

“Does this spark joy?”

Aesthetics, Gender, and Ideals
in Marie Kondo’s *The Life-
Changing Magic of Tidying Up*

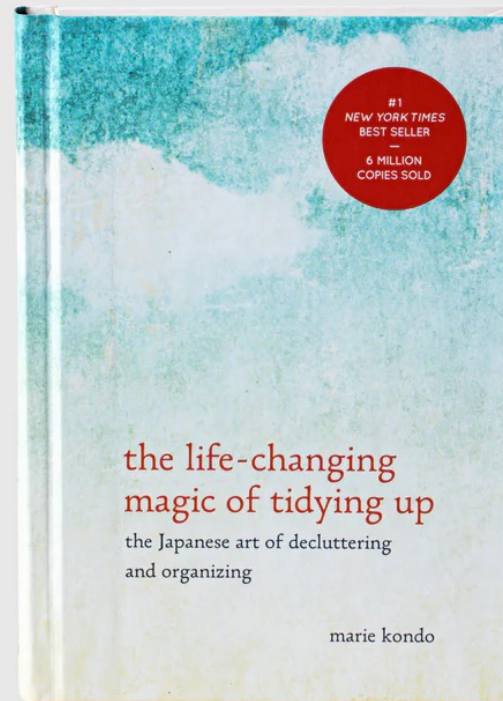
Kayla Stevens

she/her/hers

Anthropology Major

About Marie Kondo

- Tidying and organizing consultant from Japan
- Began work in Tokyo
- Published first book in 2011 (U.S. English version: 2014)
- 2019 Netflix series: *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*



<https://konmari.com/about-marie-kondo/>

<https://shop.konmari.com/products/the-life-changing-magic-of-tidying-up-1>

Research Questions

1. How does Kondo represent Japanese culture in *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*?
2. How do non-Japanese readers from the U.S. perceive and interpret the book?

1. Complicating the stereotypes of Japanese aesthetics and homes
2. Stereotypes communicated in marketing
3. Home life, consumerism, clutter, and organization
4. Self-help literature and book culture

Literature

Review

subsections

Theory



Daniel Miller:
*Material Culture and
Mass Consumption*
(1995)

- Objectification of culture in material items
- Contextualization of purchases
- Overwhelm of mass consumerism

Theory



Saba Mahmood:
Politics of Piety
(2011)

- Muslim women's piety movement in Egypt
- Focused on bodily practices to understand devotion to the authority of moral codes
- Ritual action cultivates piety

Theory



Krisztina Fehérváry: *Politics in Color and Concrete* (2013)

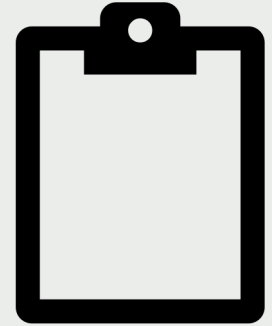
- Focused on living spaces in Hungary
- 'Aesthetic regimes' and 'qualisigns'
- Affective experiences of material qualities

Methods

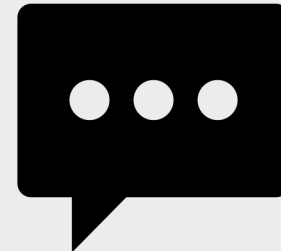
- 113 survey responses from College of Wooster students
- 3 interviews with Japanese students (from Wooster and another school)
- Individual and group interviews with 13 non-Japanese, American College of Wooster students



content analysis

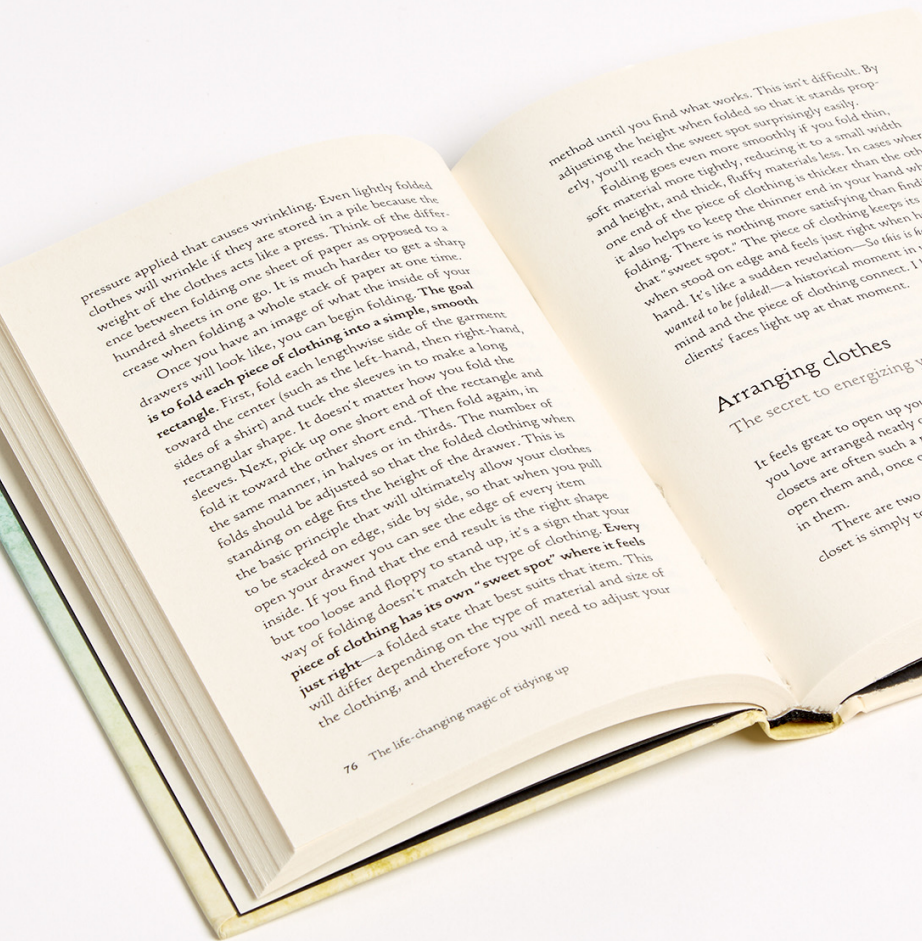


survey



interviews

Analysis & Discussion



“She made it make sense”

- Interlocutors found Kondo’s method to be surprising or unexpected
- Rationalization
- Association with Japanese culture
- Qualisigns of the book assert brand & aesthetic, while building trust



Kondo “stirred it up a bit”

- “white guy productivity minimalism”
- As a woman: calm, nuanced tidying approach
- As a Japanese person: cultural contrast



“If I had my life put together”: committing to leveling up your life

- Shame associated with the inability to follow the KonMari Method
- Inaccessibility of the KonMari Method - finances, time, effort
- Long-term commitment to an ideal lifestyle
- Gender expectations



madds

@whatmaddness

[slowly lowering myself into a trashcan as marie kondo watches]
this no longer brings me joy
[she nods cheerfully]

CONCLUSION

The importance of approaching self-help and culture-based media with critical awareness.

THANK YOU

Questions?

- Comment on my I.S. Symposium webpage
- email me at kstevens23@wooster.edu