



Research on Lifestyles, Values and Environment
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7XH



Centre for Environmental Strategy (CES)
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, Guildford,
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FORTHCOMING SEMINAR

15th February 2007, 1300 hrs

45A AZ 04

Ethical consumerism: everyday negotiations in the construction of an ethical self

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From the 18th Century boycott of sugar produced using slave labour to the 20th Century boycott of CFC aerosols, consumers have been at the vanguard of some of our greatest social and environmental victories. By its nature, ethical consumerism operates at the forefront of challenging and changing the norms of production and social behaviour, frequently at a cost to the self in terms of pleasure, price, convenience and a desirable social identity.

This seminar will outline the empirical findings from research into why individuals choose to become ethical consumers, how they decide on appropriate consumer behaviours, and the negotiations they face in everyday consumer decisions. The research explores the consumption of three categories of consumer products, across three ethical areas (green consumerism, fair trade and animal welfare concerns). Findings suggest that ethical consumerism is practised differently depending on the ethical issue, the product area and the place of consumption - creating complex relations to fluidity and consistency in ethical decision making.

These fluidities and consistencies highlight the roles of social identity, pleasure, love and graciousness in ethical consumer choices, as well as demonstrating the social and structural barriers to being an ethical consumer. The seminar will touch on how the ethical consumer negotiates these social and cultural factors, variously constructing their personal efficacy to facilitate desirable ethical choices and to justify non-ethical choices.

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