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Five Orders of Consumer Adulthood and their Impact on Sustainability

Inspired by Robert Kegan's (1994) five orders of consciousness (people's mental complexity), this chapter introduces the idea of five *orders of consumer adulthood*. Sustainable economic, human and social development hinges on people achieving the fifth order, a world centric focus on global connections and a transcendent consumer-citizen in constant transformation.

This e-book is about the challenge consumer citizens face relative to global sustainable development. Sustainability has many definitions. Fundamentally, it means that those meeting their needs in the present do not compromise the needs of future generations or the integrity of natural environments. This chapter embraces a notion of sustainability grounded in common principles found in charters and action programs: integration of environmental, social, human and economic goals and policies; ensuring inter-generational equity; no net loss of human, social or economic capital; conservation of biodiversity and ecological integrity; and, transparent citizen participation and good governance.¹

Socially responsible ethical consumption and sustainability have been conceptually linked for about three decades.² In fact, a consensus has emerged in the consumer behaviour literature that consumers' ethical judgements are best described as a function of the consumer's personality, level of moral development and cultural environment.³ Consequently, this chapter brings to bear the notions of consumer morality and sustainability and introduces the idea of *consumer adulthood*. It does this by bringing into focus the idea of moral development, and in

¹K Hargroves and M Smith (Eds.), *The natural advantage of nations*. London: Earthscan/James&James, 2005.

²R Harrison, T Newholm and D Shaw, *The ethical consumer*. London: Sage, 2005.

³S Bonsu and D Zwick, 'Exploring consumer ethics in Ghana, West Africa', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol. 31(6), 2007, pp. 648-655.

particular orders of moral consciousness in consumer adulthood. Consciousness has a role to play in moral responsibility.⁴

Orders of consciousness is a cognitive development approach developed by Kegan.⁵ R Kegan, *In over our heads*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. He has shown that people are capable of moving through deep transformations as they engage in making meaning. His theory offers five levels or orders of consciousness, and he associates age with these levels of mental complexity:

- *First order - Impulsive* (age 2-6) - actions based on emotions and impulse (no sense of *self*)
- *Second order - Imperial* (age 7-12) - motivated by one's own desires - notion of *self* is emerging
- *Third order - Interpersonal* (age 13-30) - *self* is totally defined by the group and values given by society
- *Fourth order - Institutional* (age 30 and onward, at least middle age) - *self* is self-authored and unique identity emerges
- *Fifth order - Interindividual* (mid-40s and onward) - *self* is a system in-formation, made up of a weaving together of elements from other systems.

⁴N Levy, 'Are Zombies Responsible? The Role of Consciousness in Moral Responsibility', 2004, viewed on October 13, 2007, The Future of Humanity Institute website, http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/Papers/consciousness%20and%20MR_levy%2024%20jan.pdf

⁵R Kegan, *The evolving of self*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.

The first two orders are focused on me (egocentric), the third order is ethnocentric (focused on us), and the fourth and fifth orders are focused on the world (all of us). Each level transcends the previous one but still includes the mental functioning abilities of what came before. More on this approach will be provided in the following text. Kegan⁶ proposes that, psychologically, people grow through these five stages or orders of increasing *competence, care, and concern*. Their *mental complexity* increases. Movement between levels of consciousness is incremental and usually quite slow.^{7 8} Indeed, Kegan⁹ explains that most adults (79%) never progress beyond Level Three (conformist-self, actions informed by internalized voices of others), have to be over the age of 40 to even be capable of moving to stage four (self-constructed identity, 21%) and hardly ever make it to stage five (fluid self-sense couched in complex systems) (sages, elders, spiritual leaders).¹⁰

This chapter is deeply inspired by David Korten's¹¹ book, *The Great Turning*, wherein he applies Kegan's¹² idea of transformation to understand the place of consciousness raising in the work of the moving from a society focused on domination and life-denying stories to one of partnerships and life affirming stories. Sustainability is better ensured as people operate at higher orders of consciousness because their focus is on the world and interconnections. Levy's¹³ musings further inform this chapter. He holds that people's degree of moral responsibility is linked with their consciousness of: their intentions, the risks and possible consequences. For this reason, it is important that people have help as they strive to become aware of which level of moral consciousness they hold so they can advance toward the higher orders of consciousness and consumer adulthood. Following this logic, people can only be held morally responsible for their consumer behaviour if they are conscious of the level of moral consciousness at which they are operating.

McGregor¹⁴ tenders a comprehensive discussion of what is involved in understanding *consumers'* moral consciousness. She argues that, "*other-oriented* consumer activity is mediated through moral agency, which becomes a powerful influence on sustainability when coupled with social agency"¹⁵ (p.364). This chapter extends

⁶Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

⁷Kegan (1994) posits that this development does not occur all of a sudden. People actually move through four steps each time they progress from one level to another. First, they construct knowledge in such a way that it fits their current level of consciousness (consumer adulthood). Second, they build a bridge to the next order of consciousness by constructing meaning in two ways at the same time. Third, they come to prefer one way over the other. Fourth, they step fully beyond an earlier order to the next, larger frame of complexity. He also proposes that they need *holding environments* (safety nets) in which they can be affirmed for where they are, challenged to move beyond it, and supported and nurtured in the growth of a new way of meaning making. He also asserts that society is changing in such a way that it is demanding that people evolve from the standard of Level Three to Four and, ultimately, to Level Five.

⁸S Willis, 'Research Project: Exploring LIOS' transformative education', Autumn 2004, viewed on October 13, 2007, the Leadership Institute of Seattle website, <http://www.lios.org/resources/documents/linkage32.pdf>

⁹ Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

¹⁰E deBold, 'Epistemology, fourth order consciousness, and the subject-object relationship,' *What is Enlightenment Magazine*, 22, Fall-Winter 2002, viewed on October 13, 2007, <http://www.wie.org/j22/kegan.asp?pf=1>

¹¹D Korten, *The Great Turning*, San Francisco: Berrett Koehler, 2006.

¹²Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

¹³Levy, *op. cit.*, 2004.

¹⁴S L T McGregor, Understanding consumer moral consciousness. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol 30(2), 2006, pp.164-178

¹⁵S L T McGregor, 'Sustainability through vicarious learning: Reframing consumer education', in A.E.J. Wals (ed), *Social learning towards a sustainable world*, Wageningen Pub, The Netherlands, 2007, pp. 351-367.

her thinking¹⁶, making the case that *sustainable* economic, human and social development hinges on people striving to achieve consumer adulthood and the fifth order of consciousness. The argument is made that people can achieve the highest level of *consumer adulthood* if they respect a progressive appreciation for the morality of their consumption behaviour: (a) impulsive-egocentric (still learning about the world and one's place in it); (b) imperial (myopic self-centered behaviour to gain personal advantage); (c) socialized consciousness (reliance on others' perceptions to create their sense of consumer-self); (d) autonomous, critical self-author (cultural consciousness); and, (e) self-transforming, spiritual consciousness for the betterment of humanity (Korten's¹⁷ labels for the five orders).

Willis¹⁸ and Proehl and Taylor¹⁹ explain that once people's experiences become the object of their reflection, they can take responsibility for those experiences. For this to happen, people have to stop and pay attention to their consuming life. This chapter proposes five Orders of Consumer Adulthood. Because the main intent of this chapter is to introduce the profession to this idea, the bulk of the chapter entails a discussion of the nuances of each of the five orders. The chapter concludes with a preliminary discussion of what all this means for those concerned with ethical and moral consumption vis-a-vis sustainability. The orders of consciousness approach represents *principles of mental organization* affecting the way people think, feel, and relate to themselves and others. The author anticipates that readers will be inspired to conduct future empirical and interpretative research informed by the notion of orders of consumer adulthood as it relates to sustainability. Table one was developed as a tool to spur research in this area of sustainability. It tenders initial, plausible vignettes of each of the five orders of consumer adulthood, a sort of jumping off point for future conversations and dialogue.

Table one - Plausible Vignettes of Five Orders of Consumer Adulthood

First order Consumer Adulthood	In a consumer society, people operating at this level of mental complexity assume that if they cannot see, feel or hear other people (e.g., labourers) or things (e.g., others species), then they do not exist. These consumers see everything in their own self interest and are deeply governed by consumer impulses, which they cannot resist - they have to act on them. Because they can be harmed or injured, they need constant supervision (protection from themselves). They have no sense of self and are incapable of malice or any moral sensibilities. For them, 'Shopping is not good, shopping is not bad; shopping just is.'
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¹⁶S L T McGregor, 'Sustainable consumer empowerment via critical consumer education', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, vol 29(5), 2005, pp. 426-436.

¹⁷Korten, *op. cit.*, 2006.

¹⁸Willis, *op. cit.*, 2004.

¹⁹R A Proehl and K Taylor, 'Leadership, cognitive complexity, and gender', *Kappa Omicron Nu Forum*, vol 12(1), 2001, viewed on October 13, 2007, http://www.kon.org/archives/forum/12_1/prehl.html

<p>Second Order Consumer Adulthood</p>	<p>In a consumer society, people operating at this level of mental complexity can now appreciate that any action has consequences, but they only act morally so they do not get caught. They will break the rules if the risk is perceived as small; spending is seen as a mandate in a consumer society so not spending is seen as breaking a rule. Since they are completely incapable of integrating others' needs into their wants; they cannot empathize with the plight of labourers, other species or the planet. Hence, they see no problem with spending money to buy goods; they want what they want, when they want it. They connect to others only to be able to manipulate them to meet their personal needs, usually through indiscriminately consuming goods and services. They are not capable of identifying with other races, cultures, religions or classes; because of this distance, they see no connection with invisible labourers and they view the earth as there for the taking (exploitation of natural resources and other species to advance the human species - progress).</p>
<p>Third Order Consumer Adulthood</p>	<p>In a consumer society, people operating with this level of mental complexity have totally, uncritically, assumed the value premises of a consumer society (competition, profit, wealth, work to make money to buy material possessions, conspicuous consumption, et cetera). Their sense of self and identity is tied to being a consumer. They orient themselves to other consumers for approval, and are very malleable to the overtures of advertisers and marketers. They will do things in the marketplace because they have been told it is the right thing to do, even when they know it is not in their own best interest. They crave approval and acceptance of other consumers and aspire for more. Any differences are perceived as threatening, so they tend to buy what others are buying so they fit in with the status quo. Their self-esteem is heavily dependent on the approval of other consumers (hence the penchant for brands, logos, et cetera). Any feedback from people who comment on their consumer lifestyle is perceived as threatening and they turn to more consumption to feed their fear and anger. They believe that ideas for progress, success and getting ahead come from outside them, not from within.</p>
<p>Fourth Order Consumer Adulthood</p>	<p>In a consumer society, people operating with this mental complexity have been able to shed the value systems imposed on them by the consumer society and then created their own belief system (likely these are ethical consumers, green consumers, those embracing voluntary simplicity, and advocates of anti-consumerism). They strive for a higher order of moral sensibility and are able and willing to assume responsibility for difficult moral judgements about their consumer decisions and that of the larger society. They are able to intentionally choose their future, often shaped by life-affirming principles. They feel deep empathy with the plight of women, children and others who produce the goods they consume, and for environmental impacts. In fact, they can become so convinced of their ideological stance that others perceive them as agents of indoctrination.</p>

**Fifth Order
Consumer Adulthood**

In a consumer society, people operating with this mental complexity see themselves in a constant state of in-formation. They are concerned with the common good in the face of global marketplace complexity. They see themselves as part of a wider, deeper community of humanity, as consumer-citizens. They are constantly engaged in inner and outer dialogue about the import of a consumer society and its impact on sustainability and are very able to see connections between disparate things (a global perspective). They easily see the link between their consumption decisions and the human and labour rights of distant labourers and the impact on the natural environment. For them, being self-critical is a rich act of being socially responsible. They value contradictions in their consumer life as chances to grow and learn more about their synergistic role as a global citizen. They see themselves as party to a social contract for the inclusive, mutual good of humanity. They readily recognize the needs of others and this recognition is seen as a powerful path to expanding their sense of self. Their consumer morality is predicated on compassion, justice, peace, security, non-violence and love.

Five Orders of Consciousness and Consumer Adulthood

The concept of orders of consciousness (complexity of the mind) brings a powerful perspective to bear on sustainable consumer behaviour. Kegan²⁰ conceives of cognitive development in the larger activity of transformation and meaning making rather than predictable stages over a lifespan. Development is not simply a linear progression; rather, it is a kind of multi-dimensional ripening in which each succeeding transformation goes meta to the prior one, more like a bud becomes a flower than a ladder rung leads to another rung. He believes that development is a process of outgrowing one system of meaning and integrating it as a subsystem into a new system of meaning. What was *the whole* becomes only a part of a new whole. Also, there is no order or level of consciousness that is inherently better than any other. Having a numerically higher order does not make a better person, either morally or intellectually. What *is* important is the *fit* between the Order of the mind and the complexity of the mental task each person is required to do. Problems arise when people's environments present them with challenges beyond their current capacity to manage the mental complexity; they are at an *inadequate* order of consciousness. An example is someone operating at the second order of consumer adulthood learning about the labour behind the label movement; they are unable to care for the plight of others because they are too focused on their own self-interests.

Of special relevance to Kegan's²¹ approach is the notion of *subject-object*. Quite simply, if people are controlled by something, they are subject to it (e.g., spending to keep up with the Joneses). If they can stop and take a perspective on something (it becomes the object), then they can take responsibility for it because it no longer controls them (e.g., spending to keep up with the Joneses). He suggests that any of the five levels of consciousness can be distinguished by what people are captive to and what they are objective about.

Kegan²² proposes that as people get older and mature, they become more objective, less controlled by things. With consciousness maturity, people can begin to relate to things to which they were once attached (e.g., material possessions) with a growing sense of detachment and awareness. This is how the growth of the mind

²⁰Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1982, 1994.

²¹Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

occurs, and how the mind becomes more complex. It is an easy transition to apply these ideas to consumption. With consciousness awareness, people can change their entire mode of consuming to a moral imperative, a mature consumer stance - consumer adulthood. Each of the five orders of consciousness will now be described in detail.²³ Following Korten's²⁴ example, the labels for each order vary from Kegan's so as to parallel the focus on consumer adulthood and mature, moral, consumer meaning making.

First Order Consumer Adulthood

People operating from this order of consciousness cannot connect cause and effect; therefore, they cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They are incapable of malice or moral sensibility. They expect authority figures to make things right and feel betrayed when this does not happen. They live wholly in the present and function on emotions, impulses and perceptions (what they can actually see). If they cannot see, feel or hear it, they think it does not exist anymore (literally, 'out of sight, out of mind'). They see everything in terms of

²²*ibid*

²³In addition to reading Kegan (1982, 1994), other sources were also consulted for their interpretation of his work, their consultancy with him or interviews with him:

M Bombeck, 'Helping people to mature: Robert Kegan and psychotherapy', *Mental Health Net Essays*, 2007 June 6, viewed on October 14, 2007, http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=12696

J Gary, 'Crossing the Jabbok', *Features*, 2005, March 14, viewed on October 14, 2007 from http://www.jaygary.com/print_jabbok.shtml

J deJong, 'Don't get me started: Orders of consciousness', *Catalyst Magazine*, 2006 November, viewed on October 14, 2007, http://www.catalystmagazine.net/regulars/don't_get_me_started/don't_get_me_started_orders_of_consciousness.html

R G Litchfield, 'Robert Kegan's theory of human development,' January, 1998, viewed on October 14, 2007, the Methodist Theological School website, http://www.mtso.edu/rlitchfield/Develop_theory/kegan/index.htm

M Mishra, 'Developmentally challenged', *The Journal of Liberal Religion*, vol 5(1), 2005, viewed on October 16, 2007, http://www.meadville.edu/LL_JournalLR_v5n1_Mishra.htm

T Patten, 'How consciousness develops adequate complexity to deal with a complex world: The subject-object theory of Robert Kegan', 2007, viewed on October 14, 2007, <http://terrypatten.typepad.com/iran/files/KeganEnglish.pdf>

C O Scharmer, 'Grabbing the tiger by the tail: Conversation with Robert Kegan', *Dialogue on Leadership*, March 2000, viewed on October 14, 2007, http://www.dialogonleadership.org/Kegan_1999.html#nine

F L Schults, 'Rationality in science and technology', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, vol 49(4), 1997, pp. 228-236, viewed on October 22, 2007, http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1997/PSCF12_97Shults.html

R Tiberius, 'Educational abstracts', *Academic Psychiatry*, vol 25(4), 2001, p. 240, viewed October 22, 2007, <http://ap.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/reprint/25/4/240.pdf>

W Webb, 'Differentiations of consciousness', 1997, viewed on October 14, 2007, University of Washington website, <http://faculty.washington.edu/ewebb/EVitaly.pdf>

²⁴Korten, *op. cit.*, 2006.

their own feelings and simply cannot differentiate between self and others. They have no sense of self. Furthermore, they need to be constantly reminded of the rules because they cannot hold rules in their mind. They need constant supervision. Their sole job is to learn about the world, and try to sort out basic relationships.

Second Order Consumer Adulthood

When people progress to the second level of mental complexity, a notion of *me* emerges, a sense of a *self*; things can exist even if they cannot sense them. Korten²⁵ and Kegan²⁶ call this the imperial stage because people do not share reality with others; rather, they are very egocentric (meaning they are concerned with themselves and not with others or society). They do grant that others exist and they do accept that relationships with others are predictable. They can now appreciate that their actions have consequences; they have learned some of the basic rules. But, they also have learned how to play up to the powerful and to exploit others to meet their own needs. They will break the rules if they gauge that the risk is small. Their only concern for consequences is whether someone catches them breaking the rules or engaging in bad behaviour. They distinguish between guilt (implicated in an action but not caught yet) and worry (concerned with the consequences). They act morally because they might get caught otherwise. They cannot admit that they are wrong or erred. They cannot see their own actions through other people's eyes. They also are not capable of compassion (a sad concern for someone in misfortune). They are incapable of integrating their own wants with the needs of others. Said another way, they can only understand things on an intellectual level; they cannot empathize (imagine the feelings of others and act accordingly). They can only construct knowledge out of their own point of view.

They are quite capable of giving up a perceived benefit for one more attractive in the long term. They want what they want, when they want it. They recognize impulses now but cannot constrain them; they have to act on them. As well, they are discovering order, regularity and stability but this is incomplete at this stage. Also, at this level of mental complexity, people do not make choices per se; they do as they do because it is the only way they know how to operate. They see others as either facilitators to get what they want or as thwarters. Relationships are the avenues they use to expedite exchanges. They are so preoccupied with establishing their own identity (sense of self) that they are not able to be mindful of other's interests; hence, they have no sense of loyalty and they value distributive justice (the fair exchange principle applied to the sharing of resources). They need clear boundaries but usually push back. At the same time, they need approval because they are self-centered. Tensions often arise due to this dual need. Their identity is still forming. They say things like, "I am Sue" (identify with their name) rather than identifying with a race, class, culture, religion, other citizens or some other cultural construct. They are not connected to society at this level of mental complexity and their connection with others is to be manipulated to meet their personal needs.

Third Order Consumer Adulthood

At this level of mental complexity, people have learned to conform to society's rules. Korten²⁷ calls this Socialized Consciousness. Kegan's²⁸ research has shown that 80% of adults are stuck in this stage. At this level,

²⁵*ibid*

²⁶Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

²⁷Korten, *op. cit.*, 2006.

²⁸Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

people operate within a value system that was given to them by society. They have accepted, as their own, the value system of the wider community, have internalized this value system and committed themselves to it. They are, however, not able to question this value system. They have identified with the *given* arrangements and taken them as real. They cannot step back from their cultural surroundings and look at the nature of societal arrangements and make decisions about them. As well, they cannot separate themselves from others; their identity is dependent *on* others. They have no self that is separate from others; hence, those operating at this level of consciousness need a stable society so they can be a good citizen. They have learned the conventions that both rule and define their place in the world. They mentally give external authorities permission to rule them, and can readily yield allegiance if persuaded (they are easily manipulated by others and Korten notes they can be just as likely to fall back to Level Two as to evolve to Level Four).

They are now able to identify with members of other groups (peers (with teenagers), race, nation, religion, ethnic group, corporation, civil society organization, other cultures). They accept the truth of these reference groups as the only truth. Affiliation and acceptance are key to their identity. They orient themselves to others for approval. They are very vulnerable to the views of others. In fact, people at this level of consciousness need others to help them construct themselves, their identity. Because they can now identify with others, people at this level of mental complexity can begin to care for others and for how their own behaviour will affect others. They have begun to see that people are worthy of care and our consideration; hence, they can now also enter into empathetic and reciprocal obligations with others because they are devoted to something that is greater than their own needs. They take action because the consequences are positive for someone else.

When they face a conflict, they often cannot make a decision because they do not have an internally constructed self to which they can turn. They rely on others whom they respect to make the difficult decisions for them. When push comes to shove, they either capitulate or rebel and feel profound guilt if they opt for the latter response. The idea of doing things 'because it is the right thing to do,' even if it is not in their best interest, makes sense to people at this level of mental complexity.

Interestingly, while they feel obligated to seek the rights of their own group(s), they feel justified in denying those same rights to others that are different. Differences are perceived as threatening. As with the value system, they have internalized the moral code of conduct of society but cannot critically examine it. They accept that there are legitimate public interests that require collective action, and they adopt a law-and-order morality. They follow the laws and rules out of loyalty to others in their group. Although they are capable of subordinating their needs to others, they behave morally so they can avoid feeling guilty when they do break the group's rules. Indeed, they play by existing rules and feel like they have let others down if they ignore the rules. They do not deal well with anger because they feel it threatens their relationships. They deny the anger and opt instead for feelings of sadness, incompleteness and a sense of being wounded. Their self-esteem is reliant on others. Any feedback received from others tends to be viewed as criticism, making them move easily onto the defensive. People of this mental complexity are pained when they disappoint their group. They hold others responsible for their feelings and they hold themselves responsible for other's feelings; hence, few people ever assume responsibility for their own actions.

People at this level of mental complexity have become conscious of their own thinking and they are now able to think abstractly and make generalizations. They can reflect on their thinking using the tools of logic to reveal hidden truths. They can use inferences to coordinate concrete data and develop and accept assumptions for the sake of a good discussion and argument. They also can hold two or more points of view in their mind at the same time. When they encounter new information, they try to make it fit within their existing mental schema; their level of mental development only allows them to take new, more complex content and make it fit within their existing mental frame; they cannot transform it or transcend it.

This trait is mitigated by the fact that the myths of their culture have seeped deep into their bones over the years and these myths have power. It is hard to negotiate new things into their life. People tend to think, “I *am* your opinion of me.” They are still captives of someone else’s opinion. They pay close attention to what others have to say and believe that ideas come from outside of their heads rather from within themselves (easy to assume role of martyr and victim). They are, however, developing a capacity for seeing relationships in a shared context, rather than as a tool to gain a personal advantage. They can now move between themselves and mutual concerns for others, thereby creating, at the least, an inner dialogue. Nonetheless, their identity is embedded within others and co-determined with them, rather than self-identified. Their personal security depends on the mutual loyalty of their group.

Fourth Order Consumer Adulthood

Korten²⁹ labels this fourth level of mental complexity the Autonomous Consciousness. People at this level see themselves as a part of a complex system, as part of a system of relationships. This capacity of their mind enables them to stand outside of the belief and value system that they had accepted and taken for granted at Level Three and think about that very same system, contemplating its merit and adequacy. They are capable of independent, critical thought and judgements. Upon reflection, they construct their own value system and embrace other ways of making sense of their world. Once this happens, they are in a position to prioritize a variety of competing and possible values, examine their moral principles and make new commitments and strive for a higher order of moral sensibility. In effect, they become authors of their own belief system, self-authors; hence, Korten’s label of autonomous. This stance opens their consciousness to other ways of knowing and meaning making, leading to new self-understanding and the development of their *own identity*.

Because they are capable of drawing on their own authority (not an external authority) to prioritize their goals, values and beliefs, they are able to test their behaviour against these self-authored standards and assume responsibility for difficult moral judgements. People at this level of mental complexity choose the values they wish to hold, and accept responsibility for making choices. They know they cannot take responsibility for other’s choices or how others feel. They know that they control only their own state of mind. They can take responsibility for their own feelings and responses. And, they can see relationships as an inherent mix of past, present and future, an ability that lets them intentionally choose their own future. People at Level Four are more self-owning and able to develop an identity outside the context of others. They do not need others to vitalize or renew themselves; rather, they need others to be supportive of them as they construct their new self and live according to their set of self-authored, life

²⁹Korten, *op. cit.*, 2006.

affirming principles. They can espouse their value system and stand by it. In fact, they may become resistant to corrections and run the risk of being accused of indoctrinating others to their ideology.

People at Level Four are capable of feeling empathy for others. They do not feel torn apart by conflicts around them (hoping someone else will make the hard decisions) because they have their own self-designed value system with which to make decisions. In fact, they can create rules grounded in this value system and fight to protect those rules. Their inner vision is their anchor, to the point that they may be blinded to other notions of what is right or wrong (ethical). Ideas come to them from inside themselves and not from outside reference groups anymore. Indeed, unlike Level Three, which was outward oriented, people at Level Four are very inward oriented. They believe they are a person in their own right and are active in *re-cognizing* new relationships with themselves (the hyphenated *re-cognize* represents re- knowing (cognition) themselves). People at this level see themselves in relationship with other like-minded people who share a particular or complementary belief system (but they do not see a global system, yet). Cordial relations are sufficient. Ambiguity is tolerated. Friendship, affiliation and acceptance are not an imperative because people at this level are not unduly shaped by the context within which they find themselves. Instead, their well-being and self-esteem is linked to the smooth running of their own belief system.

Because they freed themselves from the value system they held at the other level of consciousness, they see themselves as liberated, free to explore various value systems as they construct their own system. They see themselves as succeeding or failing according to how well their value system continues to make sense *to them*, to work for them, and how well they are able to analyze life and make changes to that system of ideas. However, they are not yet able to step back far enough to see themselves in the context of a constantly unfolding global system. That necessitates Level Five. Level Four is all about maintaining the self-authored system.

Fifth Order Consumer Adulthood

It is very rare that adults achieve this level of mental complexity.³⁰ If they do, they are able to see clearly how their self-constructed belief system (developed at Level Four) is mediated by historical, cultural, psychological, personal, social and other forces. People operating at this level are concerned with the common good in the face of global complexity. When people have reached the fifth order of consciousness (highest order of consumer adulthood), they have learned the limits of their inner system of meaning making and the limits of *having* an inner system in general. They now understand that they are part of wider, deeper community of humanity. They realize that their self-authored value system from Level Four is not complete, will never be complete; they can see themselves as *in-formation* within a much larger, dynamic system. They can let go of the hard earned sense of self gained at Level Four and discover that self is not fixed (hence does not need to be maintained); rather, fifth order self is a fluid process that makes up the world. They see themselves as co-creators of the world, which is complex, emergent and evolving. Their focus is on possibilities and potentialities. Their sense of self is not tied to particular identities or roles, but is constantly created through the exploration of their identities and roles and further honed through interactions with others. They are both self-authoring and willing to work with the authority of others. They are able not only to question authority, but also to question themselves. The process of inner and outer dialogue holds

³⁰Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

value in and of itself. Kegan³¹ holds that the fifth order of consciousness is not commonly achieved, but that the nature of today's world demands that we strive for this level of consciousness.

This fifth order *self* is made up of a weaving together of systems and this is possible because people with this level of mental complexity understand how systems and groups have shaped them and vice-versa. They recognize the essential connections of seemingly irreconcilable perspectives. They can reflect on the larger roles and purposes of groups, organizations and systems. They are able to actively seek to understand how other cultures see the world and make meaning. Also, they can seek what is missing about their self (via this inquiry process). Importantly, they are capable of seeking information that causes changes in their behavior and they are capable of negatively judging themselves. They can then synthesize their own value system by integrating many different perspectives into a coherent whole.

The result is a self that they can give to others. They are also willing to expose themselves to exclusion because they can live within their integrity. People with Level Five mental complexity are willing to risk enhancing their self with open-minded, conflicting encounters and they deal well with acknowledging and appreciating contradictions and tensions between self and systems. They see conflict and contradictions as opportunities for them to learn deeper. They use this vulnerability and awareness of place in present time as a transformative power source - mutual authorship (instead of self authorship from Level Four). For them, self-criticism is an act of responsibility.

Beyond Level Four, who actively seek to understand how other cultures see the world and make meaning, those at Level Five integrate these understandings into their evolving self. They have achieved a deep and richly nuanced understanding of the complexity of the infinite and their place within it. Most importantly, they do not look at the parts anymore; they can only see the wholes. They have developed a whole capacity for reconnecting to ideologies they have critically examined and recognizing that each of them is partial. They are building relationships among them rather than holding on to one and projecting the other. The results is a self with an examined ideology, an anchor for their psychic administration.

At the fifth level of mental complexity, a person's thoughts become *objects* to be viewed and critiqued rather than things that control them (making people subject to their power). This self-transforming self is able to hold on to multiple systems of thinking. They begin to construct the world so they see that the life project is not about continuing to defend one formation of the self but about the ability to have the self literally be transformative. They also see a social contract to work together for inclusive, mutual good. They have a sense of duty and loyalty to the whole of life. They appreciate that the act of recognizing others' needs and rights expands their sense of self-identity. From this transcendent stance, morality is examined from the tenets of justice, love and compassion. Morality unfolds within a dynamic context, a complex, multi-dimensional, interconnected, continuously unfolding whole.

In Closing...

The mental demands of people in their consumer role are truly being challenged; yet, people operating at the second and third orders of consumer adulthood are just not prepared for the reasoning and mental complexity inherent in judging the morality and ethics of purchases in a global marketplace as they pertain to sustainability.

³¹ *ibid.*

Kegan³² argues that the pressures of the modern culture require at least a fourth order transformation of consciousness in all areas of adult responsibility; this chapter made the same argument for life in a consumer culture. The third and fourth orders of consciousness are not inferior; they are simply inadequate in meeting the complex social, ethical and moral demands of consumer adulthood in the twenty-first century.

Imagine the challenge educators now face with this insight as they try to hold people to the standard of global education principles³³ and global citizenship^{34 35} when most people are operating only at the third order. These consumers cannot place the interests of others and the planet first because their moral imperative and their mental capacity to engage in this level of social responsibility is just not developed to that standard. Yet, the demands placed by a consumer culture on people, other species and the environment are pushing the trajectory of moral development to even higher standards.³⁶

The construct of orders of consumer adulthood enables us to argue that, because people living in a consumer society often act in a state of automation, they are not responsible for what they do because they are acting on only a small subset of their deepest selves, their convictions, their sense of what really matters (inspired by Levy,³⁷ who titled his work *Are Zombies Responsible?*). An agent is fully morally responsible for an action if the action is caused both by the reasons *and* by the agent. Consciousness alone cannot cause an action; the agent has to act on the consciousness.³⁸ If people are functioning at the second or third orders of consumer adulthood, they are incapable of appreciating the consequences of their actions on others outside of their group, or on the environment and other species. Worse yet, those at the third order feel quite justified in denying others' rights to which they feel entitled. And, any feedback they receive from others about their consuming behaviour is perceived as criticism.³⁹

Also, a person is morally responsible for an action if that person is capable of recognizing moral reasons and a place to exercise that reasoning.⁴⁰ If Kegan⁴¹ is right, if consumers are operating at the third order, or even the second order, then they need their moral consciousness awakened. Otherwise, they are stuck operating for their own self interest or marching to the tune of someone else's drum (having internalized an unexamined set of societal values that place a high importance on consuming).

What is most compelling is that from this perspective, we have to quit blaming unethical consumers because they lack effort, resources, knowledge or compassion and start appreciating that they cannot be held

³²*Ibid.*

³³G Pike and D Selby, *In the global classroom 1 and 2*, Toronto, Ontario: Pippin Publishing, 1999, 2000.

³⁴S L T McGregor, 'Towards a rationale for integrating consumer and citizenship education', *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, vol 23(4), 1999, pp. 207-211.

³⁵S L T McGregor, '*Consumer Citizenship: A pathway to sustainable development?*', Keynote at the International Conference on Developing Consumer Citizenship, April 2002 (no proceedings) Hamar, Norway. Available at <http://www.consultmcgregor.com>

³⁶S L T McGregor, 'Consumerism, the common good and the human condition', *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, vol 99(3), pp.15-22.

³⁷Levy, *op. cit.*, 2004.

³⁸R Clarke, *Libertarian accounts of free will*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

³⁹S L T McGregor, '*Conceptualizing immoral consumption using neutralization theory*', Unpublished manuscript (under peer review, 2007).

⁴⁰J M Fischer and M Ravizza, *Responsibility and control: A theory of moral responsibility*. Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

⁴¹Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

responsible for what is beyond their current mental capacity.⁴² As Kegan⁴³ and Korten⁴⁴ said, they are in over their heads and need help. Sustainable economic, human and social development hinges on people striving to achieve the fifth order of consumer adulthood. This intellectual idea is provocative, inspiring and daunting. But, its time is here. The orders of consumer adulthood construct challenges us to completely rethink our approaches to consumer education and education for sustainability.

⁴²Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994; Tiberius, *op. cit.*, 2001.

⁴³Kegan, *op. cit.*, 1994.

⁴⁴Korten, *op. cit.*, 2006.