

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Bombarded by anxiety and status envy**

Section: **BUSINESS, C11**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, May 4, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

You are encouraged to modify this lesson to fit the needs of your students. For example, some teachers might use this as a take-home assignment and others might read and answer the questions in a small group or larger, class discussion.

****Please be sure to preview all NIE content before using it in your classroom to ensure it is appropriate for your students.***

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Objectives:

Students will explore this New York Times article on "money dysmorphia" and the "boom boom aesthetic" which provides a lens to examine economics, social influences, media literacy, and personal responsibility within a broader societal context.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

It's a dizzying time to be a 20-something **inundated** by social media feeds flashing other people's trips and restaurant reservations, which feel more over the top than ever.

Inundated Guess:

Inundated Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. What are trend forecasters calling the "boom boom aesthetic?"
2. Many young people are plagued by pangs of _____ - _____, telling friends or therapists that they can't keep up with the Joneses (and what the Joneses are posting on Instagram).
3. Others are struggling to save, and then making _____ that leave them feeling anxious or guilty, with a spending hangover from an "oh, why not" pair of shoes.

4. The resulting unease is leading to what financial planners call “money dysmorphia.” What is it?
5. The average Gen Z consumer holds roughly \$_____ in credit card debt, according to data from Experian.
6. A 2024 study conducted by Qualtrics found that nearly a third of all Americans reported feeling money dysmorphia, including _____% of Gen Z.
7. It does not help that her social media acts as a highlight reel of friends’ _____, from flashy dinners to acrylic nails.
8. A corollary that some economists and sociologists have found is that when the economy turns downward, tastes for little luxuries sometimes _____.
9. During the 2008 financial crisis, some scholars reported seeing the “Lipstick Effect.” What is it?
10. “People feel like they’re participating in _____ very explicitly.”
11. “The _____ is in flux.” Dessie DiMino, a tech worker, notices when friends post pictures from ski resorts and music festivals. She has had to ratchet up the voice in her head reminding herself to save as she follows headlines about economic uncertainty and the tariffs that seemed poised to affect her daily spending, including grocery items like coffee beans and chocolate. “I don’t want to just stop doing everything, but I know there are days I should really bite the bullet and stay home,” DiMino said.
12. To Walsh, the marketing employee from New York, the draw toward prudence feels especially tricky for her generation because of the shared sense that they’re living under a cloud of incessant crisis — what examples did the article cite?
13. Kara Pérez, who founded an organization that educates women on managing finances, has seen the uncertainty reshape her clients’ views on _____.
14. Some are overwhelmed by the _____ they see on social media, and it makes them lose sense of whether they are financially comfortable.

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?
- As you scroll, do you see overconsumption and overspending among your peers, neighbors or family members? What do you typically see when it comes to spending on your social media accounts? How does what you see on social media impact you? Your spending?
- Have you made online or in-store impulse purchases? What drives consumers to “buy now?”

- How can individuals cultivate a sense of self-worth that isn't tied to their ability to consume or display wealth?
- What strategies can individuals, families, and educators employ to promote financial literacy and a healthy perspective on wealth and consumption in the age of social media?

Deeper-Dive comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment

- The article describes a trend of over-consumption on social media. How do you think these online portrayals of wealth and luxury influence what young people consider "normal" or desirable? How might this differ from the financial realities of most people?
- The Psychology of "Keeping Up with the Joneses" in the Digital Age: The article mentions the pressure to "keep up with the Joneses." How has social media amplified this pressure compared to pre-digital eras? What are the psychological effects of constantly being exposed to others' perceived affluence?
- The article highlights how economic uncertainty, like the 2008 crisis, can deeply affect individuals and even entire generations. How might the current economic climate and the constant exposure to online extravagance uniquely impact young people's financial anxieties and decision-making?
- The article mentions viral trends and tempting purchases promoted on social media. How do marketing and advertising strategies on these platforms contribute to the "boom boom aesthetic" and potentially fuel feelings of inadequacy or the desire for impulsive spending? What ethical considerations might arise from these strategies, especially when targeting young people?
- The article points to "buy now, pay later" services as a potential enabler of overspending. How do these technologies impact financial literacy and responsible financial behavior, especially among young people? What role should education play in equipping individuals to navigate these financial tools?
- The article discusses the "Lipstick Effect" as a psychological response to economic downturns. What does this phenomenon suggest about human behavior and how we cope with broader societal anxieties? Can you think of other small luxuries or trends that might emerge during times of economic uncertainty?
- Kara Pérez notes that some middle-class individuals no longer see themselves that way due to the affluence displayed online. How does social media contribute to a potentially distorted understanding of class and economic status? How might this impact social cohesion and our understanding of inequality?

News Break is posted to the Web on Tuesday. Please share this NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please [register online](#) or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.
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