ukraine or in the Philippines, both of which have stronger legislation in place to protect animals (Verbora 2015).

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