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## **A Society's Consumerism As Per The Arguments By Mark, Schor, And Streeck**

The writers Schor, Marx, and Streeck all focus on the consumerism of society yet they all have different aspects to what they feel must be emphasized to fully understand the plaguing concept of consumerism in our society. Streeck makes the argument that consumerism is largely due to the human law of their need for individuality and differentiation as fulfilled by material goods. Marx makes the point that the injustices of rampant consumerism are caused by primarily focusing on the final product of a system rather than the unfair process it took to make it. Finally, Schor states that consumerism is entrenched as a pillar of our society.

Juliet Schor spends most of her time discussing how consumerism came about around the 1960s. A large part of it being that once women entered the workplace, and those workplaces become more diverse it gave people more opportunity to compare themselves to people of higher income and larger quantity lifestyles. Originally, people with similar incomes were in the same places and thus were only able to compare themselves with other people in their wage-bracket. However, with the aid of that aforementioned work environment and television that centered on the wealthy lifestyles of upper-middle class and rich classes, the standard for living become increasingly unrealistic.

Per Schor, income was being (and still is) outrun by desire. The focus that economists make on increasing income itself does not solve some of the more major issues of consumerism. Because it just incentivizes consumerism by giving people more money to spend on things they don't need, the actual definition of an "adequate income" varies so much that it is impossible to know what is reasonable for the average person, and because arguing that Americans need more at all is difficult given that we live in the wealthiest country in the world. The answer to this crisis is to look at consumption differently, as in putting emphasis on what we need to buy rather than what we feel is trending or makes us as good as those of the upperclass.

Streeck's stance is that Americans are publicly poor and privately rich. That is to say, individuals put value on the materials gained by consumerism because it makes them feel good, even though in reality the product is not needed for survival and only puts them in debt. This is a human law of the need for differentiation. This supposed law of humanity as dictated by Streeck feeds the consumerist society we are in because people are spending so much time on what they can gain materially that everything else takes a backseat. Americans are willing to put themselves in massive debt just to continue to consume things that improve only their quantity and not the quality of life.

This is partially due to business procedures implemented in the 1960s, that have increased mass production via technology and simultaneously added to the problem by decreasing ample income opportunity. When technological microelectronics made a leap in scientific advancement, they gave businesses the option of replacing labor workers with machines that did not need to be paid or treated according to employee benefit policies. Businesses get away with this because machine-created products become more abundant, and people liked the initial idea of having easily accessible goods they wanted to buy. Unfortunately, not many consider that needed income is being taken away because of this.

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Streeck's title for his argument "Citizens As Customers" comes to fruition as he explains the ultimate impact of a consumerist society living in a mass-productive based government. The impact of machinery taking place of manual labor workers translates into government control because America has become an increasing import-only nation. Most of our goods are not produced in America, they are imported from other countries and we are in debt because of it. Yet people, according to Streeck, have become very comfortable being customers of the government rather than citizens. Because citizens have to think about long-term impacts of policies, the effects of systems on both themselves and others, and just whether or not a proposed system will be beneficial to society. However, if an individual acts as a customer of the government, the only thing they have to think about is getting policies that keep bringing in the goods they want. As long as the government provides the product, they will not think much about anything besides keeping the system intact.

On the subject of keeping systems in place, Marx's focus makes the point that consumerism stays in place because it is enforced by the way people evaluate it. On average, people will decide on the justice of a system if they feel the ends justify the means. Marx believed that people will never consider the process in which a product was made but rather what the characteristics of the finished product are. For example, if someone buys a piece of clothing from a store, they will sing the praises of the store if they like the product. However, they do not consider how it was made, and will continue to support the store even if they have cruel or illegal management of the people making or selling the clothes. As long as people define a good system by the final product and not the process in which it was created, the current social destruction by consumerism will prevail and continue to deteriorate.

Marx's solution is simple, but unfortunately is unable to gain a stronghold due to the current mindset of society. The solution is merely fair trade. His argument being that if we start trading based on what we need, it would become incredibly obvious just how much injustice a consumer-based society gets away with. Seeing the difference in how the system works would help stop the destruction caused by rampant consumerism. The difficulty is that people don't want the system to change. Currently, people see no issue with the system already in place. This is a result of what Marx said earlier about how individuals' evaluation of a system is based on the characteristics of the final product and not the system in which it was made. It is commodity fetishism. People spend more time on how things relate to the product instead of the destructive social issues surrounding them.

All in all, these three writers compliment each other very well even if they do not strictly focus on the same aspects of consumerism. Schor talks about the system already in place by society, Streeck makes it clear where this system came from and why, while lastly Marx points to the pinnacle issues of why this is a self-feeding system despite the simple solution of basic fairness. As far as writing styles go, Schor is the easiest to read and is a concise writer. Meanwhile, Marx and Streeck are far too interested in sounding smart and informed to get to the point. Overall, these writers all seem to agree that consumerism is only a detrimental system that hurts the people involved and puts them in a circle of debt due to keeping up with societal standards.

In conclusion, Marx tells us that commodity fetishism keeps people from examining the unfairness and injustice that plagues a consumerist society. The simple solution of fair trade as a practice makes such a difference to both the ill-treated parties and society in the long run. Schor, though believing that the solution is to look at consumerism differently, tells us precisely what our current consumerist society is and how it impacts us in the long run. Finally, Streeck

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helps us understand why we got to this point in the first place. That it is merely a human desire to be individual and find a way to differentiate ourselves. Unfortunately, the method being used in America is the consumption of things we do not need and cannot afford.

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