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## Money And Happiness: Ability To Have Both

It seems like everywhere around us, we are bombarded with things that lead us to believe that we need to consume. A newer version of the phone we do not need, a new pair of shoes to follow a fashion trend, a new car to impress... Society works in many ways to make us believe that we need a certain product to obtain a decent level of happiness. By definition, the term materialism means " a doctrine that the only or the highest values or objectives lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress" (Merriam-Webster). We are programmed to believe that the more we have, the happier we are. What happens when one cannot differentiate a temporary feeling with true happiness and well-being? Research has shown that people who live a more luxurious lifestyle and possess valuable objects are not as happy as people who live a more simplistic life. This paper will explore how our materialistic tendencies to overconsume are increasingly disturbing our inner peace and how we can put a stop to this system that is designed to make us forget what is truly important in life. From a sociology, psychology and economic aspect, this paper will go in depth of the consumer culture, the idea of a degrowth and the changes we can make to restore the degradation of the human experience.

Whether we like to believe it or not, most of us are born into a consumer cult. This whole ideology of materialism started as a natural survival instinct. For the longest time, the exchange of basic goods for human survival has helped us build our economies and flourish as successful societies. Ever since, worldwide societies have been socially conditioned into believing the lies hidden behind the concept of materialism. When studied from the sociology discipline, the first observable behavior in our consumer culture is the way individuals spend when they are surrounded by people. It seems as if everything is turned into a competition and people become more selfish, less generous and empathetic (Monbiot, 2013, par.4). A study by Richins and Dawson proved that people with materialistic tendencies were less likely to donate to an organization/charity or even lend money to a friend or family member (Kasser, 2002, p.63). A second finding explained that as materialist values rise, pro-social values are found to decline (Grégoire, 2013, par.13). For example, research has found that these types of people engage less in recycling. Their concern for nature goes down and they tend to leave a bigger ecological footprint behind (Kasser, 2002, p.93). Another reason why our spending behavior changes when around others is because most people today live their lives based on other people's opinion. When living your life in a constant battle with the people around you, it becomes very difficult to maintain a balanced amount of peace within yourself and your environment. According to Tim Kasser, most people today are found pressured into their behaviors (Kasser, 2002, p.100). People are often found living their lives not as their proper selves and this destroys the whole concept of well-being. This type of behavior is observed amongst all humans from coast to coast. However, a materialistic characteristic is not always seen as negative. In Asian societies, buying expensive or a product you can relate to can be seen as a way of building a sense of belonging to an extended community. Awanis also explains how these people can be seen as "meaning-seekers". By buying a certain product, they are willing to promote it to others because the certain product has a certain importance/meaning to them (Awanis, 2018, par.7). The danger of materialism is when we have difficulty distinguishing a person's happiness and well-being with the outer image they portray.

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The environment in which people grew up in has an impact on the development of future material tendencies. A sense of security and safety comes from the experiences people go through in their younger years (Kasser, 2002, p.30). When one of these is absent, younger people lack "intrinsic motivation" (Kasser, 2002, p.76). If we were to ask students today why they go to school, most of them would answer because they want to grow rich and getting an education is one way to do so. Most are doing something because of the exterior reward and not because of a sense of accomplishment. To be at peace is not only physical but also mental. It is to feel a sense of accomplishment and of achievement. More recently, researchers are starting to find that there is a link between anxiety, depression and physical pain with people that value material. Whether male or female, the research conducted that low life satisfaction and few pleasant emotions are amongst the symptoms (Kasser, 2002, p.22). Researchers also concluded that the more one is obsessed with their own vanity, the more they experience physical symptoms such as headaches, backaches, sore muscles and sore throats (Kasser, 2002, p.11). We can also state the fact that success is defined by how many things one has, and the opposite is defined by misery. In a society that spreads the message of the satisfaction of needs by purchasing the perfect product, one can easily be confused between a basic need such as food, water, clean air and self-created needs such as a brand-new car of the year. (Kasser, 2002, p.26). The author of *The High Price of Materialism* gives a very helpful example that simplifies the understanding of this idea. He explains how our consumer culture feeds us with "junk food" which we know as not very healthy and not filling but people are still willing to eat it because it keeps them full for a very short period of time and it also satisfies their cravings. (Kasser, 2002, p.27). From this, we can say that it is important that people learn how to feed and satisfy the roots of their needs because not doing so can lead to bigger problems that also triggers our health, both physical and mental.

The act of buying is what our economy relies on. Making a purchase has never been easier. The possession of physical cash is no longer necessary. The introduction of credit revolutionized the market, making it easier for people to buy anything no matter their income. In fact, a materialistic characteristic can be observed among the rich and the poor. No matter what social class we belong to, there are a lot of things that one does not have control over, but one always has control over their purchase power. For this reason, a lot of purchases made today are almost never intentional. In fact, financial literacy plays an immense role on people's spending habits (Mette, F. M. B., Matos, C. A. D., Rohden, S. F., & Ponchio, M. C., 2019, p.17).

Emotions have a big role when we find ourselves in a situation where we have to make a decision to buy something. We let our emotions control our wallets since we need to build a sense of reassurance when we are afraid or in doubt. (Murray, 2013, par.7) Consumer behaviour conditions us to believe that consumption is a must, necessary for the expansion of jobs, and that without doing so, our economy will crash. Living in a sense of fear is also a big factor of peace interruption. Also, there is a strong uprising of debt in most middle-class people's wallets. Most people are willing to ruin their financial status to purchase products they cannot afford. According to Joshua Becker, an average credit card holder currently can hold up to 4 different credit cards. Most purchases he describes as unnecessary. Additionally, studies are finding that the decision to purchase a product using a credit card depends on what type of product we are buying. Research has shown that people tend to use their credit cards more often when making a utilitarian purchase, a purchase that is useful. In contrast, hedonistic products, which bring joy and pleasure, are more likely to be paid by methods like cash (Mette, F. M. B., Matos, C. A. D., Rohden, S. F., & Ponchio, M. C., 2019, p.17).