



The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, And The New Consumer

By Juliet B. Schor

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An in-depth look at the corruption of the “American Dream,” the follow-up to the *Overworked American* examines the consumer lives of Americans and the pitfalls of “keeping up with the Joneses.” Schor explains how and why the purchases of others in our social and professional communities can put pressure on us to spend more than we can afford to, how television viewing can undermine our ability to save, and why even households with good incomes have taken on so much debt for so many products they don't need and often don't even want.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

If getting and spending define our lives, then Juliet Schor now has us covered. Six years ago, her book *The Overworked American* scrutinized the getting part. It focused public attention on the disappearance of leisure and the harmful effects thereof on families and society. It sparked a debate over whether Americans really work as much as we proudly claim. (If so, how to explain the audience for *Monday Night Football*?) Nevertheless, Schor can take credit for helping push Congress into passing the Family Leave Act in 1993.

Now she is back with a critique of our spending. Schor notes that, despite rising wealth and incomes, Americans do not feel any better off. In fact, we tell pollsters we do not have enough money to buy everything we need. And we are almost as likely to say so if we make \$85,000 a year as we are if we make \$35,000. Schor believes that "keeping up with the Joneses" is no longer enough for today's media-savvy office workers. We set our sights on the lifestyles of those higher up the organizational chart. We seek to emulate characters on TV. For teenagers, "enough" is the idle splendor that hardly exists outside of what MTV un-ironically calls *The Real World*. Schor offers an original and provocative analysis of why many Americans feel driven and unhappy despite our success. As an alternative, she profiles several "downshifters" who've taken up voluntary simplicity in search of a more satisfying way of life. No policy solutions suggest themselves this time, only a change of heart. --Barry Mitzman

From Publishers Weekly

Whereas Schor's 1992 bestseller, *The Overworked American*, touched a nerve among all classes of American society, her latest study is geared to middle- and upper-middle-class consumers who, in her diagnosis, are participating in a national orgy of overspending and living beyond their means. She traces this competitive, status-conscious consumption to the diverging income distribution and growing inequality beginning in the 1980s, as increasingly overworked, insecure, dissatisfied consumers, pressured by advertising and television imagery, sought to emulate the upscale lifestyle of the most affluent. An economist and director of women's studies at Harvard, Schor presents her arguable conclusion that the more TV a person watches, the more he or she is likely to spend. In counterbalance, she also reports on her nationwide survey of "downshifters," people who deliberately reduce their hours on the job in exchange for more leisure, time with family or other pursuits. In self-help fashion, she outlines nine steps individuals can take to break free of the cycle of compulsive spending. Although Schor's jeremiad lacks the impact of her earlier book, it offers trenchant commentary on Americans' overspending lifestyle and lack of savings.

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From Library Journal

The dual purpose of this slim volume is to describe how spending, as a process, affects the quality of life for the middle and upper classes and to show how to develop a life that puts materialism and consumerism in proper perspective. Economist Schor states that in the 1950s "keeping up with the Joneses" held sway; today, however, purchases convey status and identity with our reference groups, e.g., co-workers, media stars on television, and those with similar values, not necessarily our neighbors. Schor argues that rampant advertising and consumerism is driving an unsatisfying materialist life. She also describes "downshifters," those who reduce their income and expenditures to get off the spiral of more work to acquire increasingly expensive stuff. Unfortunately, her book's strong academic foundation is undercut by weak conclusions. Schor's *The Overworked American* (LJ 1/92) covered much of the same ground, and libraries that found an audience for that title will be well served by this one. Otherwise, the subject matter, strong research, and clear writing make this an acceptable purchase for academic and larger public libraries. A Patrick J. Brunet, Western Wisconsin Technical Coll. Lib., LaCrosse

Users Review

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Typically the book *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, And The New Consumer* will bring that you the new experience of reading any book. The author style to clarify the idea is very unique. Should you try to find new book you just read, this book very acceptable to you. The book *The Overspent American: Upscaling, Downshifting, And The New Consumer* is much recommended to you to see. You can also get the e-book from your official web site, so you can more readily to read the book.

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