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MATERIALISM: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS, ANTECEDENTS, AND CONSEQUENCES

Nimish Rustagi and L. J. Shrum

HEC PARIS, FRANCE

Materialism is a central construct in marketing and consumer behavior research. It has been the focus of substantial research by social scientists, and it is also well known by lay persons more generally, at least in western societies. Although most people probably have an intuitive feel for what it represents, and they can readily give examples of materialism, its conceptualizations, definitions, and operationalizations vary widely. For example, materialism has been defined as a collection of personality traits that relate to orientations to possessions (Belk, 1985), a personal value that reflects the centrality of possessions in people's lives (Richins & Dawson, 1992), an extrinsic motivational focus (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), and a preference for material objects over experiences (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Materialism has also been closely linked to the concept of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). These are only a subset of the many views on materialism.

Although research using the different conceptualizations of materialism can provide eclectic and diverse research questions and answers that are useful to consumer researchers, the lack of consensus also poses a serious problem for interpreting research on materialism. Because the different conceptualizations of materialism define it in quite different psychological terms (traits, values, motivations, etc.), the antecedents, consequences, and underlying processes of materialism may also vary across definitions. In other words, important relations with other variables may hold for one definition but not another, providing the possible perception of inconsistency in (for example) the outcomes of materialism, when in fact the inconsistency may be in the conceptualizations themselves.

One goal of this chapter is to reduce the ambiguity in understanding the antecedents and consequences of materialism. We first provide a short historical perspective on the philosophical roots of materialism. We then review the conceptualizations that have been dominant in research in consumer behavior over the last 30 years, followed by a review of research on the antecedents and consequences of materialism. We conclude with some critiques of previous materialism research and provide suggestions for future investigations.

Conceptualizations of Materialism

Philosophical Roots

The concept of materialism has its roots in philosophy, and the use of the term dates back to 1678 when Ralph Cudworth, a British philosopher, used the term materialism to classify atomistic theories of the universe (Steinfield, 2016). For Cudworth, and other prominent scholars such as George Berkeley, materialism was an atheistic and heretical philosophy that denied the existence of an immaterial and spiritual world by advocating that all things, including ideas, were based only on matter (Steinfield, 2016). With the advent of the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century, materialism transitioned from being a philosophical notion to a pejorative that referred to a person who puts worldly goods and pleasures above the promises of the church (eternal life) and spirituality (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2016).

By the turn of the century materialism came to be defined as a lifestyle for those whose primary value is corporal satisfaction (Larousse Dictionary, 1906). Around that same time, Thorstein Veblen (1899) published his seminal societal critique of social and economic institutions, and coined the term conspicuous consumption (and conspicuous leisure) to refer to the use of both material objects and experiences to signal social status. Although Veblen did not use the word materialism in association with conspicuous consumption, the description he gave mirrored its popular meaning. These historical and philosophical roots help explain why, in our contemporary world, materialism is constantly held in opposition to idealism, is seen as a hindrance to spiritual, social, and existential accomplishments in life (Balan, 1998), and is often viewed as a corrosive agent of consumerism.

Scientific Conceptualizations

In this section, we provide a discussion of four conceptualizations of materialism. The first three for the most part adhere to the philosophical views of materialism that we just discussed. The three conceptualizations are (1) Belk's (1985) view of materialism as a collection of traits (envy, possessiveness, nongenerosity), (2) Richins and Dawson's (1992) view of materialism as a personal value, and (3) Kasser and Ryan's (1993) view of materialism as the chronic pursuit of extrinsic goals. Although the three clearly differ on a number of dimensions, they share the common thread of viewing materialism as a human deficiency, whether inherent or socialized, and research based on these conceptualizations has overwhelmingly focused on the negative outcomes of materialism. The fourth conceptualization we review is a relatively new one that views materialism in terms of identity motives (Shrum et al., 2013, 2014). Rather than focusing primarily on how aspects of the person influence behavior, it looks at how both chronic (person) and situational factors influence motives to bolster or maintain critical aspects of self-identity.

Trait view of materialism. One of the earliest definitions of materialism in the field of consumer behavior came from Russell Belk, who defined it as

> The importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest levels of materialism, such possessions assume a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life either directly (as ends) or indirectly (as means to ends).
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> *(Belk, 1984, p. 291)*

More specifically, Belk conceived materialism as a personality trait consisting of three particular trait dimensions (possessiveness, envy, and nongenerosity), and developed a materialism scale that measured these three dimensions.

Belk defined possessiveness as a need to retain control and ownership of one's possessions (Belk, 1984). Those displaying the trait of possessiveness are concerned about losing possessions, have a strong desire for ownership, and are inclined to save and retain possessions (Belk, 1985). Nongenerosity is defined as a disinclination to give or share possessions, and thus those who exhibit such nongenerosity characteristics are not only unwilling to share possessions with others, but also are reluctant to lend or donate possessions to others and have a negative attitude toward charity. Finally, Belk defined envy as a resentment of other's possessions, whether they are objects, experiences, or persons (e.g., spouses). Together, the three dimensions comprise Belk's construct of materialism, and the construct is typically operationalized by creating a composite measure of materialism that averages scores on the three dimensions.

Materialism as a personal value. Probably the most common definition of materialism today is that of Richins and colleagues (Fournier & Richins, 1991; Richins, 2011; Richins & Dawson, 1992), which views materialism as a personal value that is reflected by people's beliefs about the importance they ascribe to possessions (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002) and is developed over time through the socialization process, guiding individual choices and conduct in a variety of situations, including but not limited to consumption. Like Belk, Richins and Dawson operationalized materialism as a construct comprised of three dimensions: acquisition centrality, possession-defined success, and acquisition as the pursuit of happiness (hereafter, centrality, success, and happiness materialism), and developed a scale that measured the three dimensions. The centrality dimension refers to the overall importance of possessions in one's life, and reflects the belief that acquisitions are linked to the sheer gratification experienced from acquiring and owning material possessions. The centrality dimension has been characterized as reflecting "happy hedonism" or "material mirth" (Pieters, 2013; p. 617). The success dimension refers to beliefs that possessions are indicators (signals) of success, and thus materialistic persons believe that success can be judged by the things people own (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002). Possession of the appropriate goods is thus a barometer by which people judge their own success, as well as that of others. Possessions confer status (Veblen, 1899) and help to project a desired self-image rooted in an imagined perfect life (Campbell, 1987). The happiness dimension refers to beliefs that acquisition of material possessions will bring happiness, and are in fact essential for life satisfaction and well-being. These three dimensions are typically combined into a composite measure of overall materialism.

Materialism as extrinsic goal pursuit. Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) view materialism in terms of the life goals that individuals pursue. Although they do not use the term materialism per se, they focus on the quest for material possessions and wealth motivated by extrinsic life goals such as financial success, social recognition, and physical appearance. These extrinsic goals are a means to acquire external reward or recognition from others, and are rooted in a psychological insecurity and lack of self-worth. Extrinsic goals are juxtaposed with intrinsic goals such as self-acceptance, affiliation, and community. To measure their concept of materialism, they developed a 32-item scale (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) that measured seven dimensions, three of which were associated with intrinsic goals (self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling) and four that were associated with extrinsic goals (financial recognition, social recognition, physical fitness, appealing appearance).

Materialism as identity motives. Shrum et al. (2013) view materialism in terms of identity motives. They define materialism as "the extent to which individuals attempt to engage in the construction and maintenance of the self through the acquisition and use of products,

services, experiences, or relationships that are perceived to provide desirable symbolic value" (p. 1180). This view of materialism differs from the previous three in the following ways. First, it focuses on actual behavior, rather than on chronic psychological concepts such as traits, values, or goals. In this respect, it takes a situational perspective that views materialism in terms of responses to specific situations that potentially threaten self-identity (but also considers individual differences in self-views). Individuals have different identity motives such as self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning (Vignoles et al., 2006), which they pursue in order to define their unique self-concepts. Materialism is one of the ways to pursue such identity motives through symbolic consumption. Second, the definition expands the concept of materialism beyond material objects to include experiences and relationships. Third, it views materialism not only in terms of acquisition of products, but also their use. Fourth, it specifies the symbolic (rather than functional) aspects of acquisition. By symbolic, Shrum et al. (2013) refer to the extent to which people use consumption to signal their identity to themselves and to others.

In summary, the four conceptualizations of materialism just reviewed provide different perspectives on materialism. Although there are some commonalities, each provides distinct value. In the following sections, we review research on the causes and consequences of materialism that incorporates each of the conceptualizations.

Antecedents of Materialism

Researchers have long been keen to understand the causes of materialism. Understanding the causes provides a path for reducing materialism in order to mitigate its presumed negative effects. Although an exhaustive review of research on the antecedents of materialism is beyond the scope of this chapter, some of the more commonly studied factors are parental influence, family structure, peer influence, social competition, insecurity, income, culture, media, and self-identity (for reviews, see Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2016; Kasser et al., 2004). Although the categorization is not perfect, these factors can be roughly grouped into *socialization* factors and *psychological* factors.

Socialization Factors

Socialization is the process by which norms, values, and knowledge are transmitted to individuals, enabling them to become successful members of society (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978). Consumer socialization refers to the specific transmission of these socialization factors to facilitate functioning as consumers (Ward, 1974). Consumer socialization also refers to the specific consumer-related values (such as materialism) that individuals acquire (John, 1999). The transmitters are termed socialization agents, and the primary ones for consumer socialization are family, peers, media, and culture.

Family and peers. Family is perhaps the most important socialization agent that shapes a person's values, attitudes, and beliefs. The norms, practices, and the relationship structure in the family play a critical role in shaping how children perceive the world in which they live and the solutions they seek in order to address their life problems. Thus, individuals' materialistic orientations can be traced to their family circumstances. For example, children growing up in families in which their parents have divorced or separated often experience enormous psychological stress and tend to display stronger materialistic values than children from intact families (Rindfleisch et al., 1997; Roberts et al., 2003, 2005). By focusing on material goods and acquisitions, children attempt to divert their attention

from their life stress as well as seek compensation for lack of warmth and parental attention in material goods.

Parenting styles can also push children toward materialistic orientations. When parents display a cold and controlling demeanor, they may motivate their children toward extrinsic goals such as material acquisitions and material success. Indeed, adolescents who are particularly focused on future financial success (and less on intrinsic aspirations) are more likely to have mothers who describe their style of parenting as having less warmth but more control (Kasser et al., 1995). In contrast, when parents are democratic and warm, they nurture their children with intrinsic goals such as affiliation and community values and away from more materialistic, extrinsic values (Kasser et al., 2004), and increased parental support (in the form of communication and time spent with children) is associated with less materialistic values (Gentina et al., 2016b).

In addition to the role played by relationship structures and parental style, children also acquire their consumption-related values, norms, and attitudes simply by observing their parents and siblings. Their consumption orientation is also influenced by the extent of communication the families have on consumption-related matters and the consumption orientation of the parents in particular. Thus, parents who are more materialistic (Flouri, 1999; Goldberg et al., 2003; Rindfleisch et al., 1997) or adopt more materialistic parenting styles (Richins & Chaplin, 2015) tend to have children who are more materialistic. Socialization during the formative years of life may also be a source of an individual's perceived sense of economic deprivation or affluence. If individuals grow up in a deprived economic environment (or merely perceive their environment be deprived), they may acquire a sense of economic insecurity that leads them to ascribe greater importance to material possessions (Inglehart, 1977; Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2011).

Outside the family, peers have a strong influence in shaping the consumption values of an individual, and for children and adolescents, these peers derive mainly from school. The influence of peers is noticeably stronger among adolescents and teenagers, who often consider their friends as role models of appropriate consumption behavior (Churchill & Moschis, 1979). It is important for a child to meet the standards set by their peers in terms of "coolness" (Belk, 2015, p. 305). Popularity or coolness among peers is increasingly associated with brands and possessions (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008; Belk, 2015; Schor, 2004), a trend seen across cultures (Belk et al., 2010). The influence of peers as a socialization agent for adoption of materialistic values is particularly strong for adolescents who lack in self-confidence and self-esteem (Achenreiner, 1997). Indeed, both parents and peers are critical socialization agents because they provide much-needed psychological support (Chaplin & John, 2007, 2010), and higher levels of peer support are associated with lower levels of materialism (Gentina et al., 2016a), whereas higher levels of peer pressure related to materialism are associated with higher levels of materialism (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008).

Media. Mass media is also an important socialization agent. The narratives, or "stories" that media tell embody and reflect the norms and values of a culture, which are transmitted through media programming (movies, television, advertising), and some theorists argue that media (and television in particular) is a particularly dominant socialization agent (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). Moreover, this influence may be especially true for consumer socialization, including the socialization of materialism. For example, movies, television programs, and advertising often portray the trappings of materialism (wealth, affluence, luxury) in a positive light. Advertisements backed with persuasive appeals showcase products and brands as a necessity in modern life, as a source of happiness, and as an easy solution to the problems of life. The programs between the ads contain similarly materialistic narratives that reinforce the notions that possessions signal success and are necessary for happiness (Shrum & Lee, 2012).

Such media portrayals potentially affect viewers' societal perceptions, attitudes, and values. Research shows that the frequency of television viewing is positively associated with perceptions of individual wealth and ownership of luxury products (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997; Shrum, 1996). Media portrayals may also either intentionally (advertising) or unintentionally (movies and television programs) cultivate the desire to own such markers of success and affluence. Frequency of television viewing is positively related to materialistic tendencies among children (Moschis & Moore, 1982), particularly when the socialization component of family communication is lacking. Pre-school children exposed to advertising prefer material objects over more socially oriented activities such as playing with their peers (Goldberg et al., 2003). Television consumption has also been shown to be positively related to holding material values in adults (Shrum et al., 2005, 2011).

Although the vast majority of research has investigated the effects of television on materialism, more recent research suggests that these effects can be seen in other media as well. For example, given the internet's emergence as an important socialization agent (Barber, 2013), it is perhaps unsurprising that increased internet exposure is also associated with higher levels of materialism (Chan, 2005). Similarly, exposure to other media such as video games has been linked to increases in materialism (Schor, 2004).

Consumer culture. How a society treats consumption also influences materialism. In consumer-driven cultures, people become enmeshed in the process of acquisition and take some of their identity from the brands they own and the products they exhibit (Stearns, 2006). The adoption of a materialistic orientation may also depend on factors specific to a society. For example, societies faced with rapid transition and shifts in their social, economic, and political systems seem to put an increasing emphasis on materialistic consumption. Such changes can increase social comparison and perceptions of relative deprivation (Arndt, 1978), magnifying comparisons with one's past, one's expectations, those who are better off in society, and those in more prosperous nations (Ger, 1992). In such a dynamic environment, consumption can become a means for achieving social mobility and prestige (Belk, 1984).

Insecurity. A number of studies suggest that various forms of insecurity also contribute to adoption of a materialistic mindset. Insecurity arises when life circumstances threaten basic survival (e.g., safety; Maslow, 1954) and impede the fulfillment of important psychological needs such as competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Although insecurity is not a socialization factor per se, it emerges in various stages of socialization. For example, as noted earlier, children raised in insecure family environments (e.g., divorced parents) are more materialistic than children raised in more secure family environments (Rindfleisch et al., 1997). Economic insecurity has a similar effect. Teens whose parents are lower in socioeconomic status tend to be more materialistic than teens from higher SES families (Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Kasser et al., 1995). These same relations can also be observed at a macro level. People whose generations grew up under bad economic circumstances report higher levels of materialism than those raised during good economic conditions, and poorer countries actually tend to be more materialistic than wealthier countries (Abramson & Inglehart, 1995; Kasser et al., 2004).

Psychological Factors

Although socialization agents have a strong influence on the adoption of materialistic values and behaviors, psychological factors also play a role. Material possessions are closely linked to self-identity (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), and people use products to signal important aspects of the self (Berger & Heath, 2007; Han et al., 2010). In particular, when individuals feel threats to aspects of their self-identities, they attempt to bolster their feelings of

self-worth in a variety of ways, and one way is through consumption (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Fournier & Richins, 1991; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Rucker and Galinsky (2013) refer to this behavior as *compensatory consumption*. In this section, we focus on four specific aspects of self–identity: self-esteem, power, meaningful existence, and need to belong. As we detail next, both chronic and situational threats to each of these four aspects of the self are associated with materialistic values and behavior.

Self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to how people feel about themselves and the extent to which they view themselves as worthy or unworthy (Baumeister, 1998; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003), and deficits in self-esteem may motivate people to try to bolster their self-esteem through consumption. Numerous studies have shown that those with lower self-esteem tend to have more materialistic values and engage in more materialistic behavior. For example, research with adult samples shows that higher levels of materialism as a personal value is asso-ciated with lower self-esteem (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Mick, 1996; Richins & Dawson, 1992), and the same relation has been shown with children and adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2010; Gentina et al., 2016a; Park & John, 2011).

Studies using experimental manipulations of self-esteem have also provided convergent evidence. For example, threatening self-esteem increased participants' endorsement of material values (Chang & Arkin, 2002) and their desire for status products (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010), whereas boosting self-esteem decreased expressions of materialism (Chaplin & John, 2007; Park & John, 2011).

Power. Power refers to people's ability to have control over their lives (Keltner et al., 2003). Power is an important aspect of self–identity, and feeling powerless is an aversive state that people are motivated to alter or attenuate (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). In line with the notion of compensatory consumption, chronic feelings of personal power and control are negatively correlated with materialism for both adults (Kashdan & Breen, 2007) and adolescents (Gentina et al., 2016a). Experimental manipulations of power show similar findings. When participants' feelings of personal power and control were threatened, they were willing to pay more for status products (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008; Rustagi et al., 2016) and engaged in more conspicuous consumption (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Lee et al., 2017; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009) compared to those whose power was not threatened.

Meaningful existence. People have a strong need to feel that their lives have meaning and purpose. When people feel threats to their feelings of a meaningful existence, they take steps to make their lives seem more meaningful, such as reaffirming shared cultural values and boosting feelings of self-worth (Solomon et al., 2004). With respect to the latter, one way that people can boost feelings of meaningfulness and self-worth is through consumption (Arndt et al., 2004). Correlational studies show that those who report deficits in their feelings of a meaningful existence tend to hold more materialistic values (Kashdan & Breen, 2007). Similarly, when people's feelings of a meaningful life are momentarily threatened by making one's mortality salient (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Mandel & Heine, 1999) or by inducing feelings of being ignored (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Lee et al., 2017), they show an increased preference for luxury goods, behave more greedily, and show greater preferences for clothing with conspicuous logos.

Need to belong. One of the more powerful aspects of the self is the need to belong. It is a critical requirement for security, reproduction, and general mental well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Williams, 2007). Thus, just as with the other fundamental aspects of the self, when belonging is threatened, people attempt to alleviate this aversive state, and consumption is one avenue for relief. For example, people who are chronically low on feelings of belonging tend to hold more materialistic values (Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Richins & Dawson, 1992;

Rose and DeJesus, 2007). Similarly, feelings of loneliness are positively correlated with the endorsement of material values (Gentina et al., 2016a; Pieters, 2013).

Experimental research also supports the link between belonging and materialism. Across a number of studies, when people's feelings of belonging were threatened, they attempted to alleviate their feelings of loneliness through choice of products and spending money on others. For example, threats to belonging (through social exclusion) increased preferences for nostalgic products as a means of reconnecting with the past (Loveland et al., 2010), increased preferences for affiliation products and willingness to pay for products liked by a potential interaction partner (Mead et al., 2011) and amount donated to charity (Lee & Shrum, 2012; Lee et al., 2017).

Summary. Although there are clearly multiple causes of materialism, they can be usefully grouped into two categories: socialization factors and psychological factors. Socialization factors are ones that occur incrementally over time, and exert particularly strong influences on children and adolescents. Psychological factors are ones that may be chronic (i.e., individual differences on factors such as security, self-esteem, power, etc.), or may be situationally induced via specific events that may threaten people's feelings of self-worth across a variety of dimensions. In addition, though distinct, the socialization and psychological factors are not necessarily independent, as certain socialization processes (parenting styles, economic deprivation) may lead to chronic insecurities.

Consequences of Materialism

In the previous section, we reviewed research on the possible causes of materialism. In this section, we address outcomes of materialism. Research on the potential effects of materialism is considerable, and by far the majority of studies document the detrimental effects of materialism, an example of what some term the "dark side" of consumer behavior (Hirschman, 1991, p. 1; Mick, 1996, p. 106). The various outcome measures are often lumped together under the category of well-being, but the measures of well-being are diverse. Some measure general levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and career satisfaction, some are more specific (e.g., loneliness), some relate to psychopathological variables (e.g., anxiety, depression, compulsive consumption), and some relate to unethical or risky beliefs and behavior.

Negative Effects of Materialism

Life satisfaction. One of the more consistent research findings is the negative relation between materialism and life satisfaction. Moreover, this negative relation is robust across the various measures of materialism, including trait materialism (Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Belk, 1984, 1985; Dawson, 1988), materialism as a personal value (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Shrum et al., 2011; Sirgy et al., 2012), and materialism as extrinsic goal pursuit (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998; see Kasser, 2002 for a review). At least one study has shown the same general pattern using experimental manipulations of materialism. Priming materialism through exposure to desirable consumer products increased negative affect (Bauer et al., 2012).

Anxiety, depression, and compulsive consumption. Materialism is also associated with more psychopathological measures of well-being, and these associations hold regardless of how materialism is operationalized. For example, trait materialism is positively correlated with depressive experiences such as self-criticism and dependency (Wachtel & Blatt, 1990) and social anxiety (Schroeder & Dugal, 1995). Similarly, materialism as a personal value is positively correlated with neuroticism (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Mick, 1996), depression, anxiety, and stress

(Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002), and compulsive buying (Dittmar, 2005a,b; Ridgway et al., 2008). Materialism as extrinsic goal pursuit also correlates positively with a host of problems, including negative affect (Kasser et al., 2014), anxiety (Kasser et al., 2014), and depression (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Yamaguchi & Halberstadt, 2012).

Loneliness. We noted earlier that research suggests that loneliness increases materialistic tendencies. However, research shows that materialism may also contribute to loneliness. Although these two findings may seem contradictory, they suggest that the relation between materialism and loneliness can be recursive. For example, in a six-year longitudinal study of Dutch participants (Pieters, 2013), higher initial levels of loneliness were associated with increased materialism over time. However, higher initial levels of materialism were also associated with increased loneliness over time, although this effect was significantly smaller than the effect of loneliness on materialism. Thus, the causal relation appears to be bi-directional, or recursive, suggesting a potential spiral downward in which loneliness increases materialism, which in turn actually contributes to greater loneliness.

Other detrimental effects of materialism. We have focused primarily on negative psychological outcomes of materialism. However, studies also show that materialism can have aversive effects in other aspects of life. Generally, materialistic individuals believe that acquisition of products will transform their lives in meaningful ways (Richins, 2011). They believe that possessions will help them to improve their social connectedness, enhance their overall pleasure, and augment their self-efficacy. Given such transformation expectations (Richins, 2011), materialistic individuals often display favorable attitudes toward borrowing (Watson, 2003), leading to their greater financial indebtedness (Ponchio & Aranha, 2008). Research also suggests that materialism is associated with greater environmental neglect and degradation. Materialistic individuals place low priority on the protection of natural environments (Clump, et al., 2002; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008) and often consume a disproportionately greater amount of natural resources than is necessary (Winter, 2004). Highly materialistic children and adolescents also perform more poorly in school (Goldberg et al., 2003), consume more tobacco and marijuana (Williams et al., 2000), and exhibit more unethical beliefs and behavior (Gentina et al., 2016a, 2016b) compared to their less materialistic counterparts.

Summary. The research just reviewed overwhelmingly shows a clear, negative relation between materialism and well-being. It is worth noting that these findings have been replicated across cultures and research methods (cross-sectional, longitudinal, experimental; for reviews, see Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2016). However, there is also research that suggests that, at least under some conditions, materialism may be beneficial. We briefly review this research in the next section.

Positive Effects of Materialism

As noted earlier, Kasser and colleagues view materialism in terms of extrinsic goal pursuits (e.g., financial success, fame, etc.). Although their research shows that such extrinsic goal pursuit is associated with a large assortment of psychological and even physical problems, others have noted that simply focusing on the pursuit of financial success (or extrinsic goals in general) may be too narrow of a view (Diener et al., 1999; Shrum et al., 2013). More specifically, they suggest that whether pursuit of extrinsic goals such as financial success affects well-being depends on the underlying motives. For example, in a series of studies, Srivastava, Locke, and Bartol (2001) showed that when the motives for making money are security, family support, and even simply self-pride, greater financial aspirations were either unrelated to well-being or in some cases positively related. Similar findings were reported by Carver

and Baird (1998). When the motives for financial success were more extrinsic (e.g., gain social approval, gain rewards), the usual negative relation between financial aspirations and well-being (self-actualization) was observed. However, when the financial aspirations were motivated by intrinsic factors (mere pleasure, reflection of one's values), they were positively related to well-being. Although these findings are not at all inconsistent with the Kasser and colleagues' perspective, they suggest that the effects of goals on well-being may be a function of the motives for achieving the goals. In fact, in a subsequent study, Sheldon et al. (2004) showed that both the types of goals that people pursue (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and the underlying motives for pursuing these goals (autonomous vs. controlled) had independent effects on psychological well-being.

Other research also supports the proposition that the effects of materialism depend on the underlying motives. For example, in a series of studies that investigated the independent effects of the three dimensions (happiness, success, centrality) of the Richins and Dawson (1992) material values scale, (Shrum et al., 2016) showed that whereas the independent effect of the happiness dimensions was negatively related to subjective well-being, the success dimension was actually positively related to well-being. Pieters (2013) reported similar findings, showing that the higher levels of centrality materialism were associated with less loneliness over time.

Experimental research on the effects of materialistic consumption also suggests that materialistic behavior can have beneficial effects under certain conditions. Earlier we discussed the concept of compensatory consumption, which is the use of symbolic consumption to counteract threats to the self. One question that was not addressed is whether such compensatory consumption works. That is, does compensatory consumption help in restoring an individual's self-identity on the threatened domain? The answer has important implications for the (dis)utility of materialistic behavior. On the one hand, if such compensatory strategies have little effect on repairing the damaged self-concept, potentially scarce resources are wasted in futile attempts to restore self-worth and may lead to financial problems when outlays of resources are substantial (e.g., conspicuous luxury consumption). This possibility is consistent with the large literature documenting the negative relation between materialism and well-being. On the other hand, if such compensatory strategies are successful in restoring self-worth, it calls into question the consensus that view materialistic consumption as a symbolic response to self-threats invariably diminishes well-being, and suggests that at least in some situations, materialistic endeavors may actually be helpful.

Although relatively little research has investigated the extent to which compensatory consumption repairs aspects of self-worth, some studies suggest that it does. For example, when participants' competence (Gao et al., 2009) or power (Rucker et al., 2012) were threatened, and they were then given the opportunity to compensate with threat-related products, comparison of pre- and post-compensation measures of competence and power showed that the compensation was successful in restoring the threatened aspect of the self. Rustagi et al. (2016) reported similar findings. Across a series of studies, they showed that compensatory reactions to self-threats (power, intelligence, sociability) successfully restored self-worth on the threatened dimension, but only if the products used to symbolically signal success were not explicitly linked to the domain of the self-threat (e.g., through advertising slogans).

Critiques, Caveats, and Future Research

Materialism is a both a complex and ambiguous construct. In this review, we have provided an overview of the most current conceptualizations of materialism, and a review of representative

research on the causes and consequences of materialism. We reviewed four specific conceptualizations of materialism, based on traits, personal values, goals, and motives. Although there are many more conceptualizations we could have included, these four are the ones that have generated the most empirical research. The multiple conceptualizations, and subsequent empirical research, attest to the construct's complexity and ambiguity.

The four conceptualizations of materialism are distinct, but also have commonalities. One of the goals of this chapter was to provide a basic framework for categorizing and interpreting materialism research. In terms of the causes of materialism, we noted two general factors that seem to be consensus causal influences: socialization factors and psychological factors. Although these two factors are useful for providing a general framework, they are at the same time very broad, and the components that make up each factor are numerous. Nevertheless, across the different conceptualizations and measurement of materialism, the research consistently shows that socialization agents such as family, peers, media, and culture, and the insecurity that these agents can induce, are related to the development of materialism, particularly during child development. Similarly, psychological factors related to self-identity and self-concept, in particular self-esteem, power, meaningful existence, and belonging, are consistently linked to materialism.

In terms of the consequences of materialism, clearly the vast majority of research points to a negative relation between materialism and various psychological, physical, and financial problems. Although we do not dispute these findings—it seems clear that regardless of how one conceptualizes materialism, it can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, sometimes devastating ones—we also want to note that in some aspects these relations are self-fulfilling. By this we mean that the construct is typically viewed a priori as negative, and the conceptualizations and resulting definitions reflect this negative view. By most any standard, traits such as greed, envy, and nongenerosity are undesirable traits, and the fact that they relate to negative outcomes (unhappiness) is not surprising. Although perhaps to a lesser extent, the same is true for values that emphasize the need for possessions to bring happiness or signal success, or goals that emphasize financial success, fame, and appearance.

We have also discussed the comparatively little research that has looked at the positive outcomes of materialism. Here again, the pattern of results tends to show a relation between how materialism is conceptualized and whether it yields any positive benefits. Most of the research we reviewed that shows positive outcomes of materialism is based on a motives perspective on materialism. In that research, the usual negative effects of materialism also emerge, but positive effects are also observed.

Although we have noted the commonalities across the different conceptualizations of materialism, there is yet no unifying framework that can account for the myriad of effects, nor explain discrepancies across studies. Perhaps this is an impossible task. Nevertheless, some attempts have been made. For example, the conceptualization of materialism as the use of possessions to maintain and signal self-identity (Shrum et al., 2013) is compatible with materialism as a personal value and as extrinsic goal pursuit, and adds the specific motive of symbolic consumption to enhance self-identity. This addition allows the theory to account for both chronic and situational expressions of materialism. Similarly, Donnelly and colleagues (2016) have proposed a theory of materialism based on escape theory. They contend that materialism is the result of individuals' desires to escape from aversive states of self-awareness, and that this general perspective can account for a wide range of empirical findings in materialism research. Although these newer conceptualizations may prove useful in providing a more integrative theory of materialism, they are as yet relatively untested in terms of direct empirical research.

One possible avenue for advancing materialism research are studies that look at specific types of materialism, ones that are normally aggregated to form composite measures of materialism. In particular, recent research suggests that the different dimensions of the material values scale (centrality, success, happiness) not only show differential relations with key criterion variables (Pieters, 2013; Roberts, et al., 2003, 2005), but the dimensions may also reflect different underlying motivations (Shrum et al., 2016). Thus, by looking at the differential effects of the different materialism dimensions, more may be learned about the motivational underpinnings of materialism.

One reasonable criticism of most materialism research is that, with relatively few exceptions, it is correlational, which makes it difficult to draw firm inferences regarding causal influence. For example, many of the variables that have been shown to relate to materialism, such as self-esteem, loneliness, and happiness, can reasonably be argued to be both causes and consequences of materialism. For example, do unhappy people turn to materialism to make themselves happier, or does materialistic behavior make people less happy? Or both? The research reviewed on a longitudinal study of materialism and loneliness suggests that both can occur (Pieters, 2013). Thus, the field would benefit from research that is designed to tease apart the different causal mechanisms, through either longitudinal studies or experiments. That said, the conceptualizations and definitions again drive the method. Both traits and personal values are by definition stable constructs that are resistant to change, making them difficult if not impossible to manipulate situationally. Moreover, presumed causal agents such as socialization processes occur over time, and also thus do not lend themselves well to experimental research.

In conclusion, research on materialism is ubiquitous but still incomplete. Although relations between materialism and key variables are well-established and stable, the causal relations between them is often unclear. Even more unclear are the reasons why materialism seems to have such detrimental effects. However, as more research uncovers the mechanisms that drive materialism effects, the more we are able to understand the big picture.

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