

FROM POSSESSIONS TO PURPOSE: HOW MATERIALISM SHAPES YOUTH MINIMALIST CONSUMPTION

OD POSJEDOVANJA DO SVRHE: KAKO MATERIJALIZAM OBLIKUJE MINIMALISTIČKU POTROŠNJU MLADIH



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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines how distinct dimensions of materialism shape minimalist consumption orientations among the young. Specifically, it investigates how materialism centrality, happiness, and success relate to three dimensions of consumer minimalism—limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption—during adolescence and emerging adulthood, and explores whether these relationships differ between girls and boys.

Design/Methodology/Approach – A quantitative survey was conducted among adolescents (N=837). The conceptual model was tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Potential gender differences were examined via permutation-based multigroup analysis.

Findings and implications – Materialism centrality emerged as the most robust predictor, showing strong and consistently negative associations with all three minimalist orientations, indicating that identity-anchored attachment to possessions represents the primary barrier to youth minimalism. Materialism happiness showed no independent associations with minimalist orientations once the other materialism dimensions and controls

Sažetak

Svrha Istraživanje ispituje kako različite dimenzije materijalizma oblikuju minimalističke orijentacije u potrošnji mladih. Točnije, istražuje se na koji su način centralnost materijalizma, sreća i uspjeh povezani s trima dimenzijama minimalizma potrošača - ograničenim posjedom, jednostavnom estetikom i svjesno odabranom potrošnjom - tijekom adolescencije i rane odrasle dobi. Istodobno se ispituje razlikuju li se ti odnosi između djevojaka i mladića.

Metodološki pristup Provedeno je kvantitativno istraživanje među adolescentima (N = 837). Konceptualni model testiran je primjenom modeliranja strukturnih jednadžbi metodom parcijalnih najmanjih kvadrata (PLS-SEM). Potencijalne razlike s obzirom na spol ispitane su putem multigrupne analize temeljene na permutacijama.

Rezultati i implikacije Centralnost materijalizma pokazala se kao najsnažniji prediktor pokazujući snažne i dosljedno negativne povezanosti sa sve tri minimalističke orijentacije, što upućuje na to da privrženost posjedovanju, usidrena u identitetu, predstavlja primarnu prepreku minimalizmu mladih. Sreća proizašla iz materijalizma nije pokazala neovisne povezanosti s minimalističkim orijentacijama nakon što su u obzir uzete ostale dimenzije

were considered. Materialism success was positively associated with sparse aesthetics, suggesting that aesthetic minimalism may be compatible with success-oriented value logics and may operate as a form of refined simplicity rather than broad restraint. Multigroup analysis indicated that the structural relationships were largely comparable across girls and boys; the only significant difference was a stronger negative effect of centrality on sparse aesthetics among boys. These results underscore the need to conceptualize materialism and minimalism as multidimensional, partially compatible orientations rather than simple opposites in youth consumption.

Limitations – The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, while the focus on a single cultural context may restrict generalizability.

Originality – By integrating materialism and consumer minimalism within a single analytical framework, this study advances a theory on identity-based consumption and offers novel insights into the dialectical and gender-sensitive negotiation of sustainable consumption orientations in early adulthood.

Keywords: consumer minimalism, materialism, gender differences, youth consumption, sustainable consumer behavior, PLS-SEM

materijalizma i kontrolne varijable. Uspjeh utemeljen na materijalizmu bio je pozitivno povezan s jednostavnom estetikom, što navodi na to da estetski minimalizam može biti kompatibilan s vrijednosnim logikama usmjerenim na uspjeh te može funkcionirati kao oblik profinjene jednostavnosti, a ne općeg suzdržavanja. Multigrupna analiza pokazala je da su strukturni odnosi uglavnom usporedivi kod djevojaka i mladića. Jedina značajna razlika bio je snažniji negativni učinak centralnosti na jednostavnu estetiku kod mladića. Ovi rezultati naglašavaju potrebu konceptualizacije materijalizma i minimalizma kao višedimenzionalnih, djelomično kompatibilnih orijentacija, a ne kao jednostavnih suprotnosti u potrošnji mladih.

Ograničenja Kros-sekcijski nacrt istraživanja ograničava mogućnost uzročno-posljedičnog zaključivanja, a usmjerenost na samo jedan kulturološki kontekst može ograničiti mogućnost generalizacije rezultata.

Doprinos Integracijom materijalizma i minimalizma potrošača unutar jedinstvenog analitičkog okvira, istraživanje unaprjeđuje teoriju o potrošnji utemeljenoj na identitetu te nudi nove spoznaje o dijalektičkom i rodno osjetljivom pregovaranju orijentacija prema održivoj potrošnji u ranoj odrasloj dobi.

Gljučne riječi: potrošački minimalizam, materijalizam, razlike prema spolu, potrošnja mladih, održivo ponašanje potrošača, PLS-SEM

1. INTRODUCTION

Growing concerns about overconsumption and its detrimental effects on environmental sustainability, individual well-being, and social systems have stimulated a substantial body of research on alternative consumption orientations that emphasize restraint, intentionality, and value alignment. Within this stream, consumer minimalism has emerged as a prominent construct describing deliberate reductions in consumption intensity, possessions, and acquisition frequency, often accompanied by increased mindfulness and selectivity in purchasing decisions (Anderson et al., 2024; Ježovit & Lučić, 2025; Pangarkar et al., 2025). Recent research positions consumer minimalism as a distinct yet interconnected orientation within broader anti-consumption and voluntary simplicity paradigms, highlighting its relevance across sustainability, well-being, ethical consumption, and identity construction (Garima et al., 2025; Inês & Moreira, 2025; Hoffmann et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence increasingly associates minimalist orientations with positive outcomes, including enhanced psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Anderson et al., 2024; Watkins et al., 2025; Murthy et al., 2025), more ethical and sustainable consumption behaviors (Gelibolu & Mouloudj, 2025; Zhang et al., 2026; Thakur et al., 2025), and participation in alternative consumption systems such as sharing, renting, and second-hand markets (Malhotra & Fatehpuria, 2025; Ong & Koay, 2025; Rasheed & Balakrishnan, 2024). Minimalism has also been linked to differences in aesthetic preferences and product evaluations, particularly in the contexts in which simplicity and refinement signal authenticity and value (Baghirov & Zhang, 2024; Polisetty et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, the literature has only partially explained how consumer minimalism relates to dominant consumption value systems such as materialism. Materialism—conceptualized as the centrality of possessions to identity, happiness, and success (Richins & Daw-

son, 1992)—remains a powerful cultural force, particularly among younger consumers. The youth represent a critical demographic because adolescence and emerging adulthood are formative periods in which consumption practices play a central role in identity development and value negotiation (Chaplin & John, 2007). Although young consumers are increasingly exposed to minimalist and sustainability-oriented narratives, they remain embedded in social and market structures that reward accumulation and visible consumption (Ježovit & Lučić, 2025; Lučić & Uzelac, 2024).

Against this backdrop, three gaps motivate the present study. First, there is limited understanding of how the distinct dimensions of materialism—centrality, happiness, and success—relate to specific minimalist consumption orientations (e.g., limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption). Second, the context of youth remains undertheorized despite its importance for understanding how consumption-related identities and value systems are formed and negotiated. Third, the role of gender in shaping whether and how materialist values translate into minimalist orientations has received limited empirical attention, with gender more often being treated as a control rather than examined as a potentially meaningful boundary condition.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how different dimensions of materialism influence minimalist consumption orientations among the young and by exploring whether these relationships differ between boys and girls. By integrating materialism and consumer minimalism within a single analytical framework, the study contributes to theory by clarifying their coexistence and tension rather than treating them as mutually exclusive constructs. Empirically, it extends the growing literature on minimalism by offering gender-sensitive insights into youth consumption orientations; practically, it informs the design of sustainability and well-being interventions that better align with the identity projects of young consumers.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study adopts a value-based and identity-oriented perspective on consumption, recognizing that consumption choices are shaped by underlying value systems rather than isolated behaviors. We conceptualize materialism and consumer minimalism as interrelated orientations that can be dynamically negotiated within individual identity projects, rather than as opposing or mutually exclusive constructs. Youth is a particularly relevant context for examining this relationship, because consumption plays a central role in identity formation, social comparison, and value internalization during this life stage (Arnett, 2000; Chaplin & John, 2007). Building on identity-based consumption research, the framework examines how distinct dimensions of materialism differentially relate to minimalist consumption orientations and whether these relationships vary across gendered identity trajectories.

2.1. Materialism

Materialism is commonly conceptualized as a value system in which the acquisition and possession of material goods are prioritized over intrinsic goals such as personal growth, relationships, and community engagement. Within this orientation, possessions are perceived as being central to life, essential for happiness, and indicative of success, often at the expense of psychological well-being and pro-social values (Kasser, 2016; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Beyond a simple preference for goods, materialism reflects a broader value-based worldview that shapes how individuals evaluate themselves and others through consumption.

A substantial body of consumer research has established materialism as a key driver of consumption behavior, demonstrating that the pursuit of possessions fulfills not only functional needs but also symbolic and identity-related aspirations (Lee & Ahn, 2016). From this perspective, possessions operate as markers of achieve-

ment, social status, and self-worth, making consumption a central mechanism through which identities are constructed and maintained (Shrum et al., 2013; Shrum et al., 2014).

Two dominant approaches have shaped the conceptualization of materialism. Belk's (1984) personality-based perspective views materialism as rooted in affective traits such as envy, possessiveness, and non-generosity (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002). In contrast, Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualize materialism as a value system comprising three dimensions: centrality (the importance of possessions in one's life), happiness (the belief that acquisitions are necessary for well-being), and success (the tendency to judge personal and social worth based on material achievements) (Tang et al., 2014). Building on Rokeach's (1973) definition of values as enduring beliefs that guide judgments and behavior, this latter approach treats materialism as a cognitive orientation that systematically shapes decision-making and consumption patterns. Given the focus of the present study on value-driven consumption orientations, the Richins and Dawson (1992) framework is particularly appropriate.

Materialism has also been linked to a range of psychosocial and financial behaviors that extend beyond consumption itself. Because self-worth is frequently negotiated in social contexts, materialistic individuals are more likely to pursue status through visible consumption, using possessions to manage impressions and secure social approval (Arndt et al., 2004). This orientation more often translates into higher spending propensities, greater tolerance for debt, and a focus on image maintenance than long-term resource management (Watson, 2003). Empirical evidence among young adults indicates that materialism is associated with impulsivity and weaker financial responsibility (Lučić et al., 2021). More recent findings further suggest that financial knowledge and skills alone are insufficient to foster responsible behavior when materialist value orientations remain dominant, underscoring the central role of values and self-regulation

in shaping consumption outcomes (Lučić et al., 2024). Moreover, typologies of financial capability reveal substantial heterogeneity among the young, showing that materialism interacts with other value orientations to produce divergent financial trajectories (Lučić, et al., 2025).

Youth represents a particularly formative life stage in which identities, values, and consumption practices are actively negotiated. Adolescents are especially susceptible to materialist values on account of heightened sensitivity to peer influence, social comparison, and symbolic markers of success (Chaplin & John, 2007; Dittmar, 2005). As young people navigate transitions toward autonomy and adulthood, consumption becomes a salient means of expressing belonging, achievement, and self-definition (Arnett, 2000). At the same time, this developmental period increasingly exposes the young to competing value narratives, including those emphasizing restraint, sustainability, and mindful consumption, making it a critical context for examining how materialist orientations shape—and potentially conflict with—alternative consumption paradigms.

2.2. Consumer minimalism

Consumer minimalism has gained increasing scholarly attention as an alternative consumption orientation within sustainable consumption research, yet it remains conceptually unevenly developed. It is commonly defined as the intentional reduction of possessions and simplification of lifestyles aimed at enhancing personal balance, social harmony, and environmental sustainability (Kang et al., 2021). While early work has often operationalized minimalism through observable behaviors such as reduced ownership or mindful purchasing, more recent scholarship emphasizes its value-laden and reflective nature, framing minimalism as a broader orientation that shapes how individuals evaluate, select, and relate to consumption choices.

Research on consumer minimalism spans both societal and individual levels. At the structur-

al level, minimalism is discussed as a response to ecological degradation and unsustainable production–consumption systems, as well as a foundation for alternative economic arrangements that privilege access, redistribution, and collaborative consumption over ownership (Blackburn et al., 2025; Gong et al., 2023; Rashied & Balakrishnan, 2024). At the individual level, minimalist orientations have been associated with personal growth, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction (Devenin & Bianchi, 2023). However, these streams remain largely fragmented, with limited integration among underlying value orientations, consumption decisions, and longer-term outcomes.

Conceptually, consumer minimalism extends beyond the notion of “buying less.” It encompasses reflective processes, identity commitments, and value-based evaluations that guide everyday consumption decisions. Wilson and Bellezza (2022) conceptualize minimalism as a multidimensional construct comprising limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption. These dimensions clarify that minimalism operates simultaneously as a behavioral pattern and a symbolic orientation, redefining consumption not as a route to accumulation but as a pathway to meaning, balance, and sufficiency.

Minimalist orientations do not necessarily replace materialist values; they may coexist with, resist, or reinterpret them in complex ways. In particular, minimalist consumers may still seek symbolic meaning, quality, or even status while expressing these motives through restrained, curated, and selective consumption rather than through volume-based acquisition (Choi et al., 2025; Mishra et al., 2025). This implies that the dimensions of materialism may have heterogeneous implications for minimalism: some facets may undermine minimalism broadly, whereas others may align with specific minimalist expressions (e.g., aesthetics and curation) when minimalism functions as a “quality-over-quantity” or “curated refinement” strategy.

These dynamics are especially salient during youth, a life stage characterized by active identity formation and heightened sensitivity to social comparison. Young consumers are simultaneously exposed to consumerist norms and sustainability imperatives, which may create tension between possessions as markers of success and restraint as a source of purpose and self-definition (Ježovit & Lučić, 2025; Lučić & Uzelac, 2024). Gender may further shape how these value tensions are negotiated. Studies across consumption and anti-consumption domains suggest that men and women can differ in the meanings they attach to possessions, the motivations underlying restraint, and the identity functions of consumption practices (Anderson et al., 2024; Güner et al., 2025; Soares et al., 2025). Minimalist practices related to aesthetics, decluttering, and mindful curation may thus resonate differently across gendered identity projects, particularly among the youth and Gen Z consumers (Polisetty et al., 2025; Lee & Furukawa, 2026). However, evidence remains mixed and gender is more often treated as a control than examined as a potentially meaningful moderator, warranting an explicitly exploratory approach in the present study.

2.3. Development of hypothesis

This study examines how the three dimensions of materialism—centrality, happiness, and success (Richins & Dawson, 1992)—relate to three minimalist consumption orientations: limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption. Building on the view of materialism as an identity-relevant value system that shapes decision-making and goal pursuit through consumption (Shrum et al., 2013; Kasser, 2016), we argue that different facets of materialism should have distinct implications for minimalism. Specifically, centrality and happiness-oriented materialism should generally conflict with minimalist restraint, whereas success-oriented materialism may show a more nuanced pattern, potentially aligning with certain minimalist expressions when minimalism functions as a distinction strategy.

Materialism centrality and consumer minimalism

Centrality captures the extent to which possessions occupy a core role in one's life and identity (Richins & Dawson, 1992). When possessions are central, acquisition and ownership become primary means of self-definition and everyday goal pursuit (Shrum et al., 2013). This identity anchoring is theoretically inconsistent with minimalist orientations because minimalism requires decentering possessions and reducing acquisition as a route to meaning. Accordingly, individuals high in centrality should be less likely to endorse minimalism across its behavioral (limited possessions), aesthetic (sparse aesthetics), and decision-oriented (mindfully curated consumption) manifestations.

H1a: Materialism centrality is negatively associated with limited possessions.

H1b: Materialism centrality is negatively associated with sparse aesthetics.

H1c: Materialism centrality is negatively associated with mindfully curated consumption.

Materialism happiness and consumer minimalism

Happiness reflects the belief that acquisition is necessary for well-being and life satisfaction (Richins & Dawson, 1992). This dimension directs attention toward consumption as an affect-regulation tool and reinforces a "more is better" logic, which should conflict with minimalist restraint and the sustained intentionality required for mindful curation (Kasser, 2016). Because happiness-based materialism is often tied to hedonic expectations and short-term uplift, its negative association with minimalism may be present across dimensions but potentially less identity-embedded than centrality.

H2a: Materialism happiness is negatively associated with limited possessions.

H2b: Materialism happiness is negatively associated with sparse aesthetics.

H2c: Materialism happiness is negatively associated with mindfully curated consumption.

Materialism success and consumer minimalism

Success captures the tendency to judge achievement and worth through material indicators (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Traditional materialism research implies that success-oriented individuals should be motivated toward status-relevant consumption and thus resist limitation of possessions. Therefore, success should be negatively related to limited possessions.

At the same time, contemporary consumption theory recognizes that status signaling can operate through restraint, curation, and aesthetic refinement—forms of distinction in which minimal design, controlled acquisition, and “quality over quantity” communicate competence and taste (Bourdieu, 1984; Eckhardt et al., 2015). Under this logic, success-oriented materialism may align with minimalist expressions that are compatible with symbolic refinement: sparse aesthetics and mindfully curated consumption. Put differently, success-oriented individuals may reject minimalism as “less,” yet adopt selective minimalism as a socially legible signal of taste and control. Accordingly, we expect a differentiated pattern across minimalist dimensions.

H3a: Materialism success is negatively associated with limited possessions.

H3b: Materialism success is positively associated with sparse aesthetics.

H3c: Materialism success is positively associated with mindfully curated consumption.

Exploratory moderation

Youth consumption is embedded in gendered socialization processes that can shape the meanings attached to possessions, the identity functions of consumption, and the appeal of restraint-oriented practices (Dittmar, 2005; Fischer & Arnold, 1994). Prior research suggests that gender may influence how materialist values are enacted and whether minimalist expressions are interpreted as deprivation, self-control, aesthetic refinement, or identity signaling (Podoshen &

Andrzejewski, 2012; Epp & Price, 2008). However, evidence remains mixed and multigroup differences are often small or inconsistent. To avoid overclaiming, we treat gender differences as a boundary condition to be explored rather than a set of directional hypotheses.

Accordingly, using multigroup analysis and appropriate measurement invariance assessment, we examine whether the proposed relationships differ across female and male youth.

RQ1: To what extent do the relationships between the dimensions of materialism (centrality, happiness, success) and the dimensions of consumer minimalism (limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, mindfully curated consumption) differ between boys and girls?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and procedure

The study focuses on youth, a theoretically relevant population given that adolescence and emerging adulthood represent formative periods for identity construction, value internalization, and consumption orientation development (Chaplin & John, 2007). During this life stage, consumption practices serve as symbolic resources through which individuals negotiate self-concept, social belonging, and future aspirations, making youth particularly suitable for examining tensions between materialism and consumer minimalism.

The data collection procedure began with the approval of the Ministry of Science and Education and an official invitation to all public high schools in Croatia to participate. As an incentive, the schools were offered free financial education for their pupils. To randomize the participation of the pupils, the principals were asked to randomly assign a teacher coordinator who will select 30 students aged 16-19 to participate in the study. Children were included in the study only if their parents provided written informed consent. Data was collected in person from May to November 2025.

3.2. Measures

All multi-item constructs were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1=completely disagree, 7=completely agree). The full item wordings, sources, and measurement details (including any minor adaptations) are reported in Appendix A to ensure transparency and replicability.

Materialism. Materialism was operationalized using the Richins and Dawson (1992) Material Values Scale, which conceptualizes materialism as a multidimensional value system comprising centrality, happiness, and success. This operationalization aligns with the theoretical premise that materialist values represent enduring belief systems guiding judgments and consumption decisions, thus providing for the testing of potentially heterogeneous effects of distinct materialism dimensions on minimalist orientations. Each dimension was modeled as a reflective construct.

Consumer minimalism. Consumer minimalism was measured as a consumption orientation rather than as a set of isolated behaviors. Following Wilson and Bellezza (2022), minimalism was operationalized as a multidimensional construct comprising limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption. This specification

captures minimalism as both a behavioral pattern and a symbolic, evaluative orientation toward acquisition and ownership. All three dimensions were modeled as reflective constructs.

Gender (grouping variable). Gender was assessed via self-report and used as the grouping variable for multigroup analysis (0=boys, 1=girls). Accordingly, sex was not included as a covariate in the structural model because group comparisons explicitly capture sex-based differences in the estimated path coefficients.

Control variables. Two sociodemographic variables were included as controls. **Age** was measured in years. **Mother’s education** was measured via participant report as an ordered categorical variable, coded so that higher values indicate higher educational attainment. Both controls were included in the structural model by specifying direct paths to the endogenous minimalism dimensions (limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, and mindfully curated consumption).

3.3. Sample composition

The total of 837 participants, between 16 and 19 years old, participated in the study. An overview of a sample composition is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Sample composition

Component	Total	Percentage	Component	Total	Percentage
Gender structure			Age structure		
Male	311	37.16%	16	67	8.00%
Female	526	62.84%	17	239	28.55%
No. of household members			18	368	43.97%
2 or less	45	5.38%	19	163	19.47%
3	137	16.37%	Household structure		
4	306	36.56%	Family	816	97.49%
5	187	22.34%	Roommate(s)	15	1.79%
6	92	10.99%	Alone	1	0.12%
7 or more	65	7.77%	Partner	2	0.24%
Missing values	5	0.60%	Other	3	0.36%
Father’s education			Mother’s education		
Primary school	45	5.38%	Primary school	51	6.09%
High school	565	67.50%	High school	513	61.29%
College	153	18.28%	College	187	22.34%
Master’s Degree	50	5.97%	Master’s degree	60	7.17%
PhD	24	2.87%	PhD	26	3.11%

Source: Author’s own research.

4. RESULTS

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, the measurement model was assessed using the full sample to establish construct reliability and validity. Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships between materialism dimensions and minimalist consumption orientations, and to assess the model’s explanatory power.

4.1. Measurement model and estimation procedure

Reflective measurement quality was assessed using indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha, ρ_A , ρ_C), and convergent validity (AVE). Consistent with PLS-SEM guidelines, outer loadings were evaluated against the 0.708 rule-of-thumb (values in the range of 0.40–0.70 were retained when construct reliability and AVE remained acceptable and the item was theoretically important). Convergent validity was established with $AVE \geq 0.50$. In our data, all loadings were statistically significant (bootstrapped $p < .001$) and ranged from 0.680 to 0.895 for consumer minimalism dimensions (limited possessions, sparse aesthetics, mindfully curated consumption) and from 0.642 to 0.917 for materialism dimensions (success, centrality, happiness). Reliability was satisfactory across constructs ($\alpha = 0.697$ – 0.882 ; $\rho_A = 0.716$ – 0.885 ; $\rho_C = 0.814$ – 0.918), and AVE values exceeded the 0.50 threshold (0.523–0.810), supporting convergent validity (Table 2).

Several items were removed due to low loadings and/or cross-loadings, following standard PLS-SEM procedures while retaining content coverage of each dimension. The final indicators retained for each construct are reported in Table 2, and all retained indicators were statistically significant.

To address potential indicator redundancy and instability (including the concern raised by ρ_A), we examined indicator VIFs (reflective indicator collinearity) and assessed full collinearity VIFs as an additional diagnostic. Indicator VIF values were all below conservative thresholds (all $VIF \leq 2.820$), comfortably below commonly used cutoffs such as $VIF < 5$ as well as below the stricter 3.3 benchmark used in some PLS diagnostics. At the construct level, full collinearity VIFs were also low (max $VIF = 1.393$), providing evidence against pathological collinearity and supporting model stability. Given the self-report, single-source design, we additionally used the full collinearity VIF approach to screen for common method bias (CMB). Following Kock (2015), full collinearity VIF values above 3.3 may indicate CMB; in our data, all values were far below this cutoff (max = 1.393), suggesting that CMB is unlikely to materially bias the estimates (Appendix Table A1 and A2).

Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion, with recommended thresholds of 0.85 (conservative) (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT values were below these thresholds

TABLE 2: Measurement model assessment

Construct	Indicators retained	Outer loadings range	Cronbach’s α	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
Limited possessions	3 (ConMin02–ConMin04)	0.842–0.870	0.813	0.816	0.889	0.728
Sparse aesthetics	4 (ConMin05–ConMin08)	0.680–0.804	0.701	0.716	0.814	0.523
Mindfully curated consumption	4 (ConMin09–ConMin12)	0.829–0.895	0.882	0.885	0.918	0.738
Materialism success	4 (Material01, 02, 04, 05)	0.724–0.851	0.772	0.812	0.852	0.590
Materialism centrality	3 (Material07, 08, 13)	0.642–0.884	0.697	0.743	0.831	0.626
Materialism happiness	2 (Material15, 17)	0.883–0.917	0.767	0.781	0.895	0.810

Source: Author’s own research.

(highest HTMT=0.685), supporting discriminant validity across constructs. Where conceptually related constructs showed moderate HTMT (e.g., limited possessions with sparse aesthetics), values remained well below critical cutoffs, indicating related yet empirically distinct facets (Table 3).

Materialism–Centrality predicting minimalism facets ($f^2=0.128-0.279$, i.e., small-to-medium approaching medium), whereas several other paths showed negligible $f^2 (<0.02)$ despite occasional statistical significance. We also report the R^2 of endogenous constructs to contextualize explanatory power. The model explained

TABLE 3: Discriminant validity (HTMT ratios)

	Age	Limited possess.	Mat. centrality	Mat. happiness	Mat. success	Mindfully curated	Mother's education	Sparse aesthetics
Age	—							
Limited possessions	0.056	—						
Materialism centrality	0.045	0.611	—					
Materialism happiness	0.025	0.111	0.094	—				
Materialism success	0.094	0.140	0.083	0.685	—			
Mindfully curated	0.025	0.426	0.524	0.020	0.088	—		
Mother's education	0.044	0.054	0.118	0.021	0.035	0.064	—	
Sparse aesthetics	0.041	0.600	0.454	0.071	0.200	0.340	0.073	—

Source: Author's own research. **Note:** All HTMT values are below 0.85/0.90, supporting discriminant validity.

The PLS-SEM model was estimated in Smart-PLS (version [4]). Statistical inference relied on bootstrapping with [5,000] subsamples and two-tailed testing at $\alpha=0.05$ (bias-corrected confidence intervals reported where relevant). The analytic dataset contained complete responses on all study measures; therefore, no missing-data imputation was required. Cases with incomplete questionnaires were removed during data cleaning prior to PLS-SEM estimation.

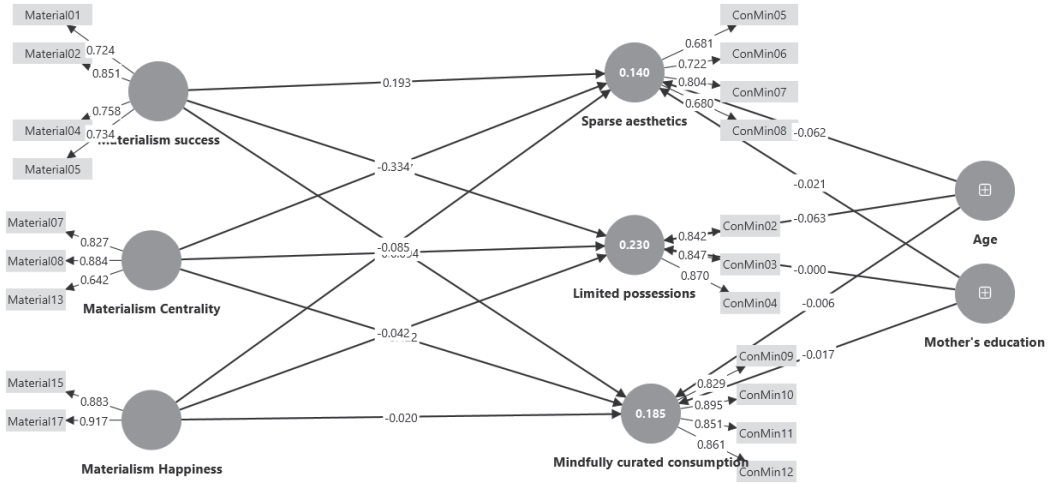
Because a large sample ($N=837$) can make very small effects statistically significant, we interpreted results using effect sizes in addition to p-values. Local effect sizes were evaluated via Cohen's f^2 (0.02=small, 0.15=medium, 0.35=large). The strongest practical effects emerged for

23.0% of the variance in "limited possessions" ($R^2=0.230$; adjusted $R^2=0.226$), 18.5% of the variance in "mindfully curated consumption" ($R^2=0.185$; adjusted $R^2=0.180$), and 14.0% of the variance in "sparse aesthetics" ($R^2=0.140$; adjusted $R^2=0.135$). These values indicate meaningful explanatory power for limited possessions and mindfully curated consumption, while also suggesting that additional antecedents likely contribute to aesthetic minimalism beyond materialism dimensions and the included controls.

4.2. Structural model results

The key results of the PLS-SEM structural model are presented in Figure 1 and Table 4 below.

FIGURE 1: The results of the overall PLS-SEM model



Source: Author's own research.

TABLE 4: Results of the overall PLS-SEM model

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Age -> Limited possessions	-0.063	-0.061	0.031	2.011	0.044
Age -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.006	-0.006	0.028	0.219	0.827
Age -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.062	-0.061	0.032	1.926	0.054
Materialism centrality -> Limited possessions	-0.467	-0.466	0.032	14.429	0.000
Materialism centrality -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.422	-0.423	0.030	14.239	0.000
Materialism centrality -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.334	-0.335	0.034	9.901	0.000
Materialism happiness -> Limited possessions	-0.042	-0.042	0.042	1.011	0.312
Materialism happiness -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.020	-0.019	0.041	0.479	0.632
Materialism happiness -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.085	-0.080	0.044	1.921	0.055
Materialism success -> Limited possessions	-0.047	-0.048	0.060	0.771	0.441
Materialism success -> Mindfully curated consumption	0.094	0.095	0.048	1.939	0.053
Materialism success -> Sparse aesthetics	0.193	0.189	0.063	3.084	0.002
Mother's education -> Limited possessions	-0.000	-0.000	0.030	0.003	0.997
Mother's education -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.017	-0.016	0.035	0.479	0.632
Mother's education -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.021	-0.020	0.033	0.646	0.518

Source: Author's own research.

Materialism dimensions exhibited clearly differentiated relationships with minimalist orientations. Materialism centrality emerged as the dominant predictor and was consistently associated with weaker minimalism across all three facets: limited possessions ($\beta=-0.467$, $p<.001$), mindfully curated consumption ($\beta=-0.422$, $p<.001$), and sparse aesthetics ($\beta=-0.334$, $p<.001$). In other words, when possessions occupy a central role in individuals' lives, minimalism is undermined not only in behavioral restraint (possession limitation), but also in how consumption is evaluated and curated, as well as in preferences for aesthetic simplicity. This pattern provides clear support for H1a–H1c.

By comparison, materialism happiness did not contribute meaningful explanatory power once the other materialism dimensions and controls were included. Its associations with limited possessions ($\beta=-0.042$, $p=.312$), mindfully curated consumption ($\beta=-0.020$, $p=.632$), and sparse aesthetics ($\beta=-0.085$, $p=.055$) were not statistically significant at $\alpha=.05$, offering no support for H2a–H2c.

A more nuanced picture emerged for materialism success. Success-oriented materialism was positively related to sparse aesthetics ($\beta=0.193$, $p=.002$), consistent with the idea that achievement and distinction may align with an aesthetic form of "refined simplicity." However, success showed no significant associations with limited possessions ($\beta=-0.047$, $p=.441$) or mindfully curated consumption at $\alpha=.05$ ($\beta=0.094$, $p=.053$). Thus, H3b was supported, whereas H3a and H3c were not.

Among the controls, age showed a small negative association with limited possessions ($\beta=-0.063$, $p=.044$), while its relationships with mindfully curated consumption ($\beta=-0.006$, $p=.827$) and sparse aesthetics ($\beta=-0.062$, $p=.054$) were non-significant. Mother's education was unrelated to all three minimalism

dimensions (all $p\geq.518$). Overall, the results support a differentiated view of the materialism–minimalism interface: centrality operates as a robust inhibitor across facets, success relates selectively to aesthetic minimalism, and happiness does not show independent explanatory power in the full model.

To examine whether the structural relationships differed between girls and boys, we conducted permutation-based multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA). Prior to multigroup analysis, measurement invariance across girls (Group A) and boys (Group B) was assessed using the MICOM procedure in SmartPLS (permutation test). Step 1 (configural invariance) was ensured by estimating the same model with identical indicators, data treatment, and algorithm settings across groups. Step 2 (compositional invariance) was supported for limited possessions ($c=1.000$; $p=.865$), Sparse aesthetics ($c=0.994$; $p=.532$), and the three materialism dimensions—centrality ($c=1.000$; $p=.690$), happiness ($c=0.989$; $p=.368$), and success ($c=0.915$; $p=.191$)—but not for mindfully curated consumption ($c=0.997$; $p=.016$). Step 3 indicated significant differences in composite means for materialism happiness (girls – boys= -0.229 ; $p=.001$), Materialism success (girls – boys= -0.162 ; $p=.020$), and Sparse aesthetics (girls – boys= -0.153 ; $p=.028$), while composite variances did not differ significantly across groups (all $p>.05$). Overall, MICOM supports partial measurement invariance, justifying MGA path comparisons, with conservative interpretation for effects involving mindfully curated consumption.

Overall, the pattern of relationships was largely comparable across groups: most differences in path coefficients were not statistically significant (Table 5), indicating that the materialism–minimalism links are broadly similar for girls and boys in this sample.

TABLE 5: Results of permutation-based multigroup analysis (PLS-MGA)

	Original (FEMALE)	Original (MALE)	Original difference	2.50%	Permutation p value
Age -> Limited possessions	-0.067	-0.052	-0.015	-0.122	0.835
Age -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.02	0.048	-0.069	-0.111	0.236
Age -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.087	-0.019	-0.067	-0.135	0.308
Materialism centrality -> Limited possessions	-0.468	-0.455	-0.013	-0.127	0.863
Materialism centrality -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.434	-0.419	-0.015	-0.12	0.826
Materialism centrality -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.284	-0.434	0.15	-0.144	0.037
Materialism happiness -> Limited possessions	-0.064	0.034	-0.098	-0.166	0.242
Materialism happiness -> Mindfully curated consumption	-0.005	-0.029	0.024	-0.159	0.773
Materialism happiness -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.115	-0.024	-0.091	-0.17	0.281
Materialism success -> Limited possessions	-0.043	-0.131	0.087	-0.22	0.479
Materialism success -> Mindfully curated consumption	0.08	0.13	-0.05	-0.177	0.591
Materialism success -> Sparse aesthetics	0.235	0.064	0.172	-0.226	0.155
Mother's education -> Limited possessions	0.002	-0.015	0.017	-0.12	0.791
Mother's education -> Mindfully curated consumption	0.032	-0.054	0.086	-0.138	0.256
Mother's education -> Sparse aesthetics	-0.068	0.009	-0.077	-0.135	0.278

Source: Author's own research.

The only statistically significant between-group difference emerged for the path from materialism centrality to sparse aesthetics ($\Delta\beta=0.150$, permutation $p=.037$). This negative association was stronger for boys ($\beta=-0.434$) than for girls ($\beta=-0.284$), suggesting that boys' preference for aesthetic simplicity is more strongly undermined when possessions occupy a central role in life.

All remaining group differences—including paths from materialism happiness and materialism success to each minimalism dimension,

as well as the effects of age and mother's education—were not significant (all permutation $p\geq.155$). Taken together, the MGA results suggest that gender does not broadly moderate the materialism–minimalism relationship, with the notable exception of a stronger centrality–aesthetic minimalism link among boys.

5. DISCUSSION

This study advances research on consumer minimalism by clarifying that the materialism–

minimalism interface among youth is dimension-specific rather than uniformly antagonistic. By disaggregating materialism into centrality, happiness, and success and linking these dimensions to distinct minimalist orientations (limited possessions, mindfully curated consumption, and sparse aesthetics), the findings demonstrate that materialist values do not operate as a single “anti-minimalism” force. Instead, they exert selective constraints and selective compatibilities, supporting a more nuanced view of minimalism as an identity-relevant orientation negotiated within the same cultural environment that sustains materialist aspirations (Garima et al., 2025; Inês & Moreira, 2025).

The most robust finding is that materialism centrality is a strong and consistent inhibitor of minimalism across behavioral, decision-oriented, and aesthetic facets. Centrality was negatively associated with limited possessions, mindfully curated consumption, and sparse aesthetics, indicating that when possessions are tightly embedded in how young people organize daily goals and self-definition, minimalism is undermined broadly rather than only in overt “buy less” behavior. This pattern reinforces the theoretical view of centrality as the most deeply identity-anchored component of materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992) and is consistent with work positioning possession-based self-definition as a structural obstacle to restraint-oriented orientations (Dittmar, 2005; Shrum et al., 2013). In a youth context—where consumption is a salient identity resource and social comparison pressure is heightened (Chaplin & John, 2007)—high centrality may function as a “value lock-in,” narrowing the psychological space for minimalism even when sustainability narratives are present.

Contrary to expectations, materialism happiness did not exhibit independent associations with any minimalism dimension once centrality, success, and controls were considered. Conceptually, this suggests that equating acquisition with happiness may be less predictive of minimalist orientations than often assumed—at least with-

in a model that isolates the identity-embedded centrality component. One interpretation is that happiness-related materialist beliefs may be more episodic and affect-driven, while minimalism—particularly mindfully curated consumption—reflects a more stable evaluative stance that is shaped primarily by identity-based value commitments rather than hedonic beliefs alone (Kasser, 2016). This result also signals an important boundary for intervention design: reducing “shopping-for-happiness” beliefs may not, by itself, generate stronger minimalist orientations if possessions remain central to identity.

The results also reveal a selective compatibility between materialism and minimalism: success-oriented materialism positively predicted sparse aesthetics, while showing no relationship with limited possessions and no reliable association with mindful curation at conventional significance levels. This pattern supports the argument that minimalism can operate not only as restraint but also as an aesthetic and symbolic strategy through which competence and taste are expressed. Aesthetic minimalism—preferences for visual simplicity and refined environments—can plausibly function as a culturally legible form of distinction, consistent with classic and contemporary accounts of status signaling through refinement and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Eckhardt et al., 2015). Importantly, however, this alignment appears narrow: success does not translate into broader restraint in possessions. This distinction is theoretically meaningful because it separates “minimalism as look” (aesthetic refinement) from “minimalism as practice” (possession limitation) and suggests that the young may adopt minimalist aesthetics without adopting minimalist acquisition norms. This distinction suggests that aesthetic minimalism may be the most “symbolically compatible” entry point for success-oriented youth, whereas possession limitation requires decentering identity attachment, which centrality directly prevents.

The multigroup analysis provides a restrained but informative boundary-condition insight.

Most relationships did not differ significantly between girls and boys, indicating that the overall materialism–minimalism structure is largely comparable across gender. The notable exception is that the negative association between materialism centrality and sparse aesthetics was stronger among boys. This suggests that when possessions are central to boys' identities, the erosion of aesthetic minimalism is particularly pronounced—consistent with the idea that aesthetic restraint may be more contingent on identity-based permission structures for boys. At the same time, because gender differences were not widespread across the model, the results caution against broad claims that materialism operates differently for girls and boys; instead, gender appears to shape a specific pathway connecting identity-central possessions to the aesthetic expression of minimalism.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study contributes to the growing literature on consumer minimalism by demonstrating that the relationship between materialism and minimalist consumption among young adults is neither uniform nor purely oppositional. By disaggregating materialism into its centrality, happiness, and success dimensions and examining their differential associations with minimalist orientations, the findings reveal a nuanced pattern of value negotiation during a formative life stage. Materialism centrality emerged as the most consistent and substantial barrier to minimalist consumption, indicating that when possessions occupy a core position in individuals' self-concept, the adoption of restraint-oriented lifestyles becomes unlikely. In contrast, success-oriented materialism was shown to coexist with, and even facilitate, selective and aesthetically driven forms of minimalism, suggesting that minimalist practices may be strategically appropriated as markers of refinement and control rather than as a rejection of consumer culture. Materialism happiness, by comparison,

played a limited role, underscoring the weaker influence of hedonic motivations on the formation of durable consumption orientations.

Taken together, the findings sharpen theory in two ways. First, they support a differentiated materialism account: centrality is the key mechanism that broadly suppresses minimalism, while success can coexist with a specific minimalist expression (aesthetic simplicity), and happiness shows limited independent explanatory power in the presence of the other dimensions. Second, they reinforce a multidimensional minimalism view: minimalist orientations are not interchangeable, and predictors that matter for aesthetic minimalism may not matter for possession limitation or mindful curation.

Practically, the results suggest that youth-focused interventions should avoid treating “materialism” as a single target. If the goal is to foster minimalism as a durable orientation, strategies should prioritize disrupting centrality—the identity-anchoring of possessions—rather than focusing narrowly on happiness beliefs about buying. Meanwhile, the positive success–aesthetics link implies a possible “bridge” strategy: minimalist aesthetics may be an accessible entry point for some youth, but practitioners should be cautious not to confuse aesthetic adoption with deeper behavioral restraint. Programs could leverage aesthetic minimalism as a gateway while explicitly supporting the transition toward mindful curation and possession limitation through identity-compatible narratives (e.g., autonomy, competence, self-control), particularly for segments in which success motives are salient.

Several limitations guide future research. The cross-sectional design limits causal inference; longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to test whether shifts in centrality precede changes in minimalist orientations or whether minimalism can reduce centrality over time. Second, the sample focuses on youth, and generalizability to older cohorts remains to be established. Third, the relatively modest R^2 val-

ues suggest that additional antecedents—such as peer norms, social media exposure, financial constraints, and sustainability identity—may further explain why young people adopt different minimalist facets. Future work should also examine whether “aesthetic minimalism” functions as a stable value orientation or a context-dependent taste expression that may coexist with high acquisition in other domains.

Finally, future research should further unpack the heterogeneity of minimalist consumption by examining its darker or unintended consequences, such as exclusionary signaling or elite forms of “aesthetic minimalism,” as well as its

long-term implications for well-being and sustainability outcomes. Addressing these questions will be essential for advancing both theory and practice in the study of sustainable and alternative consumption.

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APPENDIX

Measurement items

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with each statement.

Scale: 1=strongly disagree ... 7=strongly agree (record a number from 1 to 7).

A1. Materialism – Success

Material01: I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.

Material02: Some of the greatest achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.

Material03: Owning a large number of material possessions does not necessarily mean that a person is successful. (R)

Material04: The things I own say a lot about how well I am doing in life.

Material05: I like to own things that impress other people.

Material06: I do not pay much attention to the material things that other people own. (R)

A2. Materialism – Centrality

Material07: I usually buy only what I need. (R)

Material08: I try to keep my life simple, at least when it comes to what I own. (R)

Material09: The things I own are not that important to me. (R)

Material10: I enjoy spending money on things that are not practical.

Material11: Buying things gives me pleasure.

Material12: I like to treat myself to a lot of luxury in life.

Material13: Material possessions are less important to me than they are to people I know. (R)

A3. Materialism – Happiness

Material14: I have everything I need to enjoy life. (R)

Material15: My life would be better if I had certain things that I do not have.

Material16: I would not be much happier if I owned nicer things. (R)

Material17: I would be happier if I could afford to buy more things.

Material18: It really bothers me that I cannot afford everything I would like to have.

Note. (R) indicates reverse-coded items (recoded prior to analysis so that higher scores consistently indicate higher materialism).

Source: Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 303–316.

Consumer Minimalist Lifestyle

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with each statement.

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree.

B1. Number of Possessions

ConMin01: I avoid accumulating things.

ConMin02: I limit the number of things I own.

ConMin03: "Less is more" when it comes to owning things.

ConMin04: I actively avoid acquiring too many things.

B2. Sparse Aesthetics

ConMin05: I am drawn to visually sparse environments.

ConMin06: I prefer simplicity in design.

ConMin07: I keep the aesthetics of my space very minimal.

ConMin08: I prefer leaving spaces visually empty rather than filling them.

B3. Mindfully Curated Consumption

ConMin09: I pay attention to what I own.

ConMin10: I carefully choose the things I own.

ConMin11: It is important to me to be mindful about what I will own.

ConMin12: The things I own are carefully selected.

Source: Wilson, A. V., & Bellezza, S. (2022). Consumer minimalism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(5), 796-816.

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with each statement.

Scale: 1=strongly disagree ... 7=strongly agree (record a number from 1 to 7).

A1. Materialism – Success
 Material01: I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.
 Material02: Some of the greatest achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
 Material03: Owning a large number of material possessions does not necessarily mean that a person is successful. (R)
 Material04: The things I own say a lot about how well I am doing in life.
 Material05: I like to own things that impress other people.
 Material06: I do not pay much attention to the material things that other people own. (R)

A2. Materialism – Centrality
 Material07: I usually buy only what I need. (R)
 Material08: I try to keep my life simple, at least when it comes to what I own. (R)
 Material09: The things I own are not that important to me. (R)
 Material10: I enjoy spending money on things that are not practical.
 Material11: Buying things gives me pleasure.
 Material12: I like to treat myself to a lot of luxury in life.
 Material13: Material possessions are less important to me than they are to people I know. (R)

A3. Materialism – Happiness
 Material14: I have everything I need to enjoy life. (R)
 Material15: My life would be better if I had certain things that I do not have.
 Material16: I would not be much happier if I owned nicer things. (R)
 Material17: I would be happier if I could afford to buy more things.
 Material18: It really bothers me that I cannot afford everything I would like to have.

Note. (R) indicates reverse-coded items (recoded prior to analysis so that higher scores consistently indicate higher materialism).
 Source: Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 303–316.

Consumer Minimalist Lifestyle

Instruction: Please indicate your agreement with each statement.
 Scale: 1=strongly disagree ... 7=strongly agree.

B1. Limited Possessions
 ConMin01: I avoid accumulating things.
 ConMin02: I limit the number of things I own.
 ConMin03: “Less is more” when it comes to owning things.
 ConMin04: I actively avoid acquiring too many things.

B2. Sparse Aesthetics
 ConMin05: I am drawn to visually sparse environments.
 ConMin06: I prefer simplicity in design.
 ConMin07: I keep the aesthetics of my space very minimal.
 ConMin08: I prefer leaving spaces visually empty rather than filling them.

B3. Mindfully Curated Consumption
 ConMin09: I pay attention to what I own.
 ConMin10: I carefully choose the things I own.
 ConMin11: It is important to me to be mindful about what I will own.
 ConMin12: The things I own are carefully selected.
 Source: Wilson, A. V., & Bellezza, S. (2022). Consumer minimalism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(5), 796-816.

TABLE A1: Indicator VIF values (full list)

Level	Diagnostic	Observed max VIF	Guideline threshold
Indicator level	Indicator VIF	2.820 (ConMin10)	< 3.3 (strict) / < 5 (common)
Construct level	Full collinearity VIF	1.393 (max)	< 3.3 (CMB screening)

TABLE A2: Indicator VIF values (full list)

Indicator	VIF
ConMin02	1.826
ConMin03	1.665
ConMin04	1.938
ConMin05	1.355
ConMin06	1.215
ConMin07	1.479
ConMin08	1.352
ConMin09	1.963
ConMin10	2.820
ConMin11	2.302
ConMin12	2.189
Material01	1.591
Material02	1.751
Material04	1.513
Material05	1.510
Material07	1.567
Material08	1.706
Material13	1.203
Material15	1.630
Material17	1.630
Age	1.000
MotherEDU	1.000

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