

Chelsea Reinking

Professor Kiely

English 1202

April 30, 2018

With Minimalism Comes Freedom when Living with ADHD

“Why aren’t you in the class room for exams?” asked a fellow student. I replied, “I take my exams in the testing center.” She then, with eyes raised asked, “Why?” I told her, “Because I have a learning disability called ADHD.” With utter shock, she spoke these next words that stung, “But you seem so smart.” I did not know how to reply. I should have said, “Yes, you are right, I am very smart.” Living with a learning disability does not equal a low IQ. I must study twice as hard, but my determination to learn in college is steadfast. I struggle with executive functions all to a different extent, which includes self-awareness, inhibition, non-working memory, verbal working memory, emotional self-regulation, self-motivation, planning and problem solving, memory, processing, and detail work (Barkley). My brain doesn’t focus on just one task at a time, so added noise and clutter can cloud my mind. The swarming of different thoughts are amplified. The frustration builds from lack of focus; this is life with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “The percent of children estimated to have ADHD has changed over time and can vary by how it is measured. The American Psychiatric Association states in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, 2013) that 5% of children have ADHD¹. However, other studies in the US have estimated higher rates in community samples (“Attention-Deficit”). The article “Adult

ADHD” states, “About 60 percent of children with ADHD in the United States become adults with ADHD; that’s about 4 percent of the adult population, or 8 million adults. Less than 20 percent of adults with ADHD have been diagnosed or treated, and only about one-quarter of those adults seek help. Thought to be biological and most often genetic, ADHD takes place very early in brain development. “Adults with ADHD may exhibit the same symptoms they had as children, and although hyperactivity often diminishes by adulthood, inattentiveness and impulsivity may persist.” Living with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) amplifies that overwhelmed feeling of the never-ending to-do list and expecting perfection 100% of the time. It is normal to be busy in 2018. In the American culture, we strive for more, for better, for “things”. These “things” then define who we are as a person. These “things” then can take control and dictate how life is lived. The minutes spent are what make up a life. With ADHD, limiting distraction is essential to toning down anxiety and increasing focus. One way to limit distraction is to adopt a minimalistic lifestyle. Minimalism is living with the simplest amount of elements that provide purpose or ignite passion in ones’ life. Minimalistic living may look differently from one person to the next. One must define the concept of minimalism that best suits their personal living style. I define minimalism as: To live a life with less clutter and more purpose, to be present and mindful, to live a life by connecting with other humans and our environment, rhythmic living, eating for fuel, and choosing more natural products. Time is continued progress of existence and when one realizes how we spend that indefinite time is how one shapes a life lived and a life lived well. The minimalistic movement provides less distraction, more focus, and can lead to an overall rhythmic lifestyle.

In 2014, I was officially diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which is now referred to as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In the article "What's it Really Like to have ADHD?" Whitbourne writes, "... ADHD is a condition that both children and adults can have. The symptoms include an inability to focus, being easily distracted, hyperactivity, poor organization skills, and impulsiveness. Not everyone who has ADHD has all these symptoms. They vary from person to person and tend to change with age." To diagnose ADHD, The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states, "the primary care clinic should determine that diagnostic criteria have been met based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth edition (DSM-5, which replaced the Fourth Edition [DSM-IV] in May 2013). Making a diagnosis includes documenting that the child has difficulties in more than 1 major setting (e.g., in school and at home). The primary care clinician should include reports from parents or guardians, teachers, and/or other school and mental health clinicians involved in the child's care. The primary care clinician should also exclude any other possible cause for the symptoms" ("Attention-Deficit"). At the time of treatment, I was 26 years old and going back to college. School had always presented a challenge. I often felt behind and unworthily to try and achieve a good grade from failing so many times in the past. This time I knew it would be different because I finally had a diagnosis and an understanding of why my brain doesn't work like others. However, at the time of treatment, my doctor prescribed medication and sent me on my way. It wasn't until a year later that I made a connection on how to ease the burden of distraction and the uneasiness in my household environment. I noticed in high school I had to have all my belongings in a certain place so I would not lose them. I would need my clothes put away, which did not happen most of the time, to be able to get dressed with ease in the morning

and not feel overwhelmed. My best study time would be when my space was clear of clutter which eliminated distraction and with only the items I needed to complete the task at hand. Not knowing it at the time to have my space set up like that was setting me up for success. I felt at peace having things organized and picked up. I would strive to have the house picked up and organized giving me that sense of peace and calmness, but I still would feel overwhelmed by my surroundings. When the house was disheveled, and piles of papers stacked up on the counter, my body felt out of whack and my brain scrambled. I would always try to avoid that overwhelmed feeling, but no matter how much organizing I did it would always feel cluttered. By definition Clutter is "to fill or cover with scattered or disordered things that impede movement or reduce effectiveness" ("Clutter").

Around March 2014, I decided to go through my clothes due to hard-earned weight loss and get rid of everything that I did not feel good in. I purged my closet and the feeling of freedom lifted me. I took a photo of everything I was going to donate and felt accomplished. A



few days following, I read a quote on Pinterest, "If you don't love it, don't keep it." Why keep objects that doesn't serve purpose? I started to go through each room of the house and get rid of things I did not love. I would then ask myself before buying an item, do I love it? Does it serve a purpose in my life? Will I use it? Unknowingly, I started to adopt the mindset

of minimalism.

Allie Casazza interview

August 2015, I found out my husband I were going to have our first child. I was determined to find helpful resources on how to keep this minimalist/simple living concept going after our child was born. I found amazing resources on Pinterest of how to clear the clutter, or “what to get rid of right now”, and what to “really” get for baby. All these resources and blogs helped me to maintain setting up for our baby. After having our baby, I knew I wanted to find a group that supported this type of living. I began my research on Facebook in 2017 and came to a page called “Purposeful MomLife with Allie Casazza” reaching over 36,000 members who were searching for ways to minimalistic living to create more time. Allie Casazza’s goal for this page was for mothers “to experience community as they seek to simplify their homes and their lives.” It is not being a typical “mommy group” with general questions but specific to minimalistic living. My eyes were glued on all the posts because I wanted to seek this type of life for my motherhood. I did not want to be even more distracted than I already was. I wanted to live life every day with a purpose and to rid of the things that did not serve my time. Allie Casazza has many free courses; however, “The minimalism Starter Kit” or the free class “3 Weeks to Minimalist Motherhood” are great sources that can launch minimalistic living. Allie often gives an example of the toaster that sits on the kitchen counter. Time is spent on that one item; the toaster, it takes a few seconds every week to pick it up, clean under the it, clean the finger prints off, throw the crumbs away from the catch tray. This object takes away seconds from your life. Every object in your home takes up your brain power and minutes just to maintain a home, and if your home is cluttered, it takes up even more energy and space. Allie’s mother has been

diagnosed with ADHD and has expressed to Allie how difficult it was for her while Allie was growing up. Her mother wishes that Allie's concepts and helpful classes were around in her younger mothering years. Allie has helped her mother tackle the paper clutter in her office by tossing and filing what is really needed. When this happens, her mother is excited to go into her office and work because there is not paper work everywhere to distract her. Having a well-kept office clear of clutter increases productivity and motivation to complete tasks. Organization is needed to keep things tidy when it comes to papers but what organization is really doing is allowing objects to be kept that aren't necessary.

In my interview with Allie, she said, "When we organize, we are just putting a band aid over a bullet wound. We actually need to remove the problem because you can organize all you want. You can have a bunch of stuff you bought and think you need and you really don't...It's an extra problem or extra step and it's unnecessary" (Casazza). Buying the organizational bins and putting labels on them, yes, it is pretty and after you feel accomplished, but it is creating a high maintenance system. For someone living with ADHD, organization is needed but only to the extent of it being helpful and not creating more work. Really look at an area and ask what is really serving me here? What do I really need out to complete the task at hand? What can I throw away or donate? Allie states it as, "you have to actually remove the clutter to experience more time, more space and that visual white space that you need to be able to focus" (Casazza).



Allie's purpose is to educate mothers, women and families that living a life with less is much bigger than a fad. Some people are natural minimalist and have been living this way for years; it is just needed now more than ever with the culture in 2018 that more things equals to a happier life. When adopting a minimalist lifestyle, the joys will spread into other areas of life. Becoming a minimalist becomes deep rooted into one's soul. It is not something that one day just goes away or serves its purpose for a short time, but it is a life change that becomes a natural rhythmic way of living. Allie said, "It has transformed everything from how I eat, to how I shop, how I decorate, what I put on my calendar, what is really worth my time and even my parenting has been affected" (Casazza).

Allison Mueller Interview

Allison Mueller, MA, founder of Big River Coaching, finds that most of her clients' struggle with having stacks of paper. The client, fearful of forgetting a task, will keep all the papers out in hopes of being reminded of those tasks. Allison teaches that the paper clutter only increases anxiety and creates an unmanageable work environment thus holding the client back from completing bigger life goals. For example, this stack of paper is holding the client back from working on their resume (Mueller). Going through the stack of paper and creating a filing system would be most beneficial. Accomplishing mindfulness of what is needed to complete the task at hand verses what is needed for reference material. A minimalistic approach would be taking it a step further by taking a photo or scanning the reference material and filing it away on the computer. The stack of paper clutter that moves from one room to the next so it is not forgotten about just creates anxiety and points out what did not get done that day.

When Allison Muellers' clients tell her that they are always late for work, she has them break down their morning routine finding out that none of their laundry is put away but rather strewn about on the end of their bed or in hampers. It takes the client an extra five minutes to find matching socks and then it takes another few minutes to do the same for the children. This adds stress to the morning and means being late for work. Then work is wondering why they can't ever be on time. To solve the laundry pile up, a capsule wardrobe would be beneficial for someone living with ADHD.

Capsule Wardrobe

Susie Faux pioneered the development of the Capsule Wardrobe ("Biography"). Minimalists concept believe the idea of around 30 items in your wardrobe is plenty to get by on. A capsule wardrobe is finding pieces of clothing that are timeless, makes you feel amazing and gives you an uplifting self-confidence. This concept would incorporate spending a little more money on clothes because the goal is to get long-term use out of the items. Project 333 is a great way to start incorporating a capsule wardrobe lifestyle. The project is a challenge that involves dressing with 33 items or less for three months (Carver). This includes clothing, jewelry, outerwear, and shoes. It does not include sentimental items that you wear every day, like your wedding ring or a piece of jewelry you wear every day. It also doesn't include underwear, sleep wear, in-home lounge wear, and workout clothing (Carver). For someone living with ADHD a capsule wardrobe would be ideal to narrow down the options of outfits and build self-confidence. It also limits the amount of laundry needed to be done. Less clothes equal less laundry equals more time.

Mindfulness

Minimalism is creating purpose, and mindfulness in everyday tasks. When living with ADHD mindfulness is not easily achieved. Often time's self-awareness or self-directed attention is hard to obtain with negative drifting thoughts. Imagine sitting down to an assignment for school or project at work and having negative drifting thoughts, such as *I flunked the last exam, this project is hard, or why even try when I failed the last time...* (Kelly). These negative thoughts drift in, but learning mindfulness helps people stay focused with the task at hand and keeps emotions in check. This helps by responding to challenges and stressful situations in a more positive way. Author Kate Kelly writes how to practice mindfulness, "It can be learned...Mindfulness training typically involves breathing exercises. The goal is to concentrate on each breath, in and out" (Kelly). Described in the book *Concepts of Fitness and Wellness*, mindfulness meditation unlike most relaxation techniques, "Encourages the individual to experience fully his or her emotions in a nonjudgement way. The individual brings full attention to the internal and external experiences that are occurring in the moment" (Corbin). A great tool for breathing and meditation is an app called Headspace which teaches about focused meditation. Headspace packcast is a set of meditations that focus around one given topic such as sleep, motivation, or focus. By incorporating mindfulness into a minimalist lifestyle, someone with ADHD can learn to refocus their thoughts in a more positive, productive way while building self-awareness and self-esteem.

How to Start Minimalism

First, identify the goal and what the outcomes will be by achieving minimalism. Write them down. It is proven that writing down a goal and what the goals will achieve makes it more likely to achieve those goals.

My first goal was to unclutter the kitchen. I don't have a strong personal connection with my kitchen items, so I know I would be able to fly through the cupboards and drawers. Second, identify a place in your home even if it is starting with one drawer that you don't have a personal connection to the items. To clear the clutter from the kitchen, I could envision what the outcome would be. My outcome from decluttering the kitchen is to find cooking supplies with ease and to have less dishes to clean. This would provide more time with my family in the evening and more focus while cooking a dish. I often become overwhelmed while making dinner with so many options on what pan to grab or what utensils to use to stir the dish. When I had so many options, I would pick a spoon to stir, use it and realize that the spoon I grabbed doesn't stir well, so I would put it in the sink and grab a different one. Cutting out all the options and keeping the tools that really worked well for what I cook saves me that time of choosing a specific tool and the amount I end up cleaning in the end. Less dishes means less clean up. Keeping only what is needed eliminates the dishes stack up in the sink and forces me to clean the dishes right away for next times use.



When decluttering the kitchen, try looking at the surface areas first. For example, in my house we don't use the blender every day, so I put that item away in a cupboard. The toaster sits out because we usually use that item every day. During this process, I ended up talking to myself

taking the KonMari Method, by Marie Kondo, a Japanese organizing consultant and author of *Tidying up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing* of decluttering, “Take each item in one’s hand and ask, ‘Does this spark joy?’ If it does, keep it. If not dispose of it” (Esswein). Talking out loud and asking these questions may seem silly the first few times, but it sparks the object alive within the mind making the deciding process less daunting.

In Minnesota, we tend to like throw blankets. Often the throw blankets get left without being picked up and folded making the home feel untidy. How many blankets does one really need in Minnesota. For my family, I keep all of our daughters’ blankets in a basket in her room. During decluttering, I got rid of all the blankets we don’t tend to use and only keeping one throw blanket per person per our household (a total of four). I only keep two of them out for use and keep two away in the spare closet just in case we are all wanting blanket at the same time.

Break the whole house up into smaller areas tackling one area at a time. Everyday keep checking one small area off at a time. I strongly encourage anyone, especially mothers, wanting to achieve this lifestyle to visit The Course-Allie Casazza <http://alliecasazza.com/start-here>. Allie goes into detail on how to start decluttering and has great courses that break down step by step on tackling clutter.

Mind-blocks

The further into decluttering mind-blocks may arise which is an item that your brain doesn’t want to let go but deep down knowing it doesn’t serve purpose. For me, that road block was my never been worn clothes after I had lost all that hard-earned weight and then got pregnant. I had bins upon bins of clothes that I had bought after the weight loss and never got to

wear because of the pregnancy. I kept those “too skinny” clothes for my full pregnancy and a full year after thinking I could wear them again. I have gotten to wear some of the items but after having a baby your body changes and clothes fit differently even if you weigh the same as before. Lesson learned. If it doesn’t fit right now or give confidence while wearing it do not keep it. Donate it. Donating items can give a tax write off and saves the time of trying to sell the item. While going through this process, the last thing needed is the hassle of listing the items for sale. Decluttering is not done until the bags and boxes are gone from the home.



Another hurdle for me was memory boxes. My birth mom passed away when I was nine months old and I received some items of hers. I kept them in storage and rarely went through them. One strong and courageous day, I felt at peace parting with those items. I went through the boxes. I kept the items that gave me joy

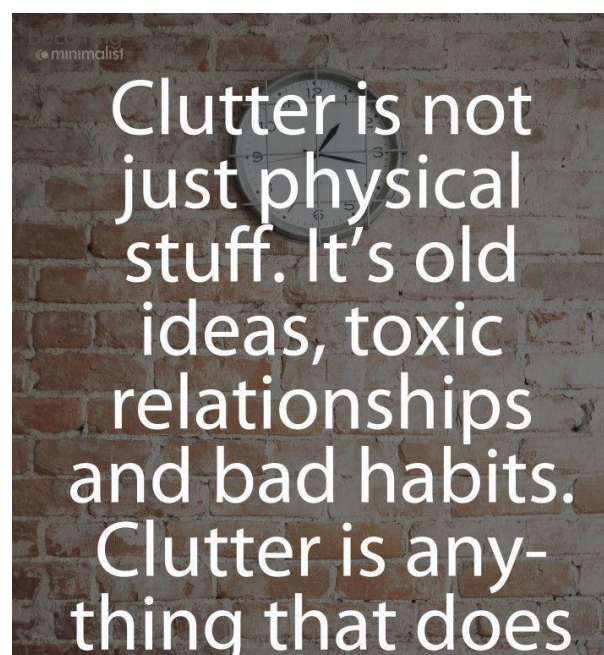
and not sadness when looking at them. One item I kept longer than others was two Christmas stockings my birth mother had made for her and myself. I did not feel joy looking at the stockings but rather sadness every time I had to go through Christmas items to take out for the season. This past year, 2017, already over three years into trying to achieve minimalism, I parted with the stockings. I took a photo of them and that’s all I need. Those stockings are not my birth mother and by keeping them will not bring her back. But rather it is the memory of her staying alive through items such as these and that’s why I have a photo that I can look at and doesn’t take up space in my home only in the Cloud.

If your spouse doesn't want to partake in decluttering their items explain to them the goals and the achievable outcomes. If they still don't want to be a part of decluttering then let them free. Don't touch their belongings. Minimalism is a personal path that can't be forced. However, after starting this journey the happiness and joy that shines from it will be contagious and they may jump on the path. Be kind and loving to those who don't see the point in becoming a minimalism.

Achieving Minimalism while having ADHD

To achieve a goal is a task that can become a means to an end. There is no end to minimalism. Minimalism is a way of life that gets rooted into your soul. In the beginning, rules may be important to keep the freeing feeling but it becomes a part of living that doesn't need to be actively thought about when being on the journey for a few years. The rhythms of life, like changes in seasons, becomes a natural wave of when to look around in the home and declutter again. Of course, the decluttering is not like what was at hand when first started because during those seasons you have internal rules or questions you ask when shopping, does this give me joy or have purpose in my life.

It is possible to have less distraction while living with ADHD. To be aware of the surroundings and only choose the items that fuels passion, mindfulness, intent, purpose, focus, and thus creating that white space is obtainable. ADHD doesn't have a cure but learning about minimalism and this profound



affect may ease the burden of too many choices, distraction, that feeling of being overwhelmed and at constant suffocations from our environment. My goal for anyone living with ADHD and trying to achieve a more attainable lifestyle is to seek minimalism. When minimalism is obtained life becomes rhythmically in sync with core beliefs, spiritual growth and goals. Minimalism equals less distraction, and a more focus lifestyle. I dare you to start; just start simply by making a change with your personal environment and get on this road of minimalism. I challenge you to pick one item in your office/workspace that doesn't serve purpose. Look for an old text book that never gets referenced or all those pens that never get put to use. Take this one step closer to living a life with less and choosing contentment over distraction and clutter. Build positive energy, focus and peace by choosing minimalistic living.

Works Cited

- “Adult ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder).” Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA,
adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/related-illnesses/other-related-conditions/adult-adhd#.
- “Attention-Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 31 Aug. 2017,
www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/guidelines.html.
- “Biography.” Susie Faux, www.wardrobe.co.uk/bio.html.
- Carver, Courtney, and Brian Gardner. “Project 333.” Be More with Less, 2016,
bemorewithless.com/project-333/.
- Barkley, Russell. “7 Executive Function Deficits Tied to ADHD.” ADDitude, ADDitude, 22 Mar. 2018, www.additudemag.com/7-executive-function-deficits-linked-to-adhd/.
- Casazza, Allie. Zoom interview. 20 Feb. 2018.
- “Clutter.” Merriam-Webster, Merriam-Webster,
www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clutter?src=search-dict-box.
- Corbin, C. B., Welk, G. J., Corbin, W. R., & Welk, K. A. (2016). Concepts of fitness and wellness: A comprehensive lifestyle approach (11th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill Companies.
- Esswein, Pat Mertz. “Can Tidying Up Change Your Life?” Www.kiplinger.com, Kiplingers Personal Finance, 25 May 2017,

www.kiplinger.com/article/real-estate/T029-C000-S002-can-tidying-up-change-your-life.html.

Kelly, Kate. "Mindfulness: What You Need to Know for Kids With Learning and Attention Issues." Understood for Learning and Attention Issues, Understood.org, www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/alternative-therapies/mindfulness-what-you-need-to-know-for-kids-with-learning-and-attention-issues.

Mueller, Allison. Phone interview. 27 Feb. 2018.

Whitbourne, Kathryn. "What's It Really Like to Have ADHD?" WebMD, WebMD, www.webmd.com/add-adhd/guide/what-its-like-have-adhd#1.

Appendix A- Interview with Allie Casazza

Blogger and researcher on Minimalism lifestyle, Podcast-“The Purpose Show”

1. What is your history with ADHD?
2. Why does organization not work?
3. Is the minimalist movement a fad? Or does it have higher purpose? Can it spread to other areas of your life?
4. Since your mother has ADHD, what was it like for you growing up?

Appendix B- Interview Allison Mueller, MA**Owner of Big River Coaching- Life coach to people living with ADHD**

1. What is a common question you get asked the most for help from your clients?
2. How do you think a person who lives with ADHD set up their work/study area? Or home?