

Culture Report 2022

Youth Unlimited™
YFC TORONTO

SUMMER 2022

Navigating Life in the Material World

yugta.ca

How can we help young people navigate a consumer-centric, materialistic world? When everything tells us to focus on the 'seen' world, what does it mean for our young people to focus on the 'unseen' world? Join us as we explore these questions and more in this year's Culture Report. 📖

ABOUT US

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Putting a Stop to Consumerism's Vicious Cycle



TOPE FAMUTIMI
Jane-Finch
Associate Director

Where are our young people? It has been reported that those aged 13 to 18 spend the most time engaged with social media, at an average of 3 hours daily, with some teens spending up to 9 hours of their day on these platforms.

Young people consistently see, hear and read messages like, "Life is gucci when you got J's on your feet," and, "Girl is lookin' snatched with that crop top." Their tastes, preferences and identities are shaped by media and pop culture. They are inundated with thousands of subliminal messages through images, videos, and texts that say, "You are not enough."

Consumerism is a mind issue. Consumerism thrives in a community that thinks more is needed to receive happiness, satisfaction, attention, and belonging. The minds of children and youth are developing and crave self-concept, identity, and the need to feel loved and

accepted by a nurturing community. The truth is that many youth do not know the value God bestows upon them; others may know it in theory, but may not believe His words in real life. The constant distractions that are reflected on the screens of their devices remind them of the things they *don't* have and supposedly need to be valued in this world.

Consumerism sells a dream, a lifestyle to fill an insecurity that can be purchased at the click of a button with same-day delivery right to your doorstep. Many young people are motivated to gain employment so they can purchase 'stuff' for quick fixes of identity and belonging. Once they have consumed stuff, they need more stuff to temporarily satisfy the craving. Then they need to work more hours to earn more money to purchase more stuff. And so the cycle continues.

The question is: When do young people have the time to build into their emotional and spiritual development? When do they have

time to meditate on the truths of God? When do they have time to spend with a loving community of family and friends? **Consumerism robs us from truthful living.**

So how should we – as Youth Unlimited, parents, grandparents, pastors, youth workers, and everyday citizens – respond? My initial response is to create social hubs, educational programs, and community initiatives to alleviate the pressure youth face to conform to the vicious cycle of consumerism. While this is appropriate and impactful, **I am reminded of the simplest and most powerful response: Pray always.** Prayer can propel youth to resolute contentment over consumerism, "Godfidence" (confidence in God) over self-reliance, and biblical identity over societal pressures. Like Jesus, our prayer to God should be to protect them from the strategies of evil (John 17:15).

Let us pray that our youth will be filled with genuine gratitude for the things they currently have, cultivate love for the people around them,

and grow in the unshaken truth that they are loved by God.

Let us pray that tween girls and boys can enjoy their uniqueness and not just pretend they do – and dispel the pressure to belong to a specific group to feel loved and valued. They neither have to abandon their identity in Christ nor cave to those depressing shades of emptiness and false identities.

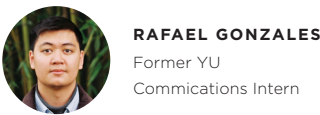
Let us pray that high school and post-secondary students relish in today's blessings and at the same time know that their identity is not defined by name brands.

May it be so. 🙏



The Upgrade Mentality

We sat down with two 20-somethings, Rafael and Brayden, to explore their perspectives on living in a consumerist world and stepping into adulthood.



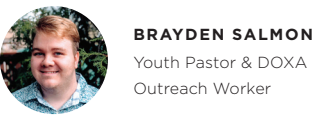
RAFAEL GONZALES
Former YU
Commications Intern

Do you think we live in a materialistic world? Why so?

BRAYDEN: Yes. We live in a world where what we have defines who we are. Our society has adopted an “upgrade mentality” when it comes to our possessions. Through social media and other influences, we start thinking we need things we didn’t even know we needed, and we’re always wanting the newest version of a product.

As you reflect on your teen years and now establishing yourselves as young adults, how has consumerism and materialism impacted you?

RAFAEL: Throughout my teen years, I tied my sense of self-worth to the stuff I owned. When my family struggled financially at times, it was hard to keep up with my friends and relate to my peers in terms of fashion, music, and culture. I was continually finding reasons to buy things and found it hard to be content with my circumstances.



BRAYDEN SALMON
Youth Pastor & DOXA
Outreach Worker

B: In my teen years, I didn’t understand the value of money. I’m slowly gaining more maturity when it comes to saving, spending, and understanding the value of money. The fear of missing out (FOMO!) on activities with friends also played a big role in my consumerist tendencies throughout high school.

What do you think are the most alluring promises young people hear in today’s society?

R: We are promised security, popularity, status, happiness, fulfillment, and success. But I’ve come to understand that the worldly identifiers of contentment fall short. I no longer tie my sense of self-worth and success to the things I own or what I wear.

B: We shouldn’t be trusting in the promises of independence, financial stability, and safety that are often tied to buying homes, or investing in stocks and cryptocurrency. I am learning that I don’t need a down-payment to find fulfillment or security.

How has your faith helped you navigate a consumerist world?

B: Simply, God is my provider. He sees the desires of my heart and when I submit those desires to Him and His will, He fulfills them in His timing and for His purpose. I ask Him to join me while I’m shopping or looking at an ad and ask, “God, do I need this? Is it wise for me to buy this?”

R: The spiritual practices of thankfulness and gratitude have been the simplest and most powerful way for me to combat materialism. It creates a heart posture of both appreciation for and contentment with what I have.



1 in 3
millennials* agree
with the statement:

“Meaning and purpose comes from working hard to earn as much as possible so you can make the most of life.”

*born between 1981 and 1996. Source: Barna

As you look ahead further into your adult years, what feels most challenging for you when it comes to your own sense of wellbeing in today’s consumeristic world?

R: Moving out on my own, or buying a house, feels like a massive wall in front of me, so it’s always on my mind. It’s also hard to be patient in today’s world – everyone around you is telling you to keep striving and we’re able to buy anything we want from the comfort of our beds!

B: There is a lot of uncertainty in our economy and it’s challenging to plan for the future. It’s also hard to not compare myself to others. I’m working on looking vertically and asking, “God, what do You want me to focus on?” rather than horizontally and comparing myself to my peers.

What would you say to a parent of a teenager today to help their child thrive and find wholeness in the midst of consumerism/materialism?

B: My parents led by example and emphasized the importance of giving things away –

even cherished possessions! They taught me the value of hard work. They also took my family on service trips to help us understand the perspectives and experiences of those less fortunate.

R: It’s important to teach your children financial literacy and model how to spend your money wisely. Parents can demonstrate to their children their own contentment and thankfulness for what they have. It’s also important to reaffirm to their children who they are in Christ and show them that they aren’t defined by their stuff; that they are truly loved unconditionally. 🌱

Materialism’s Impact in the Margins

Rob Gin and Judith Otto explore with us how materialism impacts low-income communities and can actually cause further marginalization of vulnerable youth and families.



JUDITH OTTO
Jane-Finch Community
Development Coordinator



ROB GIN
Young Dads
Ministry Worker

Both of you serve young people and communities that are racialized and/or experience significant marginalization. What impact do you see of a materialistic worldview on those you serve?

JUDITH: Put simply, youth are deceived by materialism and often lured into the ‘trap life’ as a result – trying to do anything they can to make lots of money and to have a certain persona going on. There can be a false sense of accomplishment and acceptance in ‘keeping up with the Joneses’. This often leads to debt, which has a very significant impact on marginalized families.

ROB: With young parents, they already have one stigma as a young, teenage parent. On top of that, materialism puts even more pressure as a parent to give their kids what others have. They can feel more lonely, left out, depressed, and anxious because of the pressures of wanting more, especially for their kids.

A study released by Harvard Business Review just before COVID hit demonstrated low-income earners are judged much more harshly for their consumption choices. How does this impact the young people and families you serve?

J: Many young people feel discriminated against when shopping. They are often seen as not being able to actually afford what they’re shopping for. It speaks to our perception of who has money, and who has the right to be in certain spaces. Also, families that live in subsidized housing get judged when they want their place to look nice. There’s a perception that it’s acceptable for people living in government housing to embrace substandard living because they aren’t paying market rate.

R: When our young parents are trying to choose between products for their kids, they often experience two sets of shame: (1) Feeling pressure as a parent wanting to give

RIGHT: Betty, YU Outreach Worker, with some of the brand new toys donated to the young people in the Jane-Finch community last winter.



the best for their child, but feeling unable to because of circumstances, and also (2) pressure from others that they shouldn’t be buying a better product. It all feeds the voice that tells them they are a bad parent.

How do you balance the very real need for more resources in the communities you serve with the reality that having ‘more’ materially won’t bring the fulfillment it promises?

R: In all our communities that we serve, there is always going to be a need for resources, which are crucial for our youth and families. We ultimately strive to equip and empower our youth, which we do

God’s provision will actually bring deeper peace.

For readers who live outside of low-income communities, how would you invite them to participate in reducing the stigma and marginalization experienced in those communities as a result of a materialistic worldview?

R: Three things stand out to me: (1) Pray for all policy-makers in our communities – that they would bring about beneficial changes for those we serve, (2) Put yourselves in others’ shoes and educate yourself by interacting with community leaders, community pastors, and

The pandemic has pushed inequality to an all-time high:

↑ **\$1.8Tn**

growth of Canadians’ net worth during the pandemic

95%

of growth has gone to home-owners, while many younger and racialized residents struggle with the rising cost of living

Source: Toronto Foundation

through coaching and mentoring relationships. Things like goal-setting, budgeting, conflict management. It’s a journey for both of us towards inter-dependence rather than dependence. The hope is that the impact we have on them ripples out to their families and communities.

J: I agree with Rob! It’s about helping young people find their identity in Jesus while addressing practical needs, such as financial literacy. It’s important that our young people know scriptures that guide us, especially when it comes to debt. We share how trusting

community workers, and (3) when it comes to things like donating clothes, pause before you give. Ask yourself, “In what ways is my giving beneficial or not to those who will receive this gift? And what are my motives in giving?”

J: I would invite people to think about and perhaps try to see people how God views them, not what we see on the exterior or how society perceives them. When we submit to Jesus and allow Him to lead and guide our path, we will naturally live a life characterized by grace and love for others regardless of socio-economic standing. 🌱



—Rafael Gonzales

Materialism in the Digital Age



PAUL ROBERTSON
Youth Culture Specialist

Almost every advertisement you see or hear has one thing in common. They sell disappointment. Unless the sellers can make you unhappy with what you have, they can't sell you something new.

The world of traditional advertising that has bombarded our young people for years has now shifted to online methodologies. Sophisticated algorithms track every website visited, every word used, how long they hover over a button, and the rhythm of their keystrokes to create targeted advertising. In many ways, youth are being stalked by online marketers.

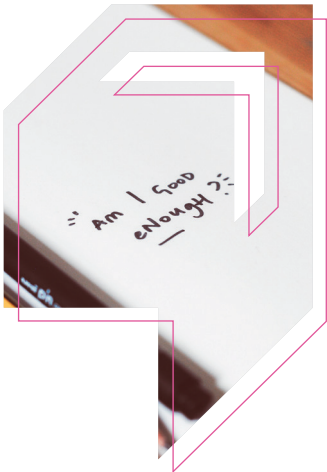
Dana Grace is 18 years-old and a research assistant for me. She sums it up this way:

"The scope of influence goes beyond what is traditionally called 'advertising'. It is very popular for influencers to create content that flaunts their material possessions. For example, it is common on TikTok for female content creators to post 'Outfit of the Day' (OOTD) videos. YouTube is overflowing with videos titled, 'What I got for Christmas', 'What's in My Bag', and 'Spring Clothing Haul'. Instagram and Pinterest are lurking as young people strive to maintain the appearance of material wealth. This leads to significant consequences for young people, including a corrupted sense of worth, poor spending habits, and feelings of not measuring up. In my own life, it shifts my focus away from what truly matters. I become self-absorbed, obsessing over how I can make myself look better according to the world's standards. My generation desperately needs to be reminded that our worth comes not from

material wealth but rather from our Creator."

So, how can parents and youth workers respond to materialism? Here are a few thoughts:

- We need to model a life of contentment to our children.
- Focus on their character and the kind of person they are becoming.
- Give your kids the best life, not just the good life. Whoever dies with the most toys seldom wins.
- Let your kids be the kind of people who grow up utilizing the gifts God has placed in them irrespective of financial gain.
- Instill in them mission-mindedness and Christian service. This will provide them with plenty of eternal rewards that will never be out of fashion. 📌



The Real Truth About Real Needs



CYNTHIA RIVERA
DOXA Journeys
Assistant Coordinator

I remember vividly my first service trip to the Dominican Republic (DR) at age 15 as part of DOXA Journeys. Like many of us, I travelled south expecting to be the one making a difference and helping 'those in need'. Instead, I left the DR overwhelmed with my own need and the richness of the community with whom I had spent a week. This sparked the beginning of 15 years of connection and travel to the DR that continues to this day, now as a leader!

Without minimizing the very real hardships of the community we partner with in the DR, my friends

there have taught me how to be rich in faith, love, and meaningful relationships. They are so filled with Jesus! Whenever I return to Canada, I am reminded how challenging it is to 'swim against the current' of instant gratification and busy-ness which leads to missing out on human connection.

As I now begin to lead other young people on DOXA Journeys service trips, I want to create a space for



honesty and vulnerability – a space where I can share my own struggles around materialism and how I so often miss the things of real value in my life. I want to continue to invite

myself and our youth to fight consumerism and reject excess. As we do so, our hearts will open up to being more generous with our time, resources, and relationships. 📌

We would love for you to support businesses that are supporting youth transformation throughout the GTA!

Go to [BUSINESSES.YUGTA.CA](https://businesses.yugta.ca) today to learn how you can support businesses that are partnering with Youth Unlimited to make a difference in young lives.

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YOUTH
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