

Luxury Shopping, from the Other Side of the Register

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The New Yorker:

This holiday season, I'm working in sales at a store in a giant luxury mall, just outside Philadelphia and near one of the richest Zip Codes in the United States. Major employers in the area include defense contractors and pharmacy conglomerates. Every day, I park my run-down car among BMWs and hybrids. The mall's interior is decked out for Christmas: light-studded garlands are strung in the eaves; colossal reindeer grace the entrances like sphinxes; security officers zoom by on Segways. The mall rats who hover around the doors smoking cigarettes wear brands of designer jeans I've only ever heard about in songs. Some of the stores resemble modern-art exhibits, and I'm still not entirely sure what they sell because I'm too afraid to approach the willowy, elegant salespeople to ask.

My work, truthfully, is not bad, nor are the customers. This is not going to be an essay excoriating the behavior of the rich, who have been, at their best, perfectly friendly, and, at their utmost worst, uninterested in my presence. But there is something shocking about working in a place like this, especially around the holidays. It is the presence of money—lots of it, more than I have ever seen in one place before—and the ease with which it moves around me.

...As it turns out, it may do quite a bit. Kathleen Vohs, a marketing professor at the University of Minnesota, has done extensive studies on how the presence of money affects the brain. In her study "The Psychological Consequences of Money," published in *Science* in 2006, she found that "money-priming"—that is, exposing people to money, or representations of money, or even words having to do with money—is enough to temporarily reduce a person's ability to perceive physical and emotional sensations and to make them "disinterested" in others.

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On top of that, constant exposure to wealth in conjunction with one's own financial struggles may affect people's happiness. For a study published in the journal *Psychological Science* in 2011, researchers looked at data gathered from 1972 to 2008 by the General Social Survey, a poll of people randomly chosen from the U.S. population.

Read the whole story: [The New Yorker](#)