

Immoral *consumption* exists. People are:

1. buying goods produced using slave, prison, sweatshop and child labour, without compunction;
2. remorselessly buying products produced using non-renewable raw resources;
3. ruthlessly, sadly, buying goods to create a personal identity;
4. buying goods for instant gratification to address the fear of being isolated and ignored;
5. feeling annoyed and irritated when someone tries to hold one accountable for unsustainable consumption;
6. 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;
7. refusing to acknowledge that one's consumption behaviour is tantamount to exploiting, using, abusing and discarding people and elements of the ecosystem;
8. shutting out empathy and altruistic values; and,
9. 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!"



Whateverism

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.

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 so they do not know what their truth or purpose is. The result is “the shrug” - the “*Have it your way. Fine. Whatever you say is right.... Whatever!*”

Lack of answers to moral questions perpetuates endless consumerism as an attempt to find meaning and purpose in life. 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* and consumerism....



Consumer Accountability

Neither consumers need to be held accountable for their consumption choices because they have so much collective marketplace power. They also live a life of privilege, relative to other societies. With privilege comes responsibility; but, this moral imperative is not front and centre in a consumer society shaped by *selfish individualism and self-interest, perpetuated by consumerism, materialism, and survival of the fittest mentality*.

In today's world, consumers will say, "*however I see things is actually true -- for me. If you see things differently, then that is true -- for you.*" 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.

If people see their consumption behaviour as true and legitimate for *them*, that leaves little room for convincing them that others see this behaviour in a negative light. It will be hard to hold them accountable.

In today's consumer society, people tend to have less loyalty to other people. Self interest and individualism are paramount. It is not surprising, then, that consumers do not feel any duties or obligations to other citizens or earth, if they hold this point of view.



Consumerism as Structural violence... no it is not this obvious! It is much more subtle and ubiquitous. **Structural violence is the absence of justice, peace, human rights, freedom, equity and sustainability.**



Our entire consumer infrastructure is a key source of structural violence, and is *enabled* by consumers who, knowingly or unknowingly, embrace the ideology of consumerism.

- 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 “veil of consumerism” enables them to overlook the connections between consumerism and oppressive regimes (governments, think-tanks, world financial institutions and TNCs) that violate human rights, increase drug trade, destroy the natural environment and other species, and increase military spending.



The result is child labour, sweatshops, prison labour, ecological and species destruction, weakened families, less resilient communities, lack of state ability to care for citizens, poverty, infringement of human rights and labour rights, intergenerational inequities and more violence and war as we compete for fewer, non-renewable resources.

Our consumer society has ignored this form of “new slavery” and the resultant **disposable people**, through ignoring the implications of consumption decisions on Majority world citizens, the next generation and those not yet born.



Consumer entitlement

Having worked hard for what they now enjoy, consumers expect others to also have to work for that they get. “*You get what you deserve.*” This mindset 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 fellow citizens or to spread charity among the general public.



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 other activities.

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.

An **entitlement mentality** holds that the world is their's (there) for the taking, regardless of possible harm or ramifications to others. Unfortunately, promoting the interest of a few elite populations, by facilitating Northern consumer indulgence, harms and leaves out the masses.



C onsumerism as Self-Identity and a Sense of Belonging

Consumerism 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 - create mental images. It is all about images and illusions. Our reality is recreated on a daily basis by buying things.



Furthermore, we do this out a profound **sense of loneliness**. We are lonely because our competitive consumer society forces us to compete or starve and go without. We do this at the expense of those who make our products and the natural environment - creating injustice and ecological destruction.

As an example, men tend to impulsively buy instrumental and leisure items projecting independence and activity, while women tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive goods concerned with appearance and emotional aspects of self.

These particular purchases (cars, computers, video equipment, CDs, cosmetics, clothes and other wardrobe accessories) all contribute to unsustainable, unpeaceful futures for the person consuming, the person producing and they inflict horrendous damage on the natural environment (through extraction of resources, use of certain products/services and then disposal of used products).



All for the sake of self image, self esteem and a mental, internal sense of who we are as a person (self-identity), **expressed externally, for all to see and judge**, by what we own, wear, drive, eat, et cetera.

