

Exercise: Recognizing conspicuous consumption (or frugality)

Take a moment to reflect on your spending habits. Have you ever had thoughts of how others might view you if you had a particular item of clothing, car, house, apartment, or other possession? What role have these thoughts played in your choices? Have you ever considered what others might think if you ate at a particular restaurant, stayed at a particular hotel, or went on a particular vacation? Have you ever worried that people would think you're not classy enough? Too extravagant? Too cheap? How do your spending decisions make you feel about yourself?

Have you ever felt comfortable, or even proud, showing off a possession or activity to one person, but felt ashamed of it in front of someone else?

Next let's examine the choices that have had the most emotional impact. In the first column below, make a list of things you've acquired or done that secretly (or not) made you feel good about yourself because they showed off your status, privilege, virtue, or talent in some way. (If you need more space, go to giftofbeingordinary.com or guilford.com/siegel4-materials.)

In the second column, note the feeling associated with the act, and in the third, what self-regard criterion (what attribute that matters to you) it involved.

Act of conspicuous consumption	Feeling	Self-regard area affected
1.		
2.		
3.		

Next list any choices you may have made to prove to others how *unhooked* you are on showing off, how especially free from status concerns you are (like driving an old car or eating at the local dive). Again, in the second column, note the feeling, and in the third, the self-regard criterion your choice touched.

Act of conspicuous frugality	Feeling	Self-regard area affected
1.		
2.		
3.		

Perhaps some of your choices are actually not tied to concerns about status. These are worth examining too—especially since they show us a path to freedom. When do you spend money motivated by other interests? What are the things you buy or do mostly because you enjoy their aesthetic beauty, usefulness, or how they enrich your life? Note these choices and the feelings they bring up.

Purchases that don't affect self-regard	Feelings generated
1.	
2.	
3.	

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