



# Does the way you think and look at the world contribute to being materialistic? Epistemic style, metaphysics, and their influence on materialism and wellbeing

Brad Elphinstone\*, Christine Critchley

Swinburne University of Technology, Australia



## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 10 December 2015

Received in revised form 1 March 2016

Accepted 2 March 2016

Available online xxxx

### Keywords:

Materialism

Wellbeing

Epistemic style

Metaphysics

Autonomy

## ABSTRACT

Research has consistently indicated that higher levels of materialism are associated with reduced wellbeing. Currently, no studies have examined the underlying epistemic or metaphysical factors that may contribute to materialism and wellbeing.

The current study used structural equation modelling to investigate the indirect influence of epistemic style and holistic/mechanistic perspectives on wellbeing via materialism and regulation. The first study ( $n = 397$ ) indicated that an epistemic orientation towards complex (i.e., Intellectual Position) rather than expedient, effortless (i.e., Default Position) thinking was directly associated with reduced materialism, which resulted in greater autonomous regulation, and subsequently to increased wellbeing. These findings were replicated in a second study ( $n = 214$ ), which also suggested that higher levels of holism were indirectly associated with increased wellbeing.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Research has found a consistent link between materialism and reduced wellbeing (see Dittmar, Bond, Kasser, & Hurst, 2014 for a review). Furthermore, materialism is proposed to contribute to ecological destruction (Gare, 1996; Kasser, 2002; McGilchrist, 2009), and a generational increase in psychopathology (Twenge et al., 2010). Despite materialism having negative personal, environmental, and societal outcomes, the underlying epistemic and ontological antecedents of materialism have yet to be explored. The current study will investigate how epistemic style and the fundamental ontological lens that someone uses to view the world are associated with materialism, the autonomous regulation of external demands, and the influence that these variables have on wellbeing.

## 2. Materialism

In a recent meta-analysis, Dittmar et al. (2014) defined materialism as the long-term endorsement of values, goals or beliefs which emphasise the importance of acquiring money and possessions that convey status. Furthermore, Dittmar et al. concluded that the most encompassing way to measure materialism is to assess materialist values and beliefs (i.e., the Material Values Scale [MVS]; Richins, 2004;

Richins & Dawson, 1992), and the relative importance of extrinsic, materialist aspirations compared to intrinsic aspirations (i.e., the Aspiration Index; Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996).

The MVS (Richins, 2004; Richins & Dawson, 1992) assesses the centrality of material possessions in one's life, the belief that the acquisition and ownership of material possessions leads to happiness, and the extent that one believes that material possessions can be used to judge the success of others. The Aspiration Index (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996) assesses the importance that individuals place on intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. Intrinsic aspirations (e.g., self-acceptance, having meaningful relationships with others, contributing to one's community) accord with evolved, psychological needs. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), these basic needs are autonomy (i.e., feeling that one is able to act volitionally), competence (i.e., being able to overcome difficulties and make a meaningful impact on one's environment), and relatedness with others (i.e., maintaining meaningful relationships with significant others). In contrast are extrinsic aspirations, such as desiring to have an appealing image, financial success, to be known and admired by others, and to conform to social expectations (Grouzet et al., 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). While extrinsic aspirations may accord with basic psychological needs to some extent (e.g., having an appealing image to impress others may be aimed at satisfying needs for relatedness), the pursuit and satisfaction of extrinsic aspirations is inherently less satisfying than focussing on intrinsic aspirations (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004).

\* Corresponding author at: Faculty of Health, Arts, and Design, Swinburne University of Technology, Mail H31, PO Box 218, Hawthorn, VIC 3122, Australia.  
E-mail address: [belphinstone@swin.edu.au](mailto:belphinstone@swin.edu.au) (B. Elphinstone).

### 3. Materialism, regulation, and wellbeing

It has been proposed that part of the reason why materialism contributes to reduced wellbeing is that it involves focussing on a lifestyle which undermines the ability to satisfy basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2002). Accordingly, research has found that the relationship between materialism and lower wellbeing is mediated by reduced basic need satisfaction (Kasser et al., 2014; Niemiec et al., 2009; Unanue, Dittmar, Vignoles, & Vansteenkiste, 2014). It is also expected that materialism indirectly undermines wellbeing through emphasising controlled rather than autonomous regulation (Kasser, 2002).

A subtheory within SDT, Organismic Integration Theory (OIT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) suggests that external demands (e.g., rules, laws, social norms) can be internalised and integrated into the self, influencing perceptions of autonomy. Higher levels of autonomy (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000) and autonomous regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) contribute to greater wellbeing.

Internalisation exists on a spectrum from amotivation (i.e., no self-directed motivation), to controlled regulation, followed by autonomous and intrinsic regulation. Controlled regulation comprises external (i.e., to obtain a reward or avoid punishment) and introjected (i.e., to avoid negative feelings such as anxiety or guilt by not meeting the expectations of others) regulation. Autonomous regulation involves identified (i.e., seeing that a particular behaviour is important or worthwhile) and integrated (i.e., a particular behaviour is seen to accord with one's sense of self) regulation. Intrinsic regulation represents behaviour guided by inherent interest or satisfaction.

Kasser (2002) suggests that the acquisition of material goods can be driven by autonomous reasons to satisfy basic needs (e.g., wanting money to buy food; clothing for warmth), or, in accordance with the definition of materialism by Dittmar et al. (2014), for controlled reasons such as wanting to impress others (see also Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). While Sheldon et al. (2004) found that striving for extrinsic goals for autonomous reasons is less satisfying than autonomously striving for intrinsic goals, research has indicated that after accounting for extrinsic reasons for acquisition, the relationship between wealth or material acquisition and wellbeing is no longer significant (Carver & Baird, 1998; Garðarsdóttir, Dittmar, & Aspinall, 2009; Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001). Thus, it is not material acquisition in general which is likely to contribute to reduced wellbeing, but material acquisition that is guided by extrinsic, controlled reasons.

Despite the negative outcomes of materialism, it has been proposed that contemporary Western society emphasises a consumer culture, leading to a growing predominance of materialist values as important life goals (Dittmar, 2007; Fromm, 1976/2005; Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001). A number of reasons have been proposed to explain why some people may become materialistic. These include the amount of importance placed on materialistic values by parents (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995), insecurity in caregiver relationships (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Roberts, Manolis, & Tanner, 2008), rejection by others (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008), a lack of physical integrity and safety (e.g., Briers, Pandelaere, Dewitte, & Warlop, 2006; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), or economic insecurity (Sheldon & Kasser, 2008). However, Christopher, Marek, and Carroll (2004) found no relationship between socioeconomic status and materialism. Low self-esteem or greater self-doubt has also been implicated in higher levels of materialism (e.g., Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Chaplin & John, 2007; Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Kasser et al., 2014), as well as environmental factors, such as media influence (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; DeBord, 1995; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007; Shrum, Burroughs, & Rindfleisch, 2005).

Collectively, these findings suggest that materialistic goals and values are a normative part of modern society and the means to deal with insecurity or low self-esteem (e.g., DeBord, 1995; Dittmar, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). However, not all people become materialistic. For example, Kasser et al. (2014) found that after the global financial crisis in Iceland, some people became more materialistic while others became less materialistic. Thus, there may be underlying individual differences which contribute to the development of materialist values. A number of philosophical perspectives suggest that the extent to which individuals reify extrinsic, materialistic values contributes to materialism.

### 4. Reification

DeBord (1995) suggested that life in contemporary Western civilisation is focussed on pseudo needs. That is, reified extrinsic connotations associated with material objects, products, or commercialised experiences, which have been culturally defined as representing a successful life. In the corporatized social environment, happiness is suggested to be achieved by buying things rather than pursuing intrinsic aspirations (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004). Similarly, Gare (1996) suggests that the emphasis on materialist values or goals represents the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead, 1929, 1938); a logical fallacy in which socially-created values, ideas, or objects are reified and seen to exist as core, concrete aspects of life. That is, the belief that extrinsic, materialistic goals are more important than intrinsic aspirations.

Similarly, it has been suggested that it is not the instrumental use of material possessions that is desired, but external connotations such as power or positive image which are seen as being able to boost self-esteem or aid in being accepted by others (e.g., Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chaplin & John, 2007; Dittmar, 2007; Fenichel, 1938; Fournier & Richins, 1991; Heilbroner, 1956; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996), or to quantify success in life (Dittmar, 1992, 2007; Fournier & Richins, 1991; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Thus, materialism has also been defined as the extent to which individuals allow the pursuit of material goods and possessions to assume a central place in their lives (Belk, 1984; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Gare (1996) further suggests that this process of reification is central to Marx (1844/1964) critique of capitalism. For example, Marx said, "I am a wicked, dishonest, unscrupulous and stupid individual, but money is respected, and so also is its owner. Money is the highest good, and consequently its owner is also good" (p. 167). Similarly, Fromm (1981) suggested that people have become 'homo consumens'; objects and things are seen as more important than people, property more important than life, and capital more important than work. Thus, in accordance with the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (Gare, 1996; Whitehead, 1929, 1938), money – an abstracted trading token removed from, but representative of, labour, material products or services – has been reified and turned into a concrete means through which to define one's self. Accordingly, Dittmar (1992) found that the same individual is perceived as being more successful and self-reliant when depicted with expensive possessions rather than basic goods. Wealthy people are also seen as being more 'cultured' and 'successful in everything' in comparison to poorer people (Khanna & Kasser, 2001, as cited in Kasser, 2002, p. 53). Higher levels of materialism are also associated with higher levels of self-enhancement motives (i.e., wealth, authority, power) and reduced self-transcendence motives (i.e., equality, peace, justice; Kilbourne, Grünhagen, & Foley, 2005).

In other words, intrinsic aspirations could be considered to be 'of nature' as they accord with evolved, basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In contrast, extrinsic, materialist values are not 'of nature' as they have emerged as the result of a socially-created consumer culture (Dittmar, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). These materialist goals however, have been reified (DeBord, 1995; Fromm, 1976/2005; Gare, 1996) and problematically become more important than intrinsic aspirations and goals (e.g., Kasser, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7249932>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7249932>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)