

The Quest to BUY LESS

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SARAH LAZAROVIC USED to love window-shopping on her way to and from her job as a web producer. But in 2012, a few years after the mother of two began working from home as a freelance illustrator, the windows she gazed at most often became those on her internet browser – ones whose marketing algorithms targeted her specific desires.

“I’d go down a rabbit hole and spend hours browsing online shops,” she says. Tired of wasteful

Sick of acquiring loads of stuff? You have options, from bartering and repairing to making do with what you already own

consumption, and wasted time, she committed to not buying clothing for an entire year. Instead, whenever she came across an item she wanted, she would paint a picture of it. “It was a way of both mitigating desire and having a creative exercise.”

In order to help herself consume more thoughtfully in general, Lazarovic created a ‘Buyerarchy of Needs’ – a pyramid chart mimicking psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – which lists the



ILLUSTRATION: SALINI PERERA

myriad ways one can acquire something, from most to least sustainable: use what you have; borrow; swap; thrift; make; buy.

Whether due to changing financial circumstances or a wish to lead a more self-sufficient lifestyle, many of us are striving, or are forced, to buy less. It doesn't have to be a loss, though, and there are plenty of ways to make the transition easier.

LENDING OVER SPENDING

Perhaps out of necessity, millennials were the first demographic to embrace technology designed to make being thrifty easier, whether it be an app that lets you split a taxi ride or a website that facilitates swapping household items, but older generations are increasingly hopping on board as well.

One of the original community marketplace sites, Bunz, began in 2013 as a private Facebook group set up by Canadian Emily Bitze for Toronto residents to facilitate the bartering of goods and services. Bitze would post a message explaining, for instance, that she had a blender she wasn't using and ask if anyone on the site wanted to exchange it for houseplants or one of the other items on her 'wish list'.

The Bunz app now has more than 200,000 users, growth that CEO Sascha Mojtahedi says comes down to simple necessity: "When you're long on things and short on cash, how can you take those things you're

not using and get what you need for what you have?"

If you can't find someone to barter with, borrowing is often still better than buying, and a quick internet search can help you find places to rent everything from home-renovation tools to surfboards.

IF IT'S BROKEN, FIX IT

At a time when almost anything can be purchased with just one click, it's become an automatic response to simply replace what breaks. Generations raised in the earlier half of the 20th century can attest, however, that this wasn't always so: household appliances, clothing, electronics and more used to be bought under the assumption that, with the occasional repair, they would last a lifetime.

Now, some conscientious consumers are taking matters into their own hands and joining the burgeoning Repair Café movement. Founded in Amsterdam in 2009 by sewing expert Martine Postma, the original non-profit has expanded to more than 1500 locations worldwide. Run by volunteers, they offer lessons in how to fix anything from an unravelled hem to an unresponsive laptop.

"You can enjoy Fairtrade coffee, teas and home-made treats and you get to meet new people," says Wendy Bishop, a professional sculptor who, along with Wendy Dwyer, a retired public servant, set up the Repair Café Sydney North in January 2016. The

service operates out of a community hall in Sydney's Lane Cove every first and second Sunday of the month.

Says Bishop, "We fix broken household gadgets, jewellery, ceramics, clothing or anything that can be mended with stitches, shoes, as well as sharpening tools and knives."

Sarah Miller, a teacher and volunteer at the café adds, "We get all sorts of unusual items on the sewing repair station. A couple recently brought in a baby stroller on which the straps had been chewed by the family dog. Luckily, I had a stash of straps and clips salvaged from an old backpack – as a repairer you have to be a bit of a 'squirrel'. We hand-sewed them on and off went a happy family with another item saved from landfill."

For Bishop, the mission to extend the lifespan of our belongings is as much a matter of principle as it is about being frugal: "Something that is broken took time and resources to make, so if you're throwing it out, you're wasting those resources. It is also adding to landfill at a time when it has already reached capacity.

"The Repair Café helps to preserve and pass on repair skills to enable people to fix their own items at home where possible. We do this in a low-key environment that also promotes social interaction and friendship-building in our community."

If you can't find a Repair Café near you, RepairCafe.org offers step-by-step instructions on how to start one.

THRIVING WITH LESS

Changing how we acquire things is necessary, but there's also something to be said for not getting them in the first place. "The more things we have, the less we can appreciate, connect [with] and be grateful for what we own," says Sally Flower, the first Australian consultant trained in the KonMari method of decluttering, popularised by Marie Kondo. "On an individual level, more physical stuff can create mental clutter. Cluttered homes are harder to relax in, harder to find things in and sometimes physically hard to live in. By removing objects that don't make us happy, we are letting go of ideas, emotions and relationships that are no longer serving us."

Flower, who offers organisation techniques on her website homsanctuary.com.au, suggests we can train ourselves to make mindful purchases instead of impulse buys.

"Never buy something spur of the moment or just because it is on sale," she says. "Retail stores are competing for your money, so sleep on it to consider if it is right for you."

Flower advises asking the following before purchasing: How much value will this item add to my life? Who got paid to make this, what resources were used, and is there a more sustainable alternative? Why am I really buying it? Is it a quick gratification, or something I'll love, use and enjoy for as long as I can? **R**