



Singapore Psychologist

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUSTAINABILITY

SUSTAINABLE WELL-BEING | SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY FROM A
MENTAL DISORDER | MATERIAL POSSESSIONS | THE CLIMATE
ARMEGEDDON | SUSTAINABLE FUNERARY RITUALS | NOSTALGIA |
SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN FASHION AND MANY MORE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In a world of ephemera, where we purchase only to possess, life becomes volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Material consumption is a major contributor to the environmental crisis and materialistic values are associated with environmental attitudes and behaviours. Importantly for psychological wellbeing, it appears that prioritising the acquisition of money and "things" is associated with lower quality personal wellbeing. Money doesn't buy happiness. So, what can we do to develop sustainable wellbeing? Research indicates that it might be achieved by adopting a sufficiency mindset, through mindfulness, or by tapping into flow experiences. Each of these pathways positions us towards attitudes and lifestyle choices that direct us away from consumerism. In this issue we aim to explore the developmental influences on materialistic values, the impacts of one's own life experiences on environmental action, environmental generational blaming, and other potential barriers to sustainable lifestyles and wellbeing. Our writers ponder materiality itself, as well as related concepts of ownership and connection throughout the lifespan, and further to how we might practice sustainability even at the end of life.

Our Singapore Psychologist magazine team take sustainable workloads seriously. We have a wonderfully creative and dedicated team of volunteers who have continued to deliver the magazine on our quarterly schedule. Shifting into 2023, we're moving to a trimester schedule to ease some pressure from our volunteers and also to allow our readers more time to read and digest the thoughtful and (we hope) inspiring content provided by our writers. Read on to explore.

Dr Denise Dillon
Editor-in-Chief



VICE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Consumerism is, perhaps, the hallmark of our modern society. This economic (and sometimes cultural) *modus operandi* has been the status quo since the Industrial Revolution, perhaps for good reason. It drives economic growth and improves our living standards and quality of life. Yet simple demand and supply would create a cycle of increasing consumption and production, leading to an overexploitation of our finite natural resources. While this is not an economics magazine, the act of simply buying has profound impact on our psychology. And thus, we shift our attention to the psychology of consumerism and sustainability.

Consumer psychology is (unironically) a booming business in our consumeristic world. To compete in a saturated material market, big corporations and small businesses alike enlist marketing techniques rooted in psychological science to manipulate consumer spending in their favour. So large and insidious is its influence that we have created a whole subdivision of psychology to understand, inform, and react to this phenomenon. These practices also inadvertently promote materialistic values, as we begin to associate our self-identity with the things we buy; our wellbeing and happiness deeply intertwined with the quantity of goods we possess and the brands they belong to. The act of buying something is no longer a means to an end, but as an end in itself.

Sustainability is the antithesis to consumerism. To act sustainably is to reject consumerism's short-term satisfaction in favour of long-term growth and sufficiency. Numerous studies have shown that consumerism leads to reduced social involvement and lower-quality social relationships (Bauer et al., 2012), negative impact on children's physical and psychological health (Kramer, 2010), and increased competitiveness (Kasser et al., 2007). When we think about sustainability, the adage "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" springs to mind. The 3Rs continue to be relevant in today's society but perhaps individually thinking that it is enough is not, and has never been, enough. To promote the values of sustainability, we need to provide the essential evidence base that it not only heals the environment but also improves our sense of self-worth. Like the Japanese art of Kintsugi that emphasises the beauty of brokenness and repair, we need to encourage a deeper appreciation of experiences, ideas, and meaningful connections with the environment (and the people around us), rather than a self-centred lifestyle of endless material wants. This holiday season, we invite you to slow down and repurpose, rethink, and reject (oh dear, 3 more Rs) the idea of consumerism and what it means to you. Do we yearn to have yet another expensive thing, or do we yearn for the simple joy of reconnecting with our loved ones?

Read on and get psyched!

Mok Kai Chuen
Vice President (Outreach)



Material Possessions— Where is Home?

By Daniela Schreier

Let me ask you a question: Where is Home? Is it where you live, and where your Hermes bag, Gucci shoes, and Apple gadgets are housed and luxury cars are parked? Where your cell phone buzzes? Or where your heart and soul reside? Same place, separate spheres? You tell me. How do you know? I tell you.

Pen and Paper Time: Kindly get out a pen and paper before moving forward... sorry, I am so demanding ... but please answer the question: "Where is home?" first for yourself.

Why? No one else can do it for you; no doctor, lawyer, colleague, coach, or psychologist. Depending on their level of self-awareness, they will well-meaningly suggest different responses to you but, ultimately, they return to their own dwelling grounds not to yours. Hence the answer resides within you alone.

Please be your *own best friend* in the process. Best friend? Yes, it takes a good friend to tell the truth. There is no wrong or right answer to where home is; just jot down what is your truth at this very moment and remember there are many passages - like pages in a book or stops on a cruise - on the journey back home.

"Human beings are poor examiners, subject to superstition, bias, prejudice, and a profound tendency to see what they want to see rather than what is really there."

— M. Scott Peck, (1978)

In a world that offers us everything (material that is), we adopt the mindset that we are what we own, what we have. The more the better, right? We depend on outside goods, opinions, and validation to fill up our insides, to make us whole and to make us feel good. We believe *happiness is the way* and we are expecting *mostly green lights*, and accumulation of precious goods gets us there. Material possessions are the *Gods of the Modern World*; the one stop quick fix. They are much like Botox and liquid face lifts but with an even shorter expiration date—generally minutes, hours, or if we are lucky, they last several days. They offer reward for hard work, or consolation during life's disappointments, frustrations, and losses. They are outward symbols of achievements, of having arrived, yet, why do we continue hurting on the inside? Yes, material possessions, the one stop fix, if they were just to have a lasting effect.

Pen and Paper Time again: What are your favorite or usual quick fixes and rewards? What's their satisfaction expiration date generally speaking?

The uncanny truth is that material possessions never fill the void inside of us for very long. Otherwise, we would have stopped buying and accumulating long ago! Our focus on goods is a distraction, an avoidance that many of us cling to through decades of our lives; material possessions are initially pleasant and rewarding—until the bill arrives (though money is irrelevant for some who made plenty and yet cannot buy illusive happiness)—yet they are impermanent.

The fleeting satisfaction of material possessions leads ultimately to deep-seated disappointment and to the repetition of a potentially life-long frustrating cycle: Acquiring more outside goods to patch up our inner longing for peace, belonging, and wholeness. It's the battle of the *ego* against the *soul*.

Pen and Paper Time again: Have you experienced that initial high followed by emptiness (e.g., after completing your entire home project or after buying that "new toy")? What was it like? And, what was the antidote?

Dr Wayne Dyer (n.d.) beautifully defines the ego, as "the false idea of believing that you are what you have or what you do" and the soul, as "that inner quiet place that is yours to consult. It will always guide you in the right direction."

While the ego is insatiable, strives constantly for more, and loves distractions and accumulations, the soul aims for peace and equilibrium. A well-balanced life integrates the outside-focused and outside-facing ego with the wise master of our inner tranquility, the soul. To create a balanced life is an active process and many of us must learn to encounter and access that treasure within. The grandmaster called soul already resides within us as a reliable compass that was muted for a long time. How come? It requires quiet time to focus, it entails taking responsibility for our choices, and it demands problem solving and the acknowledgement that life is difficult but that despite its challenges it's still worthwhile living. It asks us to feel the emotional pain (so scary for many) before we experience happiness.



"It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually."

— M. Scott Peck (1978)

How to go about it—how to choose the soul path? Step by step, we can learn to be aware of our own feelings, we can learn to observe and watch ourselves from what I refer to with my patients and clients as the eagle perspective. Distance helps to take a broader lens. It delays response time. Ultimately it teaches us to choose our responses carefully. Only then can we start to live a soul-directed life instead of being inattentively pulled down the old-trodden ego path of accumulation. The soul path equals sustainability aka balance, the ego path equals endless striving. It requires patience and compassion with self and others; it requires discipline to integrate the ego with the soul, for the ego brought much innovation and progress but, when not directed by the soul, it brings despair, excess, and disappointment often expressed as symptoms of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

"The difficulty we have in accepting responsibility for our behavior lies in the desire to avoid the pain of the consequences of that behavior."

— M. Scott Peck (1978)



Pen and Paper Time for the last time again: What are you willing to do starting now to choose your soul-path? Thank you for being here and doing the work.



In closing, here are some tips to explore your soul-path. And along the way of the soul-path you shall discover the home within again. Be patient! Be kind, as "the journey is essential to the dream," (St. Francis of Assisi, n.d.).



Five Tips to Find Your Way Home: BOLEH

B

Become an old tree: A yoga analogy (n.d.) for getting grounded and balanced is being an old tree. Let's practice it daily in the morning and evening for five to six minutes. Let's recall it when we feel unbalanced throughout the day; make it our go-to for reflective, peaceful, and stressful times. Here it goes: Imagine your feet extending deeply in the ground and see your roots taking hold. You are an integral and unique element of the world, the universe. Feel yourself getting anchored deep inside the ground. You are focused, balanced, and aware. Storms will come and pass—you may lose a few branches, tremble, or fracture your trunk but your roots and hence you—the old tree connected to the universe - remains grounded. You are profoundly aware that the dark will pass, and light shall appear while you remain deeply grounded. Stay on the soul-path: Rain or shine!

O

Opposite Action: In the middle of the perfect storm, we generally revert to our old behavior patterns. They are quasi-automized; hence do not expect to be perfect at opposite actions for a while. We are not about perfection; we are about change—little by little. Opposite action means having the awareness in times of distress to tune into our feelings, gently talk to ourselves, and calm ourselves down before we go into automation. If you are generally dealing with frustration by shopping online or in-store or acting out—opposite action is first do no harm: Remove yourself from the situation (e.g., computer or phone for online shopping). Take a deep breath: Remind yourself you are an old tree; now go for a walk or a workout. If you have a dog or companion animal, attend to your furry friend—they know how to relax. Otherwise, negotiate with yourself or an accountability partner who will help you to delay any action for 30 minutes at a time. See if after 30, 60, 90, or 120 minutes you still feel the strong need to shop. If you can delay for 24 hours, do so. The urge will reduce, and your strength will grow.

L

Learn to be mindful: In his impactful book, *Wherever you go there you are*, John Kabat-Zinn (1994) discusses how mindfulness means being aware and in the moment, which can assist us to live a balanced and meaningful life. That makes sense and the message is twofold: Only when you are in the moment can you consciously act, react, or not engage as needed and most beneficial to your balanced state of mind. The here and now creates your future so better be present as the past is long gone. Secondly, wherever you are—you always carry yourself with you—hence there you go! You can't leave yourself behind (even though you may want to). Let's try this simple exercise: Your mind is active and wanders—hence don't be surprised about it. When you wash your dishes—do it on purpose. In practice this might mean speaking out loud to yourself initially, then quietly—foam on, foam off. When you dry your dishes and put them away follow the script, verbalize what you do. You will notice that your mind is wandering. When that happens gently acknowledge it; like, "Oh, side tracking; or oh, judging; or oh, worrying"; and then gently bring your mind and thoughts back to the present moment. You can implement that same mindfulness exercise when walking or working. It will help you to stay connected with the present and with yourself. You will soon notice mindfulness empowers you to live a more meaningful and goal-directed life.

E

Elect Peace: Just for today, choose peace. There will always be pressures or timelines looming, and something will claim it needs to be done. In your ego's eyes, there may always be someone smarter, prettier, more successful, younger, or better off. Thoughts and feelings of discontent will never change anything about your position in life, about who you are, and where you like to go. On the contrary, these thoughts and feelings diminish your positive outlook and hold you back. Replace complaints with gratitude for what you have, even for the challenges you encounter. Why? Gratitude is a powerful and kind remedy leading the way to peace and acceptance. Legend attributes the famous proverb, "Be yourself. Everybody else is already taken," to Oscar Wilde. It is a powerful reminder of the reality that we are all unique and different. The analogy I share with my patients and clients is that about cars. You may be a perfect Fiat Panda, small, cute, compact, and efficient, but you envy the Jaguar: Spacious, illusive, and beautifully proportioned. Well, get it straight, you will never be a Jaguar, but you can be the best Fiat Panda and maintain that Fiat Panda and keep it going, polish and shine it — and love it! That's you, that's authentic. See, a Jaguar has the same issues as a Fiat Panda, both cars hit potholes along the journey of life, and need maintenance! Do yourself and be yourself, give the same freedom to others, and wish them well along the journey of life. Choosing peace means to keep your inner temperature well-adjusted in the midst of outside tropical heat or a winter storm. That's enough to take care of. Start practicing today!

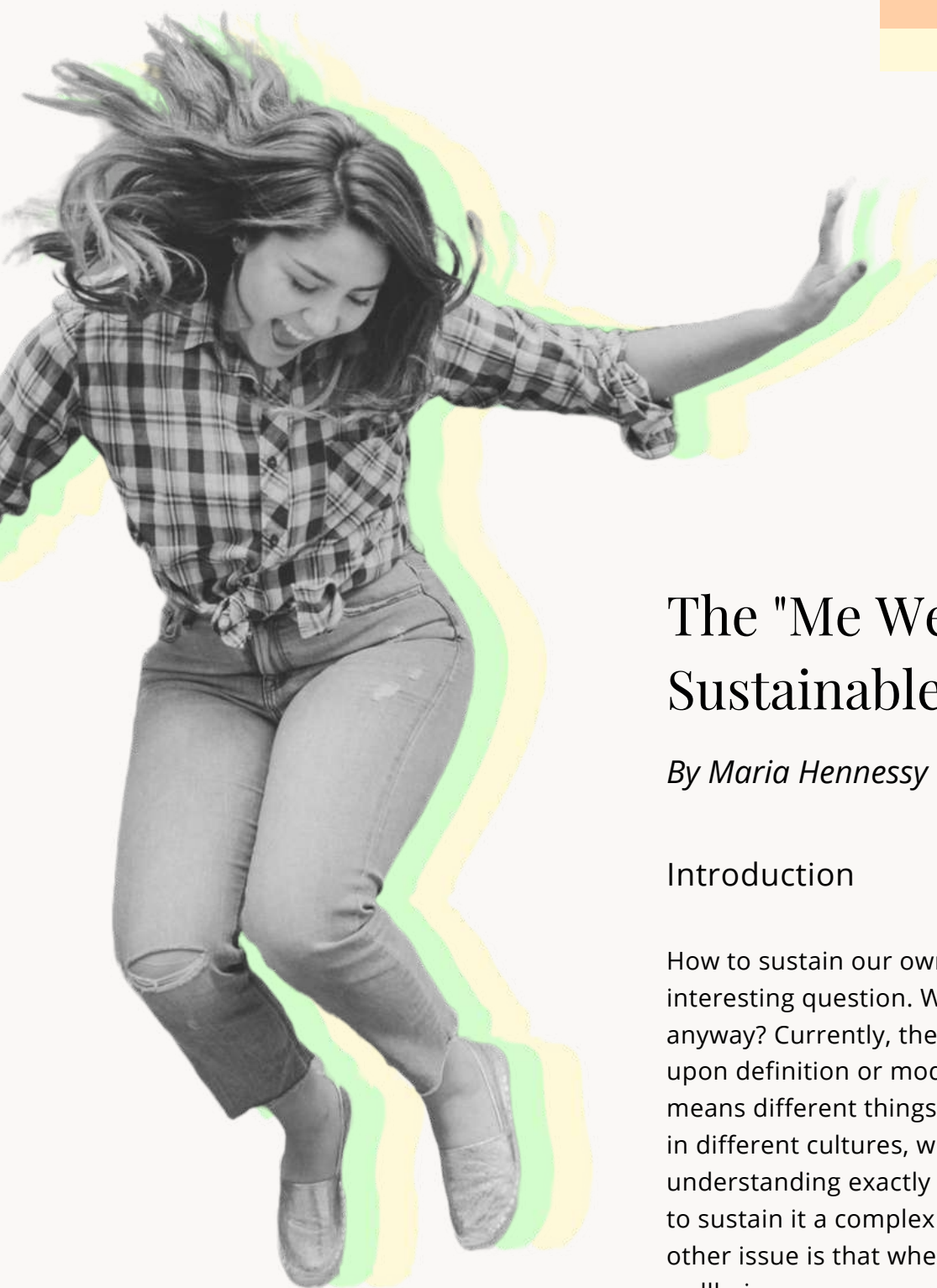
H

Honor Yourself: If you owe anybody anything then it's being honest with yourself. Be your own best friend. Look at your life, acknowledge that all the things and situations in your life are yours to handle—take responsibility! You may not have brought on all the problems you are facing, and you may have not invited them into your life—that includes people, jobs, monetary commitments, relationships, family and friend drama, loss, health issues and all sorts of situations that irritate you. But here they are. Hence, acknowledge and address what's on your plate. Little by little. One step at a time. Do yourself a favor: Choose to be honest with yourself. See life for what it is - a changing tapestry of colorful situations - and realize whatever you change today will look different soon. Your attitude and actions today create your future. Be self-aware, be honest, and love yourself.



Thank you for taking these first steps. We are all in this together. Welcome on the road less travelled... our journey back home!





The "Me We Us" of Sustainable Wellbeing

By Maria Hennessy

Introduction

How to sustain our own well-being is an interesting question. What is wellbeing anyway? Currently, there is no agreed upon definition or model of wellbeing. It means different things to different people in different cultures, which makes understanding exactly what it is and how to sustain it a complex question. The other issue is that when we mention wellbeing, we are usually talking about it on an individual level. However, wellbeing has broader levels and contexts which can be thought of as a richly interconnected system. Understanding the ways this system works can help us to explore and develop innovative ideas for change. So, let's consider what wellbeing looks like, and how it works in the world around us.

What is Wellbeing?

What exactly are we talking about when we use the term wellbeing? It's a question that has been pondered across time and cultures. For ancient Greeks such as Aristotle, it was all about eudaimonia or living a life that was true to your own values in the service of others. However, for the ancient Greek Aristippus or modern French philosophers like Michael Onfray, the pursuit of pleasure or hedonia is the highest goal of life. One simple and pragmatic definition that brings together these two schools of thought is that wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well (Huppert & So, 2013).

In general, there is consensus that wellbeing is a multidimensional construct (Hone et al., 2015). Different models tend to focus on a particular construct of wellbeing, or are hybrid models that include multiple constructs. For example, Diener et al. (1999) has a focus on subjective wellbeing involving a balance between experiencing positive and negative feelings, and the sense of being satisfied with one's life. Psychological wellbeing is commonly defined using Ryff & Singer's (1996) six dimensions of self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, environmental mastery, and positive relationships with others. Social wellbeing has been most clearly defined by Keyes' (1998) five dimensions of social integration, social acceptance, social contribution, social actualization and social coherence. Subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing and social wellbeing are related but distinct parts of wellbeing. Hybrid models such as Seligman's (2011) PERMA propose five building blocks from each of the three parts, these being Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment.

How do We Sustain Our Wellbeing?

I have an old 1920s advertising poster for Dr Poppy's Wonder Elixir that is "guaranteed to relieve symptoms and leave a positive feeling all day"! These days Dr Poppy and his followers are very active in the wellbeing space, so there are a plethora of self-help books, workshops, apps, podcasts, TikTok channels, and so on, that promise "guaranteed" ways of sustaining your wellbeing. But if you don't understand what wellbeing is, then you run the risk of falling prey to the Dr Poppys of this world! Knowledge is power, and knowing about ideas like PERMA, subjective wellbeing, or the six-parts of psychological wellbeing are important as a structure for wellbeing.

These theories help us understand the what and why of wellbeing. But there is a key piece missing—we need to know how we get there. Our wellbeing constantly changes, from moments of happiness, enjoying meaningful relationships, or the inevitable moments of distress that we all experience. In order to sustain our wellbeing we need to understand the processes behind change. Recently, key thought leaders in psychology are advocating for a major refocus from learning a particular type of therapy (e.g. CBT or schema therapy) to understanding the common psychological processes that underpin all effective interventions and therapy schools (Hayes et al., 2020). Wellbeing is not sustained by a healthy dollop of CBT but rather it is sustained by understanding the processes of psychological change.



Following the Death Star

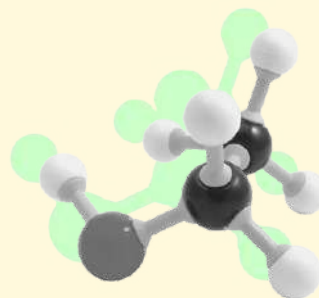
In their recent systematic review, also known colloquially as the Death Star project, Hayes and colleagues (2022) found that two psychological processes of change accounted for over 47% of outcomes in their included studies. These two processes were psychological flexibility and mindfulness (Hayes et al., 2022). Psychological flexibility involves being open to one's own thoughts and feelings, while mindfulness refers to developing a focussed and detached awareness of the present moment. The two skills interact with each other to support and sustain your wellbeing, to navigate life's issues effectively, and to keep moving in directions that are meaningful for you.

Thus far our journey through wellbeing has focussed on what it is and how it works on an individual level. However, our wellbeing and our ability to sustain it are dynamically interconnected with the world around us.

Me We Us

Our individual wellbeing is impacted across our lifetime by the social, cultural, economic, environmental and political systems that we live in. Here, systems are "a set of things...interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behaviour over time" (Meadows, 2008). Using systems-informed thinking is key to understanding how wellbeing works, not just for an individual, but also for the systems that they inhabit (Kern et al., 2020).

What might a wellbeing system look like? Brofenbrenner's (1977) ecological framework and Lomas' (2015) Layered Integrated Framework Example (LIFE) highlight how an individual sits within complex, layered, interconnected systems that influence wellbeing. A simple and pragmatic way of understanding wellbeing systems is Jarden's (2015) "Me We Us" framework, that places the individual within interactive system levels of We (our families, communities, school, workplaces) and the bigger level of Us (our government, education, health, politics, finances). Encompassing these human-derived systems is the natural world which is regarded in systems thinking as the grounding inspiration for new ways of thinking and seeing (Senge et al. 2010).

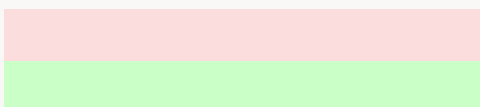


With wellbeing as a system, we should look out for interconnections that occur, parts of the system adapting and changing over time, and differing perspectives influencing ideas, solutions and change strategies. Systems are also regarded as being self-organizing and can come together in ways that are dynamic, non-linear and at times, quite unpredictable. If you are wondering what a practical example of systems dynamics might look like, then look no further than the Covid pandemic. At the Me level, consider how you made rapid changes to your own life, and how your family, friends and local community had to take very different perspectives of how we all lived and worked for a time at the We level. And importantly, at the global Us level, governments had to make rapid health and economic changes for their own countries to survive, and worked together to support a global response. Our "Me We Us" systems continuously adapted and changed in ways that were dynamic and unpredictable to meet this global challenge. The Covid pandemic is a big picture example of how systems work. At an individual level, try reflecting on the layers of your own life such as within yourself, your interactions with the immediate world of family, friends and work around you, and how your life is impacted by the politics, economic prosperity and natural environment around you. Each day you are a walking example of a dynamic system in action!

How you sustain wellbeing in a system is intriguing. A systems-informed perspective might explore ideas about finding the leverage points in the system, and developing "wise" interventions that are brief but have recursive impact (Walton, 2014). In the Covid pandemic, the "wise" intervention was accelerated vaccine development. Going to see a psychologist ideally involves a "wise" intervention being uncovered for the presenting concern. "Wicked" issues (Churchman, 1967) such as consumerism and environmental awareness need "wise" interventions that can leverage the continuous dynamic processes of a system including organisation, interaction, adaptation and innovation.

Conclusion

Wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well. Our wellbeing exists not only within ourselves as Me but also within the We of those around us, and the Us of our broader levels of society. Me, We, and Us are interconnected parts of the complex, interconnected and dynamic web that is life around us. Our wellbeing is sustained by being flexible in our thinking and aware of our world and its systems around us. Our "wise" interventions should target a systems-informed perspective of behaviour and change in specific contexts, and expect a dynamic, evolving ride.





Embracing the Path of Psychology of Sustainability

By Liliana Ferreira da Costa

I recently travelled by subway and realized that not a single person was speaking to one another and/or paying attention to their surroundings. Instead, all the commuters were focused on their mobiles and/or laptops. I realized that this is quite alarming, because as time goes by, people's ability for in-person interactions may be greatly reduced. Spending an excessive amount of time on electronic devices might not only affect our socialization, but also increase the risk of addiction, affecting both our wellbeing and the environment around us.

While technology is vital to our lives, we can put in place some boundaries in order to not become addicted and to promote knowledge about sustainability, practice, and to take action to bring about greater wellbeing in the community.

Etymology of the Words

Psychology: The word "psychology" was formed from two Greek words. The first, psyche, originally meant "breath", but later acquired the additional meaning "soul," because breathing was thought to indicate that the soul had not yet left the body. During the seventeenth century, the word broadened further in meaning to include "mind." The equivalent Latin word anima, from which the English words "animal" and "animate" are derived, also started life meaning "breath" and later evolved to include the additional meaning "mind." The second Greek word, logos, originally meant "word" and later expanded in meaning to include "discourse" and eventually "science". According to its Greek roots, therefore, psychology is literally the science of the mind. The science of mind and behavior; the mental or behavioral characteristics of an individual or group. The study of mind and behavior in relation to a particular field of knowledge or activity; a theory or system of psychology. (1)



According to its Greek roots, therefore, psychology is literally the science of the mind.

Sustainability: In its deconstruction, we can appreciate its meaning in the Latin verb sustentāre, which refers to the idea of "support", "back up", or "care", translating to "to sustain", originating in the root of sustinēre, developed from sub-, for "below", and tenēre, by the action of "to take" something; followed by the elements -bili-, as "possibility", and -ty, providing a sense of belonging. It comprises the rational practice of non-renewable natural resources, in pursuit of the planet's environmental protection, contributing to the balance and health of species and ecosystems. On the other hand, "sustainable" takes the condition of an adjective, referring to the Latin -bilis from the suffix -ble, which is expressed this way by the first level interference of the verb "to sustain". (2)



Psychology & Sustainability

Nowadays, the world and the environment became the focus of the path to sustainability. But how can we relate it to psychology and culminate in good practices for an overall wellbeing to the community?

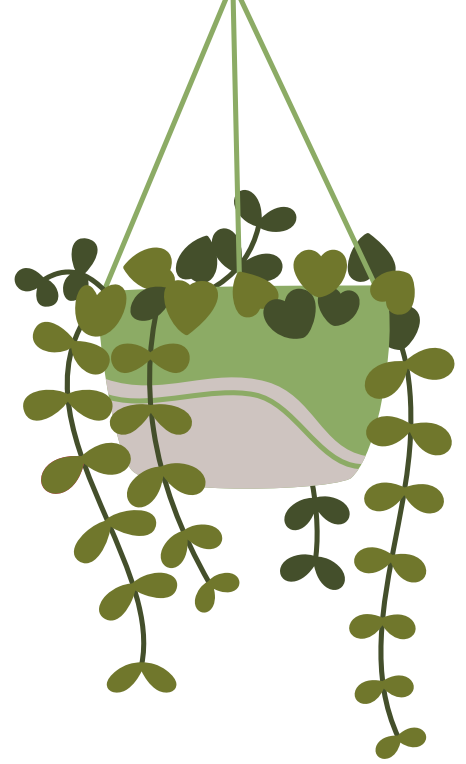
Indeed, this can be quite challenging, but it is not an impossible achievement. According to Amel and Manning (2022), psychology is a key factor that creates opportunities to adopt more sustainable attitudes and behaviors towards the community. Let's make it possible by adopting attitudes that enhance our behavior in terms of wellbeing, embracing the path of mindfulness as an example. Experience all our senses and fill our mind and body with positive interactions, such as contact with nature, contact with others in person, and try to decrease our reliance on unhealthy coping methods such as excessive consumption.

With this in mind, let's put in place some boundaries and take care of our world, as well as our mind and body, filling it with gratitude and with care about what we can do to embrace the path to sustainability in order to relate to our wellbeing. Knowledge, consciousness, boundaries, responsibility, action & communities: six key words to start these processes and embrace the knowledge of letting in the good practices.



Tips That Can be Adopted by All of Us

1. First, let's practice our mind and body awareness, such as our sense of mindfulness, by reading about sustainability and psychology. This is an important step to becoming more aware about this issue and to start to practice in order to embrace the path of wellbeing related to sustainability.
2. Use the community's resources in a more sustainable way.
3. Recycle and teach others to do the same.
4. Fill our bodies with all our senses, embracing mindfulness and motivating others to practice as well.



5. Practice yoga or other similar activities that embrace contact with nature. Group activities can enhance positive emotions that involve these processes. The notion of "inside out" from Alan Watts explains that the meaning of life addresses the quality of our state of mind, evoking our senses and emotions to ourselves, to others, and to the world. Positive emotions, interactions, and practices need to be started from within the person and then extended to outside, in this case, outside of the group. This process can be a source of good examples to others who are outside of the group, and by itself motivate these same others/community to do the same, and/or similar. This gives empowerment to keep going with the good practices in the community—the effect of the group (construct in social psychology).
6. Reduce our consumption of things that we don't need and motivate others to do the same.
7. Once a week, reduce our time spent on technology in order to enhance contact with nature and with people; this can also help in using less energy power.
8. Share items with our friends, family and colleagues instead of constantly purchasing new ones.

Keeping Up the Good Practices

When it comes to keeping up the practices of psychology and sustainability, knowledge is power. If we all do our part, the process can be easier, more effective, and faster, resulting in positive indicators and benefits to the community. All of these can hopefully bring about a powerful difference, leading to a more sustainable world and a healthy community.



Notes

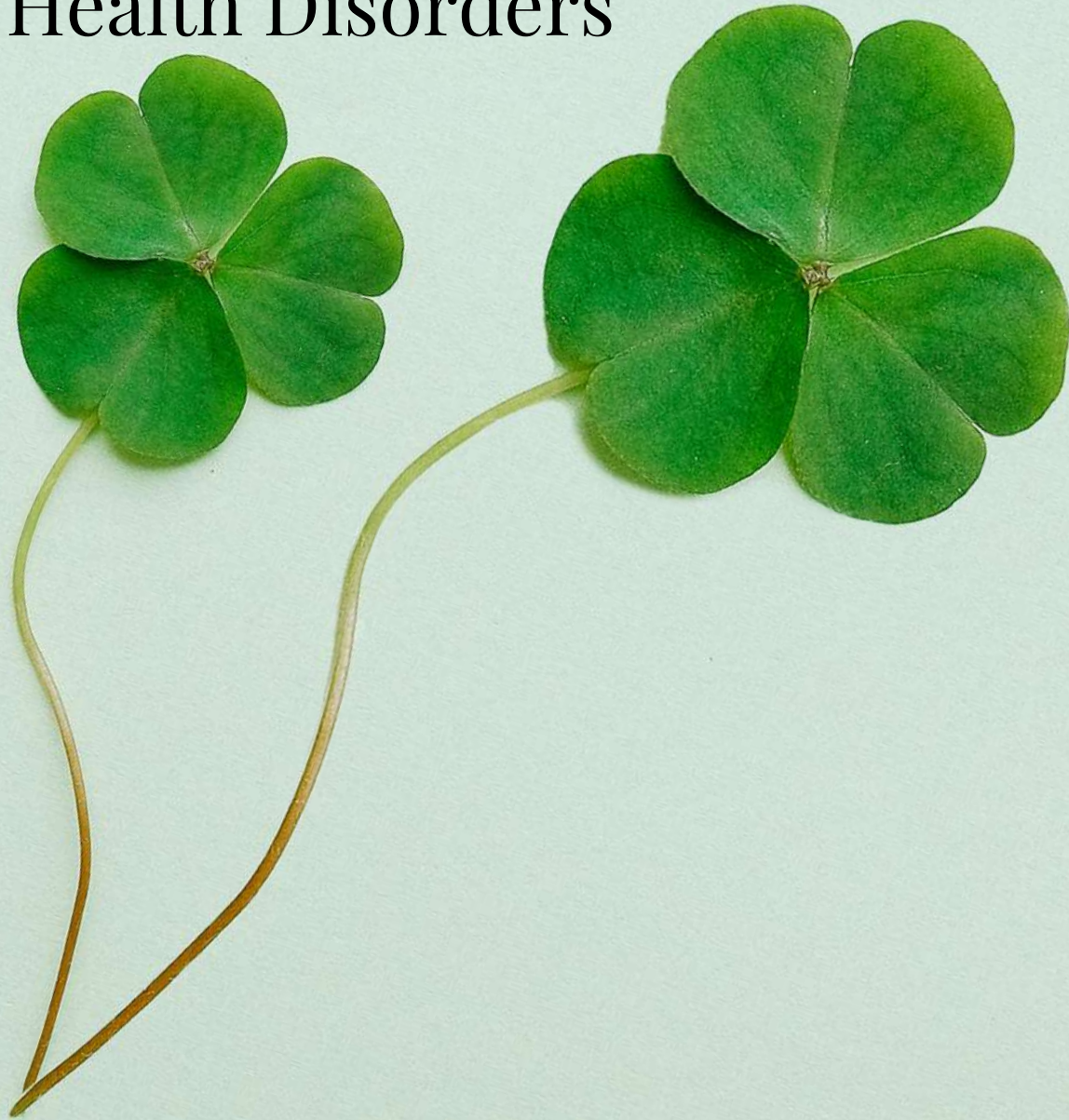
(1) Retrieved from
<https://infocentral.albizu.edu/miami/411-on-word-psychology/?amp>

(2) Retrieved from
<https://etymology.net/sustainability/>



A Journey, Not a Destination: Sustainable Recovery With Mental Health Disorders

By Viknesan SB



Have you ever heard someone say "I stopped drinking" but never specified for how long and how many times they stopped and started again? It can range from a day to a week and several cycles of starting and stopping again. It's best to avoid looking at the short recovery and relapses by themselves as a failure on their part, but as a learning opportunity to strengthen their relapse prevention plans, gain experience and make progress in their recovery. Another way of looking at it is using the acronym FAIL: Fall And I Learn. So, sustainable recovery requires a lot of learning, making mistakes along the way, and learning again. What we need to know is that true, sustainable recovery is a journey and a work in progress, not something that can be easily assessed, quantified, or put into concrete terms. There are many aspects of saying someone is in recovery but what does it take to sustain it long-term?

So, what does it really mean when we mention "sustainable recovery"? There are many aspects of saying someone is truly in realistic and sustainable recovery. It requires a positive mindset change, modifying old unproductive behaviours that sustain the mental health complications and embracing a new way of living. Let us explore some of these domains.

Developing insight is an important part of recovery. Being present and being aware of one's mental health condition triggers, being reflective of one's thoughts, actions, and behaviors can help reduce the chances of relapse or complications. Insight involves realistic thinking about one's progress in recovery and about the chain of events that happen before the serious mental health condition returns with a vengeance with its complications. Insight also involves knowing what one needs to do to keep their condition from worsening, how it impacts them and others around them, and knowing what they need to do without cutting any corners to be honest to oneself about the hard work and effort required to maintain good mental health.

Recovery networks are important in mental health recovery. Connecting to friends, family, significant others and the community is good for recovery. Therefore, people should not isolate themselves from these connections but should instead embrace them, and rebuild trust in them. Significant others can include mental health professionals, recovery peers and fellow members in a recovery group. Aim to develop a genuinely open and honest engagement or reengagement with these networks and be grateful towards these support networks.



Disengaging from negative influences and negative networks is also an important part of maintaining long term and sustainable mental health recovery. Toxic networks or influences can lead to one indulging in negative behaviours that may result in a relapse, or even aggravate their existing mental health conditions. Therefore, cutting off such unhealthy links permanently is important. It requires making tough and difficult decisions to let go and move on.

A sense of intrinsic motivation and personal empowerment towards recovery is another domain of sustainable recovery. It is important that individuals genuinely want to recover for themselves and take personal responsibility for it, and not be extrinsically motivated by rewards or punishment. The goal is to continuously work on and grow in one's recovery development with maturity, humility, sincerity, and hard work. This means receiving feedback, staying grounded, attending self-help mental health groups, community mental health programmes and, if necessary, hospital mental health services.

Working on one's general mental wellbeing and sense of acceptance by learning to reframe negative situations into positive ones is another path to sustainable recovery. Knowing one's strengths and limitations in keeping one's condition under control, and acceptance of one's own condition, involves learning how to live with it one day at a time. Learning how to regulate and relieve negative situations by speaking to people in one's support network and learning effective coping strategies can also assist the progress of recovery.

Sustainable recovery also involves other aspects of the individual's life that are beyond just mental health. This could include working on one's physical health through diet, exercise and increased productivity in other areas of life such as work, studies, relationships and more.

It is important to remember that while there are days where individuals feel motivated to work hard and take necessary actions in their recovery, there may also be times where they do not feel like putting in any effort. Motivation in recovery always fluctuates and is difficult to sustain. It is normal to



fluctuate between being motivated and unmotivated due to various internal and external reasons. When individuals feel unmotivated, what can they do to motivate themselves again? When their recovery is stagnant, how can they reframe their perspective and change the way they continue? This may require recalibrating their recovery goals and actions to keep up with new challenges or new developmental changes in their life. It is also important to be prepared for unforeseen circumstances in life and to be adaptable towards change, including existential factors beyond our control such as life or death.

Let us remember to look at mental health recovery from a broader perspective rather than specific yardsticks. Sustainable recovery is always a work in progress, and takes a lifetime to refine. No matter how long one has been in recovery, they should never get overconfident or take it for granted that they will never fall back into their serious mental health complications again. There is unfortunately no lifelong immunity when it comes to mental illnesses. Rather, we can assume that the person is always in recovery because there is potential to relapse, be it after 1 day, 1 year, or after 10 years or more.

Pacing oneself is also an important aspect of recovery; not rushing through the recovery process but slowly taking small steps to improve one's own recovery. It is not a race and progressively working on it is more important than trying to rush it only to be overwhelmed by stress.

Sustainable recovery means a continued process of working through the various domains mentioned so far. It does not just end when one gets better from the current or recent mental health episode. Ultimately, sustainable recovery involves transformation and healing, enabling those with a serious mental health disorder to live a productive life that is self-directed by their choice towards happiness and reaching their full potential. If one was given a fresh new page to write their recovery story what would that look like after reading this article?



Reliving Old Memories: Nostalgia and Cultural Sustainability

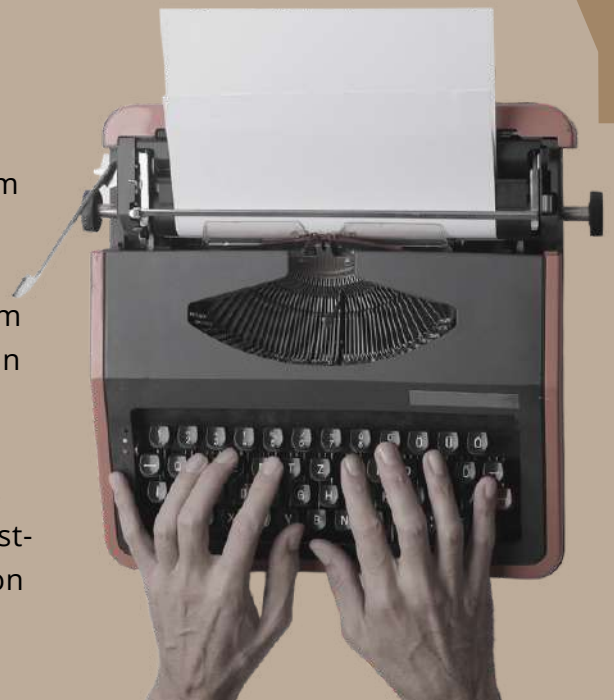
By Chen Guo (Terry) and Barry Tse

Ever found yourself mesmerized by an old photo from your childhood days? Ever gazed at a pair of retro—style sneakers that look just like your very first sneaker? Or got emotional over your favourite dessert tasting exactly the same as how your grandma used to make it? Emotions and memories come rushing in, and tears follow.

Reliving memories from the past is a common thing we all experience. Psychologists have a term for it—"nostalgia." It was coined by a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, who studied the suffering of soldiers who went off to war and missed their homes so badly in 17th—century Europe. The word "nostalgia" is a combination of two Greek words, nostos (return home) and algos (pain) (Davis, 1977). At that time, "nostalgia" was considered an uncomfortable and painful disease. Only in the latter part of the 20th century did "nostalgia" finally depart from its medical or psychopathological association (Routledge et al., 2013).

Why do We Travel Down Memory Lanes? What Purpose do They Serve?

It is our sense of identity. Something we all look for. Something that tells us that we exist, a continuity from the past (Van Tilburg et al., 2019). Sometimes we call this our autobiographical memory, a record of important times, places, and feelings that help us form a sense of self. Recently, two prominent researchers in nostalgia, Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut (2022), have gathered empirical evidence to demonstrate that feeling nostalgia is universal across different cultures and that nostalgia is known as a past-referent, self—relevant, social and ambivalent emotion which tends to have a positive slant.



There are psychological benefits to feeling nostalgia. Wildschut and colleagues (2006) posit that nostalgia heightens positive mood, increases positive self—regard, and bolsters a sense of social connectedness. Various studies have since confirmed their assumptions. Nostalgia can also enhance the meaningfulness of life, reduce loneliness, and help us age successfully (Routledge et al., 2013). A recent study found that experiencing

nostalgia about the host country helps Greek immigrants integrate better into the host country (Petkanopoulou et al., 2021). In another study done in China, the US, and the UK during COVID—19 lockdowns (Zhou et al., 2022), nostalgia contributed to people's subjective happiness, helping them cope with the loneliness resulting from social isolation.

Or perhaps you're more inclined towards hard science and need a biological explanation? Here is one: neuroscience research has shown that feeling nostalgia over personal and emotionally significant events of the past would stimulate our brain's reward system (Oba et al., 2016), bringing us joy and happiness. This perhaps explains the selective focus of our mental processes on positive memories.

Singaporeans are proud of their multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. There is a vibrant scene of different cultural ceremonies and activities.

Take Chinese Singaporeans, for example; we can see the worship of Duo Pek Gong or Mazu, cultural ceremonies by different clans, or even traditional Hokkien, Teochew, or Hakka foods in their respective activities. They provide a sense of identity continuity in a fast—changing and fast-developing nation like Singapore—something of nostalgia.

This continuation of traditional practices in a new place is important for the migrants.

For example, early settlers from China would build temples dedicated to deities they regarded as efficacious back home. Calling the original temple back home the "Zu Miao" (ancestral temple) and their newly built sub—temples as "Zi Miao" (offspring temple) reflects the close relationship and identity continuity.

During the era of migration to Nanyang (a term for Southeast Asia in the old days), many Chinese immigrant communities migrated with their ancestral gods. These deities had kept them safe and brought them luck all their life.

The Chinese migrant community has since sought to preserve traditional religious rituals, taking care of the minutest details. Even ritual props were inherited or copied from the ancestral temple in their hometown. This provided a cultural familiarity desired by the migrants. This has been the source of traditional Chinese folk beliefs and worship in Singapore and throughout Southeast Asia.



Chinese ritual ceremonies and religious exhibitions continue to be the landscape among the religious Chinese in Singapore, enabling engagement in community expression and fostering a sense of group identity and solidarity (Khun Eng, 2010). A study in Singapore using EEG on Chinese Singaporean worshipers' perceptions of ritual efficacy by Philip Cho and colleagues (2018) demonstrated that such communal worship rituals promoted increased attentiveness for the individual. When performed in a group setting, ceremonial rituals have even been found to help enhance social cohesion.

A similar conclusion was reached in an ethnographic study amongst Chinese immigrants in Sydney, Australia (Ng, 2013), where traditional cultural music was used to promote identity cohesion within the community.

The above suggests that in the process of transplanting traditional Chinese folk beliefs across the border to Singapore, the diaspora also reconstructed its entire ritual and cultural tradition across the border. This reflects the Chinese migrants' significant identification with and desire to "inherit" the traditional culture of their ancestral homeland and the importance they attach to their Chinese cultural norms. Their participation in or observation of religious rituals brings collective memories and preserves their traditional cultures. Until now, many Singaporean Chinese with a strong identity with their roots and cultural beliefs still enjoy visiting these ritual scenes where they "revisit old memories" and rekindle their shared cultural and psychological identity.



We need to balance the preservation and transmission of cultural and religious practices with the pace of modernisation. As Katriina Soini and Joost Dessein (2016) argued, preserving cultures and history could be the fourth pillar of sustainable development, mediating and transforming a place's ecological, economic, and social sustainability. This requires us to treat culture AS sustainability embedded in our values; rather than simply IN sustainability, as an implicit part; or FOR sustainability, playing merely an affording role. Only when we understand our roots, face them, and accept our traditions with cultural values embedded can we move forward with greater peace of mind. When we are overwhelmed or feeling lost about our identity, retracing our roots can provide us with a renewed and more solidified understanding of our self-identity while feeling positive along the way.

As Singapore will continue to be a migrant society, for the newer generation of immigrants, when they miss home, they will likely look for food from their home country to help them walk down memory lane, or to immerse in the religious or cultural rituals that they are familiar with. It is just like our ancestors when they first set foot on this little island called Singapura. Are we preserving our old traditions enough for our emotional and psychological wellbeing? Moreover, are we helping new migrants to feel at home by creating a piece of their nostalgic memory?



Doing What We Can With What We Know: Pursuing Sustainable Consumption With Fashion Psychology

By Charmaine Wah



Do you remember what you wore on your very first date? I do. I was wearing some of the very first clothes that I had bought with my own money and I was wearing a skirt that my mother would have disapproved. It was some of the first pieces that I owned that made me feel like I was finally figuring out the kind of person that I was and wanted to be. While navigating the world of fashion, I was introduced to terms like "slow fashion", "sustainable fashion and consumption" and "ethical fashion", and it made me reflect on how I bought my clothing. Thoughts such as, "But I'm buying what I can afford", "I don't have the time to sift through second-hand clothing," and, "But I really liked that t-shirt from Forever 21", swirled around in my head. Why did I need to care about sustainable consumption and what should it look like?

The fashion industry is one of the world's biggest contributors to global warming, with mega-fast fashion businesses at its core (Lau, 2022). Fast fashion brands are characterised by their incredible speed to mass produce, market, and sell clothing. Fast fashion brands are criticised for a multitude of reasons: mass producing low quality clothing, exploiting garment workers, stealing designs from independent artists, and using unsustainable materials and production methods that harm the environment (Mair, 2018). However, Dr Carolyn Mair, founder of the Psychology of Fashion Department at the University of Arts London, argues that non-fast fashion brands could be produced under the same conditions (Mair, 2018). She shares in the Speaking of Psychology podcast, "I think it's quite important that this notion of fast fashion equals bad needs to be changed. The problem is not with fast fashion per se, the problem is with overproduction and overconsumption that ends up in the landfill sites," (Luna, 2019, 08:08).

Fashion psychology offers us a unique perspective into sustainable consumption. While common advice reiterates buying sustainable fashion¹, the focus of psychologists working in fashion is to educate and encourage consumers to generally make more informed and considered purchasing decisions instead (Mair, 2018). Therefore, sustainable consumption can be achieved by anyone, regardless of financial ability or interest in fashion. Fashion psychology informs us by examining the relationship between human behaviour and fashion.

For example, it explores how clothing can affect our cognitive processes, how retail environments manipulate consumer behaviour, and why we develop certain shopping habits (Mair, 2018). Chartered psychologist Dr Dion Terrelonge points out that "we live our lives in clothes," (British Psychological Society, 2018). Thus, whether you are interested or knowledgeable in fashion or not, fashion psychology applies to everyone. In this article, we will focus on the psychological processes behind sustainable consumption and the relationship that we have with our clothing.



¹ Sustainable fashion is an umbrella term for clothes that are created and consumed in a way that can be sustained while protecting both the environment and those producing garments (Chan, 2021).


Psychological Processes Behind Sustainable Consumption

Interestingly, recent research has well documented the phenomenon of how environmentally conscious consumers often do not practise sustainable consumption, despite an increase in consumer interest to pursue sustainable consumption (Park & Lin, 2020; Lundblad & Davies, 2016). To overcome this attitude-behaviour gap, fashion psychology illustrates that consumers can begin to shop sustainably by learning to shift their focus towards long-term thinking instead of short-term gratification (Kotahwala, 2020).

This concept of discounting the subjective value of a reward when the given reward is delayed is referred to as temporal discounting (Critchfield & Kollins, 2001). McClure and colleagues (2004) found that there are separate neural systems involved when we pick immediate rewards or delayed rewards. Specifically, the choice of immediate/sooner rewards activates selective parts of the limbic system associated with the midbrain dopamine system, including the paralimbic cortex—brain regions that are associated with automatic processes and impulsive behaviour (McClure et al., 2004; Biederman & Faraone, 2002). On the other hand, choosing delayed rewards activates regions of the lateral prefrontal cortex and posterior parietal cortex—brain regions that are implicated in higher level cognitive functions in decision-making (Miller & Cohen, 2001; Smith & Jonides, 1999).

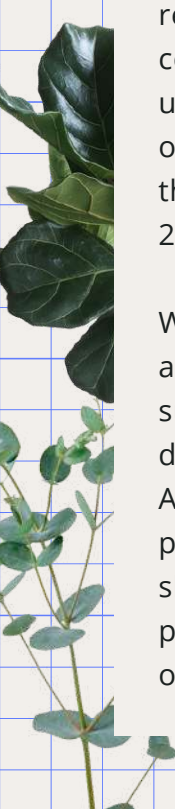
These two systems are featured in the competing neurobehavioural decision systems (CNDS) model—a dual-system model that is involved in the decision-making process (Kahneman & Frederick, 2005). This model posits that System 1, the intuitive/impulsive system, is automatic and has the capacity to process information quickly, while System 2, the analytic/executive system, is slower, requires effort, and capable of solving more complicated problems (Koffarnus et al., 2013). For example, System 1 may be activated when we make impulsive purchases during a time-limited sale while System 2 may be activated when we buy a pair of shoes after doing research on the brand's sustainability practices, checking if we already own a similar pair, considering if it will be difficult to clean and maintain, and if it is made of quality, durable material.

Research on what drives consumer impulsivity or reliance on System 1 reveals that social influence and mood play important roles in temporal discounting tasks. Calluso et al. (2017) discovered that participants who preferred short-term rewards were socially influenced to choose delayed rewards upon observing others doing so. The inverse effect was found when participants who preferred delayed rewards were exposed to others choosing short-term rewards. Kotahwala (2020, p.12) opines, "If consumers are exposed to other consumers who indulge in impulsive choices, they may be more likely to follow this behaviour pattern and therefore purchase non-sustainable goods that provide an immediate, smaller benefit."



On the other hand, if consumers are put in the context of individuals who behave non-impulsively, they may be more inclined to mimic this behaviour and therefore purchase sustainable goods that are beneficial in the long-run." This reminds me of our local kiasu culture, where we feel pressured to avail opportunities such as huge sales and offers quickly. We can admit that it is hard not to give in to being kiasu, even if we are environmentally conscious.

A person's mood is also a factor that impacts temporal discounting. People experiencing negative moods or emotional distress have been found to opt for immediate and smaller benefits significantly more often than those who are experiencing neutral or positive moods (Knapp & Clark, 1991). Additionally, Tice et al. (2001), found that when participants believed that their bad mood could change, they would opt for immediate rewards. On the other hand, those who believed their bad mood would remain unchanged opted for delayed gratification. These studies echo research on retail therapy, whereby consumers are found to indulge in unplanned purchases after a long week or if they feel upset as a way to help themselves feel better (Atalay & Meloy, 2011).



While retail therapy does relieve stress and improve our mood, we may succumb to overconsumption if it is done excessively and mindlessly. Sue Anne Han, a principal consultant psychologist, also opines that, "While shopping can offer a brief boost of positive emotion, such behaviours are often then quickly followed by shame,

guilt and regret. And to manage the feelings of shame and disappointment, (we) get into another reinforcing cycle to cope with the feelings—so you feel good, then you feel bad, and then you spend more to feel good again," (Tee, 2021). Thus, current research on the psychological processes behind our purchasing habits, including sustainable ones, highlight our competing neural systems in decision-making involved in temporal discounting and what factors influence our reliance on System 1 or System 2. Another key focus of fashion psychology is the relationship we have with our clothing. Why and how is it important in sustainable consumption?

Building Relationships With Our Clothing

Recent studies suggest that building a relationship with our clothing can help promote sustainable habits. Dr Dion Terrelonge suggests that when we focus more on the relationship that we have with our clothing, it will slow down our consumption of new clothing (Jenkins, 2022, 23:34). This could come in the form of thinking about how a piece of clothing reminds us of a positive memory, a loved one or its relations to our culture. Fleetwood-Smith and colleagues (2019) found that we are capable of constructing and imbuing our clothing with multiple personal symbolic meanings, such as viewing items of clothing as sources of comfort, strength, and emotional security. When we give ourselves the time to develop a deeper relationship with our clothing, we will be more likely to want to keep and mend them, rather than throw them out for new ones (Mair, 2018).

Besides alleviating the environmental impact of overconsumption, owning clothing that we are emotionally attached to has been found to contribute to our personal wellbeing (Masuch & Hefferon, 2018). Interestingly, even if they are occasionally worn, clothing we are attached to enables us to reminisce about our past selves and induce nostalgia. Experiencing nostalgia has been found to encourage positive wellbeing by buffering existential threats, promoting our perceived meaning in life, self-esteem and social connectedness, empathy, and prosocial behaviour (Routledge et al., 2008; Routledge et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2010; Zhou et al., 2012).

Taking together what we know about temporal discounting involving our brain's competing decision-making systems, knowledge about factors that contribute to making impulsive purchases, and the importance of building relationships with clothes we own, I would like to offer some advice for pursuing sustainable consumption that you might find helpful:



"Buy less,

choose well,

make it last."

**— Vivienne
Westwood**



What is the Goal in Sustainable Consumption?

It is evident that sustainable consumption can come in many forms and in both big and small ways. Initially, I dealt with a cognitive dissonance between my belief that sustainable consumption is important and my inability to afford—in time and in resources—the "ideal" sustainable lifestyle of only consuming slow or second-hand/vintage fashion. Fashion psychology shows us that the issue is not with the well-fitting pants we bought from Uniqlo or buying a few fancy pieces we are saving for a special occasion. What is detrimental to the environment is overconsumption—when we mindlessly buy too much too often and throw things away before building a relationship with them. I believe that the goal of sustainable consumption is to do what we can with what we know. The late, legendary fashion designer Vivienne Westwood said it best, "Buy less, choose well, make it last," (Guardian Live, 2014).

Which Generation is To Blame For Climate Armageddon ?

*By George Jacobs
& Eunice Tai*

Baby Boomers (Born Between 1946–1964)

Hi Eunice—I'm 70 years old and have lived mostly in wealthy countries, such as Singapore and the U.S. So, I've had the resources to strive to achieve my dreams, such as 30+ years ago, I received a full scholarship when I studied for my doctorate in the U.S. Now, despite impending climate catastrophe, I can continue seeking to self-actualize because I know that Singapore has made solid preparations to resist rising sea levels. I've done my share of traveling and visited my share of gorgeous natural sights. The bucket of my bucket list is empty.



Yikes—the world today is such a mess in so many ways. Beautiful places are being destroyed. The corals of the Great Barrier Reef are dying. The tropical forests everywhere are disappearing. So many plant and animal species are on the verge of extinction or are already gone. And even the human-made world is a mess. Must-see cities are enveloped in the smoke of forest fires and other forms of air pollution. Venice, with its romantic canals, is sinking as sea levels rise.



My generation has an excuse. Back when we were your age, we didn't know about global warming. Yes, we knew about pollution and other harms, but we didn't know our species faced an existential threat. Too late now, we have ingrained habits.

Your generation has no such excuses. For most or all of your lives, scientists, governments, the media, and schools have been warning you that we humans could be wiping ourselves out. The dinosaurs were wiped out too, but that was out of their control.

I live in a multigenerational family flat with seven members of your generation and four from mine. What do I see? Home delivery, disposables everywhere. So convenient. Every day, meat, with its environmental damage just as obvious as the suffering of the chickens and cows. Why, if your generation will suffer most because you will live longer into the future, are you doing less?

When I raised this question to eco-activists from your generation, they responded, "But your generation was worse than the previous generation." And, they're right. My mother's childhood was spent on a farm. Her father was, to put it nicely, thrifty. He built his own house, baked his own bread. My own father grew up in an orphanage. I can't even imagine what that was like.

My wife's parents' home is still there in rural Malaysia. For sure, they led a way-simple life: unheated water drawn from a well, no washer or dryer, no car, no food ever thrown out, and definitely no airborne holidays. Whatever behaviors are today said to constitute a green, minimalist lifestyle, my in-laws were greener, more minimal.

Generation Z (Born Between 1996–2010)



Hi George—I'm a 23-year-old who has grown up to enjoy the comfort and security of the Garden City of Singapore. One of the most frustrating things about the climate crisis is the fact that earlier action might have prevented it. Or at least delayed its effects. You Baby Boomers, caused record-high contributions to the emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) (*Boomers Could Be Responsible for Nearly One Third of Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, 2022). Your dramatic increase of GHGs to the climate crisis is still felt in my generation.



The climate crisis has affected my generation in many ways. The cost of food has risen due to the shift to greener food alternatives. My generation is experiencing the effects of the climate crisis, first hand. Everything we do, every time we crunch into a piece of fried chicken or ride in a Gojek, we have to worry about the consequences for the planet, while in your day, all you had to ask was could you afford it, not could the planet afford it. There is no doubt that generations after mine will struggle even worse to cope. Unlike you, Dr George, my bucket list is flooded, with unchecked places to visit and dreams to fulfill. But travel is an issue, we have to think twice about the risks of visiting flood prone cities (Bangkok, Venice), cities stricken with poor air quality (Las Vegas, Beijing), and cities prone to extreme weather changes (e.g., heat waves in India).

The effects of the climate crisis are not only felt on a physical level, but also on a psychological level (Farber, n.d.). Members of my generation are exposed to a steady stream of alarming news about climate change and ecological destruction. A growing body of evidence suggests that these worsening problems, and our ongoing failure to address them, are heavy mental baggage to carry (Farber, n.d.; Swim et al., 2022; *Why Mental Health Is a Priority for Action on Climate Change*, n.d.). My generation especially faces threats to our psycho-social wellbeing and mental health. Many generations and groups in society have been accused of worsening the climate crisis. But perhaps the question of who is to blame for the worsening of the Earth's conditions is not a fight between generation A versus generation B. It is what it is; the costs of globalization, industrialisation, and the cost of economic growth. That's a macro view of the climate crisis put into perspective; we reap what we sow. It is a price to pay that will be paid by my generation and generations that are to come.

Common Goal of Sustainability

George:

Okay, Eunice. Maybe we can agree that we're all to blame, and we are all suffering, not to mention the debt we owe to future generations.

Eunice:

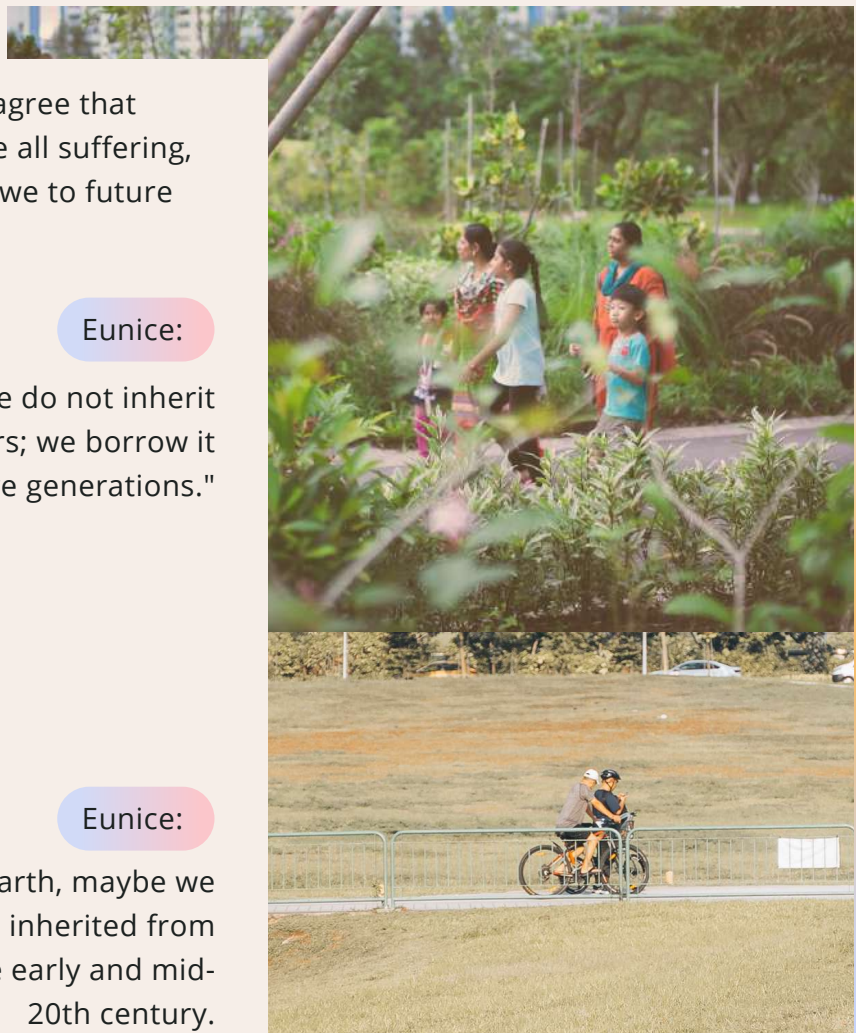
Yup. As the saying goes, "We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from future generations."

George:

Good point. So, how, lah?

Eunice:

In addition to inheriting the Earth, maybe we could also utilize a theory we inherited from social psychologists from the early and mid-20th century.



George:

Good idea. You mean Social Interdependence Theory from Lewin and Deutsch. How can we get all the generations to feel positively interdependent with each other instead of trying to blame each other?

Eunice:

Yes, in the case of climate change, everyone's outcomes, not just us humans' but the other animals' as well, are positively correlated. We do literally sink or swim together.



George:

Did you see Greta Thunberg's *The Climate Book* (2022)? When ice melts, it can't be refrozen, and even Singapore, with all our well-planned defenses, will be in seriously bad shape.

Eunice:

Yikes! So, the generations should put aside our differences and strive together to make BIG, QUICK changes with sustainability as our common goal.

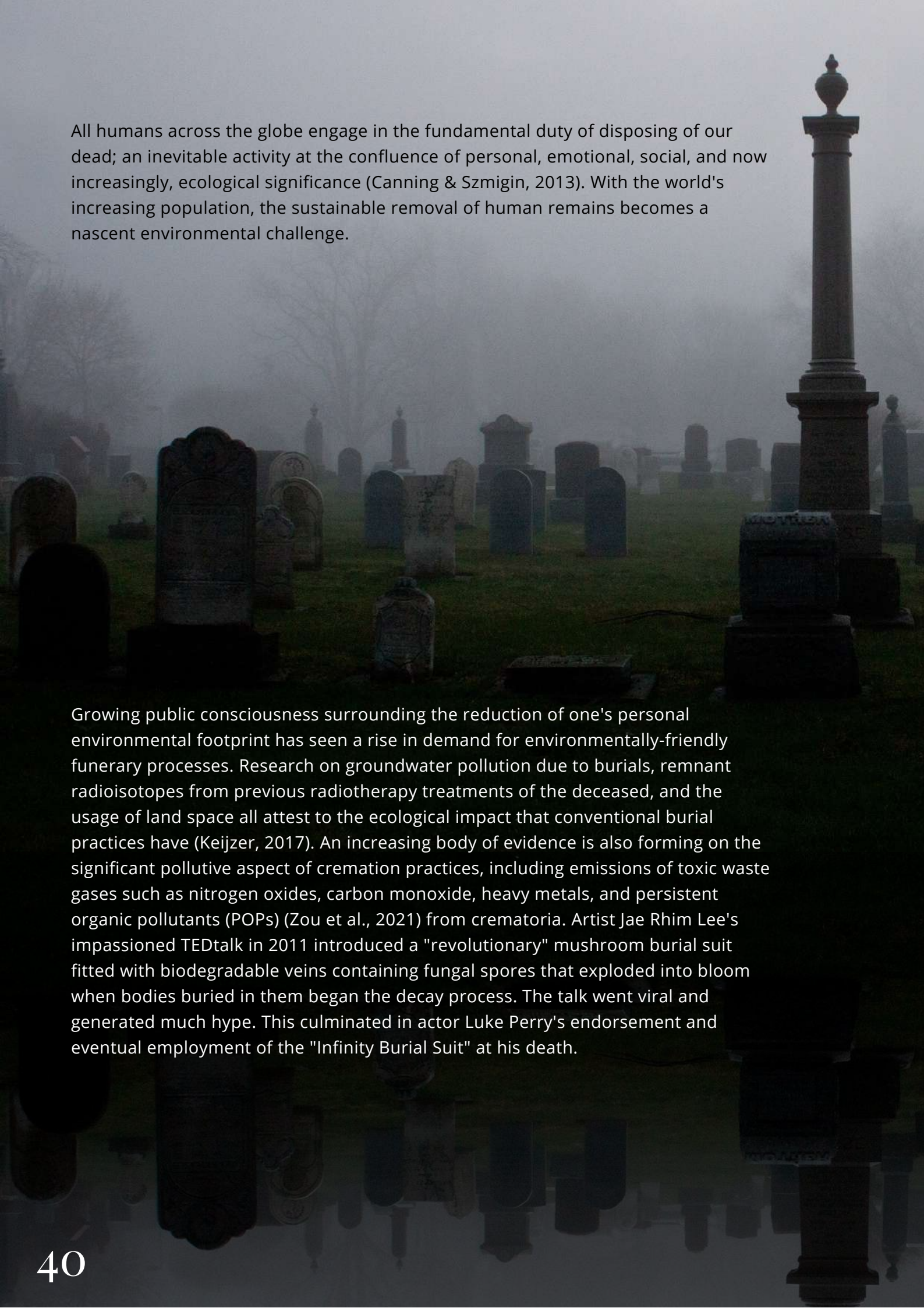
A Last Green Hurrah

Sustainable Funerary Rituals for the Conscientious Citizen

By Paul Victor Patinadan


Early in my Thanatological scholarship, I had read about the Tibetan Sky Burial (or more elegantly, the Celestial Burial)—a deeply religious funerary process steeped in significance.

The deceased are effectively left to the elements upon a sacred mountaintop and a special smoke-fire is burnt to attract the roosting vultures perched upon the peaks. The holy birds answer the call and in turn, pick apart the remains, leaving behind only bleached white bones. These are then crushed into a powder and mixed with barley flour to feed the condors once again. It was a jarring, visceral experience to search for more information about the practice online (but I Google for the sake of scholarship!). After my initial discomfort, I realised that herein was a timeless process that linked us so completely and inextricably back to our natural world; one that truly defined the cycle of life and death in an organic, sustainable, and ecological way—though perhaps not entirely feasible in our urban metropolises.

A photograph of a cemetery on a foggy day. In the foreground, several tombstones of various shapes and sizes are visible, some with inscriptions. A tall, slender column with a decorative top stands prominently on the right side. The background is filled with more tombstones and trees, all shrouded in a thick mist or fog. The overall atmosphere is somber and quiet.

All humans across the globe engage in the fundamental duty of disposing of our dead; an inevitable activity at the confluence of personal, emotional, social, and now increasingly, ecological significance (Canning & Szmigin, 2013). With the world's increasing population, the sustainable removal of human remains becomes a nascent environmental challenge.

Growing public consciousness surrounding the reduction of one's personal environmental footprint has seen a rise in demand for environmentally-friendly funerary processes. Research on groundwater pollution due to burials, remnant radioisotopes from previous radiotherapy treatments of the deceased, and the usage of land space all attest to the ecological impact that conventional burial practices have (Keijzer, 2017). An increasing body of evidence is also forming on the significant pollutive aspect of cremation practices, including emissions of toxic waste gases such as nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide, heavy metals, and persistent organic pollutants (POPs) (Zou et al., 2021) from crematoria. Artist Jae Rhim Lee's impassioned TEDtalk in 2011 introduced a "revolutionary" mushroom burial suit fitted with biodegradable veins containing fungal spores that exploded into bloom when bodies buried in them began the decay process. The talk went viral and generated much hype. This culminated in actor Luke Perry's endorsement and eventual employment of the "Infinity Burial Suit" at his death.




Also called *green, natural, or ecological* funerals or burials, Lee et al. (2022) describe these processes as not employing preservatives, expensive hardwood coffins, stainless steel or copper ornaments, cement burial chambers, pesticides or fertilizers, and high-temperature incineration, but attempts to reduce the overall pollution of water, soil, and air. With the advancement of funerary sciences, new techniques are now on offer, including *cryomation*, which deep-freezes remains and then breaks them down through vibration, and *resomation*, where through a process of alkaline hydrolysis, remains are converted into a watery solution.

These non-combustion based options are generally cleaner alternatives and use only a fraction of the energy a cremation employs. With increasing uptake rates, empirical comparisons are beginning to show marked reductions with regards to ecological damage (Lee et al., 2022). This demand and subsequent supply hint at what Cherdymova et al. (2018) call a growing "ecological consciousness", an amalgamation of psychological (cognitive, motivational, perceptive) and affective (emotional) processes that move individuals towards greater environmental awareness and change.



These options, however, are currently unavailable in Singapore, where only the "traditional" options of a burial or cremation are practiced. Burials, however, are also increasingly falling out of favour. As of November 1998, the National Environmental Agency capped burials at 15 years, following which remains will be exhumed for reburial in a smaller plot or sent for cremation (NEA, n.d.)—a level-headed, uniquely Singaporean sensibility to cater to our land scarcity. "Green" funeral practices in Singapore as such are coloured with this sentiment of land conservation rather than a reduction in pollution or carbon footprint. Cremated remains can be interred in niches within columbariums (which also take up space, albeit more efficiently), stored at home, or scattered into the sea at designated locations.

A recent third option is also now available, which does away with the cost of securing a niche and its upkeep, while ensuring a location that can be visited by loved ones outside of the home. Complimenting the Inland Ash Scattering (IAS) initiative by the NEA, the 9500 sqm secular Garden of Peace at Choa Chu Kang (opened in May last year) is the first of two government-managed ash-scattering facilities in an open, garden setting. With well-manicured lawns and carefully maintained foliage, the facility attempts to provide a respectful and dignified environment for ash-scattering. Designated ash-scattering lanes are lined with pebbles that allow ashes to percolate into the soil beneath, with functioning sprinklers aiding the process after hours. The Garden of Peace is a more sustainable and renewable alternative to the woodland burials gaining popularity in Taiwan (where decomposable urns are buried next to trees within a designated "woodland"). Due to the recency of the option, uptake rates are currently unclear.



As Singaporeans become more conscious of their personal impacts on the environment, our demands and definitions for sustainable funerary practices and deathscapes become more nuanced. Perhaps our non-combustion processed ashes may one day share spaces with the living as we strive towards a sustainable garden utopia?

Material Possessions— What Are You? Leased, Purchased, Owned... or Free?

By Daniela Schreier

Modern life is demanding. Legend has it that we make more decisions in a day than our ancestors did in a lifetime. We are bombarded with emails, texts, WhatsApp, and Telegram messages that demand our immediate attention. Modern privileges also request action: Do we order in, if so, what? What car do we buy and what condo development are we able to finance?

Pen and Paper Time: Kindly take out a pen and paper; please answer the question before reading on: "Do you feel overwhelmed by the many responsibilities and choices awaiting you each day?"

We define freedom as having more options. Freedom equals owning more stuff. We trust a larger menu—this pertains to all areas of life—to give more satisfaction. Yet, the agony of choice has us either overinvesting time and resources or paralyzed in our decision-making process.

Why are we more stressed than our ancestors who experienced scarcity and built a country from ground zero? The answer is simple: Whatever we own, owns us. Whatever and whoever we commit to commands our attention and time, which is a finite commodity. We clearly pay a premium for what we call freedom: Self-inflicted emotional, financial, and mental turmoil.





Pen and Paper Time again: "How do you define freedom?"

Let's examine the following situation: When a client shares that they have four glasses of wine each night *because they can* [exercise their freedom], I counter that the ancient sage (Anonymous, n.d.) might suggest, "My child, be honest, you don't have the wine rather the wine has you." What we define as freedom has become a liability; it's an unsustainable lifestyle that leads to unhealthy habits and attachments.

As shop owners, employees, and consultants we sell our time and services; hence we are all for purchase or lease. Many however end up *being owned*. Merchants and banks own us when we are borrowing funds to espouse material possessions. People in relationships with us own our time and take up mental and emotional space. Sadly, most of us are unaware of the consequences and commit quickly to acquire more only to regret having too full a plate later.

Pen and Paper Time: Are you leased, purchased, owned, or a free agent?

Paul Mallon (1942) remarked candidly, "There is no free lunch." Let's accept it and redefine freedom: *Freedom is the conscious choice to own and accumulate less; to mindfully forge less but more rewarding alliances; to agree to take on fewer obligations that we can then fulfill joyfully.* In closing, freedom is a personal not communal choice. Just because the herd thinks more is better, we do not have to follow.



Five Tips to Practicing The Art of Less: KURANG (less)

K

Knowledge is power; it helps us to shift our perspective: Copy the following above-mentioned redefinition of freedom or amend it according to your own vision: *Freedom is the conscious choice to own and accumulate less; to mindfully forge less but more rewarding alliances; to agree to take on fewer obligations that we can then fulfill joyfully.* Print it out; keep it in a visible place at home and on your phone. **Know** it by heart. Before any purchase or any time commitment, recite it to yourself. **Keep** the promise!

U

Use your time and space wisely: Scott Peck (1978) remarked, "Until you value yourself, you won't value your time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it." Recall that freedom means less is more; observe your living space. Gather all items that utilize space and collect dust. Pack them up (if the attachment is too strong go about it two to three items at a time) and give them away or take them to a concession store.

Then, get out your calendar. Look at your commitments. Make a conscious choice about who you meet and communicate clearly how much time you will allocate. Finally, add a daily meeting called **U-Check in with yourself** to your calendar.

R

Regulate your emotions. As you adjust to your new lifestyle, strong emotions will surge. Feelings are temporary; observe them like the waves of the ocean. They rise and fall—however they do not carry you away; they do not direct your path. Whenever you embark on a new journey your thoughts and emotions also must change. Before we adopt and learn something new, we slowly must let go of the old. Repeat after me: *From this moment forward, I am creating and living a sustainable and balanced life.*

A

Adopt new habits through **attention** and massive **action!** Old habits can be replaced with new ones. This is a three-step process:

I) Pay attention to your thoughts and feelings—they generally precede an action.

II) If the feeling is *slightly low* and it's generally followed by purchasing something to make you feel better—stop. Acknowledge how you feel: "I feel a bit low; I accept the feeling; I feel down now and shortly I will be better again. "

III) Then shift towards massive action; if you would generally end up at Paragon augmenting your wardrobe, consciously pick a couple of items you seldom wear from your cupboard instead; drop them off with the Salvation Army or somebody who will enjoy them. ...And here you are on your journey to a sustainable lifestyle by developing one new habit at a time.

N

Navigate your new path patiently. Helen Schucman (1976) states in *The Course in Miracles*, "Infinite patience produces immediate results." As quick accumulation and overloading ourselves did not result in the desired outcome, let's patiently explore the *less is more* lifestyle. Trusting that the results we wish for will arrive [as we have put in the groundwork], we breathe deeply and allow nature to take its course. Nature is in perfect balance—so can we be. Choosing **nurturing** thoughts will help along the way.

G

Give! And give away. Create space in your mind and surroundings. Be **generous:** Contribute to good causes; give to a person in need, commit to a street-seller. Volunteer at a retirement home or animal shelter. Dedicate your time and make donations that fit your billfold. The blessing of giving is that we are edging out the ego (that which identifies us solemnly with what we do, own, and have) and actively choose the soul-path (that inner place of balance and quiet).

Giving helps to develop compassion; it teaches us that suffering and the human condition transcend our own lives. We are all one. We are all here with a one-way ticket out.



Thank you for joining the journey towards sustainable living.



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