Materialism to Minimalism

Tial Par
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/buwell

Part of the Medicine and Health Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
Par T. Materialism to Minimalism. BU Well. 2021; 6(1).
Materialism to Minimalism
Tial Par

Abstract: In the modern era, happiness is often measured in terms of wealth, possession, and abundance. However, contrary to what the current capitalist, consumerist society wants its members to believe, less is actually more. The ubiquitous culture of materialism places human beings in a constant state of competition with one another, which overrides mindfulness of oneself and one’s relationships. There is only one way to break free from the competitive cycle: minimalism. This article defines minimalism, exhibits the modalities by which minimalism combats materialism, and provides helpful tips on integrating minimalism into one’s life.

Merriam-Webster defines minimalism as a style or technique (as in music, literature, or design) that is characterized by extreme sparseness and simplicity. Over time, the term has evolved to mean many different things to many individuals. The terms minimalism and intentional living are often used interchangeably, and the concept has been widely growing in popularity. Although there are no rules or standards to minimalism, the idea focuses on prioritizing the things we value most. Minimalism is rooted in the idea and belief that the environment and what we surround ourselves with immensely impact our overall health. Those who embrace the minimalist approach believe that the lifestyle brings a multitude of well-being benefits. Happiness, satisfaction, and improved personal relationships are some examples of the benefits of choosing simplicity over excess. Due to the “less is more” philosophy of minimalism and the simplistic ideals it embraces, minimalism can improve personal well-being and quality of life.

The desire for possession is an attribute that can burden both the rich and the poor. Materialism is a value system that puts the highest importance on seeking happiness through the acquisition of wealth. It contains the notion that possessions are the main focus in life and the measures for life satisfaction, well-being, and success. However, studies have shown a positive correlation between materialism and lower levels of personal well-being. Highly materialistic individuals were found to have lower satisfaction within the domains of their overall health. George Minbiot, a columnist at The Guardian states, “This is the dreadful mistake we are making: allowing ourselves to believe that having more money and more stuff enhances our well-being, a belief...possessed by almost every member of almost every government.” Materialism forces us to constantly feel the need to compare ourselves with others and becomes ingrained in our heads that to be happy, we need to have more than others. It is an endless cycle fueled by the toxic culture of wealth and success. In the end, through the perpetual search of happiness derived from the attainment of wealth, we lose our peace of mind and find ourselves in the midst of irrevocable unhappiness.

Minimalism offers a solution to materialism. The anti-consumerist attitudes and behaviors of minimalism, including a conscious decision to live with fewer possessions and making the most out of what you do have, are the core of a minimalist lifestyle. When material objects are no longer the main focus of a person’s life, the societal and self-destructive pressure imposed upon by the need to “have it all” ceases. With the elimination of life’s excess, individuals can focus on the most important aspects of life such as health, relationships, passion, and growth. The daily stress of cluttered possessions, commitments, and mindsets are minimized when choosing simplicity. A minimalist lifestyle is freed up to better pursue relationships with family and friends and is freed from the chaos of constant comparison to others. We no longer have to be stuck in the never-ending cycle of chasing more money or more stuff for idealized “success and happiness.” In addition to the absence of stress and anxiety, minimalism also offers benefits of positive emotions such as joy and peace as a result of simply finding contentment with what we have.

So how do we start? Minimalism is a process unique to everyone and not something you simply attain or accomplish overnight. Many may believe the goal of minimalism is having the least amount of belongings. However, the end goal of a simplistic lifestyle is not deprivation but internal peace and happiness. “Living minimally does not mean living without things, it simply means filling life with things that add value” and bring you joy. To start, you first need to make the decision to change. Reassess what is actually important to you and what is not. Then slowly implement the necessary change to eliminate the clutters pulling you down. The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up by Marie Kondo states that one way to declutter is to ask yourself if it sparks joy in your life. If something no longer sparks joy, let it go with gratitude. Continue that practice of gratitude for the things you have and the blessings in your life. When you surround yourself with things that bring you joy, you are bound to be much happier and at peace. Minimalism is also about focusing on what you want most out of your life and on what keeps you grounded. With minimalism, you can spend more time with those you care about to nurture your relationship with yourself and your loved ones. Not only will you be content with what you have, but you will also stop feeling like you constantly need more to be happy.

Society tells us happiness can be bought. Wealth equals a blissful life. Yet, it seems the more we have, the less effective it is at bringing us the happiness we seek. Embracing minimalism can be the alternative path. Less could actually be more. The shift of focus from being dependent on material possessions to a more simplistic lifestyle liberates us from the never-ending cycle of the pursuit for more and allows us to focus on the meaningful things in our lives. Minimalism allows us to appreciate what we already have and find contentment and joy in the present, leading to improved well-being and quality of life.

References

23 April 2021
   https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/09/materialism-system-eats-us-from-inside-out

   https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037409

   https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/urc/2017/Posters/29/

   http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=akron1595892106896602