



Reconceptualizing materialism as identity goal pursuits: Functions, processes, and consequences [☆]

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes an expanded conceptualization of materialism that grounds materialism in research on the self. The article stresses the functions of materialistic goal pursuit, the processes by which these functions are developed and implemented, and their potential consequences. This functional perspective views materialistic behavior as motivated goal pursuit intended to construct and maintain self-identity, and defines materialism as the extent to which people engage in identity maintenance and construction through symbolic consumption. The article discusses the utility of this conceptualization of materialism in relation to other conceptualizations and suggests avenues for future research.

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1. Introduction

Materialism plays a central role in many aspects of everyday life (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2011). However, what is meant by materialism is not always clear, as its conceptualization varies widely across research streams (for reviews, see Ahuvia & Wong, 2002; Fournier & Richins, 1991). Examples include its conceptualization as a personal value that reflects the importance that people place on possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992), as a collection of personality traits that manifests itself in orientations to possessions (Belk, 1985), as a function of how people use products and their perception of the value the

products hold (Holt, 1995), as a focus on lower order needs such as material comfort over higher order needs such as self-actualization (Inglehart, 1990), as a focus on extrinsic motivations such as financial success (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), and as both a means to achieving ends and a desired end state in itself (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Research has also overwhelmingly focused on the negative consequences of materialism that may result from such things as emphases on products over experiences (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), tradeoffs between social relationships and material pursuits (Kasser, 2002), and other compensatory processes (Raghunathan & Irwin, 2008; Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997).

Although each of these conceptualizations of materialism have contributed greatly to our understanding of certain consequences of materialism, each alone is often constricted by its own perspective (definitions, assumptions, levels and units of analysis) in at least two important ways (Wong et al., 2011). First, many conceptualizations are conceived a priori as negative (e.g., negative traits such as envy and possessiveness, Belk, 1985; intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivations, Kasser & Ryan, 1996; instrumental vs. terminal, Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), which limits the possibilities of understanding ways in which material pursuits may have some positive utility for consumers. Second, the different perspectives often foster different

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measurement scales that may produce different results, giving the impression that the effects of materialism are not consistent when in fact it is the underlying conceptualizations that differ.

In this article, we are interested in achieving two seemingly contradictory goals: broadening the concept of materialism, but at the same time making it simpler. Thus, we propose an expanded view of materialism that is capable of integrating many (but not all) of the different conceptualizations of materialism, but is also straightforward and concise. The conceptualization is for the most part value-free (neither negative nor positive), and allows for the possibility that aspects of materialism may be non-negative, and in some instances may even increase well-being.

In the following sections, we first provide our definition of materialism, then flesh out the construct in terms of its functions, underlying processes, and consequences. We then discuss our view of materialism in the context of those that are most dominant in current and recent research. We note both the similarities and differences, and suggest advantages that we think our conceptualization of materialism provides in terms of reconciling previous findings, making novel predictions, and providing directions for new research. We hasten to stress, however, that in offering our conceptualization of materialism and highlighting its differences with other conceptualizations, we are not suggesting that these other conceptualizations are deficient or flawed. Rather, we point out both similarities and differences between our conceptualization and others in order to illustrate the utility of this expanded view of materialism.

2. Definition of materialism

We propose that *materialism is 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*. The definition has several important implications. First, it defines the act as one of acquisition, which includes not only buying, but also acquisitions through gifts, inheritances, and other non-purchase means, to the extent that the acquisition is motivated (e.g., invited). Second, the definition also includes the use of the acquisition. Thus, *materialistic behavior* refers to both the acquisition (e.g., purchasing designer clothes) and its use (wearing them). Third, the definition expands the targets of acquisition to include not only products and services, but also experiences (e.g., mountain climbing) and relationships (e.g., friendships). Fourth, it specifically refers to the *symbolic* nature of the acquisition, and thus the extent to which the acquisition and use serves as a signal (whether to the self or to others).

Finally, this view of materialism stresses consumption-driven goal pursuit (maintaining the self through possessions), and focuses in particular on a) the self-related functions that materialism and materialistic goal pursuit serve, b) the processes through which these functions are fulfilled, and c) the potential consequences of these processes. In short, it addresses the *why, how, and to what end* components of materialism. In the following section, we expand on these three aspects by providing some examples of how they play out in everyday materialistic pursuits, and in particular demonstrate the implications and utility of the expanded definition of materialism that we have offered.

3. Functions of materialism

Perhaps the most important component of our view of materialism is its focus on the motives that underlie materialistic behavior. We view the function of materialism to be the construction and maintenance of the self. People are generally motivated to construct and maintain individual identities, or subjective concepts of themselves (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Objects, products, experiences, and services that individuals consume help to form the fabric of these identities

(Belk, 1988), linking consumption with a variety of identity motives (e.g., maintaining a self-identity that affords a positive self-concept and self-esteem).¹ Vignoles, Golledge, Regalia, Manzi, and Scabini (2006), in their extensive review of the literature on the self, outline a set of six distinct identity motives. People seek to fulfill these distinct motives as they construct and maintain their identities. The motives are self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning. In Table 1, we provide a definition of each motive and an example of how that motive might be satisfied via more or less materialistic means.

Although the Vignoles et al. (2006) set of motives is by no means exhaustive (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kenrick, Griskevicious, Neuberger, & Schaller, 2010; Maslow, 1943), they provide a useful starting point to link identity motives to materialism and consumption, and in particular to flesh out our definition of materialism. By applying this definition to each of the six identity motives, we consider how consumption is employed and relied upon by individuals as they seek to satisfy, either consciously or unconsciously, each key motive. For example, one motive for materialism may be to bolster or maintain self-esteem. Self-esteem has been linked to materialism in several lines of research (Chaplin & John, 2007; Kasser, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). Thus, if one's self-worth is contingent on the approval or admiration of others, then one may acquire things that signal success. Within our definition, these acquisitions may include the usual products and services (expensive car, luxury spas). However, to the extent that their acquisition is symbolic (signaling), they may also include experiences (mountain climbing to signal adventurousness and daring) and relationships (famous friends, or the proverbial trophy wife to signal importance and power).

Materialistic behaviors are not the only ways in which identity motives can be fulfilled. As the far right column of Table 1 indicates, motives may be satisfied through nonconsumption (nonmaterialistic) means as well. Thus, self-esteem may be boosted by improving one's appearance through cosmetic surgery (more materialistic), or through exercise and dieting (less materialistic). Importantly, although exercise may serve to enhance one's attractiveness to others, and thus may be regarded as an extrinsic motive, as it does not involve consumption, our definition does not count this example as materialistic behavior. Note that for our purpose of defining materialism as a function of consumption versus nonconsumption, we define consumption as the acquisition and use of the specific products or activities that people expect will fulfill their identity motives, but not the acquisition and use of products or services necessary to engage in or facilitate a particular activity. Thus, purchasing running shoes in order to jog is not considered consumption within our definition, but purchasing running shoes to directly enhance identity (e.g., through brand symbolism) is considered consumption. Without this distinction, the definition of consumption runs the risk of being all-encompassing (Holbrook, 1987), as virtually any activity requires some level of consumption (e.g., particular food for dieting, transportation to volunteer centers, etc.).

Similar reasoning can be applied to the other motives listed in Table 1. Continuity, distinctiveness, belonging, efficacy, and meaning may be achieved through materialistic or nonmaterialistic means. For example, continuity may be achieved by acquiring things that link the past with the present and future, such as purchasing products that were made in one's hometown or purchasing nostalgic products (Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010); it may also be achieved through nonconsumption means such as extended community service. Distinctiveness may be achieved through apparel or body art; it may

¹ The identity motives listed in Table 1 are also often referred to as needs (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kenrick et al., 2010; Maslow, 1943). For the purposes of this paper, we use the terms interchangeably.

Table 1
Identity motives and examples of seeking to satisfy those motives via more vs. less materialistic means.

Identity motive	Definition of identity motive	Examples of more materialistic behavior in seeking motive satisfaction	Examples of less materialistic behavior in seeking motive satisfaction
Self-esteem	Maintaining and enhancing a positive self-concept	Undergoing cosmetic surgery to improve satisfaction with one's appearance	Exercising and dieting to improve body shape/appearance
Continuity	Maintaining one's identity across time and situations, including progressions (reflecting change) and turning points in one's life history	Acquiring a painting by a local artist from one's childhood hometown	Donating money to help renovate a community center in one's childhood hometown
Distinctiveness	Establishing and maintaining an identity that is differentiated from others	Buying custom modifications and brightly colored paint and detailing for one's car	Taking Russian language and culture lessons after discovering one's Russian ancestry
Belonging	Fostering feelings of closeness to and acceptance by others	Purchasing and wearing local sports team clothing and accessories upon relocation to a new city	Joining a recreational sports team upon relocation to a new city
Efficacy	Maintaining and enhancing feelings of competence and control over life events	Framing and displaying academic diplomas on the wall in one's office	Training for triathlon and participating in competition
Meaning	Fostering a feeling that one's life is significant, and serves a purpose	Saving income from a second job to purchase a larger "dream" home for one's family	Saving income from a second job to send one's son to his "dream" fine arts college

also be achieved through choice of hobbies. Purchasing services such as country club memberships may foster feelings of belonging; so too may joining the drama club. Feelings of efficacy may be achieved by displaying hunting trophies, or by increasing one's proficiency at something one finds important. Finally, fostering feelings that one's existence is meaningful may be achieved by spending money to insure the safety of one's family, or by volunteering for charitable organizations.

Thus, people are motivated to bolster and maintain identity-related needs, and they have a whole host of avenues for doing so, many of which are via consumption. However, regardless of the motive, consumers need not be consciously aware that a particular identity motive is driving their consumption behavior, and any act of consumption may serve to satisfy one or more identity motives. For example, the desire to acquire a rare, status-linked product may be driven by both distinctiveness and self-esteem motives. Feelings of distinctiveness, belongingness, and self-esteem may all be fostered by purchasing a membership in a very exclusive private club. The relative importance of competing motives will vary across people, but also may vary over time within the same person.

4. Processes underlying the functions of materialism

We have proposed that the function of materialism is to bolster and maintain self-identity, and we discussed six examples of identity motives that may be fulfilled through consumption. However, there are numerous ways (or processes) by which these identities may be bolstered. The process we focus on is the one implied by the *symbolic* component of our definition of materialism, that of signaling. We have proposed that materialism is manifested by the symbolic function of acquisitions. In most conceptualizations of materialism, this symbolic function is generally thought of as what we refer to as other-signaling. A classic example is conspicuous consumption, generally defined as flaunting wealth through conspicuous possessions in order to signal to others that one has wealth and status (Janssens et al., 2011; Sundie et al., 2011; Veblen, 1899). Other-signaling is presumably intended to bolster one's status.

However, all signaling through acquisitions need not be other-signaling (Miller, 2009). For example, to the extent that one's self-esteem is contingent upon the attainment of certain goals, acquisitions may serve as a self-signal (Chaplin & John, 2007; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2012; Richins, 2011). One may purchase an expensive watch or a coveted car as a self-reward for achieving financial security, thus bolstering needs for efficacy. Similarly, one may bolster belongingness through the purchase and display of symbols of group membership (e.g., photos, team pennants) in private quarters that are not available for public viewing. Purchases for purely hedonic reasons (simple pleasure, self-stimulation) may also be self-signaling. As with

the example noted by Geoffrey Miller in *Spent*, an iPod may serve self-stimulation needs of narcissistic tendencies, in which the enjoyable experience is meant only for the user, who is contained in and the center of his own private world (Miller, 2009).

Just as a particular acquisition may serve different identity motives, and the relative importance of the competing motives may change over time, so too may the processes by which those motives are fulfilled. Thus, an expensive car may be acquired as a self-signal of success and efficacy, or as an other-signal of success, and the relative importance of the self- versus other-signal itself may change over time. One implication is that even though conspicuous consumption has been defined as an other-signaling behavior, that need not be the underlying process: A conspicuous acquisition may serve as a self-signal, and its conspicuousness (to others) is merely incidental (Miller, 2009).

Finally, an acquisition may have no signaling motive at all. Based on our definition, such acquisitions would not be materialistic. Examples include acquisitions to meet the basic physiological and security needs (Maslow, 1943). Thus, one may buy a particular type of house or brand of automobile for family safety and security reasons, and not for any signaling value. Although the acquisition of possessions that have absolutely no signaling purpose may be infrequent if not rare, some portion of the motives may have non-signaling purposes. The point we want to make is that the determination of whether a behavior is materialistic lies solely in its motive, and not in the behavior itself.

5. Consequences of materialism

The consequences of materialistic goal pursuit are surely numerous, ranging from individual, to group (family), to society. Linking all of these consequences to the implications of our conceptualization of materialism is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, we focus on the most commonly noted outcome of materialism, subjective well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). The overwhelming conclusion from extant research is that materialistic goal pursuit reduces happiness and well-being (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kasser, 2002). The general premise, demonstrated especially in the work of Kasser on intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuit, is that it is the pursuit of extrinsic goals at the expense of intrinsic goals that leads to less happiness (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). The research by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) showing that experiences make people happier than do material possessions is based on similar arguments.

However, recent research has begun to question whether this simple relation is actually all that simple (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Some research has shown that the relation between materialism and happiness may depend on the motive for the materialistic behavior. For example, when the motives for financial success are for things such as security, support of family, or even just pride

in oneself, money aspiration and importance not only do not have a negative effect, in some cases they may even be positive (Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001). Carver and Baird (1998) report similar results. When motives for financial success were more extrinsic (to gain rewards or avoid punishments, or to relieve guilt or gain social approval), these financial aspirations were strongly negatively related to self-actualization. However, when the motives were more intrinsic (sheer pleasure or reflective of one's own values and goals), financial aspirations were positively related to self-actualization. Consistent with Kasser and Ryan's (1993, 1996) research, an overall negative main effect for materialism was observed because the negative effects of extrinsic motives were greater than the positive effects of intrinsic motives.

Consistent with this research, our conceptualization of materialism captures the notion that the effects of materialism and well-being depend on the motives. However, our approach is slightly different from that of the research just noted. We start with the overarching nature of the motives: to construct and maintain self-identity. The six motives listed in Table 1 are ones that are key to identity construction. Next, we look at how those motives are fulfilled: through either self-signaling or other-signaling. This self- versus other-signaling aligns closely with aspects of Carver and Baird's (1998) constructs of self-determining versus controlling motives, and with aspects of Srivastava et al.'s (2001) positive, negative, and freedom of action motives. However, what these researchers refer to as motives, we refer to as the process of motive fulfillment. Finally, our conceptualization of materialism excludes motives that are not related to identity construction, such as meeting basic physiological and security needs. In contrast, some of these motives for making money (e.g., security) are identified by Srivastava et al. as materialistic motives.

Based on these distinctions and their underlying theoretical development, we develop a framework for classifying behaviors in terms of materialism, make predictions about the effects of materialism on well-being, and do so as a function of the ways in which identity motives are fulfilled. This framework and set of relations is summarized in Table 2.

Several aspects of the table are worth noting. First, from our perspective, it is clear that not all behaviors that might appear to be materialistic (e.g., buying an expensive house) necessarily are so. Thus, to the extent that purchasing an expensive house because it provides more security has no signaling value, it is not considered materialistic within our framework. Second, the table provides examples of what may not appear to be materialistic behaviors (e.g., making friends) that are considered materialistic under our definition. If the acquisition of new friends is motivated by identity needs—whether signaling to others that one is important by association or signaling the same to the self—then the acquisition is considered materialistic. Third, the predicted effects of materialistic behaviors pertain specifically to long-term well-being. We assume that to the extent that materialistic acquisitions are not defective (the Mercedes runs, the facelift is not botched), they bring some short-term utility. Finally, the table clearly indicates that not all materialistic behavior by our definition, or motivated consumption in general (which includes all other

definitions), necessarily leads to lower long-term well-being. In fact, it is only when the goal of the acquisition is to construct or maintain an identity through other-signaling that predominant long-term effect on well-being is negative. We address the reasons for these predictions shortly.

Finally, there are some caveats we would like to note about the table and its implications for the relation between materialistic behavior and well-being. First, the representations of materialistic behavior, motive fulfillment, and predicted effects on well-being are very simplistic. We realize that these effects are conditional on a myriad of situational and personal factors that occur before purchase, during use, and after use. Second, there is the issue of the extent to which the expected utility of the purchase—the extent to which it will fulfill the particular motives—is realized, which is true regardless of whether the motive is identity-related. For example, if someone purchases an expensive car as a self-signaling symbol of success, such materialistic behavior should make that person happy to the extent that the symbolism of success endures. If it does not endure, then some other means of self-signaling will be needed to bolster that identity motive. The same reasoning also applies to materialistic behavior that is other-signaling.

If the same processes and reasoning apply to both self-signaling and other-signaling processes, then it is fair to question why we have different predictions regarding well-being for the two. We provide two reasons, one concrete and one speculative. First, the construction of Table 2 and the predictions regarding effects of materialism on long-term well-being derive not only from our own theoretical development, but also from the results of previous research. As we reviewed earlier, the research by Srivastava et al. (2001) and Carver and Baird (1998) shows that motives and processes of motive fulfillment that resemble the different motives and processes we explicate support these differential predictions. Motives of non-identity construction (security, impulse) and self-signaling identity construction (pride) tend to be positively related to various well-being measures, whereas the opposite is true for identity construction motives fulfilled through other signaling (social comparison, social approval). Of course, this is not to say that self-signaling materialistic behavior is always good for everyone, or that other-signaling materialistic behavior is always bad for everyone. Our predictions are for the predominant effects across people. Although the precise reasons for these patterns of results are beyond the scope of this paper, we believe our conceptualization of materialism has promise for uncovering these reasons.

The second, more speculative reason for the different relations between materialism and well-being as a function of self- versus other-signaling is that there is a difference in the endurance of the expected utility that the acquisition will bring. In other words, the symbolism expected from a self-signaling acquisition may endure longer than symbolism expected from an other-signaling acquisition. At least two interrelated reasons come to mind as to why. First, people may be better calibrated in their expectations for self-signals and how long they will endure, compared to expectations for other-signals, resulting in less affective forecasting error for self-signals (Wilson & Gilbert, 2005). This possibility makes sense in that

Table 2
Effects of materialistic and nonmaterialistic consumption on well-being as a function of processes of motive fulfillment.

Acquisition	General motive	Process of motive fulfillment	Materialism?	Effects on long-term well-being
Expensive house	Identity construction	Self-signaling	Yes	+
Expensive house	Identity construction	Other-signaling	Yes	–
Expensive house	Hedonic/Intrinsic	Self-signaling	Yes	+
Expensive house	Meet basic needs	No signaling	No	+
Popular friends	Identity construction	Self-signaling	Yes	+
Popular friends	Identity construction	Other-signaling	Yes	–
Popular friends	Hedonic/Intrinsic	Self-signaling	Yes	+
Popular friends	Meet basic needs	No signaling	No	+

the enduring utility of a self-signal is dependent upon one's understanding of what makes one happy and impresses oneself, whereas the enduring utility of an other-signal is dependent upon one's understanding or perceptual accuracy of what other people will find impressive. People are likely to be more accurate with the former than the latter. Second, regardless of calibration and accuracy, what impresses others (or what is perceived to impress others) may be more fickle and fast-changing than what impresses oneself. If so, other-signals will by definition be less enduring than self-signals.

In this regard, it is telling that materialism is negatively related to product satisfaction for status-signaling products (Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols, & Ferguson, 2010; Wang & Wallendorf, 2006). Both mechanisms mentioned above may operate. First, because conspicuous consumption can create negative impressions (Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010), one may not attain the recognition one desires through consumption. Second, increases in an individual's status signals may trigger reactions from other people, who then also try to increase their status; as a result, long-term changes in status are not likely to be achieved (i.e., positional treadmill effect).

Finally, it is important to note that even though we present self-signals and other-signals as independent, in reality they may often be very interdependent and dynamic. That is, what represents a self-signal of success is most likely constructed from perceptions of what others think is a signal of success. These symbols are learned through the socialization process via different socialization agents such as peers, family, and particularly the media (O'Guinn & Shrum, 1997). Consequently, even if people are motivated to acquire for self-signaling purposes, the nature and endurance of the symbol can't necessarily escape influence of the perceptions of others. Thus, endurance is not just a simple function of the signaling purpose of the symbolic acquisition, but also of the type of symbol (some symbols endure longer than others) and individual differences that govern the types of symbols that people value.

6. Relations to other conceptualizations of materialism

Thus far we have highlighted aspects of our conceptualization of materialism that clearly differ from other conceptualizations, whether they are formal, scholarly definitions or simply part of the popular vernacular. These aspects include focusing broadly on acquisitions rather than narrowly on purchases, the types of acquisitions (experiences and relationships), and the symbolic nature of the acquisitions, all of which are for the most part simply definitional. In the following section, we discuss some of the important conceptual differences that distinguish our conceptualization from others, and also some of the similarities.

6.1. Material values (Richins & Dawson, 1992)

Probably the most currently dominant conceptualization of materialism 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. Thus, materialism in Richins and Dawson's view is an enduring concept that is developed over time through the socialization process, and is composed of three dimensions: the extent to which people believe acquisitions signal success, the extent to which people believe possessions are necessary for their own happiness, and the overall importance or centrality that possessions play in people's lives. People are considered to be materialistic as a function of their endorsement of these beliefs.

In contrast, our perspective is more focused on individual acquisition decisions. Our conceptualization of materialism focuses on the particular motivations that drive consumption, with a specific emphasis on the needs that may be bolstered by consumption (e.g., self-esteem, belongingness, efficacy) and the process by which

this bolstering occurs (type of signaling). This conceptualization allows us to assess whether different motivations, different types of signaling, or their interaction, may have differential effects on well-being. Examples of the differential effects of type of signaling are shown in Table 2. However, there are other possibilities beyond the main effect of signal type. For example, in looking at the motives (needs) listed in Table 1, it may be that chronic needs to bolster one aspect of the self (e.g. self-esteem) may be more detrimental to well-being than chronic needs to bolster other aspects of the self (e.g., belonging), suggesting a main effect for type of need. In addition, the type of signaling and type of need may interact: Other-signaling may be more detrimental for well-being when bolstering self-esteem than when bolstering the need to belong. Thus, the ability to distinguish between the effects of different types (motives) of materialism on well-being provides additional information to that provided by the Richins and Dawson (1992) conceptualization.

Our conceptualization also allows for a more situational examination of the materialism process. For example, Richins and Dawson (1992), as well as the other conceptualizations reviewed here, operationalize materialism as stable traits, values, or motivations. To the extent that these types of constructs are truly stable, they are difficult to manipulate. However, our conceptualization views the self as more situationally malleable, and subject to temporary but possibly frequent changes in self-perception and self-focus. Thus, even normal everyday experiences (e.g., being ignored by a salesperson, media exposure to ideal body types, witnessing another's success), may threaten particular needs. Moreover, this proposition can be directly tested experimentally by manipulating the motivation to bolster certain needs by making those needs more salient—either indirectly through priming or directly through a self-threat—to examine effects on avenues (products vs. experiences; consumption vs. nonconsumption) people use to restore or maintain their particular self-identity (cf. Lee & Shrum, 2012; Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, & Vohs, 2011; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008).

We want to stress, however, that we are not suggesting that the conceptualization of materialism as a personal value is at all problematic. Personal values in general are useful for understanding and predicting more aggregate human behavior (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Further, our conceptualization has some clear overlap with the Richins' conceptualization. For example, the success dimension of the material values scale relates closely to the signaling motive (self or other) that we have emphasized. The happiness dimension is consistent with our reasoning that people acquire things in an effort to make themselves happier through identity maintenance and construction. Our conceptualization simply seeks to extend this reasoning by addressing why people think possessions will make them happier (e.g., meet basic needs, purely hedonic, signaling).

6.2. Trait materialism (Belk, 1985)

Belk views materialism as a composite of the personality traits of possessiveness, envy, and nongenerosity (plus preservation, Ger & Belk, 1996). Although these traits and the behaviors that are manifested from them may be indicators of a tendency toward materialism, our conceptualization focuses on the aspects of the self that may contribute to these traits. For example, envy is an emotional state that may result from any number of threatened needs (self-esteem, belonging, distinctiveness). The same may be true of possessiveness (threatened security needs) and nongenerosity (threatened self-esteem or power needs). If so, these trait concepts can also be situationally activated in people who are not chronically disposed towards the trait.

Defining materialism as a collection of what are considered negative personality traits, and ones that are consistently linked to lower well-being, also precludes any investigation into functions of materialism that may not be detrimental. Our conceptualization takes a

more neutral view of materialism, basing predictions about outcomes on the motives underlying the materialistic attitudes and behaviors.

6.3. Intrinsic vs. extrinsic values (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996)

Kasser views materialism in the context of tradeoffs between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals are focused on satisfying psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, relatedness, and growth, and behaviors are considered intrinsically motivated because they are done for the sheer pleasure of the activity itself. In contrast, extrinsic goals are focused on obtaining positive evaluations and rewards that are contingent on the reactions of others, and behaviors are considered extrinsically motivated because they are done solely for rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Materialistic behaviors are considered to be extrinsically motivated, and were initially operationalized as financial aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). In later work, materialism was expanded to include social recognition (fame) and appealing appearance (image; Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

Our focus on the motives underlying materialistic behavior draws heavily from Kasser's view of materialism as extrinsic motivation. We concur that many motives underlying materialistic behavior are extrinsic. However, our conceptualization of materialism is broader than Kasser's. First, rather than considering goals of financial success as purely extrinsic, we consider that the motives underlying financial success goals may be intrinsic, such as competence and self-determination. This expanded view can thus account for research showing that not only are financial aspirations driven in part by intrinsic motivations, they may also be related to greater well-being (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004; Srivastava et al., 2001). To be fair, Kasser's theorizing does not specifically preclude the notion that goals such as financial success may be intrinsically motivated, but in practice most of Kasser's research on materialistic motives has a priori defined particular aspirations as either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

Second, our view of materialism also considers that materialistic behaviors generally viewed as serving only extrinsic purposes may also be intrinsically motivated and represent self-signaling. For example, behaviors motivated by goals such as improving one's appearance may also provide self-signals that bolster self-esteem, and thus may not necessarily be detrimental to well-being. That is, although social self-esteem may be boosted by improving one's appearance to others, to the extent that cultural norms of beauty are internalized, personal self-esteem may also be boosted.

6.4. Terminal vs. instrumental materialism (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981)

The concept of instrumental materialism is very similar to our focus on the motives underlying materialism. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton consider instrumental materialism to be the acquisition and use of possessions that are designed to enhance goals such as safety, longevity, and happiness, and thus materialism represents a means to the end goal. This view maps onto our concepts of meeting basic physiological and security needs and meeting hedonic (enjoyment) needs. Like us, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton consider instrumental materialism to be relatively benign, and thus not necessarily contributing to lower well-being. In contrast, terminal materialism occurs when the acquisition has no other purpose than mere possession, and thus ownership is the end goal itself. This type of materialism is considered detrimental to well-being.

Our conceptualization differs from Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) in that we do not consider acquisitions to be an end in itself, but rather that all behavior is motivated to fulfill some goal. We also agree with Richins and Dawson (1992) that the concept of terminal materialism articulated by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton is at best inconsistent. They suggest that the acquisition of products to induce envy in others and to reflect status is an example of terminal

materialism. In our view, these reflect motivated behaviors intended to construct and maintain self-identity through other-signaling, and hence constitute examples of instrumental materialism.

7. What does it mean to be materialistic?

In this paper, we have offered a new conceptualization of materialism that focuses on the functions that acquisitions provide. This functional perspective views materialistic behavior as motivated goal pursuit intended to construct and maintain self-identity. Humans have fundamental needs that they are motivated to satisfy, ranging from the very basic (physiological) to the more abstract (self-actualization; Maslow, 1943). Within this hierarchy are needs related to self-identity (Vignoles et al., 2006). We view materialism as the extent to which people engage in identity maintenance and construction through symbolic consumption. By symbolic we mean the extent to which consumption objects signal that identity to the self or to others. In addition, we expand the notion of materialism to include all acquisitions (products, experiences, relationships), and their use as well as the act of acquiring them.

This dynamic view of materialism accommodates the notion that not all materialistic behavior is detrimental to well-being, to the extent that acquisitions fulfill their intended function and these functions themselves are not detrimental to well-being. It also provides a view of materialism that has less of a focus on global beliefs about possessions and their utility and centrality, and more on the specific motives underlying materialistic behavior. Thus, it allows that materialism may change over time in many different ways, as certain aspects of self-identity become more stable and less fragile (and thus need less bolstering), or as people find alternative (nonconsumption) means for identity maintenance and construction.

Within our conceptualization, higher levels of materialism are indicated by greater acquisition and use of possessions to construct and maintain self-identity, with greater emphasis on use than acquisition. That is, we view the use of products (i.e., display) as the primary vehicle for identity construction. The act of acquiring is just a means toward that end. This distinction is important because it suggests the number of possessions is not necessarily indicative of materialistic behavior, other than to the extent that the number itself has symbolic value.

This functional view of materialism also suggests that the motivated goal pursuit that we engage in at any one time is likely to depend on some explicit evaluation of the trade-off in resources inherent in the acquisition and use context (Kenrick et al., 2010). For example, the acquisition of an expensive house can serve either a self-, other- or non-signaling motive. If one chooses to acquire a house for signaling purposes, one can be said to be more materialistic than someone who acquires a similar house for no signaling purpose. Furthermore, in the context of resource constraint for the average person, choosing an expensive house could impose a trade-off that deprives fulfillment of other identity goals, and thus could potentially diminish subjective well-being (Carver & Baird, 1998).

So what, then, contributes to high levels of materialism? Like most determinants of behavior, we view it as a function of both the person and the situation. These include the frequency with which aspects of self-identity need to be bolstered, the relative number of opportunities available through consumption and nonconsumption means, and the importance that others (friends, family, society) put on consumption and nonconsumption signals. For example, all else being equal, someone who is lower in self-esteem or feelings of power should have greater occasion to bolster those needs, and thus may be more likely to do so through consumption. This example is a person-oriented factor. However, some situations necessarily involve more threats to the self than others, such as occupations that may involve very frequent and public evaluations (sports, academics, fashion, writing, etc.). This situation factor would also influence level of materialism, as would the person by situation interaction.

Another situation factor that may influence level of materialism is opportunity. Some environments may afford more opportunities for bolstering particular needs through nonconsumption or fewer opportunities through consumption. For example, university environments may offer many more outlets for enhancing distinctiveness or efficacy motives than other environments. At the same time, environments may differ on norms for conspicuous consumption. Cultures may differ on the extent to which material goods and services are emphasized (e.g., more consumerist cultures). In addition, differences in cultural capital within cultures may lead to differences in appreciation for conspicuous consumption (Berger & Ward, 2010; Üstüner & Holt, 2010). In particular, some groups may find that conspicuous consumption reflects power and distinctiveness, whereas other groups may consider it as a signal of arrogance and boorishness.

In conclusion, materialism is manifested in the choices that people make in the fulfillment of self-identity goals. Our view of materialism stresses that there are multiple identity motives, that consumption may be used to achieve those goals, that these goals may be either intrinsic or extrinsic, and that achievement of those goals may be intended to enhance one's stature in one's own eyes or in the eyes of others. Finally, our view of materialism stresses the importance of understanding the motives underlying materialistic goals and behaviors, and not focusing primarily on the behavior itself. All materialistic behaviors are not driven by the same motives, and in fact may be driven by what are considered by most to be honorable motives, rather than the shallow ones that are often implicitly assumed. This conceptualization may be useful in countering stereotyping that may contribute to the stigmas attached to materialistic pursuits (Van Boven et al., 2010). We believe this expanded view of materialism has the potential to facilitate future research on the antecedents, underlying processes, and consequences of materialistic goal pursuit. Such research may better delineate how materialism impacts well-being and may even uncover aspects of materialism that may have some benefit to well-being.

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