

ENC 1102—Analysis of Argument

False Happiness Behind Material Wealth

In “The More Factor” by Laurence Shames, the author criticizes and analyzes modern society and its values, or lack thereof. Around every corner in today’s busy society, advertisements depict images of success and happiness. However, this so called happiness is merely superficial and void of many attributes. Love, compassion, and being a good person are rarely, if ever, depicted in modern society. Pop culture in many ways has created a superficial measuring stick for success. Society views individuals as successful if they have a plethora of money and “stuff” in their homes.

In this critique, Shames argues that people in modern society have a blurred sense of success. It is taught, and also believed, that success is defined by material wealth and not by true happiness. In fact, we may not even realize this. At times, we unconsciously strive to achieve material wealth, which brings us a false sense of happiness. Some may argue that his views are false. They would be people who stress the importance of family and responsibility. It is true that some people do act morally and are not self-centered, striving merely for material wealth. However, Shames argues that most people are represented in “The More Factor.” I strongly agree with Shames’s views on modern culture, and the ways that we act in it.

In fact, I am a member of this society that stresses the importance of having more “stuff.” This analysis did not change my views on the issue. Sometimes, I do not realize

what is happening in society, just like others. We do not analyze every situation, every action, and more importantly every core value like Shames does. I agree that most people act selfishly, always wanting more “stuff” for themselves. I also believe that along with more “stuff,” comes more true unhappiness. It may seem like we are happy when we have a vast amount of money and material objects, but when you peel back the layers, this is not the case. People who act out of self-interest and are greedy are truly not happy, for they have nothing to be happy about.

The author of this critique uses the word “stuff” at multiple points. The “stuff” that most strive to have is merely a symbol. It symbolizes empty happiness. How is modern success determined? We are deemed successful by others, if we buy a large house, which can contain more “stuff.” We continually purchase and seek more “stuff,” physical objects of no true value, to fill voids in our lives. One may have an elaborate mansion and many sports cars; however, that person may also be lacking in love for others and true happiness in life.

The collection of physical objects in one’s house does not signify happiness, nor should it signify success in life. The author claims it does for most people, which is unfortunately true. This belief is mirrored in the movie Boiler Room, in which wealthy stockbrokers spend their days swindling people out of their money. They have huge mansions full of “stuff,” yet they have terrible characters. They deem themselves successful, according to society’s measuring stick. Somewhere along the line of progress, society has strayed from the

importance of responsibility and happiness. Meaningful qualities in some sense have gone out the window and have been replaced by empty void ones.

It also needs to be mentioned that wealth and success are equated with growth. "The concept of growth has been applied almost exclusively to things that can be measured, counted, weighed" (Shames 57). Some may say that a family full of love, who has little money, is richer than a billionaire without a family or friends could ever be. This non-concrete wealth cannot be measured or weighed but only felt in one's heart. Those who do not share beliefs with mainstream society, and diverge from the author's theory live more meaningful lives. Their growth is more meaningful than simply the growth of their bank accounts, for they place significance on what really matters in life. They put greater significance on responsibility and true happiness, compared to monetary and immediate success. I believe this is true to some extent.

"A growth in responsibility and happiness will have to fulfill our need to believe that our possibilities are still expanding" (Shames 59). People have always been explorers, from the time we peeked our heads out of the cave and dreamed of crossing all the oceans in the world. We have been creatures set on growth and conquering undiscovered territory. After conquering the world, or occupying all of it, we realize that there is no more land to conquer. Upon completing our destiny of expanding the entire world, we must fill in this void with values of responsibility and family life.

In reality however, most people do not act as they should but how Shames

describes. Usually, we strive for riches and wealth but then are left with a void in our lives. This void can be defined by true happiness and love for others. Over the last few decades, we as humans have journeyed to the moon many times. Ever since we realized that we have occupied all the land available, we have changed focus. Humans are creatures of habits and when we acquire a new one, we attempt to take it to the exponential degree. We have turned our attention to individual growth, in monetary and physical terms. The constant purchasing of clothes, electronics, and toys makes people believe they are happy. Now that most of the world's land is discovered, we turn our attention to filling our lives with "stuff."

In conclusion, what is Shames saying about our society? It is clearly evident that most people in today's society determine success by how much "stuff" they have. We are no longer constantly expanding, as many did in the past. So, we now focus our attention on material growth and wealth for ourselves. It is a shame how most people do not realize that gathering more "stuff" is merely an illusion to true happiness. This constant collection of wealth does not bring us true happiness. Unfortunately, in the game of life, whoever has more material possessions wins.

Works Cited

Shames, Lawrence. "The More Factor." Signs of Life in the USA. Sonia Maasik.
Ed. Signs of Life in the USA. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.