

Why are so many young adults buying too many clothes and what can we do to change these pollution enhancing behaviors.

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The International Fashion Consumption Survey Summary Report of Greenpeace should be required reading for individual shoppers, parents, school children, activist groups for social change, and above all for managers of textile companies and policy makers at national and international levels. It documents that many stakeholders contribute to the increase in environmental problems and that all can be part of possible solutions!! The report underlines some facts which are not widely known: the growing textile industry is now **the second most important water consumer** worldwide polluting **waterways and oceans with the 3500 chemicals** that are used for producing dyeing, coating and softening fabrics, many of them able to cause cancer or disrupt the endocrine system.

Greenpeace has been fighting for a cleaner textile industry, committing almost 80 global textile brands and suppliers to ban hazardous chemicals from their supply chain. However, policy makers should make this ban compulsory for all textile companies and managers should be held accountable for the health and pollution damages they create, and receive tax benefits if they ban the hazardous chemicals in their production. But we as individual shoppers can contribute a great deal to solving the problems we create with our excessive buying, understanding why we buy and how we can explore alternative ways to satisfy our needs and desires.

The report documents that a third to a half of individuals, especially in China and Hong Kong but also in Europe are buying more clothes, shoes and bags that they need and that they have ambivalent feelings about their shopping habits, since their excitement over buying a new item wears off within a day, and about one third feel more empty and unfulfilled afterwards. About 40% shop compulsively more than once a week, and they are mostly young, high income women. Psychological factors such as gaining of approval, increasing self-esteem, feeling important and respected, seeking excitement and escaping boredom have been found by researchers to be motivating factors for excessive buying. Possessions are a way of reinventing yourself, of compensating for self-discrepancy, that is the difference between your perceived actual self and your desired self. This discrepancy diminishing function has been found also in other forms of psychological disorders such as gambling, alcohol abuse, eating disorders and sexual promiscuity, which are also increasing in our liquid, anxiety enhancing societies.

Psychologists have developed various modalities to treat these disorders, and compulsive shoppers should be encouraged to join self-help groups, or to seek psychological counseling to find the specific hidden motives and situations that lead them to compulsive behaviors. But helping single individuals is not enough, since we

need to better understand why overbuying has become a social phenomenon worldwide in the age bracket (20-45 years old) sampled in the Greenhouse survey.

I think what fuels excessive buying in these young adults is a desire to change something in an unsatisfying life, in a world in which finding lasting love, work and meaningful aims have become difficult for the younger generation and especially for young educated women. China and Hong Kong, and in spite of the gains made by women's movements, many western countries are still patriarchal societies, where most of positions of power are held by males who pursue materialistic values of wealth and power in ferocious competition with one another. Young and high income women are particularly stressed in these highly competitive work environment, where to go ahead they have to adhere to these male values. Wearing high heels and nice clothes is one quick, easy way they have, to affirm their threatened femininity, to empower themselves by having some control in at least one facet of their lives. In a globalized world that threatens local and ethnic identities, clothes, hair styles, tatoos become *visible* way to show one's unique identity.

Moreover, technological developments and social media, like Facebook and Instagram have made it possible to increase one's visibility and greatly incremented the opportunities **to see oneself in different modes, and to see other possible models to imitate. To be seen by many people has become a possible way to obtain some kind of celebrity**, the third core value (with wealth and power) of our globalized society. In fact if global stars can count their millions of followers, any Facebook member can measure how his posts are received by the number of likes! To be seen means that how we look becomes very important and changing clothes and appearance on Facebook profiles has become a frequent task!!

The Greenpeace reports documents how online shopping increases the propension to excessive buying and **how advertising plays a big role in this process**, supporting materialistic values that to "have is to be", that possessions are the key to self-identity and happiness. Changing these values in the majority of the populations is the great challenge that we face. There are many obstacles. Our finance dominated economy has promoted money as the main indicator of a successful life. Managers have to make more profits, selling more products, employing the smallest number of workers, and substituting them with robots or software devices as often as possible, and have to use more advertising to create new desires for their products. The textile industry is undergoing a structural change, with small shops and even shopping malls closing for lack of customers, cutting thousands of jobs. Immigrants compete with low skilled locals for working long hours with low salaries delivering products we buy online, where advertising is the main way social networks make their profits.

As a community psychologist I was trained to see the obstacles but also the emerging positive trends that can help us reach desired collective goals, in our specific case to find alternatives to excessive shopping to increase our happiness and define our precious self-identity. The birth of a relational and sharing economy, the mindfulness movement, and the increased attention to healthy living, are hopeful signs, because they underline that understanding one's emotions and feelings and having good interpersonal relations are major wellbeing producing factors. The results of studies that show that people who engage in volunteer activities, have more friends and are more satisfied with their life should become more known. The potentials of social networks to build lasting relations has been confirmed by research showing that one third of the marriages between 2010-2015 have occurred between partners who met on specific dating sites. To decrease online buying, we could build a lending clothes online platform, where people can exchange clothes instead of buying new ones and make friends at the same time. We can boycott products of companies which still use dangerous chemicals and above all we can use our collective creativity to persuade politicians to create a society that is more equitable and offers more opportunities for young people to lead meaningful lives.