

The Minimalist Movement: Why Get Rid of Your Stuff?

by Megan Halpin



As fast fashion and technology increase its grip on American consumer culture, a movement to combat consumerism is growing. In this article, the minimalist movement will be dissected and simplified, and an explanation will be given as to why minimalism could be the best thing for you and the planet.

What is Minimalism?

[Minimalism](#) is all about living with less. It's about living a life based on experiences instead of material possessions. It doesn't shame people for owning material possessions, but it stresses detaching yourself from the consumer culture that is the backbone of modern America. One overarching philosophy of minimalists is to fuel your happiness not through things, but through relationships, experiences, and your own passions.

“The simple life” as many characterize it - mostly void of debt, fancy cars, big houses, and in general, stuff. Stuff that minimalists believe drags people down, whether they are working long hours to pay off their ever-growing mound of debt or buying into whatever's the latest fashion or technology trend in the market. When all that “stuff” is set aside, room is made for spending time with loved ones or getting outside more. Minimalists assert that more happiness and less stress is what you'll find; things you won't find in the next Tesla or new iPhone.

Where did it come from?

Minimalism originally emerged as an art movement in the 1950s and 60s. The movement focused on simplistic music, art and design. As it ventured into interior design, photography, and fashion, people began including it in their daily lives. This effectively created the lifestyle trend of minimalism, but minimalism as a movement to help humans and the planet didn't emerge until recent years, as overconsumption became a larger and larger issue within American society.



Although it has been knocked for the way celebrities have taken the trend and made it into a vision of “[walled-off luxury](#)”, or the “self-help” style some see it possessing, it is far from a fad; many view it as a necessary lifestyle change. The movement is all about motivating a shift in consumerist cultures in order to ensure a future for our planet; the minimalist lifestyle has come just in time.

Why is it better for the planet?

One overarching goal of the minimalist movement is to try and combat [unsustainable overconsumption](#). American consumer culture and the trend of “fast fashion” has become a huge burden for our planet to hold - trends expire increasingly faster, and millions of clothing articles are dumped into the landfill, making room for more clothing - and the cycle continues.

“Instead of repairing and preserving our clothes,” the [Surfrider Foundation](#) states, “We can too easily purchase cheap and quick replacements at the click of a button when a tear or bad stain appears. This consumer behavior is driving the phenomenon of ‘fast fashion’.”

The fashion industries’ increased production of greenhouse gases, chemical microfibers, plastics, and the cotton farm’s water consumption is taking a toll on climate change and adding to the negative impact consumerism has on our planet.

The American consumer class, with diets of highly processed food and a life dedicated to acquiring material goods, is contributing in a major way to the degradation and decay of the environment. Largely due to overconsumption and consumer culture’s “[throw away](#)” mentality, this decline of habitats and ecosystems is directly related to species extinction.



Living a minimalist lifestyle not only helps to combat our species' negative impacts on the planet, but it's better for one's health and happiness as well.

What are the benefits for us?

For Joshua Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, the two guys who call themselves [“The Minimalists”](#), their decision to try minimalism as a way of living came after they had achieved everything in life that was “supposed” to make them happy; promotions, six-figure salaries, big houses and cars with which to fill with all their stuff.

But all these things had not brought them happiness, and instead they were depressed, in debt, anxious, and felt trapped - in their careers and lives. They decided to turn to minimalism in 2009 and got rid of much of the stuff that was causing the debt, stress, and anxiety. They found more time to do the things they love, new passions, and more happiness without feeling bogged down by the constant upgrades and new seasons of fashion.

To pay for a consumerist lifestyle, people are working long hours, often in cubicles, and amassing large amounts of debt to pay for the big house or fancy car. This contributes to many people feeling “trapped” in their work life, like they must work their lives away to pay for everything they've bought. This explains why minimalists say that less stuff equals more freedom.

Less time spent working, more time spent doing things you love. Less time playing with expensive gadgets and more time focusing on relationships, our health, passions, and ultimately our happiness. The phrase “less is more” really does have a truthful ring to it.

Implications for the future

The fact that minimalism is often considered a “trend” in popular culture speaks to how far America has strayed into the vast overconsumption bubble. Before mass production and the Industrial Revolution, American society was minimalist in essence – they didn't grow mass amounts of food or make clothing for more than two seasons, only buying what they needed. Now, American society is at the other end of the spectrum, buying way more than we could ever possibly need and not stopping there. This consumerism will only grow, which is why minimalism is not just a popular trend – it's a necessary roadblock. Minimalists are speaking out against overconsumption and human's disregard for the environment through their lifestyle, and this movement will grow increasingly vital to our survival and prosperity in the future.



How can you start?

Adopting a minimalist lifestyle can be done in big or small ways. Whether you want to cut down your closet size and stick to a few solid garments, or make some big changes to the way you live, here are some tips from The Minimalists on how to [live with less](#).

- 1. Get a photo scanner.** If you're like most of us, you have boxes of photos cluttering your attic or closet. Scanning old photos declutters your space but allows you to keep the memories alive.
- 2. Put everything you own into three piles: Essentials, Nonessentials, Junk.** Then get rid of the junk. These are all the artifacts in our home that serve no purpose and bring us no joy (this is for the faint of heart).
- 3. Seasonality Rule.** Aka the 90/90 rule – pick a possession, and if you haven't used that item in the last 90 days and you don't see yourself using it in the next 90, it's okay to let it go.
- 4. Just in Case Rule.** Try not to own or pack anything “just in case”. Anything you truly need, you can find for less than \$20 in less than 20 minutes from your current location. Joshua and Ryan swear to this.
- 5. Don't Upgrade Rule.** Go without giving into the newest iPhone or Apple Watch. Even though these upgrades are really, really tempting, going against consumer culture will force you to question your stuff, and whether you need it.



These are just a few of The Minimalists' tips for decluttering and refocusing your life through Minimalism. You can find the full eBook with all 16 rules [here](#).

Bottom line, we need to be creative about the way we live as we head into the future. We can't continue to live this way forever – this society of consumerism is unsustainable and cannot last

much longer with the current state of our world. Minimalism provides a way to reverse our habits, helping the Earth prosper as well as ourselves.

So, who wants to be a minimalist?