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17 February 2019

It's Time to Let Go of Grandma's Dusty Antique Vanity

“Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need.”

Chuck Palahniuk, in his award-winning novel *Fight Club*, gave an ingenious take on materialism, an arguably pandemic outbreak which has spurred across the globe since the progression of the advertisement media. Defined as the, “tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values” or, more simply put, “buying shit that we don't need”, materialism has caused people to maintain densely cluttered homes since the ideas of industrialization and mass production were first manifested into existence.

An opposing approach to materialism, minimalism, has been on the rise in the past few years; it has been recently popularized with public figures, vloggers, and particularly bloggers like [Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus](#), [Courtney Carver](#), and [Courtney Rector](#) who claim that it is the key to simple living, mental clarity, and valuing experience over materialistic wealth. Minimalism is quite possibly the solution to the prominent culture of obsessive hoarding and the mental fog and chaos which accompany it.

Culture tells us that the meaning of the life is the accumulation of things, but minimalism emphasizes the contrary. Rather, as [Joshua Becker](#), popular minimalist figure, asserts on his editorial page *Becoming Minimalist*, minimalism, at its core, “is the intentional promotion of the

things we most value and the removal of everything that distracts us from it” which “steps off the treadmill of consumerism” (Becker). Particularly by counteracting consumerism, this lifestyle promotes financial responsibility in eliminating the need for excessive, meaningless spending on clutter and leaving more room in the budget for other financial goals. A [Fox Business Article](#) stated that the average American spends more than, “\$300,000 on ‘impulse buys’ during their adult lifetime” (Fox). Focusing on minimalism and simplicity, however, deters people from spending large portions of their budget on useless clutter and rather putting it towards financial success and more rewarding investments.

Minimalism is not only financially rewarding, but mentally fulfilling and spiritually satisfying. Linda Esposito, in an [article regarding simplifying and mental health](#), described how, “physical clutter begets mental clutter” and “slowing down is everything to creating mental space” (Esposito). In order to possess mental clarity and cut down on stress, it is essential to have a stable, clear environment in which you can be more with less and embrace simplicity. This cannot be done in a house which is weighed down with clutter and unnecessary objects simply taking up space; a cluttered house, workspace, environment is a cluttered mind, and a cluttered mind is a dysfunctional one.

Have you ever tried to focus, work, and be productive in a dirty, disorganized room? Esposito explained how, each time you make a new purchase, “your mind is distracted because it has to register another thing” (Esposito). Each purchase takes up more and more space in your home, fills your closets to the point where you can barely inch the door shut, clutters your attic, and eats up every last bit of counter space. With the demanding nature of daily life, the last thing your brain needs is more clutter in the environment; it needs a peaceful place to wind down.

Modern society tells us to put value into the materialistic things which we accumulate over the years. We're taught to embrace objects – candles, wedding rings, pictures, vases, shelves – as sentimental. Worship them like shrines by letting them collect dust in the attic or spare bedroom. The minimalist mindset emphasizes that objects such as these are – *can* be – merely meaningless. Experience, rather, is the truest form of fulfillment.

Letting go of material things teaches us to put our passion, our love into the things which matter most. It frees up more money to travel. Space in which to spend with family and friends. An extra bedroom for when family visits. Further, minimalism teaches that materialistic things – technology, decorations, pillows, possessions – don't make you happy. They don't fill the void which we call the human soul. *Experience* does. *Love* does.

The minimalist movement has met considerable backlash in its movement; many, including Kyle Chayka in his [article *The Oppressive Gospel of 'Minimalism'*](#) critique the movement as, in his own words, “an ostentatious ritual of consumerist self-sacrifice” and stereotype it as, “tiny houses to microapartments” to “white walls interrupted only by succulents” (Chayka). But minimalism isn't solely about cultural aesthetic or household declutter; it's about mental clarity. About valuing the right things, about having space to breathe, about not having to search every crack and crevice and sort through piles of junk when simply tracking down your spare keys.

It's about returning to our roots. Living realistically and simplistically. Escaping the grasp of consumerism and releasing the weight of materialism from our shoulders. Owning less, and living – *experiencing* – more. Because, as Chuck Palahniuk reminds us, “buying shit we don't need” is perpetually far from living.

Mentor Texts

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/09/can-artificial-intelligence-be-smarter-than-a-human-being/571498/>

Derek Thompson provided a well-written critique on the recent ideal of “workism” in his editorial, “Workism is Making Americans Miserable”. He opened the editorial with a direct quote from John Maynard Keynes’s 1930 Essay “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren” which served not only as a source of background information for the reader, but suggested an alternative outcome to what has become the culture of modern work. In my essay, I mirrored Thompson’s usage of a quote reference to open up the editorial, which I believed opens up the topic and gives the reader a direct idea of what the editorial will be on. Later, Thompson defines the center of his critique – workism – as the “belief that work is not only necessary to economic production, but also the centerpiece of one’s identity and life’s purpose” (Thompson). Just as Thompson defined workism to provide the reader with a heightened understanding of the topic, I provided a direct definition of both minimalism and materialism in my editorial. I believe that this tactic, by giving the reader an actual understanding of my topic, opened them to interpreting my argument and being convinced by it. He provided an array of logos in his editorial as well in order to support the idea that Americans put too much value on work; just as he described how, “no large country in the world as productive as the United States averages more hours of work a year”, I provided the direct data of how much money is spent in the average adult lifetime on unnecessary goods.

Within my editorial, I attempted to mimic the structure of Thompson's article, "The Spooky Genius of Artificial Intelligence" with regards to the way he put the argument together. The very first paragraph of his article posed the question "Can artificial intelligence be smarter than a person?" and then explained how to go about answering the question. In the body of his editorial, he went through a plethora of pieces of data, examples in history, modern applications, and references to researchers. He took many different approaches to the argument and went through a multitude of realms regarding the topic. At the end of the article, he returned to the exact question which was posed in the first paragraph, wording his answer in a way which showed its relation to the question which was posed at first – "AI might not be "smart" in a human sense of the word. But it has already shown that it can perform an eerie simulation of evolution. And that is a spooky kind of genius" (Thompson). In my article, I didn't emulate his argumentative structure exactly, as I didn't necessarily pose a direct question in my article. However, I felt that the way, at the end of the article, he returned to the idea which was posed at the beginning and included the same wording which had been used at the beginning was effective in wrapping up the argument very neatly and almost tying it up with a bow. To emulate this, I used a quote at the very beginning of my article and referred back to the quote at the very end of my editorial. I feel that this essence of familiarity within the wording tied the beginning to the end and provided for a satisfying close to my editorial.