

'The Story of Stuff' and ethical consumption

Over the past century those of us living in the economically richer countries increasingly define ourselves and each other by what we buy, wear and consume. These days, 'you are what you consume' as well as 'you are what you eat'.

We are in love with 'stuff' – we are told we need stuff to make us happy, we buy more stuff, we surround ourselves with stuff, we don't like sharing our stuff and we waste stuff! What's more, all this stuff is not making us happy.

Studies show that economically richer countries tend to have the highest rates of mental illness, with the USA leading the tables and Britain not far behind, including problems arising from substance use, psychoses, depression, anxiety, and eating disorders.



We simply consume too much and we are depleting the earth's natural resources at an alarming rate. Too much of what we use is toxic and damaging to the environment, other animals and other humans.

If everyone in the world consumed at the same rate as the average North American person, we would need 5 planet Earths. The average British person consumes the equivalent of 3 planet Earths.

Most of our stuff is made by people in the economically poor countries of the world, often by children.



Despite (or rather because of) all the stuff we have in the rich countries, nearly one half of the world's population (more than 3 billion people) live on less than £1.65/day and at least 1 billion people still go hungry every day!

The good news 😊

Every day we make choices according to our personal ethics. As consumers, we have a huge amount of power to change the world.

Fairly traded goods, organic foods, vegan products, electric cars, cosmetics that are not tested on animals, upcycled products and vintage fashion, eco-friendly cleaning products and many more have come onto the market and surged in popularity due to increasing public awareness and consumer pressure.

As consumers, we have influenced the decisions of multinational corporations and governments through campaigns, petitions, boycotts and simply shopping in a different way; voting with our £s.

What else can we practically do as individuals, families and communities to make this a fairer, less-cluttered, more sustainable world?

- 😊 Reduce consumption overall. Do you really need that new gadget? Could you re-use or recycle something you already have?
- 😊 Always recycle if you cannot reduce or re-use something.
- 😊 Could you buy something second-hand? You can find amazing things in charity shops and by shopping in them you are not only reducing waste and helping you save money, you are supporting the charity's important work too.
- 😊 Support, or set up, a local swap-shop network. These are popping up all over the place now, made easier by the advent of social media of course.
- 😊 Sign petitions to encourage corporations to become more ethical and boycott unethical companies.
- 😊 Sign up to Ethical Consumer and find out which are the most ethical companies and products – either online or receive their magazine; for over 25 years Ethical Consumer has been the hub of the ethical consumer movement, helping consumers to shop ethically, campaigners to challenge corporate power and businesses to improve their supply chain. Their mission is 'to make global businesses more sustainable through consumer pressure'.

“We received this world as an inheritance from past generations, but also as a loan from future generations, to whom we will have to return it!” (Pope Francis)

Useful links:

www.storyofstuff.org

www.ethicalconsumer.org

www.happyplanetindex.org

www.oneplanetliving.com

www.earthday.org

Each month I will be writing about different aspects of sustainable living. Please do get in touch with your questions and ideas 😊



Thank you

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