Compulsive Buying: Cultural Contributors and Consequences

April Lane Benson, PhD, Helga Dittmar, DPhil, and Reeta Wolfsohn, CMSW

Introduction

Affluenza, appendicitis, luxury fever – these often-used, tongue-in-cheek disease names for our modern American plague of materialism and overconsumption boldly illustrate the fact that compulsive buying is trivialized by our culture. Amid this tendency to make light of the problem, a serious discussion of its social factors and social costs, and how to craft public (and private) policies to mitigate it, feels like swimming against a riptide. Yet, unless we focus more on what gives rise to this problem, what it costs us, and how we can keep ever more of it from developing, great numbers are likely to be washed away in a sea of dissatisfaction.

When we put less emphasis on the cultivation of what Paul Howchinsky (1992) persuasively called “true wealth” and more on monetary wealth and possessions, we sell ourselves the costliest and most debilitating bill of goods possible. For the sake of things (and our unrealizable hope of what they will do for us), we diminish what really matters: personal and spiritual development, quality time with family and friends, and involvement with community, nature, and the well-being of our planet. This is the devastation that the tide of compulsive buying leaves in its wake.

Social Factors

Although compulsive buying is a multidetermined disorder, social and cultural factors play a significant role in its onset and course. Typically reported only in societies with the mushrooming credit facilities and boundless buying opportunities that characterize a consumer culture (Dittmar 2007; Lee and Mysyk 2004), compulsive buying can be described as a culture-bound syndrome; and globalization is extending these boundaries. On a monthly basis, visitors from more than 60 foreign countries (and nearly all 50 U.S. states) visit stoppingoverspending.com, one of the few comprehensive Web sites for compulsive buyers and mental health professionals interested in this “addiction.”

Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between the development of the core features of consumer culture – broad availability of credit, endless choice of purchases, and constant encouragement to buy – and professional interest in the problem of compulsive buying. Although oniomania (buying mania) was first described as early as 1915, research publications on the problem did not surface until the mid-1980s. Since then, more and more professional literature has appeared (Baker 2000; Benson 2000; Dittmar 2007; Kotler 1999) alongside a proliferation of mass-media attention, self-help books (Arenson 2003; Benson 2008; Catalano and Sonenberg 1993; O’Connor 2005), self-help and online support groups
Two simultaneous social factors have come into play. First is the disconnect that gradually emerged in the developed world (and now even in parts of the developing world) between large-scale production of goods and a genuine need for those goods. In ever more numerous parts of the globe, economic growth has become dependent on satisfying the new or invented needs of consumers whose essential needs have already been met. Put simply, we now produce such a galaxy of products—many of them nonessential—that in order to sell them, people must be convinced to buy things they do not really need.

To promote that goal, to cultivate in the general public a powerful desire for material goods, a formidable array of resources has been mounted. Advertising and the rise of the media gave the desire a shape, and the explosion of credit cards, combined with the rise in disposable personal incomes, made material dreams seem tantalizingly accessible. Today, in order to promote the ceaseless stoking of economic engines, every one of us is targeted as a consumer. We are pushed, prodded, and programmed to purchase. Shopping itself has become a leisure and lifestyle activity, perhaps as a response to the alienation and loss of community so many feel. Malls are the new town centers. All of us are immersed, cradle to grave, in “buy messages” that, with greater and greater psychological sophistication, misleadingly associate products we do not need with feelings we deeply desire. Because compulsive buyers tend to be insecure as well as materialistic (Dittmar 2005), they are particularly vulnerable to the self-idealizing promises of advertising, promises only thinly disguised as products.

The second factor in the meteoric rise of compulsive buying involves the public’s radical shift in reference group. Thirty years ago, the Joneses were the people who lived next door, and keeping up with them—attaining a lifestyle at approximately their level—was not too much of a problem. By the 1980s, the Joneses had become the people we saw on television. They lived farther away—and had a significantly more affluent lifestyle. Soon, everybody, no matter where they were on the economic spectrum or where they lived—but especially in the middle classes—began comparing themselves with the televised Joneses. Despite a marked rise in disposable personal income over the last 50 years, what people thought they needed—what seemed an acceptable lifestyle—shifted so sharply upward that they had to borrow money to achieve it (Schor 1998).

Certain social features are particularly noteworthy. “Neither a borrower nor a lender be,” Polonius advised his son Laertes as he was going off to school. But this advice, particularly the first part of it, is largely ignored by both parents and children in today’s consumer cultures (and even more insistently by governments). Attitudes toward debt have changed from the cautious thrift of our forefathers (there were, of course, exceptions) to today’s buy now, pay later (Kahn 2000) mentality.

In an age when everything moves fast—aircraft, information, opportunity—gratification, too, gravitates toward the instantaneous. Furthering this mentality are today’s vastly increased opportunities for credit, an infrastructure that makes it easy to spend money one does not have. Thus, financial constraint ceases to be a barrier to immediate gratification. With lending standards dramatically loosened, consumers have been led to make purchases and financial commitments they cannot afford, whether they have understood this reality or have been in denial about it.

One arena in which this drama is playing out is the mortgage meltdown of 2007–2008, where a slowing economy has collided head-on with a host of unrealistic homeowners. Intending to pay more later so they could have more now, these consumers are squeezed between the rising payments of their adjustable-rate mortgages and personal incomes that cannot keep up. A second arena—and one that affects far more people than the foreclosure crisis—is credit cards. In 2005, 2006, and 2007, an all-time high average of nearly six billion credit card offers went out to America’s three hundred million people—more than twenty
offers per year to every man, woman, and child (Credit Fact Sheet 2008; Synovate 2007)! By no means coincidentally, these are the only years, except for 1932 and 1933, in the belly of the Great Depression, when the collective American populace had a negative personal savings rate: when the average American spent all his or her after-tax income and then had to dip into savings or borrow to make ends meet. Today, the average credit-card-holding family carries a debt of more than $8000, at interest rates often in the teens or higher (Kahn 2008). The depth of the current recession, however, has led to the forecast that for the next several years, consumers, in order to dig themselves out of their deep financial holes, will be saving much more and spending much less. According to the Commerce Department, the savings rate has risen sharply in the recession from the negative rate previously mentioned to a current 5.2 percent of income (Andrews 2009). The Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009, passed by Congress and signed by President Barack Obama in May 2009, has significantly impacted the amount of credit offered to consumers (Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009). And the Federal Reserve reported on June 11 that household debt has fallen to a 3.5% annual rate, the largest recorded decline since 1980 (Nutting 2009). Consumers are seeing the high cost of credit card debt.

Current economic conditions notwithstanding, the profound shift toward the materialistic is particularly strong among young people, the first generation to have grown up in the full bloom of our pro-credit orientation. Wherever one looks, the under 30s are the most likely age group to be compulsive buyers: in the United States (e.g., Koran et al. 2006; O’Guinn and Faber 1989), in Canada (e.g., d’Astous 1990), in France (e.g., Lejoyeux et al. 1999), in Germany (e.g., Scherhorn, Reisch, and Raab 1990), and in the United Kingdom (e.g., Dittmar 2005, 2007). This age group has stronger pro-credit attitudes (e.g., Lea and Webley 1995) and higher levels of debt. In the United Kingdom, to cite a statistic that may well be typical, over 60% of insolvency cases involve young people under the age of 30 (CreditAction 2006).

In qualitative studies, individuals spontaneously comment on how the ready availability of credit fosters their behavior: “[Y]ou get a bank loan and pay off all your credit cards and then, of course, you’ve got nothing outstanding on all your credit cards, so you start again. . . . [F]or a person who’s not strong-willed enough, it’s terribly easy to get into debt” (Dittmar and Drury 2000).

Results from the Higher Education Research Institute, which has polled 12 million college freshmen over the last 40 years, corroborate the steady and profound shift of young people toward materialism. In the late 1960s, approximately 40% considered it “very important” or “essential” to be “very well off” financially. The percentage rose to 50% in the 1970s, well above 60% in the 1980s, and over 70% every year since 1990. Young people, it seems clear, have internalized the culture’s materialism. Quite literally, they have bought into the notion that material goods are the way to achieve success, happiness, and a positive identity (Dittmar 2007; Kasser and Kanner 2004; Richins 2004).

As we noted earlier, this materialism is a carefully nurtured credo. A huge, psychologically sophisticated, and omnipresent advertising industry markets consumer items as bridges toward a happier and better self, an enhanced image, and a heightened popularity (Barber 2007). Compulsive buyers, who suffer from low self-esteem, are particularly susceptible to the ubiquitous subtext of most ads, with their purported self-image benefits (d’Astous and Bellemare 1989): buy this product and you can become whatever idealized self you aspire to; fail to buy, and you are an outcast at life’s feast. It is no surprise, then, that compulsive buyers are four times less likely to pay their monthly credit card balances in full (Koran 2006). Compulsive buyers lead the charge, both literally and figuratively. Only time will tell what effect the recession, the recent reduced availability of credit, and the increased pressure to save will have on the prevalence of compulsive buying.

The pursuit of material goods, and the tendency toward compulsive buying that often accompanies it, has been accelerated by one more cultural wrinkle, the burgeoning of
marketplaces. Augmenting traditional brick-and-mortar stores, powerful new venues have sprung up – catalog shopping, television shopping channels, and, above all, the Internet – and stretched the hand of commerce to wherever you are, however you are dressed, whenever you want. This omnipresence of buying opportunities lends fuel to the fire. Sheer repetitive exposure, both to advertising and to buying venues, makes it easy for anyone, and especially for oversoppers, to see the material ideal as normal, desirable, and achievable. As many as 75% of the buying motives given by QVC buyers are related to compulsive buying (Ridgway et al. 2005), and compulsive buying tendencies have also been demonstrated among online purchasers (Dittmar, Long, and Bond 2007).

As a culture, then, we have moved away from seeking usefulness and quality in what we buy and moved instead toward asking material goods to regulate our emotions, improve our social status, and transform us into our ideal selves (Dittmar 1992, 2004). This use of goods is doomed to failure – as study after study demonstrates. Though it is a particularly hard pill for oversoppers to swallow, the repeated conclusion of investigations into the relationship between materialism and happiness is that yes, there is a relationship – but it is an inverse one! Dozens of studies, both in the United States and elsewhere (for a review, see Kasser 2002), suggest that the more we pursue material goods and material gain and the more we invest things with the hope of making us happier (or more desirable, or more the person we wish we were), the less well-being we actually experience. And this leads us to a consideration of the social costs of compulsive buying.

Social Costs

The culture, communities, families, and individuals – compulsive buying hurts them all. At the scale of culture and communities, oversopping, as an extreme manifestation of our materialism, leaks away social coherence. Tim Kasser (2002) says it well: “[W]hen materialistic values dominate our society, we move farther and farther from what makes us civilized. We treat each other in less humane ways. We allow the pursuit of money to take precedence over equality, the human spirit, and respectful treatment of each other.” More specifically, materially oriented people show a demonstrated detachment from civic concerns and activities. For example, environmental and ecological issues such as global warming and deforestation tend to be of little import to them (Richins and Dawson 1992; Saunders and Munro 2000).

It is at the smaller scale, however – families and individuals – that compulsive buying wreaks its most intense and visible havoc. Here, we see a host of ills: debilitating debt, familial friction, problems in the workplace, and numerous psychological difficulties, such as shame, guilt, depression, hopelessness, and anger (Benson 2004).

Most visible, of course – and it is often a trigger for the other problems – is debt. Fifty million of us are three paychecks away from bankruptcy (In Charge Institute, www.incharge.org). While the straws that break the camel’s back are typically medical expenses, divorce, or job loss, compulsive spending plays a substantial role in overloading the beast to begin with. Just how bad is the situation? Foreclosure filings, default notices, auction sale notices, and bank repossessions in 2007 were up a staggering 75% from the year before. Americans falling more than 60 days behind on car payments spiked to a 10-year high. Credit card balances written off as uncollectible by banks jumped 24%, with late payments up 16% (Cho and Trejos 2008). During the first six months of 2008, the situation worsened; foreclosures were up 136% from the same period in 2007 (Christie 2008).

There can be little doubt that compulsive buying plays a significant role in all this. A recent prevalence study in the United States found that oversoppers in all income groups had higher credit card balances than normal buyers (Koran et al. 2006), which is no surprise. As far back as 2000, research showed that compulsive buying and the indiscriminate use of credit cards were playing a central role in the record number of personal bankruptcies.
Compulsive Buying: Cultural Contributors and Consequences

(Boss 2006; Morgenson 2008). In the years since then, that record has risen continuously, and today, in spite of recent legal reforms that have made the bankruptcy process more onerous, it continues to climb (Lawless 2008). Compulsive shopping is to bankruptcy as steroids are to home runs. What it compromises, though, is not "the integrity of the game" but "the integrity of the home," the capacity to own or take care of one, to have a financial safety net, to find resources to further education, to retire, or to properly take care of a spouse or partner, children, or parents.

Relationship costs, not the least of which is an individual’s relationship with himself or herself, are significant, too. Lying to oneself about overspending renders an individual isolated, guilty, and ashamed. Lying to others, and begging, borrowing, or stealing, often result in a compulsive buyer's diminished engagement at home, in neglecting or withdrawing from family and friends. Other frequent interpersonal consequences are loss of trust, hostility, estrangement, and divorce. Under the pressure of this compulsion, family and social life are seriously impacted; needs for intimacy, closeness, and connection are not sufficiently met. And compulsive buying – again, no surprise – plants poison seeds in the next generation. Compulsive buying in children is clearly associated with family histories of compulsive/addictive behaviors. It has also been shown to be associated among adolescents with eating disorders, drinking alcohol, smoking, and early life sexual experiences (Roberts and Tanner 2000).

Living with the financial and other stresses of their habit inclines overshoppers toward a raft of negative emotions – emptiness, inadequacy, depression, anxiety, anger, shame, guilt, overexcitement, helplessness, and hopelessness – and damages their health. In a series of studies, Tim Kasser (2000) has reported that overshoppers suffer substantially higher rates of insomnia, stomach problems, high blood pressure, backaches, headaches, and a wide variety of other mental and physical illnesses that inevitably bleed into all areas of their lives. Yet, they tend to forego regular physical exams, regular exercise, and proper nutrition.

Riding an emotional roller coaster diminishes their clear thinking and reduces decision-making and coping skills, leaving them overwhelmed and immobilized. They become increasingly vulnerable to predatory lenders and increasingly likely to steal, gamble, avoid creditors and collection calls, and incur additional debt (Boss 2006; Schulman 2003). The addictive “high of the buy” more and more quickly crashes to the “down of the debt.”

People struggling with compulsive buying tend to become less productive at work; they are easily distracted, often irritable, and frequently impatient (Schwartz 2004). Some flirt with the risk of being fired for excessive shopping during work time, whether on the Internet or away from the office in stores. Some out-and-out steal from their employers, falsifying expense reports or worse (Moore 2001). The threat of being unable to meet financial obligations makes them more likely to be late or absent and leaves them increasingly prone to mistakes or accidents, telling lies, or arguing. Often, compulsive buyers work unhealthily long hours, sometimes in more than one job, trying to support a lifestyle they cannot afford.

What seems to get sacrificed in this tumult is personal development. The compulsive buyer generally cannot afford to go back to school or take classes, and a preoccupation with shopping may take the place of intellectual challenge. Hobbies and other ways to nurture creativity are sometimes abandoned. The routes to horizon-broadening travel may be blocked for lack of money. And worst of all, a form of spiritual emptiness may result – overshoppers regularly report feeling “hollow.” They are at risk of losing their connection with family, community, and nature (Kasser 2002; Schwartz 2004). For many of them, awareness that growth is about being more, not having more, seems to have disappeared.

Public Policy

The toll is clear and unacceptable. But how are we to curtail this pernicious addiction, whose roots are woven deep into the fabric of consumer culture? How are we to stop the
spread of affluenza, when from the highest levels of government we are told that buying is the patriotic thing to do? “We cannot let the terrorists achieve their objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don’t conduct business, where people don’t shop,” President Bush told the nation in the aftermath of 9/11. “Mrs. Bush and I want to encourage Americans to go out shopping.” How do we go about changing the insecurities that lead us to adopt a materialistic value orientation? How do we encourage people to instead begin adopting intrinsic values such as self-acceptance and personal growth, close interpersonal relationships, and contributions to the community and the planet?

Changing the status quo would threaten the present basis of our economy. It would topple a worldview we have been fed from infancy: that more is better, that happiness is the next purchase away or the following one, and that clothes (or shoes, toys, computers, TVs, boats, or automobiles) make the man (or woman or child). So formidable a transformation will not be easy. We can begin it, however, with education, legislation, and, above all, action at home.

On the educational front, every public and private school, elementary through high, should have financial and media literacy courses. These can give students the tools to become knowledgeable consumers who understand the basics about the creation and manipulation of desire and about money management. School districts need to do what they can to decrease the pressure on students to consume. For some districts, school uniforms are part of that consciousness; for others it is refusing to form financial alliances with corporations that want to sell their products on school grounds. Still other districts could discontinue their subscription to Channel One, the ad-studded news program that currently reaches over 8 million American schoolchildren, conveying its message that television and advertisements are more important than live pedagogy. The American Academy of Pediatrics has reported that children who watch it tend to remember the commercials better than the news (Miller 2007).

Research shows that college students and young adults are particularly vulnerable to compulsive buying (Barber 2007; Roberts and Jones 2001). The wide availability and aggressive marketing of credit cards on college campuses to students who often have no jobs, income, credit history, or financial education is a serious enabler of compulsive buying. Pending legislation would restrict this, but the universities themselves could do much more. For example, more college and university administrators could adopt policies to ban credit card companies from marketing on campuses. Also seriously needed on college campuses are more financial education programs for the students. As we have learned from recent disclosures about kickbacks on student loans, colleges are often only too eager for a piece of the financial pie, in direct contravention of their obligations to students.

Adult compulsive spenders, too, need help that addresses their behavior and supports their efforts to take back control of their money and their lives. Establishing targeted programs for them and the general public to make sure both understand the characteristics of compulsive buying and the problems it may cause would seem reasonable. One way to do this might be to use “public service announcements [to] lead consumers to helpful websites [that] provide links to compulsive buying chat rooms, to symptoms lists and outcomes, and to self-help books and free online content” (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, and Monroe 2008). Many books, online resources, nonprofit organizations, and adult education courses cater to adults and the problems they face regarding general financial issues. These can be useful when the timing is right, but compulsive buyers also need targeted, specialized help that both addresses the psychological issues underlying their compulsion and gives them the tools, skills, and strategies necessary to overcome it. Programs of this kind are beginning to appear. Some research on their efficacy has been reported (Mitchell 2006), and more is in process. A list of books and online resources that specifically address compulsive buying is available at www.stoppingovershopping.com/resources.
Like education, legislation cannot single-handedly stay the impending "shopocalypse," but it can have an impact. To begin with, the financial industry must be prevented from using practices that endanger the futures of Americans too naïve to comprehend the long-term consequences of their choices – offering credit cards to children, for example, and sometimes even to infants. The Credit Card Reform Act of 2009 will put into effect some extremely important changes, most notably the change in the age that one can get a credit card without a co-signer. As of February 2010, those under the age of 21 will need a co-signer for their credit cards. The only exceptions are for those applicants who can prove that they have an independent income and can make monthly payments (Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009).

This same legislation has now made deceptive and predatory lending practices illegal, with severe penalties to thoroughly discourage them. This legislation is a huge advance; it offers protections to consumers including the requirement that consumers "opt in" for over-the-limit charges; full up-front disclosure by credit card companies of repayment information and possible interest rate hikes; and the elimination of universal default (Credit Card Accountability Responsibility and Disclosure Act of 2009).

Further steps are available. The placement or targeting of advertisements could be regulated, as some states and countries have already moved to do. Sweden and Norway, for example, do not allow advertising targeted at children under 12; Greece forbids advertising of toys to children between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m. (Linn 2004). Legislation could be drafted that views advertising as a form of pollution, with suitable penalties invoked against polluters (Kasser 2002). While it is unlikely that we will see Beware: Shopping May Be Hazardous to Your Health on price tags, the retail sector can, and in our view should, take proactive steps. A global marketplace such as Ebay, for example – fertile soil indeed for compulsive buyers – could initiate a Shop Responsibly campaign, an analogue to the Drink Responsibly campaigns of the beer companies.

For all that education and legislation can do, the most important bulwark against runaway materialism and the compulsive shopping that it spawns must be the home and family. Overshopping behavior is seeded very early, with infants as young as 18 months recognizing logos and children requesting brands as soon as they can speak (Linn 2004). Kids are assaulted by advertising, the average child seeing an almost unimaginable 40,000 commercials a year on TV alone (Linn 2004). Is there any wonder that children, on whom $15 billion a year is spent pitching products, want what they see there, and want it now?

We believe that the most effective counterstep that parents can take is a long, hard look at their own relationship with material goods, at the messages they are sending their children through their own shopping and buying behavior. Apples seldom fall very far from apple trees. And parents need to face what they already know at a gut level, that placating kids with material rewards is detrimental to their social and psychological development (Bee-Gates 2006).

These things are not academic niceties; they really matter. Some research suggests that, as opposed to their less-materialistic counterparts, materialistic youngsters report more insecurity and less happiness. They are more critical of other people and more likely to have difficulties with attention (Kasser 2002). They more frequently exhibit unusual thoughts and behaviors, isolate themselves socially, and ascribe malevolent intentions to others. They are more prone to difficulty with emotional expression and controlling impulses and more likely to either avoid or overdepend on others. They try to overcontrol many aspects of their environment and may more often relate to people in a passive-aggressive manner (Kasser 2002, p. 17). Their materialistic yearnings seem to overwhelm their desire for healthy social interactions.

Parents who express their love through things are teaching their children that love means things. When parents focus more on making and spending money than on being with their families, children learn that money and its trappings are more important than they are.
A healthier childhood is often a simpler childhood, one that puts good communication and quality time with family and friends far above engagement with the material world. We believe parents need to look beyond the traditional benchmarks of success and embrace the importance of passion, spirituality, relationships, and meaningful work in their children’s lives (Bee-Gates 2006).

To help children resist the pressures to overshop, parents can apply the same tools and techniques they apply to themselves, identifying the ways that they are triggered and recognizing what overspending is costing them. Helping children explore why they think they need a particular object, discern what they really need, and discover what underlying feelings might be triggering their wish for a desired object will pay off in spades. And parents need to talk to children about using money responsibly, about saving as well as spending: the stuff of piggy banks, allowances, and later savings accounts. Other concrete actions include reducing their children’s exposure to shopping venues and to television, magazines, and Internet sites with overwhelmingly materialistic messages.

Parents who watch television and surf the Web with their children can use the opportunity to teach media literacy, helping them learn to think critically about the images and information presented by media. Together, the family can identify the often unspoken promises of advertising, then look at the product, and then examine the likelihood of the one leading to the other. Another important step parents can take is to help their children find alternative ways of handling the emotions and needs that propel them to buy unneeded things. They can look for, and enlist their children in looking for, healthy, constructive nonshopping activities, alternatives to consumerism that promote well-being rather than material wealth. Particularly worthwhile are alternatives that incorporate generosity. Overstuffed as many of us are in this life, we are at the same time starved for connection, vitality, and engagement. Generosity feeds these needs and in our view is far more satisfying than getting and spending.

Conclusion

Compulsive shopping is the dark underbelly of the American dream of prosperity. Overshoppers pursue a vanishing horizon, marching, purchase after purchase, to nowhere, becoming more and more miserable with each step. If we are to mitigate the sting and curtail the spread of this epidemic, we must focus on intrinsic values, on making time for mindful, meaningful engagement with ourselves, others, and our communities, on ideas and experiences rather than goods and services.

We end this discussion where we began, with True Wealth (1992), Paul Howchinsky’s seminal look at materialism gone wild. Howchinsky urges us to leverage those nonfinancial assets, different for each person, that invigorate and vitalize – talents, hobbies, close connections with people and animals, communion with nature – food for our neglected spiritual and emotional appetites. Materialism, he notes, focuses on status, power, and control and cannot fulfill us. True wealth can and does by embracing self-acceptance, personal growth, intimacy, creativity, curiosity, courage, integrity, compassion, forgiveness, and community feeling. Howchinsky’s arguments, strong when the book first appeared, seem more and more powerful with each passing year.

But making these changes will not be easy. Powerful forces feed luxury fever. To overcome them, the culture must back away from its fierce pursuit of excess. The legislative steps that have recently been taken, in combination with the educational and personal steps we have outlined, would be a more than respectable start. Above all, we must learn and teach proportion and perspective. Enough makes life rich. Too much impoverishes.

Perhaps we need to take a hint from the government of Bhutan, which some years ago threw out traditional economic progress indicators like the GNP and replaced them with a revolutionary instrument called the GNH, the gross national happiness. Embracing
Compulsive Buying: Cultural Contributors and Consequences

everything from the protection of natural resources to the promotion of a strong culture and ensuring democratic governance, the GNH puts the overall well-being of citizens at the forefront of national policy. No dark underbelly there!

References


Compulsive Buying: Cultural Contributors and Consequences
