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Composition I

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The Entitlement of American Consumers

Turmoil is everywhere in modern America. The pushes for a customer to take precedence and the stress from confusing loyalty programs have led to a retail hell for the service worker. In her article, “American Shoppers are a Nightmare”, Amanda Mull critiques the pertinent issue of the growing consumer class, that is a growing development of retail, the diminishing status of service workers, and the growing use of loyalty programs which is leading to the mistreatment of service workers.

The development of retailers has exacerbated the creation of a class-conscious consumer, one that has separated the consumer from the employee (Mull 6). Throughout the development of department stores, they have convinced consumers that the retailers are different from the corporate powers that supermarkets have and instead trust the consumers to make their own purchases (Mull 7). The brands developing marketing materials have also shifted to align themselves with the consumers. Brands have made their opinions loud as Mull finds, “Dove [...] wants you to buy its soap because the brand has the right opinions” (8). Through this kind of political alliance, they’ve attracted consumers who also align themselves with those beliefs. It results in further retention of customers and a constant stream from a political party or even political support (Mull 8). In addition to this, consumers have been made to believe that retailers are an overarching good. Instead of just a place of business, they’re the heart of the economy and the community as well (Mull 7). They’re more than just the big-box retailer, but they “put on

holiday parades and fireworks shows” (Mull 6). This kind of socioeconomic involvement has made an impression on the consumers but they’ve also become a source of entitlement. The marketing from retailers has given people self-perception and the choice of what people think about them.

The status of service workers has progressively diminished as consumers are held above them by corporate powers (Mull 6). Shadowed by the effects of the phrase, “The customer is always right”, consumers today hold a status above any service worker working for the retailers (Mull 6). This results in the destabilization of the workers, should tensions arise. When a consumer is left unsatisfied with a purchase, it destabilizes them, and the retail workers are left to handle it (Mull 11). Even though consumers may be at fault, the retailer has honored, time after time, a tradition of keeping the customer close and honoring most of their wishes. It is this action that reinforces the consumer’s behavior and keeps them doing these kinds of acts. On the other hand, retail workers are facing a diminishing paycheck as they continue to be paid the same for an overworked day. This low payment often results in the companies’ ability to artificially decrease the prices of goods, making the consumer happy. This artificial pricing doesn’t help the workers, however, it also doesn’t help the company. The low payment results in an influx of new employees as managers have to train and teach new employees, possibly resulting in higher rates of employee turnover (Mull 5). The low prices do increase customer satisfaction, according the Mull, “as long as they don’t have to think about what makes it possible” (10).

Throughout the years, corporations have pushed programs, loyalty retention programs, to retain existing customers and entice new customers to come into their stores or business. These programs have faced many challenges from the customer service side of it. Angry or upset, customers go to the nearest customer service desk, but the people there are unable to resolve

their issue, instead asking them to call. CRM programs or loyalty retention programs increase the size of frequency and purchase amount from a customer (Mull 11). These customer interactions have led service workers to alienate themselves as they're faced with scrutiny and challenges from consumers they can't fix. It is through this process that can develop physiological consequences which may ultimately end up as the response to the customer (Mull 11). Even the scrutiny, however, won't stop customers from signing up and for employees to push these programs. According to Mull, the stakes are even higher as more consumers sign up and believe they have control over the program, as the loss of control—or empowerment—would cause customer turmoil (11). These loyalty programs must pique the interest of the consumer, such as on an airplane, where they must walk through first-class, encouraging the thought of what the customer is missing out on (Mull 11). These interactions with the customers are also causes of some turmoil as Mull claims “passengers who are forced to walk through first class to board a plane are more likely to become violent” (11).

Amanda Mull sees a growing class of consumers poorly treating service workers as consumers have been marketed to and supported by retailers. “The customer is always right” has become a catalyst of mayhem within the service industry well after its first use (Mull 10). The phenomenon of consumer outlashes is growing and most Americans have experienced it or will experience it. Wherever you go, whether it's at the Airport, at the department store, or a restaurant, consumer turmoil is going to occur. Workers are being hurt, both physically and emotionally, by rising levels of class-consciousness supported by the retailers. This issue did not occur overnight; there has been a long development of supported class consciousness. Whether it's through empowerment or customer satisfaction, the retailers support the customer, even after an incident has occurred (Mull 10).

Works Cited

Mull, Amanda. "American Shoppers Are A Nightmare." *The Atlantic*, 3 Aug. 2021,
www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/08/pandemic-american-shoppers-nightmare/619650/. Accessed 4 September 2023.