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Fracking Teco: Analyzing the Communication Strategies in Teco Peoples Gas Advertisements

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by

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Abstract

TECO advertisements promote the use of natural gas as an energy source because it claims that natural gas is an environmentally responsible alternative to other sources of energy. However, these advertisements do not reveal the not-so-green process, namely hydraulic-fracturing, or fracking, by which natural gas is produced and the consequences that it can and does have on public health and the environment. Even though the conversation about fracking has been on the rise in recent years as certain companies and politicians have pushed for an increase in natural gas production, scholars have yet to examine the communicative strategies used by energy companies, such as TECO, to disregard the environmental dangers associated with fracking and present natural gas extraction as both environmentally friendly and safe for consumers. Although there are numerous ways of analyzing the relationship between communication and greenwashing, I chose to examine the rhetorical choices, both written and spoken, and image choices embedded in TECO's greenwashing advertisements for natural gas. The use of communicative strategies in TECO's advertisements aim to create a dominant discourse of green consumerism, which works to shape society's understanding of what it means to be a consumer who strives to be environmentally responsible. My analysis was informed by Stuart Hall's theory of Encoding and Decoding (1973) and his theory of representation (1997). I argue that TECO presents the dominant code of the green consumer and my analysis offers an oppositional reading. The use of grounded theory provided me with a viable method to analyze TECO's advertisements because I was able gather and analyze

data from ten commercial advertisements, examine each individually for themes, and then discuss the ways in which TECO uses specific language, both written and spoken, and visual images, in its advertisements, in order to construct the meaning of natural gas and the identity of the natural gas consumer.

I. Introduction

TECO Energy is one of the Tampa Bay area's major domestic and commercial energy suppliers since 1899. In 2004, TECO switched one of its coal-based energy plants to natural gas. This led TECO to brand itself as "TECO Peoples Gas" and it began promoting the use of natural gas through its commercial advertisements. Despite the green reputation, which TECO Peoples Gas[1] has worked to achieve, this company didn't always advertise itself as environmentally-friendly (See Appendix I: Glossary of Terms). In November 1999, the Justice Department and the Environmental Protection Agency charged that Tampa Electric Company (TECO) violated the law at their power plants by making major modifications to the plants without installing equipment required to control smog, acid rain and soot ("U.S. settles landmark," 2000). The settlement required TECO Electric to pay a $3.5 million civil penalty, install permanent emissions-control equipment to meet pollution limits, and implement a series of interim pollution-reduction measures to reduce emissions while the permanent controls were designed and installed ("U.S. settles landmark," 2000). TECO also had to retire pollution emission allowances that Tampa Electric or others could use, or sell to others, that emit additional pollution into the environment. TECO's initial response to the lawsuit was one of a "surprise," stating in a news release: "First, at Tampa Electric, we comply with all environmental

[1] "TECO Peoples Gas" is a subsidiary of TECO Energy Inc, which sources natural gas from the Bayside Power Station for both residential and commercial consumers in the Tampa Bay area. "Tampa Electric" is

rules and regulations, including the Clean Air Act Amendments. In addition, we have made good-faith efforts to reduce emissions from our power plants even further" ("Tampa electric named," 1999). Included in this settlement was the requirement that TECO convert one of its coal-based energy plants, the Gannon Power Station, into a natural gas energy plant by 2004. This station is now known as TECO's "Bayside Power Station," located in Tampa, Florida. It provides natural gas to the surrounding area.

The lawsuit against TECO in 1999 and the settlement in 2000 pressured the company to reform its practices and rethink how it advertised to potential or existing customers. TECO Peoples Gas offered TECO Energy an opportunity to create a new identity focused on natural gas and present itself as a new, domestic, clean energy source. It was around this time that the idea of going green or being eco-friendly (See Appendix I: Glossary of Terms), gained popularity in the United States, and more and more businesses were inclined towards marketing themselves as such to compete with a growing demand of consumers who wanted environmentally responsible products and services. The opening of TECO's first natural gas plant in 2004 gave the company the opening to enter this green industry. Subsequently, TECO began to market itself as a green company. TECO was not the only natural gas company looking to take advantage of this booming green industry. In 2005, Congress under George W. Bush and former CEO of gas driller Halliburton, Dick Cheney, exempted fracking from the Safe Drinking Water Act, which allowed the natural gas industry to expand in the United States with very few regulations. TECO, as well as natural gas companies such as Chesapeake Energy, Exxon Mobil, and Encana have taken due advantage and have grown to create a

billion dollar industry, which advertises natural gas as a clean energy source (Kusnetz, 2011).

This thesis explores the communicative strategies[2] TECO uses to promote the use of natural gas as an environmentally responsible energy alternative to other energy sources. I analyze the communication strategies TECO uses to manufacture consumer perceptions of environmentally responsible practices through a textual analysis of 10 TECO TV and Internet commercials. My analysis is guided by constructivist grounded theory to explain the themes that emerge from the texts. This thesis offers an oppositional reading, which Stuart Hall (1973) defines as a moment in which a viewer understands both the literal and connotative inflections proffered by the dominant discourse and decodes the message in a contrary way by retotalizing the message within some alternative framework of reference (Hall, 1973). An oppositional reading allows one to read beyond dominant messages encoded in both language and visual texts. My thesis seeks to reveal the dominant code TECO uses to establish itself as an environment-friendly company and then to read beyond it.

Ultimately, the purpose of my thesis project is to consider the implications of knowledge production related to green consumption (See Appendix I: Glossary of terms) by focusing on corporate claims of promoting environmentally responsible consumption practices. By analyzing the commercial messages of TECO Peoples Gas, I explore the impact that such messages are likely to have on creating the consumer's conception of what it means to be a green energy consumer. TECO promotes the use of natural gas as an energy source because it claims to be an environmentally responsible alternative to

[2] Communication/Communicative strategies, in this context, can be described as the use of rhetorical word and visual image choices that TECO employs to create mainstream consumer notions of what it means to be green in the context of natural gas as a green energy source.

other sources of energy; but the advertisements do not reveal the not-so-green process, namely fracking, by which natural gas is produced and the consequences that it can and does have on public health and the environment (See Appendix I: Glossary of terms). I argue that TECO communicatively frames the green, responsible energy consumer in more senses than one. While it uses communicative strategies to underline how, by use of its natural gas, a consumer acts as a responsible green consumer (See Appendix I: Glossary of terms), the same strategies are used to deceive the consumer. Advertisers employ this phenomenon, known as greenwashing (See Appendix I: Glossary of terms), to frame a product, a service or a company's identity as environmentally responsible (Cox 2012). Here I focus on the greenwashing strategies TECO uses in its commercial advertisements.

Stuart Hall's articulation of representation is critical to this effort. Hall (1985, 1997) describes representation as a phenomenon in which visual images and texts function within a broader structure characterized by groups who wield power in a society and thereby influence what gets represented through the media. My analysis of TECO's advertisements is driven by the understanding that consumers have been culturally trained to view mediated images as a means of making sense of the world, which Hall describes as internalized "conceptual maps" (Hall 1997). The following section of this thesis explores literature on the theoretical notion of representation and ideology, the practice of greenwashing, the production and use of natural gas, and the communication strategies used to produce consumer perceptions about the environment and natural gas.

II. Literature Review

A. Representation and Ideology

Sociologist Stuart Hall argues for an alternative view for the notion of representation that gives it a more active and creative role in relation to the way people think about the world and their place within it. Introducing Hall's lecture on representation and the media, Sut Jhally states: "Hall shows that an image can have many different meanings and that there is no guarantee that images will work in the way we think they will when we create them" (Hall, 1997). Hall, taking cues from Edward Said (1979) and Michel Foucault (1980), argues that communication is always linked with power and that those groups who wield power in a society influence what gets represented through the media. Moreover, Hall argues that messages work in complex ways, and that they are always connected with the way power operates in society (Hall, 1985; 1997).

One method Hall uses to examine the intersections of knowledge and power is what he calls "interrogation of the image" (Hall, 1997). Hall argues that by examining the image, asking the difficult questions about it rather than simply accepting it at face value, one is working as "… a good interrogator [who] looks behind the suspect's story or alibi, … [to] probe inside and behind the image" (Hall, 1997, p.3). Media theorist Marshall McLuhan once said he wasn't sure who discovered water, but he was fairly certain it

wasn't the fish. Hall asks us to recognize that when we are immersed in something, surrounded by it the way were are by images from the media, we may come to accept them as part of the real and natural world. What cultural scholars, such as Hall, would like us to do is "Step out of the water in a sense and look at it, see how it shapes our existence, and even critically examine the content of the water" (Hall, 1997, p.3.).

Hall suggests that we may examine the "water" that surrounds us by considering the notion of representation. Central to the notion of representation is the idea of giving meaning. "Representation is the way in which meaning is somehow given to the things that are depicted through the images or whatever it is, on screens or the words on a page which *stand for* what we're talking about" (Hall, 1997). My thesis examines how TECO represents the use of natural gas, gives it meaning, and thereby works to construct consumers' understanding. Hall's argument that the message behind an image has no real or fixed meaning until it has been represented is particularly useful in this context. He writes:

> Representation doesn't occur *after* the event; representation is *constitutive* of the event. It enters into the constitution of the object that we are talking about...It is one of its conditions of existence, and therefore representation is not *outside* the event, not *after* the event, but *within* the event itself; it is constitutive of it. (Hall 1997)

Hall calls this a "signifying practice" in the production of meaning, which is circulated by the media. He says that the media are among the most powerful and extensive systems for the circulation of meaning" (Hall, 1997, p. 14). The increased use of media technologies such as the television and internet has resulted in a widespread circulation of meanings, which prompts Hall to suggest that we, as consumers of these messages, question *who* has the power to circulate these messages, in *what* channels, to circulate *which* meanings

and to *whom* (Hall, 1997). By examining those who circulate these messages, Hall argues that we must acknowledge that knowledge (such as being environmentally-responsible consumers), as ideological configurations of representation, is the result of specific practices involved in the production of meaning (Hall 1985).

B. Greenwashing and the Energy Consumer

As the popularity of going green has increased in recent years, companies such as TECO Peoples Gas have recognized the lucrative marketing opportunity that has accompanied consumer desires to adopt more environment-friendly lifestyles. People who want to use products and services that produce less of a negative effect on the environment are taking their business to companies that identify with their ideological aspiration to be green. To harvest this growing aspiration/demand, companies are pursuing advertisement campaigns to introduce new products or services that appeal to the eco-friendly consumer. The advertisements aim to present those products and services as green, clean, and safe, but these claims about the environmental benefits are often false or misleading (Maier 2011). Known as greenwashing, this corporate advertising strategy and advertisements that greenwash have flooded multimedia environments including television, newspapers, magazines and the Internet. For the purpose of this thesis project, I focused on TECO's greenwashing endeavors as they appear in television and Internet (video) advertisements.

Greenwashing by companies like TECO has been closely watched by the advertising consultancy TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. TerraChoice ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2007) published two reports on the subject and identified 2,219

products making “green” claims, which is an increase of 79% over such claims reported in its first report two years earlier. TerraChoice concluded that 98% of the companies producing these environment-friendly products were guilty of greenwashing. From the first study conducted in 2007, 1,753 environmental claims were recorded on 1,018 products. The resulting false or misleading claims were studied for patterns, now called the Six Sins of Greenwashing. Of the 1,018 products that made environmental claims, all but one committed at least one of the Six Sins**.** The “sins” serve as guidelines for marketers to distinguish between greenwashing advertisements and legitimate claims of environmental stewardship. As of 2010, an updated report by TerraChoice includes a total of seven “sins” They include: *Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off, Sin of No Proof, Sin of Vagueness, Sin of Irrelevance, Sin of the Lesser of Two Evils, Sin of Worshipping False Labels and the Sin of Fibbing* ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010). TerraChoice found that the *Sin of Hidden Trade-Off* accounted for the most greenwashed advertisements. It reveals a claim committed by a company suggesting that a product is green based on a narrow set of environmental attributes without attention to other important environmental issues. TerraChoice’s report provides this example for this *Sin of Hidden Trade-Off*: “Paper is not necessarily environmentally-preferable just because it comes from a sustainably-harvested forest. Other important environmental issues in the paper-making process, including energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and water and air pollution, may be equally or more significant” ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010).

As greenwashing in the media has been on the rise, the definition of the term has evolved so that a greenwashed service or product may not necessarily be one that harms the environment, but rather one that may not offer the suggested benefit to the

environment that it claims to provide. Some scholars have more broadly defined greenwashing as a variant of whitewashing in which parties "attempt to cover up or excuse wrongdoing through false statements or the biased presentation of data" (Coppolecchia, 2010, p.1354). Additionally, we see that strategic ambiguity is often used in corporate greenwashing advertisements to purposefully use language to express values at a stage of abstraction at which agreement can occur. This approach seeks to encourage individuals to focus on the more abstract concepts with which they agree, rather than the specific details with which they disagree (Paul & Strbiak, 1997, p. 150) Strategic ambiguity[3] is also likely evident in TerraChoice's (2010) *Sin of Vagueness,* which identifies "a claim that is so poorly defined that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the intended customer" ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010). For example, a company may label its product as "all-natural," but components such as arsenic, uranium, mercury, and formaldehyde are all naturally occurring, and poisonous ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010). Therefore, a product labeled "all-natural" may be committing a *sin of vagueness* and isn't necessarily green.

Corporations greenwash consumers by presenting a seemingly genuine storyline- about how green consumers should purchase a green product (See Appendix I: Glossary of Terms) to stay true to their eco-conscious selves. The concern here is that attempts by consumers to make environmentally-conscious choices are mediated by the companies who are disingenuous about their stewardship towards the environment. Consumers may find it hard to distinguish between advertisements from companies who are greenwashing

[3] Strategic ambiguity holds an important place in the tradition of organizational communication studies (Eisenberg, 1984). In my thesis I use the term to refer to the communication strategies used in company advertisements, which present ambiguous information.

and those from companies who do uphold sincere efforts at promoting a more eco-friendly consumer culture, such as household cleaner brand Seventh Generation ("Seventh generation," 2013). Due to the rise of the environmental movement (See Appendix I: Glossary of Terms), coupled with an increase in green marketing, consumers who purchase green products are often unaware that their desire to purchase these products is influenced by an eagerness to join the group of the moment (Coppolecchia, 2010).

Greenwashing may thus essentially threaten environmentally-responsible consumerism because consumers could become wary of all environmental products' claims due to the fact that green marketing terms remain ill-defined and ambiguous. Additionally, as I have stated before, we see that the use of strategic ambiguity is often used in corporate greenwashing advertisements to use language to express values at a stage of abstraction at which agreement can occur (Paul and Strbiak, 1997). Coupled with strategic ambiguity is the lack of consumer knowledge to completely assess products and services for their environmental merit (Paul and Strbiak, 1997). This lack of knowledge concerning environmental claims is accompanied by a growing cynicism toward such claims. Forty-seven percent of consumers surveyed by an agency specializing in "energy effciency and sustainability," called the Shelton Group, reported that most businesses were engaging in green practices for the sole purpose of creating a more favorable corporate image (Coppolecchia, 2010). Of significant concern is the fact that this growing cynicism and lack of thorough knowledge on environmental claims might eventually discourage consumers from buying environmentally-responsible products altogether. Corporate advertisers recognize the potential green goldmine they've struck by appealing

to the social consciousness of consumers. Therefore, interrogating and critiquing corporate greenwashing may possibly work towards combating the skepticism associated with trying to be a green consumer.

Adding to the greenwashing conundrum is the fact that environmental advertising in the United States is not tightly regulated. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the agency responsible for regulating unsubstantiated or unscrupulous advertising that misleads consumers, introduced environmental guidelines known as the Green Guides (Dahl 2010). They were created in 1992 and updated in 1998; since that time greenwashing has substantially increased and the green claims made by companies have been realigned to support current marketplace rhetoric, which encourages green growth. Further, the environmental terminology used by greenwashers is not currently addressed in the Green Guides (Dahl 2010). The FTC had planned to review and update the Green Guides in 2009, but the initiative was postponed to late 2010 based on the FTC Division of Enforcement's statement, which claimed that the increase in environmental marketing claims in many different sectors of the economy, in addition to the newer green claims such as "sustainable," and "carbon-neutral," resulted in the additional time required to frame the new guidelines. As of October 2010, the proposed revisions have been made, but have yet to be put together in an updated Green Guides.

Existing literature on greenwashing underscores the misleading claims that corporations make to espouse their environmental stewardship (Dahl 2010; Terrachoice: The sins," 2010; Coppolecchia, 2010). The literature also analyzes greenwashing warning signs that both critics and consumers should be aware of ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010). However, lacking in this literature is a comprehensive analysis of the communicative

strategies used by companies such as TECO to claim that they are green companies. My thesis project addresses this gap. I examine the communicative strategies, such as certain rhetorical word and visual image choices, that TECO employs to create mainstream consumer notions of what it means to be green in the context of natural gas as a green energy source. I deconstruct the greenwashing strategies and scripts in TECO's advertisements and argue that natural gas is not the environmentally-safe energy source TECO claims it is. While the subject of greenwashing gains more attention, both academic and nonacademic sources are analyzing and evaluating the impact this advertising tactic has on consumers and the corporations themselves. The information provided by nonacademic sources seems to be more thorough in their criticism and analysis of environmental claims (Dahl 2010; Terrachoice: The sins," 2010; Coppolecchia, 2010). They have given consumers the tools to recognize the presence of greenwashing in advertisements, but what is lacking is a discussion about the larger effect that language and images may have on society with regard to environmental stewardship. The goal of this thesis project is to expand this analysis into the academic realm, more specifically into the realm of environmental and health communication. In order to do so, I argue that one has to understand first what natural gas use entails and how it influences the ways meanings on health and the environment are made and shared. In the following section I explain how the process and the results of extracting natural gas, through fracking, is not an environment-friendly business after all.

C. Natural Gas and Fracking

Along with the rise of the greenwashing advertising trend, there has also been a perceptible increase in the promotion of natural gas by organizations and companies who project its use as the greener, cleaner, and safer, energy alternative to reduce the US's dependence on foreign oil ("TECO," 2013). Missing in this rhetoric is the fact that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking" (the process used to extract natural gas), is at the least a controversial process. This method of drilling for natural gas, by injecting more than a million gallons of water, sand and chemicals at high pressure down and across into horizontally drilled wells as far as 10,000 feet below the surface to cause fissures in rock and force natural gas to the surface, causes the rock layer, often marcellus shale, to crack. These fissures are held open by the sand particles so that the natural gas from the shale can flow up the well ("What Is Hydraulic Fracturing?" 2012). Some of the hazardous chemicals used in the fracking fluid include formaldehyde, methane, sulfuric acid, lead and benzene, all of which are considered carcinogens ("Committee democrats release," 2011). Thousands of cases of groundwater and water well contamination have been reported in areas surrounding hydraulic fracturing drill sites in regions of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and New York (Lustgarten, 2009, 2012; Groeger, 2012). Many of these reports have gained national attention in recent years. Despite the risks associated with fracking, natural gas companies are not subject to disclosing all the toxic chemicals used in the process; neither are they subjected to protecting underground drinking water sources (Kusnetz, 2011a; Currier, 2012).

Water contamination is a serious health and environmental threat associated with natural gas production, but just as serious is the emission of methane, a powerful

greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere. In a recent study, Duke University researchers discovered that groundwater in the areas near active fracking wells contained, on average, methane concentrations 17 times higher than wells located where fracking was not taking place ("Duke University study," 2011). Consequently, natural gas is touted as a greener energy source by companies such as TECO because carbon dioxide emissions associated with its use are much lower than emissions from use of conventional gas, oil, or coal ("Natural gas and,," 2011; "Epa clean energy," 2013); but the methane that is released during hydraulic fracturing is an exponentially more harmful greenhouse gas (Howarth, Santoro & Ingraffea, 2011; McKibben, 2013; Roberts, 2012; Tollefson, 2013). Methane has a far greater effect on climate change than carbon dioxide because its potency contributes to an increased greenhouse effect; even small leakages can have very serious consequences for the atmosphere, such as accelerating the effects of climate change (Lustgarten, 2012). Moreover, the methane in unburned natural gas is twenty to one hundred times more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas (McKibben, 2013). Cases of explosions have been reported by people whose well water was contaminated with gas that leaks during fracking. Several of these explosions were responsible for injuries and deaths of people, including a baby in Pennsylvania in 2004 (Lustgarten, 2011).

Even though the conversation about fracking has been on the rise in recent years as certain companies and politicians have pushed for an increase in natural gas production, scholars have yet to examine the communicative strategies used by energy companies to disregard the environmental dangers associated with fracking and present natural gas extracted through fracking as both environment friendly and safe for

consumers. Energy companies advertise natural gas as a flawless energy source, but seldom do these companies expose their consumers to the process of fracking (Kusnetz, 2011b) as they go about contributing to the production of green knowledge.

D. Production of Green Knowledge

Natural gas companies like TECO have been critiqued by communication scholars, such as Lakoff (2010) and Cox (2012), who have argued that natural gas is not the ideal environmentally responsible energy source that companies claim it is. However, lacking in this academic discourse is the consideration that the communication strategies used by natural gas companies are responsible for the production of what has become green knowledge for consumers. The advertisements produced by TECO Peoples Gas involve specific strategies, languages and images, aimed at depicting natural gas as an environment-safe, responsible and clean energy source. Using the commanding position as one of Tampa Bay area's only energy companies, TECO produces the dominant discourse regarding the use of natural gas by legitimizing its production and consumption (Cox 2012). I intend to analyze the communication strategies, including both language and images, that TECO uses in its advertisements to shape the dominant discourse regarding green energy. In addition, I explore the ways in which TECO produces consumer subjects who are constituted by a false benevolence that, on the one hand, soothes the conscience of the green consumer, and on the other hand, reproduces the conditions of environmental degradation they claim to oppose.

For example, TECO molds the dominant discourse on green energy by promoting natural gas as the clean and efficient energy source through visual rhetorics (Cox 2012).

Depictions of babies, children and happy/smiling/active families invoke ideas of the cleanness and freshness of natural gas as well as a consumer's responsibility towards future generations and the environment; images of dollar bills and American flags urge consumers to envision natural gas as the home-grown answer to the nation's energy crisis. Olson, Finnegan, and Hope (2008) point out in their study, *Visual Rhetoric,* that*,* "public images often work in ways that are rhetorical; that is, they function to persuade." The images/visual rhetorics, which are found in the TECO commercials and videos advertisements act in this way by influencing our perceptions or the way we see certain aspects of natural gas and it's relationship to the environment, as well as by constructing what viewers conceive to be an environmental problem. While the natural world (See Appendix I: Glossary of terms) surely affects us, our symbolic action*,* including images, also affects our perceptions of nature itself. All images, of course, are artifacts; they are human made. They select certain aspects of the world (and not others), certain angles of vision, frames, and ways of composing this larger reality. As a result, visual representations influence meaning; they suggest an orientation to the world (Cox 2012). Linked to visual rhetoric is the idea of employing rhetorical tropes (Cox 2012) to frame consumer ideologies[4] and habits. Rhetorical tropes refer to the use of words that turn a meaning from its original sense in a new direction for a persuasive purpose. A common trope, the metaphor, is often used to compare the life sustaining nature of planet Earth to a mother, while others call our personal contribution to warming the planet a footprint (Cox 2012).

[4] The collection of beliefs, attitudes, and values held by consumers regarding corporations, products, and consumption.

Framing offers another critical theoretical concept to analyze advertisements. Lakoff (2010) discusses the impact that framing in advertising messages has, stating that the messages have the potential to invoke an emotional response. The emotional connection viewers make with an advertisement, however, does not form on its own**.** It is connected to an existing system of frames, which have been introduced through other media messages. This process in effect creates ideologies, which have been continuously built upon to inform opinions and preferences (Lakoff 2010). I argue that natural gas vendors, such as TECO, have framed their energy source as the clean alternative to oil and coal while neglecting to include any of the negative aspects of natural gas. As communication scholar Robert Entman (1993) explained, "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient...in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, more evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 56). By framing natural gas as the clean alternative, TECO aids in the construction of the consumers' knowledge about natural gas and its effect on the environment.

The use of communicative strategies in TECO advertisements, such as visual rhetoric, rhetorical tropes and choices, and frames, work to create a dominant discourse of green consumerism, which helps to shape society's understanding of what it means to be a consumer who strives to be environmentally responsible. Consumers who consciously choose to buy from companies that advertise themselves as ecologically safe, clean, and green, may be influenced by the dominant, pervasive discourse of greenwashing advertisements. The influence of greenwashing advertisements may ultimately dilute the broader intentions of the environmental movement, which actively

supports the notion of legitimate environmentally-responsible consumption practices by consumers, such as buying reusable water bottles instead of using plastic bottles (Shiva, 2005; McKibben, 2011; Cox, 2012). It would be fair to suggest that the environmental movement has put pressure on businesses to fulfill the growing number of customers' expectations and desires for eco-friendly products and services. As well, we must be critical of the advertisements broadcast to us and the dominant codes embedded in companies' advertising strategies. This thesis poses the following questions to generate a critique of TECO's advertisements: a) What are the communication strategies TECO uses to represent natural gas as the optimal alternative to other energy sources? b) How do these strategies work to shape the dominant discourse regarding green energy? The following section details the method used to address these questions.

III. Methodology/Methods

A. Textual Analysis Supported by Constructivist Grounded Theory

I use constructivist grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz 2009) to conduct a textual analysis of TECO's television and online advertisements. Mckee (2003) tells us that a text is something we make meaning from, and it ranges anywhere between a television show to a magazine. For the purpose of this thesis project, the texts I analyzed were TECO's commercial advertisements, related to natural gas consumption, on television and the Internet. Through textual analysis of TECO's advertisements, I make an educated guess about some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of the texts (language and images in the advertisements) (Mckee 2003).

Environmental communication scholars are united by their topical focus on communication and human relations with the environment (Milstein 2009). Many of these scholars are particularly concerned with the ways people communicate about the natural world because "they believe that such communication has far-reaching effects at a time of largely human-human environmental crisis" (Milstein 2009, p. 344). Further, environmental communication scholars often examine the ways in which the environment is represented in media messages and how these images are informed by social, economic and political contexts and interests (Milstein 2009; Cox, 2012). This idea is supported by the social-symbolic perspective, which focuses on the sources that constitute or construct

our perceptions of what we consider to be a natural or an environmental problem (Cox, 2012). Thus, the images, the language in media messages, and other mediated sources become the texts, which environmental communication scholars analyze to interpret their likely effects on the public. My decision to conduct a textual analysis of TECO advertisements is guided by a similar environmental communication perspective; it seeks to examine the representation of natural gas and its consumption in current media messages.

The textual analysis I conducted is also guided by what Charmaz (2009) calls constructivist grounded theory. Charmaz explains that grounded theory offers qualitative scholars a versatile approach for collecting, managing, and analyzing data; this, in turn, acts as a nodal point around which researchers discuss contemporary debates in qualitative inquiry, and by extension, the production of knowledge and scientific theorizing. This approach assumes a relativist epistemology, which sees knowledge as socially produced (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a result of grappling with empirical problems (Charmaz 2009). In the context of my research project, the text and images in TECO advertisements act as a source of knowledge, whereby TECO constructs ideas about natural gas consumption. I transcribed and coded the text in the advertisements to arrive at distinct themes, which helps me address my research questions mentioned above. Adopting a constructivist grounded theory as a model for my textual analysis allows me to formulate meanings from the broad themes that emerged in coding and analyzing the TECO advertisements.

Given that grounded theory offers scholars a flexible approach for data collection and analysis, this method has been used across disciplines and methodological urgencies.

Health communication scholars such as Basu and Dutta (2009) utilized grounded theory when analyzing audio-recorded participant interviews. They relied on a constant-comparative method of analysis of the transcribed interview conversations, where data analysis proceeded side by side with data gathering until conceptually dense theory was derived from the data. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were systematically used to test the fit of new pieces of data with the emerging theoretical frameworks. Other communication scholars have utilized the grounded theory approach to analyze communication strategies constituted on Internet websites. Pal and Dutta (2012) use this approach to thematically analyze texts on a website and theorize how such a textual analysis helps to locate such web spaces as sites of collective resistance and social change for organizations and communities. I argue that my textual analysis of TECO's advertisements provides insight into how TECO produces meanings associated with consuming natural gas and the relationship of such consumption patterns to the environment. By utilizing grounded theory, I hypothesized that a critical understanding would emerge as a result of coding data and analyzing the emergent common threads/themes. The use of grounded theory provided me with a viable method to analyze TECO's advertisements because I was able gather and analyze data from ten commercial advertisements, examine each individually for themes, and then discuss the ways in which TECO uses specific language, both written and spoken, and visual images, in its advertisements, in order to construct the meaning of natural gas and its usage. At the core of constructivist grounded theory is the belief that reality, the words and images we see and hear, are always socially constructed and therefore are always interpreted.

The motivation for conducting this study is informed by my stance as an environmental activist wherein I hold the belief that environmental communication scholarship should critically engage with both the understanding of human-nature relations as well as aid in social-environmental change. My calling as an environmental advocate sparked my interest to analyze greenwashing advertisements, specifically TECO's advertisements for natural gas, which flood the Tampa Bay area's local television channels. I am encouraged by recent conversations within environmental communication studies, which have been interested in the ethical role of scholars to explain ecological crisis, while ultimately working towards social-environmental change (Milstein, 2009). Furthermore, I believe environmental communication scholars have the opportunity to analyze and critique the structures of corporate power, such as TECO, which have directly contributed to climate change and harmful ecological phenomena. This thesis offers a critical perspective aimed at deconstructing natural gas-related greenwashing, which I believe threatens the legitimate understanding and advancement of the environmental movement.

B. Data Collection

Ten video advertisements, which were uploaded onto YouTube by "TECO Energy Inc." and three TECO television commercials served as the texts/data for my project. "TECO Energy Inc." has posted approximately sixteen videos, including public service announcements, on the YouTube page. I chose ten advertisements that offered me the broad range of ideas I aimed to analyze. Each of the commercials and videos are no longer than thirty-seconds, providing me abundant data in easily manageable segments. I

transcribed the texts -- the words spoken, words written, and the visual images -- associated with each of the advertisements. The transcribed texts acted as the foundation for my analysis of communicative strategies embedded in the advertisements. The following is an example of a transcribed text from one of TECO's videos:

> What carbon footprint are you leaving for your children? When just one household switches their non-gas water heater to natural gas, it removes about 3,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air every year. 3,000 pounds, gone. Here's what you can do to leave a lighter footprint for them: Switch to a natural gas water heater and get up to $525 back from TECO peoples gas. Leave a lighter carbon foot print for them. Visit Peoplesgas.com to learn more. (TECO Energy Inc 2010).

> In this advertisement, a baby is walking around an empty white room, wearing only a diaper and has what appears to be, a dark, oil-like substance on his feet, which is tracked with his movement around the room. The image acts as a visual rhetoric (Olson, Finnegan & Hope 2008) to influence our perceptions of oil as an energy source in comparison to natural gas, while simultaneously constructing our understanding of a "carbon footprint." By the end of this video, viewers read and hear the announcement: "Switch to a natural gas water heater and get up to $525 back from TECO peoples gas. Leave a lighter carbon footprint for them. Visit Peoplesgas.com to learn more" ("YouTube" 2010). At this time, the baby's feet are clean and the solution TECO wants us to see is clear. TECO attempts to persuade us that a switch to a natural gas water heater will leave a lighter carbon footprint for our future generations. I am guessing that this is the conjoined transcript of the ad because that is how I think it should be. In that case, let the words and your explanation of the visuals come together in the same format in two paragraphs. (See appendix II for all transcriptions)

To expand on and scale my interpretations of the TECO advertisements, I also fell back on the text and images from the trailer of the documentary film *Gasland*, which reveals the process in which natural gas is extracted and the effects it has on communities surrounding such extraction sites. The documentary follows filmmaker Josh Fox on a

cross-country odyssey, uncovering the lies, deception and contamination of citizens' water sources by natural gas companies in the United States ("Gasland ," 2013). The text and images from the documentary's trailer, retrieved from gaslandthemovie.com, served to support or negate my arguments on TECO's representation of natural gas in the media.

C. Data Analysis

The constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) provided the overall philosophy to analyze data for my project. This means that data—texts and visuals— were coded for themes inherent within each of the commercials and videos. This approach allowed me to enlist a systematic process of interpretation where theory emerges from data collected from the commercials and videos, as well as identify exemplars to support the themes/theories.

Through induction, data was collated using a constant comparative technique of identifying categories and trends rendered from the texts. Thus, the analysis was an instinctive process of open, axial, and selective coding. The goal of *open coding*, writes Strauss (1987), "is to *open up* the inquiry. Every interpretation at this point is tentative...Whatever is wrong in interpreting those lines and words will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry" (p.29). This first step in the coding process allowed me the flexibility to explore as many potential themes as possible. I narrowed down the themes using *axial coding. Axial coding* involves identifying relationships among these themes, recognizing patterns of meaning and interconnectedness. This step tends to affect a theme in several ways: "The [*casual*] conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is

embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the consequences of those strategies" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 97). A*xial coding* helped me bring previously separate categories together under a principle of interrogation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The final step of constructivist grounded theory, *selective coding,* entails drawing distinctions between these relationships/principles of interrogation in order to make broader claims about the theoretical underpinnings of knowledge production (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). At this stage the relationships among the distinct themes are established at a more abstract level and are validated by returning to the data and finding evidence to support or refute the relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data analysis concluded when no new significant categories or relationships emerged.

After transcribing each of the ten advertisements, both text and images, I used *open coding* as a preliminary analytic step. During this phase of coding, the fewest number of open codes that emerged from an individual advertisement was nine, and the largest number that emerged from an advertisement was twenty-two. While certain advertisements were densely packed with verbal messages, others relied more heavily on the use of images, or what I argue are visual rhetorics. During the *open coding* process, I allowed myself the flexibility to record as many possible codes as I could find, but it was already apparent that certain codes, such as "natural gas" and "money" were emerging in almost all of the advertisements. In the next round of data analysis, *axial coding*, I began the process of identifying relationships among the open codes. I interrogated the possible patterns of meaning and interconnectedness that these codes share, such "green," "clean," and "efficiency." In the final phase of data analysis, *selective coding*, I was able to draw

together the relationships between the major axial codes in order to formulate the broader theoretical arguments/themes regarding the theoretical underpinnings of "green" knowledge production.

Four themes emerged from this process. They are: 1) Natural Gas is Green, Clean and Efficient, 2) Natural Gas is American and Reduces Foreign Oil Dependence, 3) Natural Gas is Safe, Reliable and Comforting, and 4) Natural Gas Saves Money. Although the themes appear distinctly labeled from each other, I argue that they are ultimately all interconnected to explain how natural gas is presented as a green energy source. The theme "Natural Gas is Green, Clean, and Efficient," appeared in eight of the advertisements I analyzed, and "Natural Gas is American and Reduces Foreign Oil Dependence," appeared in three advertisements. The theme "Natural Gas is Safe, Reliable, and Comforting," appeared in four advertisements, and "Natural Gas Saves Money" appeared in nine of the advertisements I analyzed. As mentioned above, in addition to thematically analyzing the TECO advertisements, I also used grounded theory to transcribe the text--words and visuals--in the fifty-two second trailer of the documentary "Gasland," and coded it for themes. I compared these themes with the themes that emerged from my analysis of the TECO advertisements.

The following section includes my findings and offers and analysis of each theme and an overall discussion of TECO's advertisements on natural gas.

IV. Findings and Discussion

In 2011 journalist Nicholas Kusnetz reported on a pro-fracking advertisement created by ExxonMobil, which was part of a $2 million advertising campaign produced by the gas giant aimed assuring people that natural gas drilling is safe (Kusnetz, 2011b). The advertisement, a full-page spread in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, features a fracking well that looks like it extends more than a mile and half beneath the surface. It includes a close-up of the layers of steel and cement that are supposed to protect the surrounding earth from the gas and fluids inside the well pipe (Kusnetz, 2011b). The prominent text in the advertisement reads: "An amazing resource for Americans. A responsible way to produce it" (Kusnetz, 2011b). Kusnetz critiques the advertisement because it implies that these layers of protection extend all the way down the well, although the majority of natural gas wells do not (a fact acknowledged by an Exxon spokesperson). Kusnetz argues that the depiction of the gas well's protective barrier in this advertisement is inaccurate and produces a false representation for the process of fracking (Kusnetz, 2011b).

I agree with Kusnetz's criticism of the ExxonMobil advertisement for its inaccuracies and misrepresentations. The company's seemingly straightforward informative advertisement works to only give a partial account of the fracking procedure, which I found emulates some of the ways in which TECO advertises its natural gas service. Both companies employ the trope of uncertainty to produce ambiguity (Cox,

2012) about natural gas and its extraction process in the minds of consumers. This trope of uncertainty functions to nurture doubt in the public's perception of scientific claims, while also altering the public's understanding of what is at stake with regards to the environment and surrounding communities. Coupled with the use of producing uncertainty and doubt, the TECO advertisements reconstitute our understanding of natural gas by propagating certain representative ideas. These are discussed next.

A. Natural Gas is Green, Clean and Efficient

Of the ten TECO advertisements I analyzed, nearly every one promoted natural gas as an environmentally responsible, clean and efficient energy source. "Living[5]" (see appendix for a transcript of this and other advertisements that I analyzed) depicts a mother who uses natural gas successfully accomplishing two things: making a house with more valuable amenities for her, while fueling a better environment for her family. The visual scene opens to a warm, well furnished home that appears to be comforting a middle to upper-middle class American family. A woman is cooking on a gas stove and shopping vegetables on a granite countertop. The kitchen has rich hardwood counter-tops and bottles of wine are placed on a shelf in the distance. As natural gas is represented as the "natural choice," TECO attempts to convince consumers that by using natural gas, we are making the best choice for both the comfort and well being our family and the well being of the environment.

"Natural Gas. Clean and Green," another advertisement, presents a clear argument by TECO that natural gas is an environmentally friendly energy source because it

5 These are labels that I have used to separate and describe the TECO advertisements I analyzed. See Appendix II for a description of each of them.

"conserves energy and can reduce greenhouse gases up to 70%." This advertisement urges consumers to use natural gas because TECO is "growing a cleaner, greener future for the ones who matter most." This speaks to the need for protecting the environment for future generations. This same advertisement ends with TECO requesting that consumers adopt the same environmental stewardship: "TECO Peoples Gas wants you to live clean and green with natural gas."

Similarly, "PGS Carbon Foot Print with Natural Gas Commercial" discusses how natural gas reduces greenhouse gases when consumers switch their non-gas water heater to natural gas. First, consumers are asked: "What carbon footprint are you leaving for your children?" Next, consumers learn that when a household switches its non-gas water heater to natural gas, it removes about "3,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from air every year." Finally, TECO presents to viewers the solution for reducing their carbon footprints: "Here's what you can do to leave a lighter footprint for them -- switch to a natural gas water heater and get up to $525 back from TECO peoples gas. Leave a lighter carbon foot print for them ("Youtube" 2010)." This advertisement exemplifies TerraChoice's Hidden Trade-Off "sin" ("Terrachoice: The sins," 2010) because they claim that the use of natural gas will reduce harmful carbon dioxide, greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, but they don't acknowledge that the production of natural gas generates high amounts of methane, an even more harmful greenhouse gas (Tollefson, 2013).

"Natural Gas. Here and Now" presents natural gas as an environmentally-responsible option because it is stated that the energy source is clean and efficient. This advertisement also states that TECO Peoples Gas provides consumers with the energy for

the future, suggesting that natural gas is an environmentally-responsible energy source, which consumers can depend on today and in the long term. The "PGS Reduce Dependence of foreign oil with natural gas" advertisement focuses on the opportunity to reduce our country's dependence on foreign fossil fuels by using natural gas, while simultaneously reinforcing how natural gas benefits the environment. The spokesperson in this advertisement goes so far as to say that natural gas is "priceless for the environment."

"PGS Tankless vs. Tank Water Heater" focuses on the efficiency of natural gas appliances, specifically tankless water heaters. The spokesperson argues that the decision to switch to a natural gas tankless water heater is a "no brainer," and that by doing so one can reduce water heating bills in half, receive endless hot water for the next 20 years, and conserve energy. Additionally, when "TECOEnergyInc" uploaded this advertisement on October 21, 2010, they included additional text below the viewing box, which read: "Natural gas tankless water heating technology offers many advantages over a standard tank model, including energy savings and carbon dioxide reduction. Why are you not using natural gas in your home" ("Youtube" 2010)? "The Pros know." suggests that working professionals rely on natural gas for its cleanliness and efficiency. A football player states: "My motto, 'dirty plays, clean locker room.'" A high school principle says: "Energy bills down. Productivity up. Class dismissed." Finally, a businessperson asks: "The difference between surviving and thriving? Clean efficient operation." When this advertisement was published on October 21, 2010, the text below the viewing box included the following: "Hotels and other businesses with big laundry needs all know that

energy efficient natural gas is the best fuel for their needs. Why aren't you using natural gas in your home" ("Youtube" 2010)?

The TECO advertisements, which focus on the theme "Natural gas is green, clean and efficient," provide clear verbal messages to consumers urging them to believe that natural gas is not only a better choice than fossil fuels, but that it is in fact an environment-friendly, green energy source. Along with these texts are numerous visual representations embedded in the advertisements. These images also aim to reinforce the message that natural gas is green.

"PGS Reduce Carbon Foot Print with Natural Gas Commercial," uses a baby as the primary image for this advertisement. This seemingly confused and distressed baby walks around a white room with a black, oily substance on his or her feet. As he walks around the room he tracks black footprints across the white floor. As viewers watch the baby walk around the white room, the spokesperson asks: "What carbon footprint are you leaving for your children?" The image of the baby with black, oily feet provides visual reinforcement for the idea that natural gas is the green alternative to dirty fossil fuels, which is further exemplified at the end of the advertisement when the baby's feet are clean and no longer tracking a footprint around the room. Viewers see a sharp contrast between the white of the room, the white of the baby's skin and the blackness of the oily feet. This gives the impression that white depicts cleanliness, and the black depicts the idea of not being clean. This particular advertisement utilizes the rhetorical trope known as a metaphor as a communicative strategy. It argues that natural gas is a more efficient energy source than coal, and that using natural gas results in a consumer's "carbon footprint" to be decreased by the use of natural gas. The baby's black footprints assert the

comparison of the consumer's own carbon footprint, which TECO suggests will be lessened by using natural gas.

"Living," "Natural Gas. Here and Now," "Natural Gas. Clean and Green," and "Savings," provide subtle visuals supporting the theme of natural gas as clean and green. Even if there doesn't appear to be any clearly visible images suggesting eco-friendliness within each of these three advertisements, the green colors and neutral, natural colors color a consistent backdrop. Additionally, the actors are often wearing colors, which invoke associations with the environment. In "Natural Gas. Clean and Green," the mother and daughter are wearing solid green and blue outfits while cutting and arranging a bouquet of flowers, invoking ideas of the natural outdoor environment and furthering an affinity towards environmentalism (See appendix I: Glossary of terms).

"PGS Tankless vs Tank Water Heater" features an animated water heater tank, which is made to appear with the features of an elderly man, with glasses, a cane, long beard and a feeble voice. The spokesperson tells viewers that this old water heater is inefficient and unreliable, and suggests that by switching to a tankless water heater, consumers will save money on water heating bills and can be assured the appliance will "crank out endless hot water for the next 20." By using the image of an elderly man and the water heater tank, TECO implies that using anything other than a tankless water heater is inefficient and obsolete, whereby switching to natural gas will provide consumers with a dependable and new-age energy-conserving appliance. This advertisement also has a "Natural Gas" logo in the bottom right-hand corner. Next to these words is an outline of a fire-flame in blue, suggesting the flame sparked by natural gas, and inside this flame is a bright green colored leaf enclosed in the flame. These

overlaying images, I argue, add to the representation of natural gas as a pristine (blue) and green (leaf) energy source. This again tries to connect to its pristine nature, which in itself is a signifier of greenwashing suggesting that TECO cares to protect the natural world. The color of the font chosen for the "Teco Peoples Gas" logo in many of these advertisement is green; the information on the amount of money one can obtain in rebates or savings when one switches to natural gas appliances is also in green.

In my discussion on the theme, "Natural Gas is green, clean and efficient," **i**t is apparent that TECO has deployed specific words, phrases and visual images in order to communicate to viewers the notion that natural gas is a green energy source. These word choices and visual rhetorics aim to construct the public's perception of natural gas, while producing what is believed to be the issues associated with oppositional energy sources, such as coal. TECO aims to transform the meanings of terms like "natural gas," and "environment," into dominant conceptions, which shape our understanding of those terms. TECO creates this dominant code (Hall, 1973) by utilizing commercial advertisements as a means of distributing a mainstream understanding of natural gas consumption. My oppositional reading (Hall, 1997) of TECO's advertisements on natural gas use recognizes that green energy and green consumption are constituted by the theme "natural gas is clean, green and efficient." However, I argue that this theme is a corporate fantasy dressed up in the use of images and language to promote environmental responsibility. To imagine this as responsible is to ignore all the dangers posed by fracking, which goes strategically omitted in TECO's symbolic activity (Hall, 1997).

TECO promotes the use of natural gas as an energy source because it claims that natural gas is an environmentally responsible alternative to other sources of energy, but

the advertisements do not reveal the not-so-green process of fracking. TECO strategically avoids any mention of fracking or even from where the company's natural gas is sourced. This begs the question of whether or not TECO is attempting to withhold this information for fear that the reality about natural gas extraction would deter consumers. Furthermore, TECO Peoples Gas, a subsidiary of "TECO Energy" works to separate its identity from that of the parent company, which operates five coal based power plants ("Teco power stations," 2013). These coal based power plants produce the harmful carbon dioxide greenhouse gas, which TECO Peoples Gas actively advocates against in its advertisements for natural gas. It would appear that TECO is looking to maximize its relationship with energy consuming audiences by exploiting an apparent contradiction. One the one hand, TECO depends on the profitable coal-based power plants; and on the other hand and at the same time, markets itself as the green, and hence, ethically superior energy producer with TECO Peoples Gas.

As disconcerting as TECO touting itself as an environmentally-responsible energy producer is its failure to acknowledge the communities in the United States who have been adversely affected by natural gas fracking. Since 2005, natural gas companies across the country led a surge in gas production, causing unforeseen contamination of our nation's freshwater aquifers, drinking well, and surrounding ecosystems (Lustgarten, 2009; 2011; Kusnetz 2011a; Groeger, 2012). This water contamination has caused illnesses, and explosions (Lustgarten, 2009). Fracking fluids contaminating drinking water sources include: formaldehyde, sulfuric acid, benzene and lead, all of which are carcinogens (Groeger, 2012; "Committee democrats, 2011"). For example, in July of 2008, a hydrologist dropped a plastic sampling pipe 300 feet down a water well in rural

Sublette County, Wyoming, and pulled up a load of brown oily water with a foul smell. Tests showed it contained benzene, a chemical believed to cause anemia and leukemia, in a concentration 1,500 times the level safe for people (Lustgarten, 2008). This specific case was the first fracking-related water contamination documented by a federal agency, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. More than 1,000 other cases of fracking-induced contamination have been documented by courts and state and local governments in Colorado, New Mexico, Alabama, Ohio and Pennsylvania (Lustgarten, 2008).

Furthermore, contamination is not the only danger associated with fracking. Between one and eight million gallons of fresh water are used to frack a single well and each well may be fracked up to 18 times (Lustgarten, 2012; "How much water," 2013). Comparatively, 11,000 American families use approximately 4.4 million gallons of water per day, which is also enough to fill six Olympic size swimming pools ("How much water," 2013). Additionally, nearly half of the wells drilled in the U.S. in recent years are located in river basins with high or extremely high risk of water stress ("Report: Half of," 2013). Water stressed regions are areas where it is difficult to obtain fresh water because the resource is depleting. TECO makes no mention of the toxic fracking fluids, water contamination or the ecological effects of fracking, illustrating, possibly, the duplicity behind marketing the company as a caring, responsible, green energy producer.

TECO presents the green, responsible energy consumer in many ways. The individuals and families depicted in each of the advertisements analyzed appeared of middle to high socioeconomic status, which suggests that TECO is marketing to such an audience base. The well-maintained and somewhat lavish, natural gas-fueled houses in these advertisements seemed to be the prominent signifier for this claim, that TECO's

advertisements are aimed primarily towards middle to upper class, mostly Caucasian, consumers. The process of switching your old appliances to natural gas appliances is an expensive conversion, which alludes to the socially exclusionary undertones embedded in TECO's advertisements (See theme *Natural Gas saves money and our economy* for conversion expense details**).**

The green consumer TECO aims to attract is moderately wealthy, educated, and predominately Caucasian, emphasizing the possible ramifications of a dominant discourse of green consumerism. The words and images TECO chose for these advertisements construct the meaning of what it means to be an environmentally conscious consumer – socially conspicuous and financially abundant upward classes of our society who can relate to the depictions on the screen. Shiva (2005) writes that with respect to environmental issues, such as the water contamination from natural gas fracking, ecological hazards are most often most pervasive in low-income communities because corporations can easily dispose of toxic waste in these areas due to little oversight (related to these particular areas) by both local and national government agencies. This speaks to the fact that TECO presumably doesn't intend to advertise to low-income consumers. A true sign of environmental stewardship recognizes that going green cannot solely come from affluent citizens. It requires effort from all socio-economic levels of society to combat ecological issues (Shiva, 2005). It should be noted that the majority of the global ecological crises can be blamed on corporations like TECO who extract natural resources and inequitably distribute environmental hazards into low-income, often minority communities (Cole & Foster, 2001; Shiva, 2005).

Lastly, TECO seeks to construct the identity, or partial identity, of its potential or established customers through its advertisements. The words and images embedded in its advertisements would not be effective if not associated with a kind of claim on the consumer's identity. TECO advertisements serve as a means of attracting consumers who are, or aim to be, environmentally-conscious individuals. Advertising often works by attempting to win identification with potential customers in which we may ask: "What is the degree to which, in some way, you can project yourself into the image so that you can place yourself within the field of what is being represented to you" (Hall, 1997, p. 16)? TECO hopes that consumers see themselves in the advertisements and that they identify with the images the company has chosen to associate with natural gas consumption. These image choices, such as the baby with oily feet, aim to construct a green consumer identity, which advocates environmentally-responsible choices and behaviors. Viewers see the repetitive use of these images, which may foster a belief that TECO is a green company; therefore by purchasing and/or aligning with TECO Peoples Gas, viewers can conceivably identify as green consumers.

B. Natural Gas is American and Reduces Foreign Oil Dependence

Many of the TECO advertisements I analyzed advocate the idea that using natural gas promotes domestic, American energy use and will decrease our country's dependence on foreign oil. By using natural gas produced in the United States, TECO argues in "PGS Reduce Dependence of Foreign Oil," that consumers will conserve energy and rely less on foreign oil, while our country saves "billions each week" by using a domestic energy source. This advertisement even states that in addition to reducing our dependence on

foreign oil, using natural gas is also "priceless for the environment." The spokesperson urges our country, and the consumer, to "break the cycle and clean up our act," by switching to natural gas.

"Natural Gas. Here and Now," also attempts to convince consumers that by switching to natural gas, consumers can help reduce America's dependence on foreign oil. Consumers hear that "America has enough clean, efficient natural gas to last us well into the next century." The suggestion that natural gas can be used into then next century aims at convincing the consumer that our country no longer needs to outsource foreign oil because we have a plentiful energy source in natural gas already. Along with the messages in this advertisement, "TECOEnergyInc" posted the following below the video screen on Youtube on August 22, 2012:

> How can you help America reduce its use of foreign oil? Natural Gas. The supply of natural gas in the U.S. is enough to satisfy the diverse energy needs of our country today, and for more than 100 years from tomorrow. Peoples Gas is Florida's largest natural gas provider. We're working for our economy -- and your family. ("Youtube" 2012)

This text helps TECO reinforce the notion that natural gas is an American energy source and by utilizing it in our country, consumers can turn into patriots.

The rhetoric that natural gas as an American, domestic source of energy, is also seen in TECO's use of images in its advertisements. "Natural Gas. Here and Now" emphasizes the theme of domesticity of the home while simultaneously promoting the use of natural gas as an energy source which can be utilized in the United States. Viewers see a mother and her children cooking together and doing in a comfortable, modern home, enjoying being together. The washer and dryer appliances featured are bright white

and new, while the kitchen shown has rich hardwood cabinets and shiny granite countertops. “Domestically produced natural gas” provides viewers with distinct visuals, which again represent the idea that natural gas is home grown, and hence, should be emblematic of one’s ties to one home and country. This advertisement begins with the spokesperson shoveling a pile of dollar bills into a black hole, while stating: “America shovels out billions and billions every month on foreign oil. That’s billions of your dollars going you know where; but what are we really getting?” (“YouTube” 2010). Based on both the visuals and the message, I argue that TECO attempts to persuade viewers that Americans are wasting their money and essentially hurting the economy by using foreign oil as the energy source for our country. After the spokesperson questions what we are getting in return for the money spent on foreign oil, a plume of black smoke rises from the hole, which suggests that the return is dirty pollution from foreign oil. Next, the spokesperson suggests, “Let’s keep America’s energy dollars here,” while a map of the Unites States is featured, which is filled in with the red, white and blue of the American flag. The vividness of the U.S. map and flag, both aim to invoke patriotic sentiment while TECO relates natural gas to the opportunity for domestic energy production, the reduction of foreign oil, and the opportunity to improve America’s economy (discussed in the next section of Findings).

In “Reduce Dependence on Foreign oil with Natural Gas,” the advertisement opens with the spokesperson yawning, wearing a robe and slippers, while saying: “Really need coffee.” A voice from the background yells, “Get him his fix!” Next, a multicolored “technical difficulties” screen appears with the TECO logo in the corner and text, which reads: “Spokesperson Difficulty. Please Standby” Then the spokesperson reappears,

dressed in a suit and tie, with a cup of coffee (topped with a bright yellow circle, symbolizing a halo) in his hand, and he says, "Ahh, dependence. It's no way to live." He then tells viewers that if we use America's own natural gas, our country can conserve energy and rely less on foreign oil. At the same time, viewers see the map of the United States and American flag, which was seen in the "Domestically produced natural gas" advertisement. The spokesperson ends by telling viewers, "It's time to break the cycle and clean up our act," while tossing the coffee cup behind his head, apparently symbolizing, yet again, the fervent need to be American and contribute to reducing America's dependence on foreign oil, the same rhetoric that has been consistently used by American oil corporations to lobby for increased drilling for oil along the country's coast (Gore, 2009).

In summary, this theme, Natural Gas is American and reduces foreign oil dependence, reveals that TECO wants consumers to believe that natural gas offers Americans a domestic energy source that will decrease our country's dependence on foreign oil sources. This idea is closely paired with TECO's suggestion that natural gas is a clean energy source, making it a superior choice to dirty pollution from foreign oil. This theme offers viewers an opportunity to identify with environmental responsibility while simultaneously invoking a sense of patriotism through the placement of visual images such American flags and U.S. maps. In spite of the potential benefits of extracting natural gas as a domestic energy source, TECO completely ignores the reality of American citizens who are negatively affected by the fracking process around the country. Rural areas in which natural gas drilling occurs, are contaminated by the chemicals used in fracking, causing people, animals and ecosystems to become ill (Lustgarten, 2009; 2011;

Kusnetz, 2011a). TECO advertisements proudly claim the U.S. has, "enough clean, efficient natural gas to last us well into the next century," but details of fracking fluids and Americans affected by fracking are once again ignored.

TECO's suggestion that the United States should reduce dependence on foreign oil is both accurate and necessary, but it is also equally true that our country should reduce/eliminate the use of carbon-based fuels, including oil and gas. As previously discussed, natural gas is not a clean, sustainable energy source as TECO claims it to be, therefore the United States should work towards reducing and eliminating the use of both natural gas and oil, foreign or domestic. Instead, our country should be investing in renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind technologies, to harness domestic energy that is both environmentally and economically beneficial (Gore, 2009). Natural gas produced in the United States is admittedly domestic, nevertheless its extraction and production process are still threatening the health of communities of people and ecologies around the country. Solar, wind and other renewable energy sources foster domestic energy security, produce little to no carbon dioxide emissions, while promoting the health of citizens and the environment (Gore, 2009; McKibben, 2011). The exciting news about renewable energy sources is that there is almost a limitless amount available (Gore, 2009). For example, the earth is bathed in endless energy from the sun, so much so that the amount reaching the surface of our planet every hour is theoretically equal to the entire world's energy use for a full year (Gore, 2009). Similarly, one month's worth of the energy that could be captured from wind and geothermal sources, such as heat pumps which source water from hot springs, could supply the entire energy supply for the planet's human inhabitants for a year (Gore, 2009)

The difficulty of harnessing these sources like wind and solar energy lies in the focused effort and large investments needed to develop and build cost-effective renewable-energy systems that allow us to capture and efficiently use these enormous natural flows of energy. Through these investments, overtime, renewable energy will become cheaper while fossil fuel- based energy will likely become more expensive. The problematic basis of TECO natural gas advertisements lies in the company's effort to brand itself as a part of the clean energy future. TECO and other natural gas companies are co-opting this language of a clean energy future by advertising their products as environmentally safe (Kusnetz, 2011b; *"Teco peoples gas*," 2013) in ways that are similar to how renewable energy is promoted. Ultimately, the threat here is that viewers of TECO natural gas advertisements may be convinced that natural gas is part of a clean energy future, and will invest in this resource as a way to support apparently environmentally-conscious corporations such as TECO, that thrive on and promote greenwashing.

C. Natural Gas Saves Money and Our Economy

Every TECO advertisement I analyzed ended with a message to the consumer on how to earn money in rebates or cash back allowances by switching to natural gas. Many of the advertisements direct the consumer to "peoplegas.com/enjoy" to see if they qualify for these rebates and cash back allowances. The two most frequent references to the theme of "Natural Gas Saves Money" are the following: "Go to peoplesgas.com/enjoy and see if you qualify for up to $1750 in rebates," and "Switch to a natural gas water heater and get up to $525 back from TECO peoples gas." Slight variations of these two

statements are present in each of the ten TECO advertisements, and they all suggest that switching to TECO natural gas will save the consumer money.

"Savings" pairs the notion of saving energy with saving money, therefore providing additional incentives for viewers to go green. Viewers hear: "When natural gas amenities are installed in your home, you're saving energy and money without sacrificing style or comfort." The additional money saving opportunities presented in this particular advertisement are called "conservation rebates," and viewers are urged to visit "peoplesgas.com/enjoy" to learn more about such savings. "Tankless vs Tank Water Heater" also attempts to persuade viewers about the opportunity to save money by switching their water heaters to a new "tankless technology" water heater. By doing so, consumers "can cut water heating bills in half, get in a $525 rebate and $1500 tax credit."

Along with the savings that each consumer household can incur by switching to natural gas, these TECO Peoples Gas advertisements also discuss the benefits to the American economy when people switch to natural gas. "PGS Reduce Dependence of Foreign Oil with Natural Gas," couples lessening America's dependence on foreign oil with the promise that our country will save money and protect the environment. While referring to harnessing American natural gas, the spokesperson proposes: "Our country will save billions, each week, and it's absolutely priceless for the environment." The similar advertisement, "Domestically Produced Natural Gas," also advocates using American sourced natural gas to strengthen our economy. The spokesperson cautions that America wastes billions of dollars every month by outsourcing foreign oil, then suggests that by using the abundance of "clean, efficient natural gas" found in America, we can "put our own resources to work and dig our way out of this mess."

TECO relies on certain images to support this theme that, "natural gas saves money." As previously mentioned, each of these advertisements ends with a statement suggesting the opportunity to save money by switching to natural gas. These statements are often assisted with a visual text providing the concluding image regarding the potential for saving money. It says:

TECO
PEOPLES GAS
Up to $1,750 in cash back allowances
peoplesgas.com/enjoy

Acting as the visual finale, this image (with slight variations), is present in all the ten TECO advertisements I analyzed.

"Domestically produced Natural Gas" includes vivid images associated with saving money. While the spokesperson states that America "shovels out billions and billions every month on foreign oil," he is shown physically shoveling piles of dollar bills into a black hole, invoking ideas of a waste receptacle. Large bags of money with green dollar signs are placed beside him as he's using a shovel to place money in the hole. The purpose of these visuals is to create a parallel exemplifying the financial waste our country allows by outsourcing foreign oil instead of using natural gas sourced in our own country. The large bags of money reappear in the concluding visual placed below the text, which reads: "Switch to Natural Gas. Get up to $1,350 Cash Back." This exact image is duplicated in the advertisement, "PGS Reduce Dependence of Foreign Oil with Natural Gas."

In summary, my accounting of the theme, "Natural Gas saves you money," shows that the apparent financial benefits of switching to natural gas is one of TECO's major

selling points. Every advertisement analyzed included either text, written or spoken, and/or visual images aimed at attracting consumers who'd like to save money on their energy bills. The money-saving consumer appears as important as the environmentally-conscious consumer because TECO has an opportunity to connect with both ideologies in its advertisements. Providing money saving opportunities through cash-back rebates, and tax credits, combined with environmentally-positive behaviors, such a "reducing your carbon footprint," allows TECO to connect with two prized consumer desires simultaneously ("Youtube" 2013). The money-conscious consumer may not necessarily care about going green with natural gas, but the environmentally-conscious consumer will presumably prefer to save money.

As previously discussed, TECO's advertisements seek to identify with a certain audience base: moderately wealthy, educated, and predominately Caucasian. Therefore, embedded in this theme are exclusionary undertones which point to the fact that the money saving opportunities aren't possibly for everyone. Three of the ten advertisements specifically state that one must qualify for rebates: "Go to peoplesgas.com/enjoy and see if you qualify for up to $1750 in rebates." If a viewer follows TECO's suggestion, she/he will find specific criteria and restrictions in order to receive the cash back rebate:

In order to qualify for an Energy Conservation Rebate, you must meet the following criteria:

1. Replace your old appliances with new energy-efficient natural gas appliances.
2. Complete and submit an Energy Conservation Form, along with copies of your sales invoice(s) and receipt(s) for purchase and installation of appliance(s).
3. Be an existing Peoples Gas customer or be in the process of becoming a Peoples Gas customer ("Teco conservation rebates ," 2013).

Based on this information, we can see that the process of switching to natural gas requires the purchase of new, natural gas appliances. A basic search for a natural gas water heater

on sears.com ("Sears natural gas," 2013) found these appliances range in price from $324-$1,443. The qualifications which TECO requires demands that existing customers or future customers are financially capable of purchasing appliances that are this expensive, which further suggests that these advertisements are aimed at consumers of at least moderate wealth and status. Furthermore, contractors may charge between $2,100 to $7,000 for installation expenses depending on the size, age, location of the home, and the amount of gas piping needed inside the house ("The costs of," 2013). Hence, the green consumer that TECO aims to construct is one of middle to high socioeconomic status, thereby likely excluding low-income classes.

D. Natural Gas is Safe, Reliable, and Comforting

TECO's natural gas advertisements often highlight the fact that natural gas is safe, reliable and comfortable. "Living" focuses on the comfort and reliability natural gas provides a family in their home: "When you live in a natural gas home, you're doing more than just living. You're setting the stage for a great night of games. You're taking of your family in ways they don't even realize. You're making your house a home with better amenities for you, while fueling a better environment for them ("Youtube," 2012)." Similarly, "Natural Gas. Safe and Sound" states: "Since natural gas will be there rain or shine, they joined the nearly 2 million Floridians who enjoy natural gas every day. Ensuring greater reliability for the ones who matter most...TECO peoples gas wants you to know, with natural gas, you're safe and sound." TECO wants viewers to know they can rely on natural gas in rain or shine, because the energy source can still be accessed during a power-outage ("Natural gas works," 2012). Natural gas appliances, such as water

heaters and gas range stoves, typically operate during power-outages so that people can continue to cook food and bathe during these situations. TECO highlights this reliability so that viewers will feel a sense of comfort knowing their homes will never be short of fuel.

The visuals associated with this theme are mostly evident through the depiction of families in their homes, enjoying everyday activities such as cooking, cleaning, playing games and watching television. They are all safe, and they can always be comfortable relying on their energy source, which is natural gas supplied by TECO. “Living,” “Natural Gas. Safe and Sound,” “Natural Gas. Here and Now,” “Savings,” and “Natural Gas. Clean and Green” each include visuals of people interacting in their homes. Mothers are often caring for the children and family are all coming together to enjoy an activity. “Safe and Sound” depicts a family hosting a dinner party with friends in their home. All the people in this advertisement appear happy, secure and to be enjoying the comfort of their surroundings. Viewers are shown to connect with the warmth, comfort and safety of a family in their homes, to the use of natural gas because both invoke a sense of consistency and reliability. Ensuring that TECO Peoples Gas is reliable may cause consumers to feel like the company is honest and trustworthy, whereby they’re attempting to create a relationship with these consumers that promotes a sense of trust with and dependence on TECO.

In summary, my analysis reveals that TECO aims to closely pair natural gas with the notion of safety and comfort offered by families. Viewers see having natural gas as a source of reassurance that they and their families will be protected in times of crisis, such as a power outage, as well as in the future. By coupling a sense of reliability and safety

with its service, TECO plays upon the emotional connection it wants to make with its consumer base. TECO wants consumers to believe they are a trustworthy company, so by promoting ideas of safety, reliability and comfort, TECO aims to create a relationship with viewers that develops a sense of trust and dependence.

By failing to acknowledge that there are communities adversely affected by the hazardous fracking process, we see how TECO ignores the reality of natural gas production while advertising its greenness, safety, and reliability. The communities across the country who've experienced health and ecological issues associated with fracking would probably disagree with TECO's claims of safety and comfort. Residents in fracking areas, whose water wells have exploded or have had flammable tap water (Lustgarten, 2011) would likely argue that TECO is presenting only a partial or a mis-representation of the benefits associated with natural gas use. The trailer of the documentary Gasland corroborates this rationale.

To expand on my interpretations of the TECO advertisements that I have presented thus far, the following section includes an analysis of the documentary film trailer for *Gasland* (2013), which reveals the process in which natural gas is extracted and the effects it has on communities surrounding such extraction sites.

E. *Gasland*

A transcription of the fifty-two second trailer of the documentary film *Gasland* provided text to conduct a comparative analysis of how natural gas is represented in the film and in TECO Peoples Gas advertisements. It begins with the film maker, Josh Fox stating, "My land was on top of a formation called the 'marcellus shale,' and that was the 'Saudi Arabia' of natural gas. I could lease my land to this company. Could it be that

easy" ("*Gasland,"* 2013)? During this introduction, viewers see a map of the United States with the marcellus shale formation shaded in red, followed by an image of the potential leasing document with a natural gas company. The trailer follows Fox through his conversations with the people affected by fracking, well explosions, and water contamination. "Everywhere I went it was the same story-water trouble," explains Fox. The names of states such as "Oklahoma, Utah, Arkansas, and New Mexico," pass across the screen as he says this. One community resident states: "We never had a problem with the water and after they drilled the water was bad." During this claim, images appear on the screen of various residents holding jars filled with visibly contaminated water samples. Next, Fox introduces the health problems associated with natural gas, placing the following written text on the screen:

> **Known Effects in Humans**
>
> Testicular Toxicity
> Malformation of the Embryo
> Bone Marrow Depression
> Hemolysis (Destruction of the Red Blood Cells) ("*Gasland,"* 2013)

Another resident appears saying, "I'm never healthy." Then Fox, wearing a gas-mask, says, "Hazardous explosive conditions inside the house," while the next resident can be seen lighting the water coming from a kitchen faucet in his home. Another map appears on the screen with countless dots throughout the state of Texas, marking the oil and gas wells. The final resident figure says, "This is happening everywhere. That's the biggest thing I want everyone to know." Finally, the viewer sees several water samples collected in a box, followed by Fox asking: "I have several samples that are from all over the

country. I'm wondering if you're interested in drinking some of this ("*Gasland,*" 2013)? The screen zooms onto a mason jar filled with murky, brown and yellow-colored water. The trailer ends with the film title "GASLAND" placed on a landscape of what appears to be an open rural field, with a towering natural gas well adjacent to the title.

The representations of natural gas and fracking in *Gasland* are unquestionably different from those in the ten TECO Peoples Gas advertisements. *Gasland* explains the dangers associated with water contamination, well explosions and health problems, while TECO presents a much cleaner and safer image of natural gas. These conflicting representations of natural gas reveal opposing motives of the producers, i.e. Fox and TECO. TECO aims to sell natural gas while Fox attempts to reveal the dangers associated with natural gas. Based on my research and review of literature on natural gas, fracking, and the adverse affects of natural gas on human health and the environment, the depiction of natural gas and its use in *Gasland* appears to be legitimate, however certain images in the film trailer, such as Fox wearing a gas mask, may seem somewhat exaggerated or sensational (Lustgarten, 2011; Kusnetz, 2011a). A comparative analysis of the film trailer to TECO's advertisements, coupled with the literature review on fracking, reveals that natural gas companies are constructing a distorted and false understanding of the energy source and the process in which it's acquired. My analysis of this trailer is coupled with the understanding that the producers of this documentary aim to depict natural gas in a certain way that supports the foundation of their argument, just as TECO producers depict natural gas in a way that aims to support viewers understanding of the benefits of natural gas. My reasoning for selecting the *Gasland* trailer is because I believe it's

depiction of natural gas most accurately supports my research of natural gas, the process of fracking, and the effects on the environment.

V. Conclusion

The website “peoplesgas.com/enjoy” is featured as a suggested website for more information about TECO Peoples Gas in the closing for each of TECO’s natural gas advertisements that I analyzed. TECO directs viewers to visit this website after watching their advertisements so that they may learn more information. When navigating to this site, I found prominently displayed: “Natural Gas. Here and Now. Safe and Sound. Clean and Green.” These words, which pair with each of the themes I found, are placed next to a rotating screen of images featuring families, couples, and individuals “enjoying natural gas,” a text which is placed within each of these images. Below the rotating pictures is text telling the viewer to enter her zip code to find out if natural gas is available for her home. Followed by “You could qualify for up to $1,750 in cash-back rebates,” “Cash-back rebates” is an activated hyperlink, which leads viewers to another webpage. If the viewer enters her zip code in the designated box and clicks “Check Availability,” she will receive one of the following responses: “Great! Peoples Gas offers service in your zip code. Please call to see if it's in your neighborhood. 1-877 TECO PGS (1-877-832-6747)” ("Teco peoples gas," 2013). “Sorry! Peoples Gas does not currently offer service in your zip code” ("Teco peoples gas," 2013).

The section of text below the title “Natural Gas. Here and Now. Safe and Sound. Clean and Green,” gives visitors to the site details on the information presented in many of the advertisements seen on television or Youtube. Included in the additional

information on natural gas is the claim that the domestic supply of natural gas in the United States is enough to satisfy the "diverse" energy needs of our country until 2111, "and maybe beyond." Also stated is TECO's claim that, "The U.S. has as much natural gas as Saudi Arabia has oil" ("Teco peoples gas," 2013). Visitors to this site are also told of the potential financial impact of natural gas on the U.S., "employing almost 3 million people and infusing our economy with nearly $400 billion annually" ("Teco peoples gas," 2013). This website exemplifies all of themes I found in my analysis of the TECO advertisements; they spoke to the frames that TECO aims to construct about natural gas by its use of repetitive words and images in the advertisements.

My analysis of TECO's Peoples Gas advertisements examined how TECO presents natural gas to its current and potential customers, the viewers of its advertisements. TECO uses specific images aimed at depicting natural gas as: 1) a cleaner, greener energy source, 2) a domestically produced source, which reduces U.S. dependence on foreign oil, and 3) as a reliable, safe, comforting, and 4) financially beneficial energy source.

Hall's (1997) theory of representation helped me understand how the images embedded in TECO's advertisements affect viewer/consumer ideologies. Using Hall's suggestion that we may become critical of the "water" in which we're surrounded, I recognized that the meaning of natural gas is constituted by TECO's use of images in its advertisements. These advertisements serve as the representational event in which the meaning of natural gas, as an energy source and utility, emerges for consumers. TECO works to construct consumers' understanding, or give meaning to the representation of

natural gas. This meaning making process and outcome, a communicative phenomenon, shapes the identity of the consumer regarding her or his use of natural gas.

This thesis explores the strategies TECO uses to construct the identity, or partial identity, of its potential or established natural gas customers. The images TECO uses are strategically selected in order to exemplify the benefits of natural gas, but these images would not be effective if not associated with a kind of claim on the consumer's identity. TECO aims to construct a green consumer identity, which advocates environmentally-responsible choices and behaviors. Viewers of the advertisements see the repetitive use of images, such as tree leaves and green coloring, which may foster a belief that TECO is a green company; therefore, by purchasing a green product from TECO, i.e. TECO Peoples Gas, one could conceivably become a green consumer.

Through its representations of natural gas, TECO evidently constitutes the dominant discourse aimed at green energy consumers, whereby the company is producing and constructing consumers' understanding of natural gas and its connection to the environment through its commercial advertisements. As producers of knowledge about natural gas, TECO is directly involved in the symbolic work, activity, and practice which goes into giving meaning to things and communicating that meaning to the viewer (Hall, 1997). This thesis thus presents an oppositional reading of TECO's advertisements in order to analyze the communication strategies used to construct green consumerism. Hall's theory of representation (1997) provided me with critical cues, which I brought into my analysis of the advertisements. I found themes that indicated that green energy and green consumption are constituted by greenness, domestic sourcing, safety and reliability, and financially beneficial properties. But, these themes are corporate illusions

dressed up in the images and language of environmental responsibility. To imagine this as responsible is to ignore all of the danger posed by fracking, a narrative that is strategically erased in TECO's symbolic activity (Hall, 1997).

The bottom line is that TECO constructs an image of green energy that aims to bring green consumers into being. This image ignores the threats that fracking poses to the natural environment and urges consumers to ignore those threats as well. If TECO succeeds at constructing green consumers like this, they will be energy consumers that poison their own water as they critically evaluate our national dependence on foreign oil, destroy the water supplies of their neighbors as they imagine the safety of natural gas, and pay high costs for clean water as they think they are saving money. So, not only is TECO omitting the truth about fracking, it is presenting solutions that might prove to be a danger to life, health, and property. My analysis reveals that TECO is a corporate institution that not only says one thing and does another, but aims at creating consumers who will damage the environment while thinking they're saving it. That is the motivation behind my oppositional reading of TECO's dominant text on natural gas and its usage.

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Appendix I: Glossary of Terms

Environment: The external conditions or surroundings, in which people live, work or affect in any way.

Environmentally-friendly or Eco-friendly: A commodified good, service, person or company which behaves, operates, or is produced with minimal or no damage done to the environment during the process.

Environmental movement: A multifaceted phenomenon created by an organized effort to protect the planet's natural environment, ecosystems, habitats and species. The movement encompasses as many as two million worldwide nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on the environment, indigenous rights, and social justice, as well as additional groups of people who advocate for environmental protection (McKibben, 2010). Ecologist Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* (1949) is an essential volume of American environmental literature, followed by marine biologist Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). By linking certain industrial chemicals, such as DDT, with animal and human health, she had the most profound impact of any individual on the environmental movement. Increased activism of the 1960s and 1970s mobilized the emerging environmental crusade, which was bolstered by other books such as *The Population Bomb* (1968), by Paul R. Ehrlich and Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968). The famous "Earthrise" photograph taken from *Apollo 8* in December 1968 seemed to wake up the world to the earth's delicate position in space (Llewellyn, Hendrix & Golden, 2008). Soon after, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson organized the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, and the participation of an estimated two million people demonstrated the emerging strength of environmental awareness. It is suggested that in response to this growing grassroots support, in addition to *Silent Spring,* Congress established the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and passed the first Clean Air Act in 1970 (Llewellyn, Hendrix & Golden, 2008). By the 1990s, the emergence of the environmental movement led to a progressive flood of books, media coverage, conferences, symposia, and political dialogue (Gore, 2009). Scientific verification of species extinction, global warming, air pollution, and resource depletion became definitively clear, which led to worldwide response efforts, including the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and the Kyoto Summit on Global Warming in 1997 (Llewellyn, Hendrix & Golden, 2008). The twenty-first century has ushered new environmental groups committed to environmental protection and sustainability, including influential spokespersons such as former U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

Environmentalism: See *Environmental movement*

Green consumer: A person who buys products or services from a company that uses environmentally-responsible practices to source the product or service produce or service.

Green product: A commodified good or service which was produced, manufactured and distributed with minimal or no damage done to the environment during the process.

Greenwashing: An advertising strategy, which aims to present products or services as green, clean, and safe, but these claims about the environmental benefits are often false or misleading.

Nature: The world and it's naturally occurring phenomena, including the elements of trees, oceans, mountains or animals, which surround humankind but exist independently of and in relation to human activities.

Appendix II: Video Transcriptions

"Living"

When you live in a natural gas home, you're doing more than just living. You're setting the stage for a great night of games. You're taking of your family in ways they don't even realize. You're making your house a home with better amenities for you, while *fueling* a better environment for *them*. Peoples Gas. We're delivering the natural choice more Floridians enjoy. Learn how to earn up to $1,750 in cash back allowances at peoplesgas.com/enjoy. ("YouTube" 2012)

"Natural Gas. Safe and Sound"

How does this family keep comfortable before, during and after a storm? Simple. They use natural gas everywhere they can. Since natural gas will be there rain or shine, they joined the nearly 2 million Floridians who enjoy natural gas every day. Ensuring greater reliability for the ones who matter most. Go to peoplesgas.com/enjoy and see if you qualify for up to $1750 in rebates. TECO peoples gas wants you to know, with natural gas, you're safe and sound. ("YouTube" 2012)

"Natural Gas. Here and Now"

How does this family help reduce America's dependency on foreign oil? Simple. They use natural gas every where they can. Since America has enough clean, efficient natural gas to last us *well into the next century,* They've joined the nearly 2 million Floridians who enjoy natural gas every day. Go to peoplesgas.com/enjoy and see if you qualify for up to $1750 in rebates. TECO peoples gas has the energy for the *future* here and now. ("YouTube 2012)

"Natural Gas. Clean and Green"

How does this family increase energy efficiency without sacrificing comfort? Simple. They use natural gas everywhere they can. Since natural gas conserves energy and can reduce green house gases up by to 70%, they've joined the nearly 2 million Floridians who enjoy it every day. Growing a cleaner, greener future for the ones who matter most. Go to peoplesgas.com/enjoy and see you qualify for up to $1,750 in rebates. TECO Peoples gas wants you to live clean and green with natural gas. ("YouTube 2012)

“PGS Reduce Carbon Foot Print with Natural Gas Commercial”

What carbon footprint are you leaving for your children? When just one household switches their non-gas water heater to natural gas, it removes about 3,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air every year. 3,000 pounds, gone. Here’s what you can do to leave a lighter footprint for them: Switch to a natural gas water heater and get up to $525 back from TECO peoples gas. Leave a lighter carbon foot print for them. Visit Peoplesgas.com to learn more. (“YouTube” 2010)

“Domestically Produced Natural Gas”

America shovels out billions and billion every month on foreign oil. Thats billions of your dollars going you know where, but what are we really getting? (smoke) Lovely. Meanwhile we have plenty of clean, efficient natural gas right here in America. What are we thinking? Lets keep America’s energy dollars here, put our own resources to work and *dig* our way out of this mess. Earn up to $1,350 in rebates. Switch to natural gas. Visit peoplesgas.com (“YouTube 2010)

“PGS Tankless vs. Tank Water Heater Commercial”

I’ve been telling people for years about the value of natural gas. They ask me “what should I switch to first?” No brainer. Tankless water heater. “Oh sure, pick on the old water heater!” Well, with the new tankless technology you can cut water heating bills in half, get in a 525 rebate and 1500 tax credit “But I worked my tank off for 10 years” Yeah this guy will crank out endless hot water for the next 20. Get gas Florida. Visit peoplesgas.com. Conserve energy and switch to natural gas. (“YouTube 2010)

“PGS The Football Pros Know Commercial”

My motto “Dirty plays, clean locker room” “Energy bills down, productivity up. Class dismissed” “The difference between surviving and thriving. Clean efficient operation.” Energy efficient, performance enhancing natural gas. The Pros know. Now you do too. Get Gas Florida. Call 877-TECO-PGS or go to peoples.com for up to $1,350 is cash rebates. (“YouTube” 2010)

“PGS Reduce Dependence of Foreign Oil with Natural Gas Commercial”

Really need coffee....*Get him his fix!* Ah, dependence...it’s no way to live. But with Americas own natural gas we can conserve energy and rely less on foreign oil. Our country will save billions, each week, and its absolutely priceless for the environment. Its time to break the cycle and clean up our act. Earn up to 1,350 in rebates. Switch to natural gas. Visit peoplesgas.com (“YouTube 2010)

“Savings”

When natural gas amenities are installed in your home, you’re saving energy and money without sacrificing style or comfort. Sure natural gas appliances come with deluxe features and last longer, but its their efficiency that’s really cool. You can even get up to $1,750 in cash back allowances just for installing natural gas appliances. Peoples Gas. We’re delivering the natural choice more Floridians enjoy. Learn more about our energy conservation rebates at peoplesgas.com/enjoy (“YouTube” 2013)

“GASLAND” Documentary Trailer

My land was one top of a formation called the “Marcellus Shale,” and that was the “Saudi Arabia” of natural gas. I could lease my land to this company. Could it be that easy? Everywhere I went it was the same story: water trouble. “We never had a problem with the water and after they drilled the water was bad.” Health Problems. “I’m never healthy.” Hazardous explosive conditions inside the house. “And all those dots you’re looking at here are oil and gas wells.” “This is happening everywhere. That’s the biggest thing I want everyone to know.” I have samples that are from all over the country. I’m wondering if you’re interested in drinking some of this?