

# **“Children, Values, and Consumer Culture”**

## **Powerpoint Orientation by Tim Kasser, Ph.D.**

*The purpose of this document is to orient individuals to the use the Powerpoint slideshow presentation entitled “Children, Values, and Consumer Culture” that I made at the AMI Montessori conference in Tampa in February 2013.*

This orientation will not give an overview of everything I said, but instead provide readers with a basic understanding of the purpose of different slides and the overall points that I was trying to make, in case readers are interested in using these slides for their own purposes.

**Slides 2-7** were designed to show viewers the extent to which advertising and messages about the importance of materialism have become part and parcel of contemporary life in the United States. They vary slides concerning the omnipresence of advertising (on foreheads and report card envelopes) to political messages to studies of the values of incoming first-year college students over the last 40-some years.

**Slide 8** presents some of the statements that I found listed on Montessori School websites concerning what a Montessori education intends to do. I proposed, at this point, that the goals of consumer society stand in opposition to Montessori’s goals, and suggested that I would demonstrate this conflict in 2 different ways.

**Slides 9-22** concern the first way of supporting this claim. These slides present basic information about psychological research on values and goals, and, more to the point, the circumplex models of Schwartz and Grouzet that have been validated with thousands of individuals across dozens of cultures. These models identify values/goals that are focused on self-direction, self-transcendent, and intrinsic aims; notably, these types of goals are very consistent with the goals of a Montessori education. These circumplex models also recognize the existence of the goals/values of consumer culture, and label them as self-enhancing/extrinsic. The key point is that these circumplex models demonstrate that it is psychologically quite difficult to simultaneously pursue the first set of goals and the second set of goals, because these two sets of goals stand in conflict. I used the metaphor of a see-saw to make the point that as people focus on one set of goals, the other set of goals tends to diminish in importance. Thus, the way that goals/values are organized in people’s minds is such that to the extent they focus on the goals of consumer society, they are likely to become less concerned about the goals most relevant to a Montessori education.

**Slides 23-35** concern the second way of supporting this claim. These slides present very brief overviews of the research literature showing that when people focus on intrinsic, self-direction, and self-transcendent goals, they have higher levels of well-being, better academic outcomes, and more positive social and ecological attitudes and behaviors. In contrast, the prioritization of extrinsic, self-enhancing goals has been consistently associated with lower levels of happiness, worse academic outcomes, and more negative social and ecological attitudes and behaviors.

**Slides 36-64** concern empirically-supported recommendations that I made for Montessori educators who are interested in encouraging intrinsic/self-direction/self-transcendent goals in their students and in discouraging extrinsic/self-enhancing goals.

**Slides 37-41** report on studies that have shown that an interpersonal style that is warm, structured, and democratic tends to help people shift towards intrinsic and away from extrinsic goals. This is basic to the Montessori approach, and provides support for what the approach already does well.

**Slides 42-51** report on studies that have shown that very subtle changes in language can affect people's values and behaviors. Specifically, framing beliefs and activities as concerning intrinsic aims tends to support other intrinsic aims, to diminish a focus on extrinsic aims, and to lead to greater persistence and depth of learning. In contrast, framing beliefs and activities as concerning extrinsic aims tends to support other extrinsic aims, to diminish a focus on intrinsic aims, and to lead to lower persistence and depth of learning. Thus, it may be helpful for Montessori educators to think carefully about the kind of values that they might be priming and the kinds of values that they use for framing assignments and other communications with students.

**Slides 52-58** report the results of a study showing that immersion in nature (as opposed to human-made scenes) promotes intrinsic and suppresses extrinsic concerns. Such findings suggest the importance of helping Montessori students experience nature in a way that deeply immerses them.

**Slides 59-64** concern data showing that the extent to which children are exposed to television and marketing is associated with their prioritization of extrinsic goals. Such findings suggest that Montessori educators might engage in both classroom and political actions to help children be less frequently exposed to such marketing.