

10 Books to Counter Consumerism

Gemma Alexander

We are constantly bombarded by messages that tell us we need more stuff to be happy. In the midst of a pandemic, more and more people are starting to [question the value of shopping](#).

Many of us are unemployed or insecurely employed and have no choice about spending less. Even those with secure jobs don't feel safe going to stores, and a growing awareness of the way our shopping impacts factory, warehouse, and delivery workers is making many of us question which of our purchases [are really necessary](#).

If you are rethinking your relationship to consumer culture – whether by choice or necessity – we've rounded up a list of books to make breaking up with consumerism easier.

(Note: We're including Amazon links for convenience, but consider looking for these books at your local library first.)

[Empire of Things](#)

by Frank Trentmann

Trentmann's 2016 history of stuff tracks takes a long view on material culture. He tracks the centuries-long rise in trade-based affluence through to the current challenges of waste and inequality. But [Empire of Things](#) is not preachy or judgmental. If you want to understand acquisitiveness better without feeling too bad about it, this is a good book to start with.

[A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America](#)

by Lizabeth Cohen

If you've ever wondered how citizens transformed into consumers, [A Consumer's Republic](#) is the book for you. Bancroft Prize winner and Pulitzer Prize finalist Lizabeth Cohen shows how the pursuit of prosperity after World War II fueled America's pervasive consumer mentality and reworked American life.

[No Logo](#)

by Naomi Klein

Award-winning economic journalist Naomi Klein is a well-known critic of globalization's version of capitalism. [No Logo](#), published in 1999, became a manifesto for the movement opposing the consumerist brave new world of the 21st century. The book has not been updated. For a more current look at capitalism's threat to democracy, try Klein's [The Shock Doctrine](#). And for the effects of unfettered

capitalism on the environment, read [This Changes Everything](#), also by Klein.

[Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us – and How to Fight Back](#)

by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor

First published in 2001, [Affluenza](#) is a classic of anticonsumerist literature that introduced the idea of consumerism as a problem rather than a virtue to many people. A new edition updates the original with information on the Great Recession and new policy recommendations while maintaining the core message that the best things in life aren't things.

[Excess: Anti-Consumerism in the West](#)

by Kim Humphery

The U.S. may have invented modern consumerism, but Americans aren't the only ones dealing with its downsides. In 2013's [Excess](#), Australian academic Kim Humphery looks at the development of anticonsumer movements in the Western world and examines the complex politics of consumption.

[Less is More: Embracing Simplicity for a Healthy Planet, a Caring Economy and Lasting Happiness](#)

by Cecile Andrews, et al.

For some people, “anticonsumer” might feel a little too political. But there is an aesthetic wing to the movement known as “simplicity.” The essay collection [Less is More](#) includes Jim Merkel, Bill McKibben, Duane Elgin, Juliet Schor, John de Graaf, and others. They remind readers that community counts more than possessions, and recommend policies to make simplicity and sustainability available to everyone.

[The Conscious Closet](#)

by Elizabeth Cline

In 2012, Elizabeth Cline sounded the alarm in [Overdressed](#) about the human and environmental harm caused by the fast fashion industry. Now she's back with [The Conscious Closet](#) teaching readers how to get off the fast-fashion treadmill.

[The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing](#)

by Marie Kondo

By now everyone has an opinion about Marie Kondo. Not everyone wants to thank their discarded knickknacks. But Kondo's primary message is that people are happier when they don't mindlessly stockpile stuff. If you are having a hard time letting go of stuff and you want to keep from refilling your space once you've decluttered, [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up](#) can help.

[The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, but Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy, but Does](#)

by Sonja Lyubomirsky

In *[The Myths of Happiness](#)*, psychology professor Sonja Lyubomirsky presents the scientific evidence that you can't buy happiness. Achieving material goals like earning more money and buying cool stuff provide short-term spikes of happiness at best. And the things science says actually do make us happier are not for sale.

[How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy](#)

by Jenny Odell

In *[How to Do Nothing](#)*, Odell argues that our most precious resource is not money, but attention. Rather than relentlessly pursuing economic gain, Odell suggests an alternative economy of attention. She frames idleness as a political act that creates space for a more meaningful existence than you can buy at the mall.

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