



The High Price of Materialism

By Tim Kasser

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The High Price of Materialism By Tim Kasser

In *The High Price of Materialism*, Tim Kasser offers a scientific explanation of how our contemporary culture of consumerism and materialism affects our everyday happiness and psychological health. Other writers have shown that once we have sufficient food, shelter, and clothing, further material gains do little to improve our well-being. Kasser goes beyond these findings to investigate how people's materialistic desires relate to their well-being. He shows that people whose values center on the accumulation of wealth or material possessions face a greater risk of unhappiness, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and problems with intimacy -- regardless of age, income, or culture.

Drawing on a decade's worth of empirical data, Kasser examines what happens when we organize our lives around materialistic pursuits. He looks at the effects on our internal experience and interpersonal relationships, as well as on our communities and the world at large. He shows that materialistic values actually undermine our well-being, as they perpetuate feelings of insecurity, weaken the ties that bind us, and make us feel less free. Kasser not only defines the problem but proposes ways we can change ourselves, our families, and society to become less materialistic.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

You've always known that money can't buy happiness, but do you have the data to prove it? Kasser, a psychology professor at Knox College, certainly does. Drawing on an impressive range of statistical studies, including ones that use his own "Aspiration Index," Kasser argues that a materialistic orientation toward the world contributes to low self-esteem, depression, antisocial behavior and even a greater tendency to get "headaches, backaches, sore muscles, and sore throats." In numerous studies, Kasser shows, people who were paid for completing a task that they normally found pleasurable (e.g., solving puzzles) reported the activity to be less fun than those who did the task without financial compensation. While at first the book seems to retrace the steps of Juliet B. Schor's *The Overspent American* and other recent titles that analyze why many Americans feel driven and unhappy despite success, Kasser goes beyond this, showing how materialistic values shape an individual's orientation toward friends, family, work, death and "internal satisfactions." Of great interest are the studies demonstrating that children of divorce and people with "less nurturing" mothers are more likely to hold strong materialistic values (though some readers may protest that children of divorce simply feel more economically vulnerable than their peers). Drawing on sources as diverse as dream analysis and game theory, Kasser powerfully argues that when we as individuals or as a nation feel more vulnerable, we exhibit more sharply defined materialistic tendencies a theme particularly resonant in this era of terrorist threats, personal debts and corporate scandals. Illus.

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Review

Does money buy happiness? For years, social scientists knew relatively little about this important question. Now that has changed. On the basis of more than a decade's worth of original research, Tim Kasser provides a powerful answer -- materialism undermines human well-being. *The High Price of Materialism* is a path-breaking work that suggests a fundamental rethinking of our values, behaviors, and economic structures. Deserves the widest possible readership.

(Juliet Schor, Professor of Sociology, Boston College; author of *The Overworked American*)

An excellent, thorough, insightful examination of object hedonism and its psychological costs. Well-written to boot.

(Amitai Etzioni, University Professor, George Washington University and author of *The Monochrome Society*)

What an irony: Lusting for and getting what we want -- more -- does not, in the long run, make middle class folks happier. Seeking ever more affluence exacts both environmental and psychic costs. So why not dream a new American dream, asks Kasser in this provocative and practical book -- one focused more on meaning than money, and more on connection than consumption.

(David G. Myers, Professor of Psychology, Hope College and author of *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty*)

It is rare that a book combines insightful scholarship, rigorous research, passionate involvement in its subject, and a focus on a topic of true importance to the human condition. In his careful, caring, and constructive examination of materialism, Tim Kasser has created a brilliant analysis of a growing problem and its possible solutions.

(Russell W. Belk, N. Eldon Tanner Professor, David Eccles School of Business, University of Utah)

A much-needed scholarly analysis of the psychological factors surrounding materialism in contemporary America.

(Marsha L. Richins, College of Business, University of Missouri, Columbia)

Tim Kasser's book nails the whopping lie at the heart of our civilization: the belief that having more money and the things that money buys makes us happier. The truth, as he demonstrates so comprehensively and thoroughly, is that materialism breeds, not happiness, but dissatisfaction, depression, anxiety, anger, isolation, and alienation. The importance of Kasser's message is difficult to overestimate; it reaches beyond our personal lives to the world situation. The global economy requires for its continued stability and growth that those of us in the West -- and Americans especially -- consume more and more. A vast media-marketing-advertising industrial complex serves this purpose. As a result of the consumer binge, our individual health suffers, social cohesion declines, and the biosphere is degraded. Reversing these trends means changing what we consider to be right, good, and important. Tim Kasser's book will add to the gathering momentum for achieving this fundamental shift in values.

(Richard Eckersley, Fellow, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, The Australian National University)

A valuable critique of material culture, with facts and surveys making the case that the true source of happiness comes from non-material pleasures.

(Betsy Taylor, President, New American Dream and author of *Sustainable Planet*)

About the Author

Tim Kasser is Associate Professor of Psychology at Knox College, Illinois.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christy Brodersen:

As people who live in the particular modest era should be revise about what going on or information even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era and that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice to suit your needs but the problems coming to a person is you don't know what one you should start with. This *The High Price of Materialism* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

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Brian Crafton:

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