

THE LIMITS TO SATISFACTION

1. There is a 'consumption' norm which exists in a given society at a given time, and which enters into the reference standard of virtually everyone. This provides a common point of reference in self-appraisal of well-being, leading those below the norm to feel less happy and those above the norm, more happy. Over time, this norm tends to rise with the general level of consumption, though the two are not necessarily on a one-to-one basis. (Richard Easterlin)
2. Part of what's new is that lifestyle aspirations are now formed by different points of reference. For many of us, the neighborhood has been replaced by a community of co-workers, people we work alongside and colleagues in our own and related professions. And while our real-life friends still matter, they have been joined by our media "friends." (This is true both figuratively and literally - the television show *Friends* is a good example of an influential media referent.) We watch the way television families live, we read about the lifestyles of celebrities and other public figures we admire, and we consciously and unconsciously assimilate this information. It affects us. (Juliet Schor)
3. Advertising and the media have played an important part in stretching out reference groups vertically. When twenty-something's can't afford much more than a utilitarian studio but think they should have a New York apartment to match the ones they see on *Friends*, they are setting unattainable consumption goals for themselves, with dissatisfaction as a predictable result. When the children of affluent suburban and impoverished inner-city households both want the same Tommy Hilfiger logo emblazoned on their chests and the top-of-the-line Swoosh on their feet, it's a potential disaster. (Juliet Schor)
4. Thus, the new consumerism has led to a kind of mass 'overspending' within the middle class. By this I mean that large numbers of Americans spend more than they say they would like to, and more than they have. That they spend more than they realize they are spending, and more than is fiscally prudent. And that they spend in ways that are collectively, if not individually, self-defeating. Overspending is how ordinary Americans cope with the everyday pressures of the new consumerism. (Juliet Schor)
5. Advertising doesn't mirror how people are acting but how they're dreaming. (Jerry Goodis)

6. When young adults report that financial success is relatively central to their aspirations, low well-being, high distress, and difficulty adjusting to life are also evident. Although we cannot be sure from these results whether materialistic values cause unhappiness, or whether other factors are at work, the results do suggest a rather startling conclusion: the American dream has a dark side, and the pursuit of wealth and possessions might actually be undermining our well-being. (Tim Kasser)
7. Adults who focused on money, image and fame reported less self-actualization and vitality, and more depression than those concerned with these values. What is more they also reported more experiences of physical symptoms. That is, people who believed it is important to strive for possessions, popularity, and good looks also reported more headaches, backaches, sore muscles than individuals less focused on such goals. This was one of the first indicators of the pervasive negative correlates of materialistic values – not only is people's psychological well-being worse when they focus on money, but so is their physical health. (Tim
8. During the first two-thirds of the [20th] century, Americans took a more and more active role in the social and political life of their communities – in churches and union halls, in bowling alleys and clubrooms, around committee tables and card tables and dinner tables. Year by year we gave more generously to charity, we pitched in more on community projects, and ...we behaved in an increasingly trustworthy way toward one another. Then, mysteriously and more or less simultaneously, we began to do all these things less often.... Why beginning in the 1960s and 1970s and accelerating in the 1980s and 1990s, did the fabric of American community life begin to unravel?