

---

## Material Possessions And The Pursuit Of Happiness

Americans have become so materialistic that they have lost touch with what really matters in life. Understanding why we think the more stuff we acquire, the happier we will be is truly puzzling. We work long hours to not only pay for the essential things we need but to also buy non-essential things that we do not. If we step back and reevaluate our lives, we will see that all the stuff we buy hoping for happiness really has no real weight in life. Happiness is something we all seek, but we are not going to find it at the department store. As Americans, we mindlessly spend money on things that play no role in our happiness.

In a book titled, *The High Price of Materialism*, the author stated that “the more materialistic values are at the center of our lives, the more our quality of life is diminished” (Kasser 14). Yet we work long hours and wear ourselves down to consume things with the assumption that we need them. Instead of finding happiness in these objects we purchase, some of us find regret later down the line when we finally realize we didn’t need them in the first place.

Overconsumption is like a disease that slowly kills happiness instead of contributing to it. Buying frivolous things will not make us happy. In fact, it is more likely to do more harm than good. We begin to undervalue social relationships when we focus on buying happiness. There have been studies that prove that rather than getting pleasure from things, we get pleasure from experiences (Gooray). Instead of buying things to be temporarily happy, we need to divert our attention to more important subjects. Think of all the things we could do as Americans if we spent the money we waste on stuff that sits around collecting dust and spend it on something worthwhile. We could use our hard-earned money to do good in the world like feeding the hungry or helping a charity that provides other resources to the less fortunate. It is possible that we could find happiness in giving to others that would otherwise go without.

We could spend our money on making memories instead of treasuring material objects. Most of us probably do not even realize how much we turn to shopping for happiness, but we do it all the time. We shop for Christmas, birthdays, and even out of boredom. Americans feel the need to fill the void of loneliness and other emotions with unnecessary shopping sprees. Some of us are so concerned about having the latest and greatest new items to hit the market that we allow ourselves to go into debt to do so. The key is to find a balance between what we really need and what we do not. No two feet need 60 pairs of shoes. Consumer debt is another issue in relation to excessive consumption. In 2017, “outstanding consumer revolving debt- mostly credit card debt- hit an all-time peak of \$1.021 trillion in June, according to the federal reserve” (Singletary). No one can say for sure how much of this debt is from overconsumption, but I think we can all agree that it is a good portion of it.

Debt causes an immense amount of stress and cutting back on excessive purchases could certainly make life easier. I cannot imagine anyone finds true happiness while in debt from buying things we never needed in the first place. Why do we buy things with the hope that it will make us happy? Perhaps, it is the peer pressure we feel to fit in with society. Or maybe as Sofio Archon said, “the fact of the matter is that your unconscious mind is often driving your behavior as a consumer: under the influence of basic evolutionary drives and tactics of retailers, it’s easy to feel compelled to buy something that later doesn’t find a place in your life”. Whatever the cause, becoming more of a minimalist could certainly steer us towards the direction of

---

happiness. We need to overcome the psychological impulses that cause us to buy so many things we don't need. Look at the example we are setting for our children, and the children for generations to come by trying to buy their happiness.

We purchase toys and gifts for our children when they are feeling down, as rewards, and even for no reason at all. By doing this, we are reinforcing the idea that their happiness can, in fact, be bought. And if your children are anything like mine, they only play with things for a short period before they make it to the bottom of the toy box and eventually to the landfill. This mentality continues to follow our children into adulthood and they think that they need things to be happy. Holiday shopping is a perfect example of how buying things can make us unhappy. For some of us, shopping for others can be stressful and overwhelming. It is almost like a race to get every popular item on each wish list before they are sold out. In a time when people should be happy and festive, they will fight in the local Wal-Mart over big screen televisions and gaming systems. Once materialism begins to take over the meaning of the holiday itself, people are left empty and hoping for more (Gavin).

An article titled, *Why Buying Stuff Won't Make You Happy*, states that "we've been convinced to think that buying stuff is the only way to prove to ourselves and others our worth, to such an extent that we look down upon those who have less and look up to those who have more" (Archon). Buying a new sports car or a designer handbag to add to your collection may contribute to temporary happiness, but it will not last long. It may even make you feel like you are better than others. When it's all said and done, we are left with a little less cash and cluttered homes. American's must realize that even treasured possessions will never lead to true happiness. Our society has become so obsessed with material possessions that we have lost touch with what really matters in life. No amount of stuff we buy will ever amount to anything more than temporary happiness. It is time that we stop working so much to pay for things we do not need and focus on more important matters. We need to clean out our closets, declutter our lives, and start setting a good example for the future generations to come. No matter how hard we try, we cannot buy happiness.