Consumerism and Peace:
Using Postmodernist Thinking to Understand Consumerism from a Peace Perspective

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Introduction

People do not often think of consumption in relation to peace. But, in a postmodern world, it is hard to separate the two. Tonight, I want to talk about what it means to live in a postmodern consumer society, how this came to be and what it means to strive for a culture of peace in such a society.

To develop this idea, I intend to draw links between the concepts of postmodernism, consumerism and a culture of peace. I will try to show that what happened over a millennium ago is still being felt in the world today in the form of injustice, structural violence, wars, lack of eco peace, no inner peace and exploitative and repressive relationships at all levels. I will begin with a discussion of the five different kinds of peace as a way to overcome the assumption that peace means we have no war. Then, I will turn to the journey to a postmodern consumer society. Since consumerism began in the 1600s, during the centuries leading up to our postmodern consumer society, it is important that I tell the story of the evolution of postmodernism. Once this story is told, I will weave together the three strands of peace, postmodernism and consumerism. It is abnormal to think of our consuming behaviour as causing conflict, unrest or war. I will make the case the irresponsible consumerism is having very negative affects on many types of peace.

It is unthinkable to most people to see themselves as perpetuating the onslaught of human rights infringements, war, injustice, inner turmoil or ecological destruction when all we do is:

· buy a coffee with a friend, a chocolate bar for a stressful day, a diamond ring for a loved one,

· buy a piece of furniture made of mahogany, a bottle of water for convenience or safety, a Disney toy for our child,

· buy a treat at McDonalds, a healthy snack like a banana, a computer,

· buy hockey skates for our child so she or he can be involved in the community and sports, a hot chocolate on a cold winter's day - even flowers for someone we love or on their birthday or wedding or funeral.

These seem like such innocuous, benign purchases, often done as we relate with other people on a social or emotional level. *Who would have thought* that they had such ramifications on peace? But, they do. And, understanding the links between modernism, postmodernism and consumption in the 21st century global marketplace, from a multifaceted peace perspective, helps us gain inner power to make changes in our consumption roles - to be empowered.

Five Different Kinds of Peace

Inner Peace

While a culture of peace fosters an appreciation that peace comes from within each person, a consumer culture reinforces *dis*satisfaction with whom we are as a person. We tend to deal with that dissatisfaction by buying more things. People living in a consumer society are not at peace with themselves. Peace is linked to the spiritual aspect of being human, not just the outside, physical sphere. This does not mean that people should not value material goods. But, they should strive not to become attached to them to the extent that they value physical things more than the spiritual, inner-peace sphere of life and make immoral decisions that harm others and the environment.

Negative Peace

Negative peace refers to situations when we have no war or no overt violence. If we are not fighting, we must be at peace. This is the way most people define peace and it is very limiting. To ensure we have negative peace, societies have set in place many institutions, procedures and processes including: conflict mediation and resolution, diplomacy and embassies, disarmament and arms control, international organizations (e.g., the UN) and peace through strength (the party with more weapons and bigger armies is the strongest party so they prevent war - threats etc.).

Positive Peace

We all know that we can live in a time of no war, yet still experience violence and exclusion. To address this reality, the concept of positive peace was developed. Positive peace refers to the presence of justice, freedom, rights, equality, inclusion. It refers to the lack of structural violence. Structural violence can occur in a society if institutions and policies are designed in such a way that barriers are built in that result in lack of adequate food, housing, health, safe and just working conditions, education, economic security, clothing, and family relationships. Unequal access to resources, to political power, or to legal standing as a person - these are all forms of structural violence. People affected by structural violence tend to live a life of oppression, exclusion, exploitation, marginalization, collective humiliation, stigmatization, repression, inequities and lack of opportunities due to no fault of their own, per se. The people most affected by structural violence are women, children, elders and those from different ethnic, racial and religious groups and sexual orientations.

Relational Peace

From the relational peace perspective, the focus shifts from the structure of society (structural violence) and the culture of war (negative peace) to peace rooted in personal experience while relating to other people on a daily basis and around how peace *feels* to individuals (Groff & Smoker, 1995). When this type of peace is missing, it is experienced as violence in the street, on the school bus, in the school yard, in the

home, with peers (bullying et cetera), in the community (graffiti), in the workplace (harassment) and in personal relationships (child, spousal, elder and sibling abuse).

EcoPeace

Peace can also be understood to include eco-peace, taken to mean living in a peaceful, respectful relationship with nature and the other one million species who share the earth with humans. Peace defined in these terms refers to all forms of physical and structural violence against the environment. From this perspective we assume that humans are *not* separate from the earth, that earth is our communal home and that we must *make peace* with the earth for the sake of our own future.

The Journey to Postmodernism

I like the idea that all of the past ages are with us today, shaping our "now." We can imagine that the progression of humans through different eras in time happens along a continuum. As time passes, the "now" eventually becomes the "then," yet all eras make up the whole continuum that helps us appreciate the contemporary times. Even current times eventually become the "been there, done that, got the T-shirt." But, we are who we are "now" because of the previous eras we passed through. We pulled bits and pieces of the past into our present which will, in-turn, help shape the future. And, the cycle continues. With that metaphor in mind, I will now share a brief story of how humanity passed through the Dark Ages and the Age of Reason to the New Age, or from pre-modern through modern to postmodern times. This story helps us make deep connections about the state of the human condition. What we have absorbed over the centuries is now a part of our societal consciousness. To make sense of now, we have to study the many "thens." This metaphor is drawn from Walters (2003).

Pre-modernism *(800s-late 1500s)*

This is the *age of faith and superstition*. Pre-modern, medieval cultures were based on a religious or sacred world view where people tended to live at the mercy of their environs, or their guiding spirits, religions, and/or gods (Scheurich, 2001). The Middle Ages, also known as the Dark Ages and Medieval Times (800's -late 1500's) - were pre-modernism. When you think of the pre-modern world, think of King Arthur, Guinevere, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc, King John, Thomas Beckett, William the Conqueror, heralds, scribes, magicians, trenchers, hovels, cavalier, knights, feudal life (Lords and peasants (surfs)), castles, ladies in waiting, sorcerers and pages.

The pre-modern era was very religious and accepting of the dictates of the Church. Due to the Feudal model, there was little respect for human dignity. Serfs were tenant farmers who worked the Lord's land and then paid a percentage of their crops in rent to the Lord. They had a duty to work so many days a month and had to pay fees for things like getting married. The serf could not leave the land without the lord's permission. If they had a dispute with the Lord, they could not use the King's court but had to use the Lord's court (so much for impartiality). Serfdom, the practice of linking the farmer to the land he worked, and preventing any social or geographical mobility, was not invented in the Medieval period but it prevailed during this time. People believed in absolutes, with God being the starting point of understanding everything. That is why the role of the Church was so significant and why serfdom, as a system, worked. In the Medieval Ages, it was accepted that only GOD (hence, only *men* of the church and kings or lords) is capable of pure and incorruptible reason because any other human's reason is clouded by their passions and their material nature.

In 1347, Europe was ravaged by the Black Death, the Plague and Medieval medicine had nothing to combat it. Holy and healing wells, pools, and streams and the idea of miraculous interventions could not fight the Plague. Six years later, when the last of dead had been buried, three profound changes had occurred in society. First, the Church began to lose power. Survivors of the plague could discover no Divine purpose in the pain they had suffered. If disaster of this magnitude was an act of God, with no discernible purpose, then reliance on God's goodness was no longer absolute. Once people began to envision a change in the fixed order of things, the age of unquestioned

submission to Church, King and Lord was over. Minds opened to admit these questions could never be shut again.

Second, the Medieval economy never recovered from the results of the plague. So many people had died that there were serious labor shortages all over Europe. This led workers to demand higher wages, but landlords refused those demands. By the end of the 1300s, many peasants' revolts broke out.

Third, at this time, society witnessed the beginnings of the movement from the *miracles* of healing to medical science. Society started moving from relying on myth-making and the development of legends (which always goes on in ages ignorant of the relation between physical causes and effects) to modern science. Eventually, instead of giving attention to supernatural agencies, reliance upon observation, experience, experiment, and thought evolved (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1997).

Transition to the Modern Era

After the Plague, society began to move out of the Darkness. It passed through several eras. As with all periods in history, there is a drift of dates. So, the dates attributed to the eras that shaped the transition to the modern ear are approximate.

Renaissance Era (1500-1700) (the Renaissance Humanist era preceded this between the 1300-1400s). There was a new focus on living well in the present (humanism) and a renewed interest in the classics.

Think Elizabethan Times, Shakespeare, printing press, emerging middle class, Leonardo da Vinci, Florence, John Milton, gunpowder, cannons, witch burnings, beginnings of democracy and civics. There was a compelling blend of art and science during this time.

The Renaissance Era was the transitional period between the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Modern Age. People began to doubt everything in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions *on their own*, rather than be dictated to by the church or royalty. Renaissance scientists began to develop the foundations of a thoroughly empirical view of the world. During this period, people began to reject scholastic authority, which had evolved in the medieval universities. Scholastics relied upon ancient authorities as sources of dogma and they engaged in elaborate debates about how to *interpret* them properly. Renaissance scholars were very excited about the prospect of achieving scientific knowledge - new knowledge. They studied the old texts to gain their *own* interpretation of them and they gladly embraced the methods of the new science. With the advent of the printing press, this new knowledge spread far and wide. There was also a rise in commerce and exploration. They rejected authority that came from institutions (church, government, rulers) and began to place greater emphasis on individual freedom.

During the Renaissance (an act of reviving, rebirth, revitalization), people held the "modern view' that reason is a distinctly human trait and must be investigated. Those who held this view included: Bacon (empiricism), Descartes (rationalism), Locke (natural rights), Adam Smith (capitalism and neoliberalism), David Hume (naturalism and human nature), and Voltaire (separate Church from State).

Of course, there is general agreement that this era benefitted only those people of influence and the literate. It was largely an intellectual and ideological change rather than a substantive one. The masses remained unchanged from the Middle Ages.

Nonetheless, the new methods of learning, commerce, experimentation, etc. triggered the coming advancements in science, economics, medicine, education and politics.

Enlightenment Era (1700s)

During the1700's, in Europe, the Renaissance gave way to more modern times in the form of the Enlightenment period - the development of modern science. It was an eighteenth-century intellectual movement that placed great emphasis on the use of *reason* in the development of philosophical, social, political, and scientific knowledge. They believed that human reason could be used to combat ignorance, superstition and tyranny and to build a better world. The Enlightenment Era was shaped by confidence in the power of human knowledge to overcome injustice and other social ills, ills that were formerly blamed on superstition and political decisions that were based on whim or impulse instead of logic and reason.

This was a time when the key intellectuals of Europe emphasized the need to base a "modern" society on a more secular world view one that was less grounded in religious doctrine. A secular view theorized, and idealized, the concepts of rationality and inevitable social progress and believed that this progress would advance through the emerging sciences and the scientific method. In concert with the development of natural science, the enlightenment Era brought the early rise of market capitalism, the development of transnational banking, and the initial development of the nation-state. Formerly, there were hundreds of fiefdoms with a prince ruling each one. Indeed, in Italy there were individual city-states.

Those living in this new modern age valued individuality. People had faith in a human's ability to think for themselves, rather than have an established authority tell them what to think. This age valued human self-determination for the first time, meaning that people believed they were capable of using their intelligence without being guided by another.

It was also characterized by a manifest mastery over nature and the magnification of efficiency, everywhere. Universal natural laws were developed using the scientific method (e.g., Newton's laws of physics, Darwin's theory of biological evolution, the construction of the chemistry periodic table). These laws replaced medieval laws that had been determined by the divine right of the ruling church officials or kings.

<div align="center">Modernity (1800s-1950)</div>

This is the age of reason, empiricism and science. Modernism is a term that refers to what happened after the Enlightenment Era. It refers to the rise of mass media, large scale integration of isolated communities into large-scale societies, departure from tradition and religion to individualism, rational or scientific organization of society and egalitarianism (all persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status). During the Modern Era, man still believed in absolutes, but the absolute shifted from God to nature and finally to *man himself*. Man became the absolute which could be depended upon, not God or higher authorities. The human enterprise was built on the foundation of an optimistic view of man. Reason pushed faith out of the picture - it was no longer necessary.

Other defining events in the Modern Age were industrialization, rise of representative democracy, urbanization, and mass literacy. In particular industrialization

involves social and economic transformations due to technological innovations, notably in automation, energy, telecommunications and metallurgy (engineering). The later stages of modernity have several other defining features including: ubiquitous technology and science (technoscience), mass production and industrial efficiency, the origins of the middle class (formerly there were just aristocrats and peasant classes), central governments with centralized power, and economics organized around consumption instead of production - consumerism (Scheurich, 2001; Shepherd, 2000).

Governments evolved into centralized and hierarchal organizations that seem far removed from the citizens they were designed to benefit. Instead of being confined to the family and social class one was born within, people living in a Modern society were able to move around and move up (as well as back down), creating a sense of liberty, competition and individualism.

Also, during the unfolding of the Modern age, Western European and American societies gained incredible influence on other societies. This happened for two key reasons. First, rationale thinking replaced earlier reliance on religion, superstition and convention. Second, colonalization and the plunder of colonies in developing worlds created exploitative relations with a large part of the world's population, relations that continue to this day. These two factors allowed leaders to *assume* that the rational, scientific approach to problems, and the pursuit of economic wealth, is a *reason*able way to achieve social development.

In the 1950s, people came to believe that they lived in a modern secular society that was "better" than earlier societies because of modern scientific advances. This modern society believed that progress is built on reason, education using the three R's, and absolute science. The supernatural, outerspace or faith phenomena were considered a total myth that could be explained away by science. The modern referred to a post-Enlightenment notion of the individual "subject," free of state and church, yet regulated and disciplined by increasingly powerful apparatuses of bureaucracy and surveillance. The modern age is marked by faith in progress and technology to improve the lots of individuals, even as these same individuals begin to critique the impact of this progress and technology on public life (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

One of the defining features of the Modern Era is the beginning of consumerism. This went hand-in-hand with industrialization, economic efficiency, and the rise of capitalism. Consumerism began in the mid 1600's and continues today, unabated. But, consuming in the 1600s did not look like consumption today. In the 1600-1800s, a culturally specific set of reasons existed for consuming. People consumed to show that they were respectable. It was assumed that taste arose from good breeding so it made sense for the elite to be the ones responsible for consuming sugar, tea, coffee and imported fabrics. The virtue of self-restraint gave the elite a moral stand. If they consumed for comfort (innocent pleasure) and convenience (end of unnecessary work), they saw themselves being more efficient and constructive participants in the public sphere. Consuming coffee in coffeehouses was a way for men to transact business in a civil and respectable manner. Consuming tea at home was a way for women to be seen as civilizers, the moral hearth of the nation (Smith, 2002). Most people accepted slave labour and colonization as the leading edge strategies for economic growth and imperialism.

This all changed in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Because producers needed people to buy their products, the advertising and marketing industries flourished. *Modern* consumption is now defined as the gratification of individual material acquisitiveness (wanting more than one needs) in the marketplace. Products and services are not seen as valuable in themselves. Rather, they are seen as social signals that allow people to identify with like-minded people through consumption and display of similar products or use of similar services. The features of the Modern Era are summarized in Table 1.

Unintended Fallout of Modernism Leading to Postmodern Angst

As noted, modernism represented a new social order that believed in social progress, the potential of human reason, scientific rationality and technology in an economy driven by capitalism and consumption. Unfortunately, *things did not go as planned. Progress* manifested itself in material progress, the production of "things," the exploitation of workers, and the natural environment. As well, progress manifested in the development of a massive amount of objective, value free scientific knowledge at the same time that the masses remained ignorant and spiritually impoverished.

Community resilience declined, family strength and connectedness suffered and individuals lost direction and began to define themselves by what they owned rather than their value as a fellow global citizen (Baldwin, 2002). Anxiety, emotional disorder and breakdown of families and marriages etc. are common results of this age. A new social formation has emerged which is generated by random activities of lost individuals trying to make sense of the world and their place in it. They feel that the social is dissolving and that the bonds that once held them together are no longer accepted without question. They try to search out the ideal life but without success. This failure creates fear, anger, frustration, greed and hatred and a sense of revenge. The attempts by governments to erase differences between people, and to impose national identities, have backfired, leaving a fragmented populous seeking leadership and focus.

Table 1 - Features of the Late Modern Age
♦   rise of market capitalism (via the mercantile system)   ♦   the development of transnational banking and worldwide trade,   ♦   development of the nation-state with central government (formerly there were hundreds of fiefdoms with a prince ruling each one). These nation states mandated and controlled the market on behalf of citizens.   ♦   the origins of the middle class (formerly there were just aristocrats and peasant classes)   ♦   supernatural, outer space or faith phenomena considered as a total myth that can be explained away by science (positivism)   More recently, under the label **Late Modernity**,   ♦   free market capitalism in the context of 21st globalization (neo-liberalism)   ♦   ubiquitous technology and science (referred to as t*echnoscience*),   ♦   mass production and industrial efficiency, in concert with growth of service and information society and industries

- ◆ economics organized around consumption instead of production
- ◆ rationalization rules - comprising efficiency, predictability, calculability and control. It enables people to dehumanize people and relationships
- ◆ notion of one truth perpetuated by the Grand Narrative (success, competition, science, individualism). This is the only way to interpret "how things work." (Social Darwinism)
- ◆ obsessed with ordering, classifying and grouping things (reductionism). Lead to unnatural fragmentation and compartmentalization of subjects and knowledge
- ◆ patriarchy (women's, or less privileged voices, are not legitimate nor are they important)
- ◆ being biologically alike means you are equal (leads to racism, ethical discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, wars and conflict)
- ◆ earth is to be dominated by man. "There for the taking"
- ◆ meaning and truth is decided by each person
- ◆ living things are like mindless machines that can be controlled (management paradigm and education system - *mastery)*
- ◆ assumes everything is separate, disconnected and sees things as opposite ends of one pole (dualism, binary, cause and effect) (leads to irresponsible, distanced consumption)
- ◆ focus on the nuclear family and division of gender roles although different family *types* have emerged with labels (reductionism)
- ◆ concerned with conclusions and closures with proof - no appreciation for the process
- ◆ only *matter* has power (leads to *mater*ialism and power over others by buying things)

In the Modern Age, we have become dependent on technology and industry, addicted to consumerism. We value competition in a free market economy as a good thing and we highly value our individualistic society (Notess, 2001). Not all technological developments ensure human and social progress, though. Technological developments, touted to be a good thing, also occurred in the military as well as in medicine and agriculture. New weapons, new types of warfare, especially germ and biological warfare, space weapons etc. are now available. Developments in biotechnology and genetic engineering are creating unknown risks for generations to come. Rational thinking, a corner stone of Modernism, is often behind the actions of genocide and extermination or exclusion of nonstandard human elements (e.g., Bosnia and Kosova, mentally ill, criminals, homosexuals). This is not the progress intended by Modernists. Indeed, our "enlightened society" now allows capitalism to politically and militarily oppress other peoples so we can have more products to buy and sell (Cronk, 1996).

Modernism meets Consumerism in the 1960s

In the 1960s, it was determined that modernism had lost its vitality because those involved in the innovation of new techniques, the "avant-garde," were engaged in activities that reflected the emerging culture of consumerism. When this happened, some say it was the beginning of the age we now call *postmodernism*. Modernism seems to have gone wrong. The *fundamental, original concept of rationality* (reason and logic) was replaced with *consumer-based rationality* and continues today. The resultant consumer society is a vast floating complex of bits of signs and images (ads, etc.) which produces an endless sign-play, destabilizing long-held symbolic meaning and order in

society. Just the opposite of what Modernist wanted! The long term growth of the consumer culture, during Modernism, led to the belief in the rightness of the endless pursuit of new experiences and values via consumption, rather than reliance on familiar and traditional, albeit imposed, values and dogma. The global market is characterized by the proliferation of identical goods and a growing consumer monoculture (easier to sell things). Consumerism is the means by which the capitalism machine maintains control of the buying public. These unintended side effects of modernization, merging with growing consumerism, have lead to the emergence of *post*-modernistic thinking (Featherstone, 1995; Wikipedia, 2003a,b).

Postmodernism

In review, the Pre-modern (Medieval) age was called the *age of faith and superstition*, followed by the modern age, the *age of reason, empiricism and science*. What exists now is the postmodern age of *globalization* and, recently, the newest form of postmodernism, *the age of holism and interdependence*. Postmodernism became an area of academic study in the mid eighties (Klages, 2003). It is called *post*-modern because those who labelled it first assumed that the modern age was over. Not all agree, however, that the age is over. Some say there is no such thing as postmodernism. Some say it has come and gone and we are living with the aftershocks. Some people say we are living in a postmodern age. Still others say we are in transition between eras. Regardless, the problem postmodernists are trying to solve is, "*If science and reason are not the answer, then what is? How do we get out of the box that modernism has put us in*" (Morley, 2002, p.3)?

I agree with the latter position - we are at a key juncture in time. Because so many features of the late modern era are still in evidence (see Table 1) -the then and now are merged for the time being - I will proceed on the assumption that we are in a period of transition between eras and that globalization is a key factor in this transition. What is more important, I am convinced that all facets of peace are being profoundly affected by consumerism, a key component of globalization.

Modernism *age of reason, empiricism and science*	Period of Transition and Opportunity	Post Modernism *Vanguard of a New Age*? *age of **globalization** as well as holism and interdependence*

Postmodern angst, referred to earlier, is inspired by a ubiquitous lack of faith and presence of cynicism and doubt. Consumerism offers short term ego-gratification for those who can afford it and frustration for those who cannot. Those doing the consuming end up with sick relationships, deep debt and insolvency, obsessive shopping, and bodily, emotional and spiritual harm from the products and service they use. People are suffering because they feel that they do not have anything to cling to anymore. We are a vanquished consumer generation looking for peace and security. Worse....many of those people making the products for us are living a life of dire oppression, poverty and exclusion. Their rights are being trampled, their youth, elders

and communities destroyed, their natural resources plundered. None of us will find the human security and peace we so desperately want if consumerism continues on its current tract. **To change directions, we need new insights.**

Many people are trying to figure out what it means to live in this world of angst and uncertainty. In this attempt, five different strands of postmodernist thinking have evolved (Oord, 2001). Each of these approaches provides a different interpretation of life during the transition from a Modern to a Postmodern age. For tonight, I will present the different approaches in a table and speak to how each one helps us understand the links between peace and consumerism (see Table 2).

Using Postmodernist Thinking to Understand Consumerism from a Peace Perspective

In "the expanse" (think of the new TV show *Enterprise*) between the modern and postmodern eras, we are living with many instances of lack of peace. We have war and conflicts around the world. Examples of structural violence abound, here and abroad. Communities, schools, families, workplaces and individuals are all struggling with stress, isolation, lack of resiliency, strained relationships and violence. We are destroying the earth. Most individuals feel very disconnected, alone, alienated - they lack inner peace of mind, contentment and security.

All of these types of lack of peace are exacerbated by consumerism and globalization as it looks in the 21st century. Most significantly, they are manifested in a sense of consumer entitlement, consumerism as a source of identity, the structure of a society based on consumerism (structural violence), a lack of consumer accountability, consumer skepticism and *whateverism*, no moral consumption compass and consumerism as Northern slavery. Each of these will be discussed.

Consumer Entitlement

Popular culture postmodernism believes that there is a wide sense of consumer entitlement today. Consumers expect a reward for behaving is a certain way. "I know I am entitled to this product or service and I don't care if I hurt someone else in the process." Northern consumers are much more affluent relative to other consumers. Affluence is perceived as a matter of deserved personal reward and thus fully available to any who put forth the effort. Having worked for what they now enjoy, people expect others to do the same. This ideology ignores the plight of those people who did not start with the same advantages. A negative consequence of this perspective is that many consumers do not feel any sense of noblesse oblige to support their nation or to spread charity among the general public (Surdyk & Diddams, 2001).

Worse, if something is seen as an entitlement (in this case, the right to consume), people will place a high priority on that activity to the exclusion of others (McGinnis, Chun & McQuillan, 2003). Because of this high priority on the right to consume, people will not be receptive when asked to make socially and morally responsible consumption decisions. Remember that, in a consumer society, people have very high expectations for personal gratification. People feel that they are entitled to have all their expectations met. Life should be easy. People should get out of their way (Strauss, 2000).

Not surprisingly then, a sense of entitlement can lead to destructive, as well as aggressive, consumption behaviours. An entitlement mentality holds that the world is theirs (there) for the taking, regardless of possible harm or ramifications to others.

Promoting the interest of a few elite populations, by facilitating consumer communal indulgence, harms and leaves out the masses (Hexmoor, 1998). Delayed gratification is a difficult reality for entitled consumers to accept, and their attitude can be expressed as: 'I must act now to get mine.' This behaviour exhibits a sense of social Darwinism on their part. They believe they have the right to subject others to undesirable outcomes simply because they can (Surdyk & Diddams, 2001).

Table 2 - **Five Different Strands of Post Modernism** (drawn from Oord, 2001)				
Popular Culture	**Deconstructive**	**Liberationist**	**Narrative**	**Constructive**
Preoccupied with novelty, newest innovation ("*new and improved*," the latest gadget). Consumerism is inevitable. It is as a way of answering life's questions about meaning and purpose through buying things. *Everything is for sale.* The world is obsessed with technology, mass communication and marketing to create new commodities for sale. Wide sense of consumer entitlement (expect a reward for behaving is a certain way)	There is no **one** truth. What is true for me may not be true for you. *Everything is relative*! The truth changes with the circumstances and the situation. Instead of knowing "truth," we express opinions, preferences or go with our gut instincts. No moral sensitivity. Ideas of what are right or wrong are matters of personal taste, emotional preference etc. There is no predictable order to things. The focus is on differences, diversity and free will Because there is no grand story for the whole world, there is nothing in common for us all. Corporations have gained power, states have lost power, citizens are consumers and economies are organized around consumption.	Three strands: 1. Postmodern feminist want to be out from under the language that perpetuates keeping women inferior 2. Ethnic postmodernists want out from under the modern assumption that being biologically alike provides equality. Focus on race and culture. Believe that the voices of the people at the margins created by modernity are legitimate and must be heard. 3. Ecological postmodernists want out from under the modern assumption that the earth can be dominated by man. Call for responsible relationship with earth.	Stress the power of language and stories over the power of empirical science. Strong focus on irrational elements of emotions, feelings, intuitions and reflection as well as speculation, personal experiences, customs, magic, myth, and mystical experiences. Knowledge, meaning and truth are constructed in local communities and then reflected in people's stories. Because these stories were created within a given community lived in on a daily basis, they are valid. Do not need scientific proof. Culture specific myths define what is right and true and full of meaning (rather than one grand narrative for the whole world).	Hold open the possibility that humankind is standing on the threshold of *a new age*. Embraces a holistic, interdisciplinary perspective so as to gain new unity between scientific, ethical, aesthetic and religious institutions Assumes that everything is interrelated and in relationship with all living organisms on earth. Calls for a fundamental openness to other beings and holds that all entities are interwoven in webs of interdependency Offers an organic world view that is viable for **our** time (rather than one truth) Non-sensory perceptions (dreams, memories, visions) are just as valid as the truth we know from our five senses using the scientific method.

	Nothing can be known with any certainty since all is an illusion. Many questions and no clear answers *Nihilism.* Esp. Youth Disillusioned with life, it is meaningless, has no purpose, no loyalties. No respect for current social rules, *Whateverism!*			Concerned with the process and of becoming

Consumerism as Self-Identity

Consumerism is a serious threat to peace during the postmodernism era because it has become a process of self-identification, a process that has to be continually fed by buying more things to define who we are. We now use the products and services to define ourselves. It is all about images and illusions. Our reality is recreated on a daily basis by buying things. We do this at the expense of those who make our products and the natural environment - creating injustice and ecological destruction. That is, we create a lack of positive peace, eco-peace and inner peace.

Consumerism as Structural violence

Capitalistic consumerism needs an infrastructure in order to continue to manifest itself. Components of that infrastructure include technology and telecommunications, corporate led globalization, the neo-liberal market ideology, several world financial institutions, and complacent, or complicit, governments. Most significantly, the other component of this infrastructure is the consumer. This entire infra*structure* is a key source of structural violence*,* and is enabled by consumers who, knowingly or unknowingly, embrace the ideology of consumerism.

Figure One - Consumption FACTS:

- global consumption of goods and services has topped $30 trillion dollars, annually
- the richest 20% of the world's countries, consume 86% of all things bought in the global marketplace
- 80% of all the products we buy are made by women, on average aged 12-14
- 37% of all clothes/apparel sold in North America are made in China where they are forbidden from organizing to improve working conditions (sweatshops, child labour, prison labour)
- more than a billion people are living at a material standard of living that is supposed to be able to support only 400-800 million people and another five billion people aspire to this standard of living, maintained through unsustainable consumption patterns
- we would need four earths if everyone lived the western lifestyle
- a child born in North America or England will consume, waste and pollute more in a lifetime than as many as 50 children in a developing country
- the average Canadian household has more than 10,000 things in it. The ideal, sustainable, amount would be 200 things
- in the last 40 years, the world lost half of its crop land. It takes 500 years to form one inch of top soil. We deplete it 40 times faster than it can be replaced
- the industrialized world uses close to 70% of all oil consumed in transport even though they make up only 20% of worlds' population

·	there are more than 500 million cars in the world, expected to increase five fold, to three billion by 2020

Remember that those adversely effected by structural violence are not involved in direct conflict. Because they, and others, may not **see** the origin of the conflict, they feel they are to blame, or they *are* blamed, for their own life conditions. This perception is readily escalated because, in a Modern world, people tend to divide people into in-groups and out-groups (dualities). Those outside "our group" lie outside our scope of interest and justice. They are invisible. Injustice that would be instantaneously confronted if it occurred to someone in "our group" is barely noticed if it occurs to strangers or those who are invisible and irrelevant. Those who fall outside "our group" are easily morally excluded and become demeaned or invisible so we do not have to acknowledge the injustice they suffer (Winter & Leighton, 1999).

Almost all of our consumer products are made offshore, thousands of miles away, by people we cannot see. Services delivered to us at home are usually delivered by those in the unskilled sector or the high paid professionals - invisible to us. Resources used to make our products are extracted in countries thousands of miles away - invisible to us. We are so far removed from the source of the goods and services we consume that we can readily create a dichotomy of "we and they." The evidence of consumerism as structural violence is in the facts (see Figure 1). These facts reflect oppressive conditions created by globalization, capitalism and neo-liberal development models.

War and violence are an inherent part of this scenario. Too often, people conclude that they must arm themselves to protect their commodities and the ongoing access to them (especially oil, drugs, and metals). This position justifies war and violence (Cejka, 2003). The "veil of consumerism" enables them to overlook the connections between consumerism and oppressive regimes (governments, several world financial institutions and transnational corporations) that violate human rights, increase drug trade and increase military spending (Sankofa, 2003). This disregard is possible because consumerism accentuates and accelerates human fragmentation, isolation and exclusion for the profit of the few, contributing significantly to violence (Board of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, 1994). Society has ignored the "new slavery"and the resultant disposable people through ignoring the implications of consumption decisions on third world citizens, the next generation and those not yet born (Sankofa).

Lack of Consumer Accountability

Deconstructive postmodernism holds that people have no loyalties to other people. Self interest and individualism are paramount (also part of modernism). It is not surprising, then, that consumers do not feel any duties or obligations to other citizens if they hold this point of view. Popular culture maintains that people are loyal to product brand names for as long as they are novel. This craving for novelty, the latest technological gadget, has lead to a new illness in society - gadget addiction. Popular culture postmodern thinkers also say that there is a growing distrust and disrespect of authority. If this is so, we are in an even more compromised position if we are calling for human responsibilities to balance consumer rights. Norther consumers need to be held accountable for their consumption choices because they have so much collective marketplace power. They also live a life of the privileged Northern consumer. With privilege comes responsibility but this moral imperative is not front and centre in a society

shaped by selfish individualism and self-interest, perpetuated by consumerism, materialism, and survival of the fittest mentality.

In the deconstructive postmodern world, all things are relative, that is, no one standpoint is uniquely privileged above any others. If this is so, it is hard to make a case for Western consumers to assume responsibility of the consequences of their consumption habits on others and the environment because one point of view (i.e., be responsible) cannot take precedence over any other. If consumers can say, "*however I see things is actually true -- for me. If you see things differently, then that is true -- for you,*" then we are hard pressed to advocate that they shift to seeing all people as members of the human family and that there is a universal truth or value for social justice and freedom etc. In a deconstructive postmodern world, if they see their consumption behaviour as true and legitimate, that leaves little room for convincing them that others see this behaviour in a negative light.

Consumer Skepticism and *Whateverism*

Deconstructive postmodernism holds that people they feel that they have no purpose - that their life is meaningless. When people are skeptical, when they lack conviction that their truth is valid, that their life has meaning and is worth something, they tend to engage in *whateverism*. This is the label given to the "who cares?" response when asked deep questions about consumerism. When people say, *whatever*, they are really saying they do not want to take a stand for their truth, likely because they have not critically examined their life. "Have it your way. Fine. Whatever you say is right.... Whatever!" It is an attitude of defeatism, an attempt to avoid confrontation, a sign of abdication, a note of surrender. It is as if everything is a battle and a struggle (signs of modern Grand Narrative). *Whateverism* is passive acceptance of all ideas as more or less equal, the fear of conflict, and the acceptance of pluralism as a political default position. Unfortunately, taking this attitude does not get one any closer to real and rigorous understanding of the issue of consumption. Instead, people can relinquish responsibility and say "If other people aren't consuming differently, why should I?"

Whateverism also goes hand-in-hand with modern and postmodern secularism. If life is being lived with less and less reference to faith and religion, people may be losing their ability to find a purpose in life. God and religion used to serve that role. Now, people find meaning in life by buying things or services, owning them or by being seen consuming them, with little thought to their disposal or what went into their production. Unfortunately, this meaning is short lived so they continue consuming and perpetuating lack of inner, eco, relational and positive peace (cause injustice, infringe on rights of others etc.). Lack of answers to moral questions perpetuates endless consumerism as an attempt to find meaning and purpose in life. This can lead to a profound lack of inner peace, let alone what it does to the lives and futures of others and the environment.

Lacking moral consumption compass

Deconstructive postmodernism holds that people do not have good moral sensitivity. It assumes that people are not capable of living by a coherent ethical code and that truth (correctness) degenerates into personal beliefs, tastes, and lifestyles where private preferences are alienated from moral convictions (Jessup, 2001). From this standpoint, people can more readily see unpaid work, community involvement, voluntarism, involvement in social activism etc. as not valuable, not legitimate activities to

advance rights and responsibilities.

Allowing the philosophy of consumerism to fill the sucking hole created by moral ambiguity creates intolerable social injustice and ecological disaster on a worldwide scale. This situation is made worse by the popular culture assumption that if we resist consumerism, we are accused of not coming to grips with the fundamental shift away from modernism (Burman, 1998). If we do not comply, we are seen as failures (a subliminal message from the modern Grand Narrative). And, we do not like to fail in a postmodern society. It is a sign of weakness. As a result of having no moral compass, the following *state of immoral consumption* exists today. People are:

· buying goods produced using slave, prison, sweatshop and child labour, without compunction;
· remorselessly buying products produced using non-renewable raw resources;
· ruthlessly, sadly, buying goods to create a personal identity;
· buying goods for instant gratification to address the fear of being isolated and ignored;
· feeling annoyed and irritated when someone tries to hold one accountable for unsustainable consumption;
· denying any link between one's consumption patterns and the impact on the lives of those who labour to produce our goods or on the environment;
· refusing to acknowledge that one's consumption behaviour is tantamount to exploiting, using, abusing and discarding people and elements of the ecosystem;
· shutting out empathy and altruistic values; and,
· worst of all, assuming a misplaced sense of being immune to all of the ramifications of one's consumption behaviour, then assuming that "someone will save us in the nick of time!"

These practices have lead to profound injustices in the world (structural violence, discrimination, marginalization), lack of eco-peace, deep fractures in global, human relationships (relational peace), and lack of inner peace (fear, isolation, greed, no remorse, irritation).

Oppressed Northern Consumers

Consumerism is also a form of slavery to those *doing the consuming*. People behave as they do in a consumer society because they are <u>so</u> indoctrinated into the logic of the market that they cannot "see" anything wrong with what they are doing. Because they do not critically challenge the market ideology, and what it means to live in a consumer society, they actually contribute to their own oppression (slaves of the market and capitalism) as well as the oppression of others who make the goods, deliver the services and of the natural ecosystem. Strong and unsustainable consumption patterns have developed and have been unchallenged over a long period of time. This has happened to the point that consumerism and structural violence represent dominant forces in human social interaction and these forces are transforming human life in powerful and destructive ways (Santi Pracha Dammha Institute, 2001). When someone is oppressed, they are living with structural violence. Until they can be brought to see that they are responsible for their own oppression, they will continue to consume they way

they do now. It is very unnatural for a Northern consumer to call themselves oppressed because they have been taught that it is their fundamental right to have individual choice, especially in the marketplace.

Toward a Culture of Peace

It seems clear to me that popular culture and deconstructive post modern thinkers provide us with a framework to *describe* the state of the human condition in this era, why that state exists and how it is being perpetuated. On the other hand, it seems that the other three strands of postmodern thinkers give us some answers and solutions to better the human condition. They are calling for:

· a respect that we are on the threshold of a new age - holistic and interconnected
· unity between scientific (political and economic), ethical, aesthetic and religious institutions
· a responsible relationship with earth, stewardship instead of mastery
· a voice for those marginalized by race, ethnicity, religion and gender (globalization from the bottom-up movement)
· language that respects the power of women, leading to actual increase in power and influence
· respect for the power of language and stories (instead of just the power of scientific proof)
· a balance of rational scientific knowledge with elements not governed by reason and logic, things like "irrational" emotions, intuitions, personal experiences, dreams, customs
· appreciation that knowledge, meaning and truth are constructed in local communities rather than the one grand narrative of success, competition, profit and individuality
· openness to idea that everything is connected and in a web of relationships
· respect for the process of becoming (not just the end result)
· fair trade and localization in mindful markets
· humane working conditions and the end to sweatshops and child labour
· indigenous respect and continuity

In effect, they are calling for a culture of peace. 2001-2010 is the UNESCO Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. In fact, if someone were to ask you what "would a culture of peace might look?", you could tell them that people living in that culture would respect the principles of freedom, justice, rights, solidarity, tolerance and democracy. Citizens in a peaceful culture would share their time and resources with others, in the spirit of generosity, to end oppression, exclusion, injustice. They would listen to understand (empathy) and defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference to dialogue and avoiding fanaticism, defamation and rejection of others.

Citizens of a peaceful culture would foster awareness, information sharing, citizenship, education, prevention, cooperation, mobilization and participation. They would promote nonviolent practices and reject violence in all its forms, especially toward the most deprived and marginalized and vulnerable such as children and adolescents,

women and elders.

They would also redefine security from national security to include human security and would choose new criteria for selecting their leaders. This new criteria would include the person's predisposition toward harmony, inclusiveness, integrity and healing. They would put in place a system of government which is concerned with the best interest of all citizens, without exception. This government would follow a code of ethics, be accountable and compassionate.

People living in a culture of peace would appreciate that peace comes from within each person first. People would also respect their environment and challenge consumption behaviour and production patterns and development initiatives. They would entrench the value transformation process over the transmission or transaction process. They would respect all life with dignity, without discrimination or prejudice. For them, the concept of community and life expands beyond humans to include the other thousands of species sharing the planet.

As they lived in this culture, they would be adaptive to local reality while respecting the global situation. Respect for the basic democratic unit in society - *the family* in their *community* - would be paramount. These peaceful citizens would rediscover solidarity and contribute to development of community with full participation of women, elders and children. Finally, they would know in their hearts that they have power over their destiny and that they are responsible for our world.

A culture of peace places the universal welfare of all people, without exception, as the highest priority of a society. The task of sensitizing a new generation of citizens to value the welfare of everyone above themselves is a severe challenge in a consumer society. Consumer societies and consumer cultures value self-interest, material and wealth accumulation, status, novelty and individualism, and define people by what they can consume. An individual's self-respect and self-esteem are strongly tied to their level of consumption relative to others in the society. By contrast, a culture of peace aims for respect for diversity, tolerance, sustainability, equality, and empowerment. It strives for democratic participation and the transformation of values, attitudes and behaviours which promote peace within each individual (Canadian Centers for Teaching Peace, 2000).

Conclusion

I see this expanse that we are floating in (between modernism and postmodernism) as a phenomenal opportunity to nudge contemporary society in the direction of global citizenship, mindful markets, and a culture of peace. Part of this process involves opening peoples' eyes to the profound impact of their consumption decisions on peace around the world. I hope this talk has opened your eyes. Better yet, I hope it has contributed to bringing things into a new focus for the future.

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