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## Mediating and moderating variables between discretionary purchases and happiness

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MEDIATING AND MODERATING VARIABLES BETWEEN DISCRETIONARY  
PURCHASES AND HAPPINESS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Mediating and Moderating Variables Between Discretionary Purchases and Happiness**

by

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Media and societal images suggest that the accumulation of objects, possessions, and wealth will produce happiness. However, research has found higher rates of materialism are associated with lower levels of happiness. The current studies explored the relationship between different types of purchases and happiness. Specifically, experiential purchases are distinguished from material purchases in terms of goal; experiential purchases have the goal of acquiring a life experience, while material purchases have the goal of acquiring an object. Several studies have found that experiential purchases are associated with more happiness than material purchases. A number of variables that mediate and moderate the relationship between purchase type and happiness were investigated.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Two distinct discretionary purchase typologies are experiential and material. These purchase types differ in terms of goal. Experiential purchases have the goal of acquiring a life experience and are episodic, while material purchases have the goal of obtaining a possession and are tangible. There has been an enduring trend of rising discretionary income and discretionary time in most developed countries (Franco, 2004; Graham, 2000). For the most part, these increases in discretionary assets have been used by persons to make elective purchases to pursue pleasure and gratification. Research has demonstrated that people are happier with experiential purchases compared to material ones. In the current studies, several variables were investigated as mediators, or explaining/causal variables, and moderators, or variables that make the relation between variables stronger or weaker. Constructs examined as influential factors between purchase types and happiness were impacts on the self, interpersonal relationships, socioeconomic status (SES), materialism, and self-actualization.

It was found that impacts the purchase has on the self mediates the relationship between purchase type and happiness. Experiential purchases are more central to positive self-identity and contribute more to growth and development than material purchases (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The acquisition of experiences leads persons to view the self more favorably due to the positive aspects associated with experiential people. Concurrently, it was predicted that interpersonal relationships would mediate the relation between purchase typology and happiness. Discretionary experiential purchases ostensibly foster more social contact than discretionary material purchases (Millar &

Thomas, 2009; Van Boven, 2005) and research has shown that interpersonal relationships are key components to happiness (Argyle, 2001). It was posited that participating in an experience with another person would presumably increase feelings of happiness because recollective memory consists of the aggregate of the experience and the interpersonal relationship. It was found, however, that interpersonal relationships do not mediate purchase types and happiness. In addition to mediating, or explaining variables, several variables that have a potential moderating influence on discretionary purchases and happiness were investigated.

The current research found the amount of happiness produced by discretionary purchases is moderated by individual differences in socioeconomic status (SES), but is not moderated by materialism or self-actualization. Kasser (2002) posits that to cope with insecurity and lower-level need satisfaction, low SES persons focus on the acquisition of possessions. Conversely, high SES persons may not have a preoccupation with lower-level needs and focus on higher-level ones such as those associated with experiential purchases. Consistent with predictions, low SES persons associated more happiness with material purchases compared to experiential. Contrary to predictions, however, experiential discretionary purchases did not make higher SES people happier. In actuality, there was no difference in amount of happiness between experiential and material purchases in persons high in SES.

Concerning the other moderating variables, it was predicted there would be differences in self-reported happiness among materialistic persons compared to non-materialistic persons and, synchronously, self-actualization would have a moderating influence between happiness and discretionary purchases. It was hypothesized that low



materialism and high self-actualization would be associated with experiential discretionary purchases because of the higher-level meaning associated with experiential purchases. It was found that neither construct was a moderating variable. That is, rates of happiness did not vary in experiential and material purchases, regardless of levels of materialism or self-actualization. Lastly, a subsequent study was conducted to determine if forced choice between purchase types created bias in results. In accordance with experiment one, there was no difference between purchase types on levels of materialism or self-actualization. Contrary to experiment one, no differences were found between purchase type and happiness, and SES did not influence happiness with purchases.

Research has demonstrated that, in general, people are happier with experiential purchases as compared to material purchases. One mediator that explains this relationship is the impact the purchase has on the self. Experiential purchases contribute more to self-concept and self-identity than material purchases. In addition, discretionary purchase types and happiness are moderated by individual differences in socioeconomic status. Persons low in socioeconomic status are happier with material purchases compared to experiential purchases, while there is no difference in purchase happiness for persons high in socioeconomic status. Contrary to predictions, interpersonal relationships do not mediate purchase type and happiness, and materialism and self-actualization are not moderating variables.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Although happiness has been discussed colloquially for millennia, until only recently has it been studied empirically. Definitions of happiness range from an emphasis on cognitive aspects such as retrospective thought (Veehoven, 1994), to emotional aspects such as feelings (Argyle, 1987). Overall, happiness has been described using many concepts including satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, and contentment (Argyle, 2001). One of the most common strategies employed by persons to increase happiness has been to increase discretionary purchases (Argyle, 2001). There has been a long-term trend of increasing discretionary income and discretionary time in most of the industrialized countries (Franco, 2004; Graham, 2000). For the most part, these increases in discretionary resources have been used by persons in order to make elective purchases to pursue happiness. A question produced by this increase is, what type of discretionary purchases produce happiness? The goal of the following studies was to examine mediating and moderating variables in relation to purchase types and happiness. Varying categories of purchases have the potential to influence levels of happiness.

#### Purchase Typologies

Several influential purchase typologies have been proposed. Piron (1991) uses the relative speed with which buying decisions occur to distinguish between planned and unplanned purchases. Planned purchases involve more thought and time consuming information pertaining to the purchase. These purchases, in turn, dictate what is thought to be a rational decision making process (Piron, 1991; Stern, 1962). Conversely, unplanned buying is a behavior in which purchases are made without an advanced

thought process and are the result of a less rational decision making method. A common idiomatic term for unplanned purchases is “impulse buying”. This typology has had a significant impact on marketing research. For example, Carter, Mills, and Donovan (2009) demonstrate that point of sale displays influence unplanned purchases more than planned purchases. In addition, Lee and Kacen (2008) found that consumer satisfaction was influenced by cultural differences. Consumers from collectivist cultures (e.g., Korea) were more satisfied with an impulse purchase than consumers from cultures that emphasized individualism.

Growing out of this distinction between planned versus unplanned purchases, market research has examined individual differences in purchase planning. Cobb and Hoyer (1986) categorize persons into a hierarchy of planners: planners, partial planners, or impulse purchasers. Planners had determined the brand and type of purchase prior to entering the store, while partial planners had decided a category of purchase with no brand intent, and impulse purchasers had not determined either. Not surprisingly, psychological considerations were more important for impulsive purchasers and, conversely, functional considerations were more important for planners.

More recently, Piron (2000) differentiates between public versus private purchases. Building on research examining conspicuous consumption, he suggests that public purchases are those that are visible to others and for that reason contain a higher social risk. Examples include clothing and cars. Private purchases are those seen primarily by the purchaser, sometimes exclusively, and have a much lower social risk. Some examples would include furniture and household items. Most of the research examining this distinction has found that image conscious consumers report more

happiness associated with public purchases, (e.g., Graeff, 1987; Ross , 1971; Bearden & Etzel, 1982).

Dhar and Wertenbroch (2000) make another major distinction between the purchase of utilitarian and hedonic goods. Utilitarian purchases involve the acquisition of objects that have a specific function or purpose (e.g., kitchen appliances or computers). Utilitarian purchases are characterized by being useful or practical. Hedonic purchases involve the acquisition of objects that produce desired sensations, such as pleasure and excitement (e.g., flowers or music). In general, hedonic purchases provide more emotional payoffs and utilitarian purchases provide more instrumental or functional payoffs. This typology has had a significant impact on marketing research examining consumer preferences. For example, Overby and Lee (2006) found that when consumers made utilitarian purchases they preferred internet retailers over more traditional retailers, and Chittur, Raghunathan, and Mahajan (2007) found in general, people prefer hedonic purchases (see Kivetz & Simonson (2002), Okada (2005), and Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann (2003) for similar findings). It is difficult, however, to apply this solely to discretionary purchases because both utilitarian and hedonic purchases could be considered either discretionary or mandatory. For example, clothing is something that must be purchased and can be seen as utilitarian; it serves to satisfy a social rule. However, clothing could be considered a hedonic purchase as well because many people acquire clothing to obtain pleasure and excitement.

In a similar typology popularized by Deaton (1980), a distinction is made between luxury and necessity purchases. Luxury items hold a higher status as not all people may obtain them, and are considered more exclusive and expensive. Further, these purchases

contain a higher level of monetary risk. Necessity purchases are those needed by everyone, and are not considered exclusive or expensive. One of the difficulties encountered in applying this typology has been dealing with the subjective nature of luxury versus necessity. Attempts to create scales designed to tap this distinction have for the most part been unsuccessful (Kemp, 1998). It seems as if one person's luxury can be another person's necessity.

Finally, Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) have conceptualized discretionary purchases into a dichotomy of either material or experiential. Material purchases have the purpose of acquiring a material object. Consequently, material purchases are something that may be touched or held and remain in the present. These purchases can be taken with a person and brought to different physical locations. Examples of material purchases are furniture, cars, and household goods (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). The most common material purchases recalled by participants in empirical studies are electronics and jewelry (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Conversely, experiential discretionary purchases are purchases that have the purpose of acquiring a life experience through participation in an event. Experiential purchases are not tangible, are episodic, and are experienced by the person for a finite amount of time. Examples of experiential purchases would include vacations, admissions to an amusement park, tickets to a concert, and dinner at a restaurant. Experiential purchases are distinguished from material purchases in terms of the goal; that is, experiential purchases have the goal of acquiring a life experience while material purchases have the goal of acquiring an object. This typology overcomes the limitations imposed by other purchase typologies by restricting purchases to those defined by the purchaser as discretionary.

The current investigation focuses on the material/experiential distinction because of its direct relevance to discretionary purchases. Two studies explored the relationship between material and experiential purchases and self-reports of happiness. Further, a number of explanations, or mediators, for these relationships are examined, and several variables that have the potential to moderate this relationship are investigated.

### *Material Purchases and Happiness*

Western culture is currently imbued with the idea that material possessions produce happiness. Strong forces in the culture promote and support this idea. The media inundates the average American with an astonishing 3000 advertisements each day (Kilbourne & Jhally, 2000). Kasser (2002) suggests the media propagates the concept of material purchases and happiness by saturating the market with images of excess. The images convey the idea that the accumulation of objects, possessions, and wealth through material purchases are the goal regarding one's worth, satisfaction, and meaningfulness in life. Not surprisingly, Americans use vast amounts of discretionary funds for the acquisition of material possessions (Franco, 2004).

Despite the ascendancy of material acquisition, persistent voices from both religious and humanistic traditions have disputed the notion that the procurement of possessions brings happiness. In fact, Erick Fromm (1976) proposed that acquiring possessions could actually inhibit happiness. Kasser's (2002) research suggests people who have low self-esteem, or one's evaluation of themselves, attempt to use material items to compensate for low self-worth and people who aspire to obtain material possessions have higher levels of depression and anxiety than those who do not.

Controversies over the effects of material possessions on happiness have inspired social scientists to scrutinize the relationship. Their work does not support the proposition that the acquisition of possessions leads to long-term happiness. For example, at the societal level, Frank (1999, 2005) examined this relation and found increases in material possessions were not associated with gains in happiness. Correspondingly, both Diener (2000) and Myers (2000) examined happiness and wealth in a number of affluent western countries and reported that there was no relationship between national wealth and self-reports of well-being. In addition, Ahuvia (2002) found within a particular country there is little difference in subjective well-being between wealthy and nonwealthy persons.

At a more ideological level, persons who placed more importance on material possessions reported less happiness and were less psychologically healthy than persons who placed less importance on possessions. For example, Kasser and Ryan (1993) investigated personal well-being in relation to purchasing behavior through the Aspiration Index. This index categorized varying types of goals including those for affiliation (family life and friends), self-acceptance (psychological growth, self-esteem), community feelings (world good), and financial success (obtaining expensive possessions). Those participants with an emphasis on financial success and possessions, compared to the other goals, did not have higher levels of psychological growth and well-being. In the revised Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), more diverse forms of materialistic values were investigated through financial success, social recognition, and appealing appearance. Consistent with previous work focusing on materialistic values, striving for financial success and obtaining expensive possessions was not associated with increases in happiness.

More recently, Kasser and Ahuvia (2002) found an increase in possessions was associated with a decrease in well-being. Many other researchers have produced similar findings (e.g., Richins & Dawson, 1992; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; and Wright & Larson, 1993). Further, research suggests that focusing on material purchases may actually lead to higher levels of depression and anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Scholars have offered an assortment of explanations for this relationship. Lyubomirsky, Tucker, and Kasri (2001) proposed a sociocultural explanation that focused on relative deprivation. Relative deprivation is the process of comparing one's standing to others and has been extensively utilized in happiness and income research (D'Ambrosio & Frick, 2006). Lyubomirsky, et al. (2001) noted that people tend to evaluate their possessions in terms of the possessions owned by other highly recognized persons, possibly demonstrated through media images. Highly recognized or famous persons tend to be wealthy and own "better" possessions that make the purchases of average persons seem inferior. Consequently, material purchases fail to produce lasting happiness. Brickman and Campbell (1971) note that as possessions increase, expectations rise. They propose that people who participate in the pursuit of material objects may find themselves on a "hedonic treadmill," in which the acquisition of possessions leads to more consumption to sustain prior levels of perceived success. Richins and Dawson (1992) suggest the satisfaction of the material object is short lived, leaving the individual wanting more. The overall outcome for this process leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. In a similar line of reasoning, Diener (2000) proposed that people habituate or adapt to wealth, decreasing the ability of new possessions to generate happiness. Recently, Tatzel (2003) offered a societal paradigm in which people are led to believe consumerism and ownership will



result in a better life; while contrasting images exist that insinuate being overly invested in material possessions is viewed as unhealthy. This paradigm may explain why people strive for the acquisition of objects but have less happiness with them. Perhaps social commentator Eric Hoffer was correct when he observed, “You can never get enough of what you don’t need to make you happy.”

### *Experiential Purchases and Happiness*

There are also strong forces in culture that promote and support the proposition that experiential purchases produce happiness. As early as the 1700’s (Hume, 1737, 1975) scholars have suggested that experiences were better than the acquisition of “worthless toys and gewgaws.” More recently experiential purchases, such as travel, have been extensively advertised in the media and it is estimated more than two trillion dollars are spent on leisure travel worldwide (Paulin, 1999). Leisure activities with a social interaction component, such as vacations or social clubs, are associated with more happiness compared to activities that do not have a social element such as watching television (Argyle, 2001). Social leisure activities satisfy motivations including social needs, close relationships, and needs for affiliation. Experiential purchases are often viewed as being more meaningful than material purchases because of their ostensible ability to contribute to self-growth and development (Kasser, 2002).

Compared to material purchases, there is much less research examining experiential purchases. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) conducted one of the few direct tests of the effects of experiential and material purchases on happiness. In a series of studies, they found that participants reported more happiness after recalling an experiential purchase than after recalling a material purchase. Specifically, participants

were asked to recall their last experiential purchase or their last material purchase with a cost of more than \$100. It was found that not only were participants happier with their experiential purchases compared to material purchases, the experiential purchase participants also thought their purchase was a better financial investment. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) observed that participants are consistently able to distinguish between experiential and material purchases and have replicated the initial findings on experiential purchases with a larger sample of participants with varying ethnic, economic, and regional backgrounds. Participants were consistently happier with experiential purchases compared to material purchases. Further, Millar and Thomas (2009), in the context of a larger investigation, have replicated Van Boven and Gilovich's finding that experiential purchases were associated with more recollective happiness than material purchases.

#### Explanations/Mediating Variables

On one hand, there is considerable evidence that discretionary material purchases do not increase happiness. On the other, there is a small but growing body of evidence that suggests experiential purchases can increase happiness. Both studies that directly compared experiential purchases and material purchases found that experiential purchases were associated with more happiness (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). There are a number of potential explanations for the stronger relationship between experiential purchases and happiness. The current investigation explored two possible explanations: impact on the self and interpersonal relationships.

#### *Impact on the Self*

Discretionary experiential purchases may be more central to positive self-identity than discretionary material purchases. Personal self-concept is made-up of experiences.

When one describes life it tends to be a series of experiences (e.g., obtained degree, fell in love, had children). Although purchases are often used to signal to others elements of one's identity, they tend not be incorporated into descriptions of the self (Belk, 1988). The acquisition of experiences may lead a person to view the self more favorably due to positive stereotypes associated with experiential people. Persons who are primarily interested in the acquisition of material objects are often viewed as superficial and unintelligent due to the lower-level meaning of material purchases. Alternatively, there is a positive stereotype associated with persons who pursue life experiences. Person who seek experiences are often viewed as learned or cultured because of the higher-level meaning (Van Boven, 2005).

Further, experiential purchases may satisfy the personal needs of self-actualization and personal growth more than material acquisitions (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Self-growth leads to happiness. The highest order need is the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Numerous researchers have found that happiness is associated with self-actualization (e.g., French & Joseph, 1999; Vitterso, 2004). Self-actualized persons have frequent peak experiences, and greater levels of morality and creativity, which is characterized by profound happiness (Maslow 1962). There is evidence linking creative action with positive states. For example, creative art experiences lead to more self-growth (Manheim, 1998) and creative activity reduces depression (Reynold, 2000). In sum, the humanistic tradition indicates that creative activity has an impact on the self and that this impact leads to well-being and happiness. If experiential purchases contribute to a positive self-concept and self-actualization then

it is likely that experiential purchases will be associated with positive emotions such as happiness.

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

Discretionary experiential purchases may foster more social contact than discretionary material purchases, i.e., experiences are more likely to involve significant interactions with other persons. In the literature examining purchases and happiness, the most commonly described experiences are dating, dining, and dancing purchases, whereas the most commonly described material purchases are clothes, jewelry, and electronics (Van Boven, 2005). Each of the commonly referred to experiential purchases requires some form of social interaction. Although purchasing clothes may involve other persons, the primary feature of an experiential encounter such as dating is interacting with another person. It is possible that most experiential purchases by their nature require social interaction.

A number of lines of research have demonstrated that social interaction is closely associated with life satisfaction and positive affect. For example, many researchers have found that increases in social interactions are associated with increases in happiness (e.g., Argyle, 1987; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Kasser, 2002; Oishi & Koo, 2008). In fact, Argyle (2001) suggests that social relationships have the greatest single effect on happiness. The relationship between happiness and social interactions is not surprising because social interactions allow persons to meet a number of fundamental needs (Campbell, 1976; Argyle & Furnham, 1982). Thus, experiential purchases, by stimulating interpersonal interaction, may produce more happiness than material purchases.

Impact on the self and interpersonal relationships have the potential to act as mediating variables. At this point, it is tempting to simply conclude that experiential purchases will be associated with more self-reported happiness than material purchases due to possible mediating mechanisms. This would, however, overlook a number of variables that have the potential to enact a moderating role between these discretionary purchases and happiness.

### Moderating Variables

Although there is small body of evidence that experiential purchases are associated with more happiness than material purchases, there is reason to believe that a number of variables may moderate the relationship, i.e., there are factors that might make the relationship between experiential purchases and happiness either stronger or weaker. These variables include socioeconomic status (SES), materialism, and self-actualization.

#### *Socioeconomic Status*

*Socioeconomic status.* Socioeconomic status (SES) most often refers to a person's position within a hierarchical social structure. Mirowsky and Ross (2003) suggest SES is a distribution in relation to others based on opportunity, prosperity, and standing. In the extant literature, SES is conceptualized as a psychosocial variable consisting of components of education, income, occupation, and wealth (Rindfleish, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). These variables are correlated and combine to define a person's position in the hierarchy.

Characteristics of high SES persons include college education, high-income occupations, and little economic hardship (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). SES influences the food people eat, hobbies they participate in, and can even have an impact on health

(Dunn, Veenstra, & Ross, 2006). Not surprisingly, high SES is also related to a number of psychological variables such as intelligence (Colom & Fores-Mendoza, 2007) and cognitive decline (Czernochowski, Fabiani, & Friedman, 2008). It may be that a college education associated with high SES creates employment opportunities and reduces unemployment (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003) and its negative psychological effects (Argyle, 2001). Further, more education allows for better quality of occupation which includes characteristics such as creativity, less supervision, continued learning, and development (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). Overall, occupational quality gives the opportunity for rewarding experiences, accomplishments, and possible self-expression. A rewarding occupation facilitates mental abilities (Reynolds & Ross, 1998).

*Socioeconomic status and happiness.* The research examining materialism indicates that striving for wealth does not produce happiness. It is possible, however, that the actual attainment of wealth and status produces happiness. Overall, the research examining the psychological consequences of SES has produced inconsistent results. Some research has indicated that people high in SES report higher levels of positive psychological outcomes such as happiness and life satisfaction compared to people low in SES (Argyle, 1987; Myers & Diener, 1995; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). Other research has indicated that little to no relationship between income and feelings of well-being or happiness (Ahuvia & Friedman, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Diener, 2000; Myers, 2000; Oishi et al., 1999; Oropesa, 1995; Richins & Rudmin, 1994; Schyns, 1998, 2000).

Ryan and Deci (2001) suggest that once certain levels of wealth have been obtained, the feelings of security and stability have been met. At this point, more wealth adds little to increase well-being. Instead, the attainment of higher-level needs, such as

psychological needs, should be more satisfying. Consistent with this reasoning, Inglehart and Klingemann (2000) found that happiness levels tend to be higher when average levels of income are high. Above a certain level of income, however, happiness ceases to increase.

*Moderating effect of SES on reactions to discretionary activities.* Socioeconomic status may moderate the effects of discretionary purchases on happiness. Most theorizing and data indicate that persons low in SES would be happier with material purchases compared to persons higher in SES. Kasser (2002) posits that low SES leads to insecurity due to the worry and preoccupation with basic needs such as physical safety and comfort. It is possible that low SES persons cope with this insecurity by focusing on the acquisition of possessions. Further, it is possible that low SES persons use possessions as a means of improving their SES standing. Consistent with this, Sangkhawasi and Johri (2007) have found that people with lower incomes acquire material possessions to gain the perception of higher status. Further, persons low in SES may be happier with purchases because they are less habituated to material possessions (i.e., they have made fewer of these purchases than high SES persons). Consequently, the purchased items may have higher levels of novelty and value to low SES persons.

### *Materialism*

*Materialism.* Individual differences in materialism have garnered the attention of many researchers (e.g., Belk, 1985; Ger & Belk, 1996; Inglehart, 1990; Richins, 1994), and have been conceptualized in a variety of different ways. For example, Belk (1985) suggests that materialists have three distinct characteristics. Materialists envy the possessions of others, are low in generosity towards others, and are concerned about the

possibility of others taking their possessions. Alternatively, Inglehart and Klingemann (2000), drawing on Maslow (1987), characterized materialists as persons who emphasize lower-order needs such as physical safety and comfort over higher order needs associated with self-expression. Similarly, Kasser (2002) proposed that materialistic individuals tend to concentrate on obtaining possessions at the expense of fulfilling intrinsic needs such as the need for affiliation.

The most prominent and utilized conceptualization of materialism in the psychological literature has been offered by Richins and Dawson (1992). They propose that materialism involves three elements. First, materialists are characterized by acquisition centrality. That is, materialists put possessions and their acquisition at the center of their lives so that the pursuit of possessions is what gives them meaning. Second, materialists use acquisition as a means in which to pursue happiness. That is, for materialists the possession provides the greatest source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Third, materialists use possessions to define success. That is, materialist's evaluation of their own success and other person's success is based on the amounts and value of accumulated possessions. Consistent with their reasoning, Richins and his colleagues have found that persons high in materialism emphasize accumulating desirable possessions, are more likely to spend money on themselves than friends, and are less concerned about others (Hirsh & Dolderman, 2007; Richins, 1994; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

*Materialism and happiness.* A great deal of research has explored the psychological consequences of a materialistic orientation (Belk, 1985; Ger & Belk, 1996; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Most of this research is consistent with the view that



materialistic persons are less happy than non-materialistic persons. Belk (1985) found people who are high on materialistic traits describe themselves as less happy compared to those low on these materialistic traits. Similarly, Hellevik (2003) found a concentration on material possessions has a negative effect on self-reported happiness (see Sirgy (1998), Van Boven (2000), and Wright and Larson (1993) for similar findings). Further, many studies have found that materialistic persons report low levels of life satisfaction (e.g., Piko, 2006; Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001). Studies directly measuring happiness produced similar results. At a societal level, both Diener (2000) and Myers (2000) found increases in materialism were associated with decreases in self-reported happiness and subjective well-being across a number of nations. In addition, materialism is associated with a general decrease in psychological health. For example, Rose (2007) found materialistic values are associated with several adverse outcomes such as narcissism and compulsive buying.

Although it seems well established that a materialistic orientation reduces happiness, less is known about the processes that cause this relationship. In an effort to understand this relationship, scholars have proposed a number of tentative mechanisms. For example, Christopher, Lasane, Troisis and Park (2007) proposed that materialists have a great fear of negative evaluation because there is always a discrepancy between what one owns and would like to own. Consequently, materialists engage in defensive self-presentation that limit self-development. Sirgy (1998) suggests that materialists have wealth goals that are unrealistically high. These unrealistic goals are not attained, causing materialists to have more dissatisfaction with their level of wealth than non-materialists. This dissatisfaction bleeds over to cause a general unhappiness. Tatzel (2003) suggests

that persons receive mixed messages about the value of material objects. On one hand, they are led to believe consumerism and ownership will result in a better life while on the other hand they receive messages that material objects should be valued less than things like love or intelligence. These conflicting messages may lead people to strive for the acquisition of objects but have less happiness with them.

Kasser (2002) theorized that materialists organize their lives around extrinsic goals and thus have less energy to pursue intrinsic goals. Extrinsic goals usually involve the desire for approval and admiration from others and intrinsic goals focus on the self and the opportunity for self-growth. According to Kasser and Ryan (1996), materialists attempt to obtain the approval of others by concentrating on financial success. Focusing on extrinsic goals is associated with psychological distress and negatively related to well-being, whereas focusing in intrinsic goals is related positively to well-being.

In a similar line of reasoning, Myers suggests that the pursuit of material goals may cause other social and emotional goals to go unmet (Myers, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995). A preoccupation with objects resulting in materialism leaves fewer resources such as time, effort, and money available to pursue goals that are more rewarding such as interpersonal relationships (Argyle, 2001). Consistent with this reasoning, Lane (2000) has demonstrated that people who are materialistic sacrifice potential interpersonal relationships, which are one of the key components to happiness.

*Moderating effect of materialism to discretionary activities.* It seems plausible that the amount of happiness produced by discretionary activity would be moderated by individual differences in materialism. Discretionary material purchases are likely to be associated with more self-reported happiness among materialistic persons than non-

materialistic persons. Materialistic persons may use the pursuit of material possessions as a means by which they attempt to obtain happiness, even though it might not produce high levels of happiness. Alternatively, persons lower in materialism who place less value on discretionary material purchases may be more likely to associate other types of discretionary activity (experiential purchases) with happiness. Non-materialistic persons may place more value and obtain more satisfaction from activities that satisfy higher order needs such as social contact and self-expression.

### *Self-Actualization*

*Self-actualization.* One of the most influential theories in humanistic psychology proposed by Maslow (1968, 1987) suggests a hierarchy of needs motivates persons. The needs in this hierarchy in ascending order consist of physiological, safety/security needs, social needs, ego/esteem needs, and self-actualization. According to the model, usually persons need to fulfill low order needs before progressing to high order needs. That is, persons will remain in their position until lower level needs are met, at which point they will ascend the hierarchy. The highest order need is the need for self-actualization. Self-actualization is the need or motivation for self-fulfillment and the tendency to maximize self-potential (Maslow, 1943). People who are self-actualized demonstrate their level in the hierarchy through greater levels of morality, creativity, and peak experiences.

There are several misconceptions regarding the needs hierarchy and self-actualized persons. First, the hierarchy of needs is person dependent. The hierarchy does not demonstrate a linear relationship such that more safety will lead to more self-actualization (Sassoon, 1988). Once a certain level of need has been met, ascendancy up the hierarchy is possible but not inevitable. There are people who have their lower level

needs met but do not move to a higher level in the hierarchy. Sassoon suggests people who do not move to higher levels, even though their needs are met, are fixated on lower level needs. Also, needs are relative. One person may require a higher level of safety compared to another in order to meet the requirements to ascend the hierarchy (Sassoon, 1988). Lastly, one misconception is that of self-actualized persons and perfection. In fact, being self-actualized does not make the consummate person and they are susceptible to human flaws (Sassoon, 1988). Persons demonstrating self-actualization are not superhuman or superior over others; they simply realize and utilize their potential to the maximum extent.

*Self-actualization and happiness.* Numerous researchers have found that happiness is associated with self-actualization (e.g., French & Joseph, 1999; Vitterso, 2004) and a number of explanations have been offered for this association. Sassoon (1988) notes that self-actualized people tend to have more close friends than non self-actualized. They derive happiness by spending time cultivating close interpersonal relationships and these interpersonal relationships add to the feeling of general happiness. Rogers (1961, 1980) posits that self-actualization is associated with an openness to experiences and that self-actualizers seek out challenging situations and obtain enjoyment from them. Consistent with this reasoning both Sassoon (1988) and Vitterso (2004) found openness to experiences was related to happiness. Maslow (1987) proposed that self-actualized persons experience more peak and optimal experiences that ultimately lead to well-being and happiness. Building on Maslow, Csikszentmihalyi (2000) uses the construct of flow to describe peak experiences. A flow experience occurs when a person

is absorbed in a challenging activity and occurs more in self-actualized persons.

Individuals who experience more flow experiences report higher levels of happiness.

*Moderating effect of self-actualization to discretionary activities.* Self-actualization seems likely to moderate the relation between happiness and discretionary purchases. Self-actualized persons have been able to meet their basic needs (physiological, safety, esteem) and are most likely to be focused on meeting higher order needs. For the most part, material purchases are related more to lower order needs. That is, material objects can readily satisfy physiological needs such as hunger, or an esteem need such as prestige. However, it is more difficult for material objects to meet self-actualization needs involving self-development and self-fulfillment. Alternatively, experiential purchases may relate more to higher order needs such as self-actualization. For example, Pearce (1982) found that experiential purchases like vacations are often viewed as leading to self-development. It may be that self-actualized persons associate more happiness with experiential purchases and non self-actualized persons associate more happiness with material purchases.

### Hypotheses

The current research study will examine six hypotheses. To begin, experiential purchases will produce more self-reported happiness compared to material purchases. Second and third, impact on the self and interpersonal relationships will mediate the relationship between purchase type and happiness, respectively. Fourth, SES will moderate the relationship between purchase type and happiness. Specifically, persons lower in SES will report more happiness with material purchases compared to experiential purchases; persons higher in SES will report more happiness with

experiential purchases compared to material purchases. Fifth, materialism will moderate the relationship between purchase type and happiness. Specifically, persons higher in materialism will report more happiness with material purchases compared to experiential purchases; persons lower in materialism will report more happiness with experiential purchases compared to material purchases. Lastly, self-actualization will moderate the relationship between purchase type and happiness. Specifically, persons higher in self-actualization will report more happiness with experiential purchases compared to material purchases; persons lower in self-actualization will report more happiness with material purchases compared to experiential purchases. To test these hypotheses an empirical research design was utilized.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Experiment 1

##### *Participants*

Participants were 80 females and males recruited from undergraduates at a large university located in the southwestern United States. The sample size was determined by using a minimum requirement of 10 cases per variable (Mitchell, 1993; Stevens, 1996; Kline, 1998; Thompson, 2000); and a power analysis indicated a similar but smaller sample size is required for hierarchical regression analyses with a large estimated effect size of .35, power level of .80, and an alpha level of .05. The larger required sample size was utilized for this study. Participants read a paragraph advertizing the study on the web-based Psychology Department Subject Pool (see Appendix 1 for the advertisement). Participants received no monetary compensation and the student participants received class credit in exchange for participation.

##### *Procedure*

The experimenter followed a script (see Appendix 2 for the script) to inform the participants that the purpose of the study is to explore his/her reaction to a recent life event. Participants were told that all of their responses would be anonymous. Random assignment methodology was utilized to distribute participants to either the material purchase or experiential purchase conditions. Participants read and signed an informed consent indicating they understood the cost to benefit ratio of participating in the research study. There was an attrition rate of zero once participants entered the laboratory, in that no participants declined to participate once reading the informed consent, and no

participants chose to terminate the experiment before its end (i.e. all participants filled-out the questionnaire).

*Manipulation.* The experimenter followed the script for either the experiential or material purchase condition (see Appendix 2 for script). In the material purchase condition, the instructions asked the participants to recall their most recent material purchase for more than \$100. That is, think about a recent discretionary purchase of an object that you obtained and kept in your possession. In the experiential purchase condition, the instructions asked the participants to recall their most recent experiential purchase for more than \$100 where the primary purpose of the purchase was to acquire a life experience. That is, think about some recent discretionary activity you paid to participate in (see Appendix 3 for the purchase paragraphs). The directions in this study for the purchase conditions were modeled from Van Boven and Gilovich (2003). In each of the conditions after recalling an event, the participants were asked to write down a description of the purchase.

### *Measures*

*Happiness measures.* After the participants completed the written description of the event, the instructions asked them to complete the questionnaire designed to measure happiness (see Appendix 4 for the questionnaire). Although there are many different ways to measure happiness, the most common way to measure the construct is through self-report surveys (Kalmijn & Veenhoven, 2005; Abdel-Kahlek, 2006, 1998). For example, Argyle (2001) used a single-item to measure happiness and Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1997) use four items in the Subjective Happiness Scale. In the current study, happiness created by the purchase, or the dependent variable, was measured with three



continuous Likert-type scales. On the first scale participants were asked to indicate how happy the purchase made them feel on a nine-point scale with end-points of 1 (*not happy*) and 9 (*very happy*). On the second scale participants were then asked to indicate how much the event contributed to their happiness, and on a third scale whether they would have been more happy doing something else. This method has shown to be a reliable and valid way to measure happiness in regards to purchase typologies and allowed for a check of internal consistency (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

*Mediating variables measures.* The two mediating variables, impact on the self and interpersonal relationships, were measured with self-report scales. The order of the two scales were counter balanced. The degree to which the purchase was associated with impacts on the self was measured on scales with end points of 1 (*no contribution to the self*) and 9 (*contributes highly to the self*). On the scales participants were asked how much the purchase contributed to their self-concept which included their self-image, how important the purchase was to their self-growth, how important the purchase was to them as a person, how meaningful the purchase was to them, and if the purchase made them feel more positive about themselves. Regarding the other mediating variable, the degree to which the purchase was associated with interpersonal relationships, was measured on three nine-point scales with end-points of 1 (*no interactions*) and 9 (*many interactions*). On the first scale participants were asked to indicate how much time was spent with another person in relation to the purchase, on the second scale participants indicated how much the purchase fostered a relationship with another person, and the third scale asked how much the purchase contributed to conversation and/or discussions with others.

*Moderating variables measures.* Participants were asked to complete three measures designed to determine the moderating variables. This included continuous variable measures of SES, materialism, and self-actualization. The order of the scales were counterbalanced.

SES is conceptualized as a psychosocial variable consisting of components of education, income, occupation, and wealth (Rindfleish, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). In the current study, six items were used to measure SES (see Appendix 4). To begin, participants were asked to indicate maternal and paternal educational attainment on separate scales with end points ranging from 1 (*no school*) to 9 (*completed graduate degree*). Third, participants were asked to indicate their perceived wealth on a scale asking their family wealth compared to the average American family at age 16, with endpoints ranging from 1 (*lowest wealth*) and 9 (*highest wealth*). Perceived wealth was explored to avoid potential recall problems regarding a specific dollar amount. Perceived wealth has been found to be a better predictor than more objective dollar measures (Ghiselli, 1964; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Rindfleish, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997). Fourth, SES was determined by housing status. Specifically, participants were asked their housing status compared to the average American family at age 16 with endpoints ranging from 1 the (*lowest status*) and 9 (*highest status*). Concurrently, in order to obtain a construct of discretionary SES, the fifth and six items asked participants how much of their own income consists of discretionary funds with endpoints ranging from 1 (*low amount*) to 9 (*high amount*), and how much of their parents' income consists of discretionary funds with the same endpoints, respectively.

Materialism was measured using Richins and Dawson's Trait Materialism Scale (1992). This 18-item scale identifies the extent to which persons emphasize the importance of acquiring possessions over accomplishing other life goals (Richins & Dawson, 1992) on dimensions of success, centrality, and happiness. The scale has been widely used and has adequate psychometric properties (Kilbourne, Grunhagen, & Foley, 2004; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

Self-actualization was measured using the Short Index of Self-Actualization. This is a widely used 15-item self-report measure of self-actualization, which asks about several self-actualization domains including emotions, responses to failure, cognition, and love (Jones & Crandall, 1986). Crandall and Jones (1991) found that the measure has good test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and construct validity. Self-actualization was conceptualized as a personality trait, while the measures for impacts on the self were based specifically around the purchase itself. Self-actualization was envisioned with internal disposition characterization while impacts to the self were of an external nature influenced by the purchase.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Experiment 1

To investigate the impact of the type of purchase on self-reports of happiness, a happiness measure was created by summing the participant's responses to the three questions of happiness associated with the purchase and analyzed for internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .62$ ). This happiness measure was analyzed in a one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential purchase or material purchase) analysis of variance (ANOVA). As predicted and consistent with past research, a significant effect for Purchase Type was obtained,  $F(1, 78) = 7.99, p < .01$ . Experiential purchases were associated with more retrospective reports of happiness ( $M = 7.50$ ) than material purchases ( $M = 6.62$ ), (see Figure 1).

#### *Mediators*

*Mediating role of impact on the self.* It was demonstrated in the first analysis that happiness levels differ on purchase type. A mediation analysis was conducted to explore whether impacts on the self mediate the relationship between the type of purchase and happiness. An impacts on the self measure was created by summing each participant's responses to the questions related to the construct (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). At least three conditions must be met to demonstrate mediation: (a) the independent variable (Purchase Type) must be related to the dependent variable (Happiness), (b) the mediator (Impact on the Self) must relate to the independent variable (Purchase Type), and (c) the relationship between the independent variable (Purchase Type) and the dependent variable (Happiness) must be significantly reduced when the effects of the mediator (Impact on

the Self) are removed, see Baron and Kenny (1986) for a discussion of analytic strategies associated with mediation. To establish mediational influence, a path model was constructed by performing three regression analyses. First, Happiness was regressed on the Purchase Type. As expected and consistent with the original ANOVA, Purchase Type was significantly related to Happiness (*standardized beta* = .31,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Second, Impact on the Self was regressed on Happiness and, again as predicted, there was a significant association, (*standardized beta* = .42,  $t = 4.08$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Third, Happiness was regressed on both Impact on the Self and Purchase Type. In this analysis, the effects of the mediator (Impact on the Self) are removed from the relationship between the independent variable (Purchase Type) and the dependent variable (Happiness). As predicted when the effects of the mediator (Impact on the Self) were controlled for, the relationship between the Type of Purchase and Happiness became nonsignificant (*standardized beta* = .10,  $t = -.82$ ,  $p = .42$ ). A Sobel's Test indicated the beta from this equation (*standardized beta* = .10) was significantly smaller than the beta for Purchase Type when the mediator was not controlled for (*standardized beta* = .31,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (see Figure 2), (Sobel's Test,  $Z = 2.63$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

In addition, a subsequent one-factor (Purchase Type: experiential or material) ANOVA was conducted to test the differences between Impact on the Self between experiential and material purchases. It was predicted that Impact on the Self would be associated with experiential purchases more than material purchases. Consistent with this prediction, there was a statistically significant difference between Purchase Types on Impact on the Self,  $F(1, 78) = 32.44$ ,  $p < .0001$ , with experiential purchases ( $M = 6.94$ )

having a higher propensity to associate with Impact on the Self compared to material purchases ( $M = 4.57$ ).

*Mediating role of interpersonal relationships.* An interpersonal relationships measure was created by summing each participant's responses to the questions related to the construct (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ). A mediation analysis was conducted to explore whether interpersonal relationships mediate the relationship between the type of purchase and happiness. As with the first examination, the same analytic strategy suggested by Baron and Kenney (1986) was employed to test for mediation. Once more, to demonstrate mediation (a) the independent variable (Purchase Type) must relate to the dependent variable (Happiness), (b) the mediator (Interpersonal Relationships) must relate to the independent variable (Purchase Type), and (c) the relationship between the independent variable (Purchase Type) and the dependent variable (Happiness) must be significantly reduced when the effects of the mediator (Interpersonal Relationships) are removed. First, Happiness was regressed on the Purchase Type. As expected and consistent with the original ANOVA, Purchase Type was significantly related to Happiness (*standardized beta* = .31,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Second, there was a significant relationship between the mediator (Interpersonal Relationships) and Happiness (*standardized beta* = .26,  $t = 2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Third, Happiness was regressed on both Interpersonal Relationships and Purchase Type. In this analysis, the effects of the mediator (Interpersonal Relationships) are removed from the relationship between the independent variable (Purchase Type) and the dependent variable (Happiness). When the effects of the mediator (Interpersonal Relationships) were controlled for, the relationship between the Type of Purchase and Happiness remained significant (*standardized beta* =

.24,  $t = 2.11$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The beta from this equation (*standardized beta* = .24) was not significantly smaller than the beta for Purchase Type when the mediator was not controlled for (*standardized beta* = .31,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (see Figure 3), (Sobel's Test,  $Z = 1.37$ ,  $p = .17$ ), indicating that Interpersonal Relationships were not a mediator between Purchase Type and Happiness.

However, a subsequent one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential or material) ANOVA was conducted to test the differences between Interpersonal Relationships and Purchase Types. It was predicted that the experiential purchases would be associated more with Interpersonal Relationships compared to material purchases. Consistent with this prediction, there was a statistically significant difference between Purchase Types on Interpersonal Relationships,  $F(1, 78) = 11.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , with experiential purchases having a higher level of association ( $M = 6.58$ ) with interpersonal relationships compared to material purchases ( $M = 4.83$ ).

### *Moderators*

*Moderating role of SES on happiness.* It was hypothesized that SES would moderate the relationship between the type of purchase and happiness. A SES measure was created by summing each participant's responses to the questions related to SES (Chronbach alpha = .61). It was expected that experiential purchases would produce more happiness than material purchases in persons high in SES, and material purchases would produce more happiness than experiential purchases in persons low in SES. To test this hypothesis, a three-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed in which Purchase Type, then SES scores, and then the interaction of Purchase Type and SES were added into the equation (See Aiken and West (1991) for an explanation of the procedure).

It was predicted that the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by SES) would produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model. Consistent with expectations, the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by SES) produced a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model, *standardized beta* = -1.41,  $t = -2.89$ ,  $p < .005$ , *R square* change = .09,  $p < .005$ , (see Table 3). The interaction of Purchase Type and SES was probed by examining the values for each of the two groups when SES was high (1 standard deviation (SD) above the mean = 6.05) and when SES was low (1 SD below the mean = 3.89), (See Aiken and West (1991) for an explanation of the procedure). It was predicted that persons high in SES would report more happiness associated with experiential purchases than material purchases, and with persons low in SES more happiness would be associated with material purchases compared to the experiential purchases. There was a statistically significant difference in low SES persons on purchase happiness, *standardized beta* = -1.53,  $t = -4.92$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Persons low in SES reported more happiness with material purchases ( $M = 8.33$ ) than experiential purchases ( $M = 5.27$ ). Contrary to expectations, there was no difference in high SES persons on purchase happiness (*standardized beta* = .194,  $t = .59$ ,  $p = .57$ ). That is, persons high in SES did not report more happiness associated with experiential purchases ( $M = 8.00$ ) than material purchases ( $M = 7.67$ ), (see Figure 4).

*Moderating role of materialism on happiness.* It was also hypothesized that materialism would moderate the relationship between the type of purchase and happiness. A materialism measure was created by summing each participant's responses to the questions related to materialism (Cronbach's alpha = .91). It was expected that material purchases would produce more happiness than experiential purchases in persons high in



materialism, and that experiential purchases would produce more happiness with persons low in materialism. To test this hypothesis, a three-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed in which Purchase Type, then Materialism scores, and then the interaction of Purchase Type and Materialism were added into the equation. It was predicted that the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by Materialism) would produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model. Contrary to expectations, the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by Materialism) did not produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model (*standardized beta* = .21, *t* = .57, *p* = .573, see Table 4), indicating Materialism was not a moderator between Purchase Type and Happiness. The interaction was not investigated further due to the lack of statistical significance in the interaction of Purchase Type and Materialism.

*Moderating role of self-actualization on happiness.* Further, it was hypothesized that self-actualization would moderate the relationship between the type of purchase and happiness. A self-actualization measure was created by summing each participant's responses to the questions related to self-actualization (Cronbach's alpha = .69). It was predicted that with self-actualized persons, experiential purchases would lead to more happiness than material purchases and this occurrence would be reversed for those low in self-actualization. To investigate this hypothesis, a three-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed in which Purchase Type, then Self-Actualization scores, and then the interaction of Purchase Type and Self-Actualization were added into the equation. It was expected that the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by Self-Actualization) would produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model. Contrary to expectations, the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by

Self-Actualization) did not produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model (*standardized beta* = .37, *t* = .54, *p* = .592, see Table 5), indicating Self-Actualization was not a moderator between Purchase Type and Happiness. The interaction was not examined further due to the lack of statistical significance in the interaction of Purchase Type and Self-Actualization.

#### *Control Analyses*

*Money spent.* An analysis was performed to examine the amount of money spent by participants on the reported purchases. The amount of money spent was analyzed in a separate one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential or material) ANOVA. While approaching significance, there was not a statistically significant difference between the conditions for money spent on the purchase,  $F(1, 78) = 3.15, p = .08$ , with the mean of experiential purchases being more ( $M = 634.48$ ) than the mean of the material purchases ( $M = 369.95$ ).

*SES between groups.* An analysis was performed to examine the differences of SES between participants on purchase type. SES was analyzed in a separate one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential or material) ANOVA. There was not a statistically significant difference between the conditions for SES,  $F(1, 78) = .92, p = .34$ , indicating there were no inherent differences between the groups on SES and results can be extrapolated to the experimental conditions.

*Materialism between groups.* An analysis was performed to examine the amount of materialism of participants between purchase types. Materialism was analyzed in a separate one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential or material) ANOVA. There was not a statistically significant difference between the conditions for Materialism,  $F(1, 78) = .33$ ,

$p = .57$ , indicating there were no inherent differences between the groups on materialism and results can be inferred to the experimental conditions.

*Self-Actualization between groups.* An analysis was performed to examine the amount of self-actualization of participants between purchase types. Self-Actualization was analyzed in a separate one-factor (Purchase Type: Experiential or material) ANOVA. There was not a statistically significant difference between the conditions for Self-Actualization,  $F(1, 78) = .41, p = .52$ , indicating there were no inherent differences between the groups on self-actualization and results can be supposed to the experimental conditions.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Experiment 1

Substantiating results from past research (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and supporting the first hypothesis, the current study found experiential purchases were associated with more happiness than material purchases. In addition, support for the second hypothesis was found on the meditational role of impact on the self between purchase type and happiness. That is, the relationship between happiness and the type of purchase was reduced when impact on the self was removed. There is a positive association for those who are cultured and intelligent (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Experiential purchases facilitate the growth and development of these constructs by containing higher-level rewards. The higher-level intrinsic reward to the self, accompanied by an experiential purchase, gives persons greater happiness compared to a material purchase. For this reason, impacts to the self were associated with experiential purchases more than material purchases. Alternatively, little support was found for the third hypothesis on the mediating role of interpersonal relationships. There are several possible reasons for this failure.

First, participants may have recalled specific experiential purchases that do not require social interaction. One such example of an experiential purchase that does not require social interaction, though by nature contact may be an ancillary consequence, is education. Education is not tangible, and therefore cannot be construed as a material purchase. Concurrently, education does not require social interaction, although it is often

a byproduct. Participants reported educational related purchases (i.e. tuition, courses) 13.9% of the time, which may have influenced results.

Second, it may be that while interpersonal relationships do not mediate the relationship between happiness and purchase type, interpersonal relationships are simply associated with experiential purchases more than material purchases. That is, mediation is a more powerful way in which to examine variables because it allows for a causal explanation. The current study found interpersonal relationships were associated with experiential purchases more often than material, but were not a causal explanation (mediator) for the finding. The social interactions with others during experiential purchases have an influence on happiness, but do not explain the relation between happiness and purchases. In the same vein, perhaps interpersonal relationships should not be investigated as a mediator, but as a moderator instead. The valence of the interaction could influence whether interpersonal relationships would increase or decrease happiness. For example, happiness with a family vacation may be contingent upon the quality of the social interaction. A vacation consisting of contention would result in lower levels of happiness compared to one with few arguments. In this aspect, interpersonal relationships would be considered a moderator because the construct has the potential to make the relation between purchase type and happiness either stronger or weaker.

A third reason for the current results regarding interpersonal relationships may be that the construct is not as important to happiness with purchases as happiness in general. Interpersonal relationships are a key indicator to overall happiness (Argyle, 2001, 1987), but regarding specific purchase types, may be less important. That is, perhaps experiential purchases do not foster interpersonal relationships to the extent posited. One

reason being, in experiential purchases the focus is on the activity as it relates to hedonic factors and not on the social interaction. For example, in a dating scenario, perhaps persons are focused on their own abilities, appearance, or perceived intelligence, and not on the interaction with the other person. Research has shown persons often employ an illusory self-perception mechanism (Gilovich, Medvec, & Savitsky, 2000); in which persons believe much more attention is being given toward their behavior and attributes than what is occurring in actuality. It may be an inaccurate supposition that the interpersonal relationship is the primary focal point.

### *Moderators*

Socioeconomic status (SES) was found to be a moderator for purchase type and happiness, giving support to the fourth hypothesis. Persons low in SES reported more happiness with material purchases than experiential purchases. This finding corresponds with both theoretical postulations and previous research. Specifically, persons low in SES have a preoccupation with material possessions (Kasser, 2002). This may occur because the item is used as a coping mechanism or because of less habituation to material objects (i.e., they have made fewer of these purchases than high SES persons). Consequently, the purchased items may have higher levels of novelty and value to low SES persons. Further, it is possible that as a means of improving their SES position, low SES persons use purchase behavior. Supporting this conjecture, Sangkawasi and Johri (2007) have found that people with lower incomes acquire material possessions to elevate the views of others regarding their standing.

Contrary to expectations, there was no difference in high SES persons on purchase happiness. That is, persons high in SES did not report more happiness

associated with experiential purchases than material purchases. One reason for this occurrence may be high SES persons are happy with any purchase, regardless of type, because of less preoccupation or worry in general. Specifically, one component of SES is a person's standing in the social hierarchy from an educational standpoint (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003). It may be that the education associated with high SES creates employment opportunities and reduces personal economic decline (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003) and its adverse psychological effects (Argyle, 2001). Less worry about finances and employment would lead to less worry about life in general and facilitate happiness with purchases, regardless of type. The current study did not measure trait happiness to test this postulation, however, the overall happiness with purchases was higher for persons high in SES ( $M = 7.84$ ) as compared to low SES persons ( $M = 6.80$ ). Further research is needed to explicate the causal mechanisms in the relationship between SES standing and purchase happiness for explanatory purposes, due to the evident influence SES contains.

Contradicting expectations, materialism did not moderate the relationship between happiness and purchase type. Persons both high and low in materialism were happier with their experiential purchases compared to material purchases. Potentially, a social desirability effect obscured this relationship. There is a negative stereotype associated with persons who avariciously pursue the accumulation of material objects (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Nickerson et al., 1997). Persons who are primarily interested in the acquisition of material objects are often viewed as superficial and unintelligent due to the low-level meaning of material purchases. Alternatively, there is a positive stereotype associated with persons who pursue life experiences. Persons who seek experiences are often viewed as learned or cultured because of the higher-level meaning

(Van Boven, 2005). Persons high in materialism may assert they are not happy with their material purchases, even though they have the propensity to desire objects. This may be done to establish intelligence in the eyes of peers, experimenters, or society. There is considerable evidence that social desirability effects can lead to this type of response distortion (Diener, 1984; Holtgraves, 2004).

The last variable examined, self-actualization, was determined not to be a moderator between purchase type and happiness. It was reasoned that persons who are self-actualized are most focused on meeting higher order needs. In general, material purchases are associated with lower order needs. It is more difficult for material objects to meet self-actualization needs involving self-fulfillment. Alternatively, experiential purchases relate more to higher order needs such as self-actualization, and thus it was predicted self-actualized persons would be happier with experiential purchases. Once more, these predictions and the sixth hypothesis were not supported. One reason for the results in the current study may be sample bias. Obtaining a group of people who have, at the very least, the potential to self-actualize is difficult in many circumstances (Maslow, 1968, 1971, 1987), albeit in a sample of introductory psychology students who may not have had a vast amount or variety of experiences. Variability in self-actualization may not have been great enough between participants to demonstrate an effect. Giving credence to this premise, an analysis of the descriptive statistics demonstrates a mean, median, and mode of around 6 out of 9 (6.11, 6.21, and 6, respectively) with little variance (.998) and a small standard deviation (.999). Further, a control analysis found there was no difference between the experiential purchase condition and the material purchase condition on levels of self-actualization. These analyses indicate there may not



have been enough variability between any of the participants, not just the conditions, to demonstrate an effect. One way to overcome this obstacle is to choose a sample in which self-actualization is more likely to occur than introductory psychology students, and then subsequently compare the groups. Other potential samples to examine for future research would include professors, writers, or persons from community groups associated with creative aspects, all of which are potentially more commonly related with self-actualization (Maslow, 1967).

#### *Forced Choice Bias*

Another possible explanation for the overall results is a problem with forced choice bias. In previous research regarding the current purchase typologies, participants have been required to recall a specific purchase type, be it experiential or material. This frequently does not occur in natural circumstances and may influence results and external validity. For example, participants may be able to recall a type of purchase more readily or easily compared to another. This availability may influence happiness with purchases. To expand upon this thought and examine this situation, a subsequent experiment was performed.

## CHAPTER 6

### INTRODUCTION

#### Experiment 2

Previous research, including experiment one, has required participants to recall either an experiential or material purchase, i.e., participants were required to think about either one type of purchase or the other (Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). This type of procedure may not give an accurate representation of how purchases influence happiness in natural environments. It is possible that one type of purchase (be it material or experiential) would be recalled differently compared to the other. Research has shown persons are more easily able to recall certain events and varying emotions associated with events. That is, memory processes inherently influence recollection of purchases including experiences. Take, for example, the recollection of events that are temporally distal versus proximate. Focusing on the temporally distant leads to the construal of higher-level features, or features with deeper meaning, as compared to the temporally proximal, which leads to lower levels features. Consequently, recalling an experience lends itself to the temporally distant perspective, which allows for the opportunity for unfavorable aspects of the event to be reinterpreted, and for the event to acquire a higher-level of meaning. Conversely, material possessions are viewed from the temporally proximate perspective because the object is tangible and in the present, which allows for less reinterpretation and leads to a lower-level meaning (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Liberman and Trope (1998) suggest the favorability of a recalled experience is influenced by the level of the meaning of the event with higher-level meaning associated with more positivity than lower level meanings. Consistent with this explanation, Van

Boven and Gilovich (2003) found participants reported they would be happier with an experiential purchase when thinking about it in a temporally distant perspective one year in the future compared to the temporally proximate perspective one day in the future. Further, comparing the features of an object may be easier than comparing the features of an experience. The features of the object are for the most part concrete and immutable, while the features of an experience are often more abstract and subject to memory distortions. For example, the features of a recently purchased television can be recalled by looking at the object and are uniform across other objects of comparable type. Conversely, the features of a recent vacation are not as easily recalled because they are not tangible and vary greatly between person, place, and experience. Consequently, persons may find it is easier to recall either experiential or material purchases. In addition, in most real world situations there is not a direct request to recall a certain type of purchase. It is possible that how experiential an object is rated affects levels of happiness. As suggested by the association of higher-level meaning with more positivity than lower-level meanings (Liberian & Trope, 1998) and favorability being influenced by comparison points of abstract experiential purchases versus concrete material purchases, it is predicted that more happiness will be associated with experiential purchases compared to material. Using an experiential material rating, on a continuous scale, would allow for the assessment of purchase type and happiness, without bias from forced choice situations. In addition, there are several variables investigated in experiment one that will be evaluated in experiment two. These include SES, materialism, and self-actualization.

In accordance with experiment one, it was predicted in experiment two that persons low in SES would be happier with material purchases compared to persons higher in SES. Kasser (2002) posits that low SES leads to insecurity due to the worry and preoccupation with basic needs such as physical safety and comfort. Low SES persons cope by focusing on the acquisition of possessions. Further, low SES persons use possessions as a means of improving their SES standing. Agreeably, Sangkhawasi and Johri (2007) found that to gain the perception of higher status, persons with lower incomes acquire material possessions.

In opposition to previous postulations, experiment one found that varying levels of materialism and self-actualization did not influence happiness with purchases. In accordance with these findings but contrary to theoretical discourse, it was predicted in experiment two that there would be no difference in levels of happiness in relation to materialism or self-actualization. Past research would predict discretionary material purchases to be associated with more self-reported happiness among materialistic persons than non-materialistic persons. Alternatively, persons lower in materialism, who place less value on material purchases, would be more likely to associate other types of discretionary purchases (experiential) with happiness. In addition, past research would predict self-actualized persons to associate more happiness with experiential purchases and non self-actualized persons to associate more happiness with material purchases. However, experiment one found no difference in levels of happiness on materialism or self-actualization traits, therefore, it was predicted that there would be no difference in experiment two.

The purpose of experiment two was to remove the constraints imposed on the participants in experiment one. In experiment two, participants were not asked to recall a particular type of purchase, but instead were allowed to freely recall any recent purchase. In addition, the same three individual difference variables from experiment one were investigated in their relation to the purchase type continuum.

### Hypotheses

The principal hypothesis was that more happiness would be associated with experiential purchases compared to material. Secondly, the more material a purchase was rated would be associated with lower levels of SES and lower levels of purchase happiness; and there would be no difference between levels of materialism or self-actualization on happiness with purchases; the third and fourth hypotheses, respectively.

## CHAPTER 7

### METHODS

#### Experiment 2

##### *Participants*

Participants were 44 females and males recruited from undergraduates at a large university located in the southwestern United States. The sample size was determined by a power analysis for a large estimated effect size of .35, power level of .80, and an alpha level of .05. Participants read a paragraph advertizing the experiment on the web-based Psychology Department Subject Pool (see Appendix 1 for the advertisement). Participants received no monetary compensation and the student participants received class credit in exchange for participation.

##### *Procedure*

The experimenter followed a script (see Appendix 2 for the script) to inform the participants that the purpose of the experiment was to explore his/her reaction to a recent life event. Participants were told that all of their responses would be anonymous. Participants read and signed an informed consent. There was an attrition rate of zero once participants entered the laboratory, in that no participants declined to participate once reading the informed consent, and no participants chose to terminate the experiment before its end (i.e. all participants filled-out the questionnaire). Participants reported three purchases, rated them on an experiential-material continuum, rated how happy they were with the purchase (Appendix 5) and filled out the questionnaire (Appendix 4).

### *Measures*

Participants were told to read and fill out the questionnaire for experiment two (see Appendix 5 for the questionnaire). The purpose of experiment two was to remove the constraints of experiment one, so participants could equally recall the two types of purchases, experiential or material. To overcome prompting and potential influential effects, free recall of purchases was utilized. This methodology was used to determine what emotions or thoughts would come to mind without cues from scales.

## CHAPTER 8

### RESULTS

#### Experiment 2

Participants reported three purchases, rated them on an experiential-material continuum (purchase type continuum), rated how happy they were with the purchases, and filled out the questionnaire. It was predicted that more happiness would be associated with experiential purchases compared to material, and the more material a purchase was rated would be associated with lower levels of SES and purchase happiness; and there would be no difference in happiness levels based on materialism or self-actualization.

#### *Measures*

To investigate the impact of the type of purchase on self-reports of happiness, a happiness measure was created by summing the participant's responses to the three questions of happiness associated with the purchase and analyzed for internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ). In addition, in order to examine the influence of the individual difference variables on happiness with purchases, a measure was created for each construct by summing the participant's responses to the questions related to the moderators of SES (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ), materialism (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ), and self-actualization (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ).

#### *Control Analyses*

It is possible that variances exist in different types of individuals in their ability to recall either material or experiential purchases. For example, persons high in materialism might be more likely to recall material purchases. In order to examine this possibility, materialism scores and self-actualization scores were correlated with the participants'



ratings of the purchase as material or experiential. Neither materialism nor self-actualization was related to the rating of the purchase ( $r(s) < 1$ ). Further, an analysis was performed to examine the amount of money spent by participants on the reported purchases. The amount of money spent was analyzed in a separate standard multiple regression analysis. There was not a statistically significant difference between the conditions for money spent on the purchase, (*standardized beta* = .22,  $t = 1.47$ ,  $p = .149$ ).

#### *Main Analysis*

A standard regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of purchase type on happiness. It was predicted that the more material a purchase was rated would be associated with less happiness. Contrary to predictions it was found that purchase type continuum was not a statistically significant predictor of happiness with purchases, (*standardized beta* = .16,  $t = 1.03$ ,  $p = .310$ ). This indicated that participants reported comparable levels of happiness with purchases, regardless of experiential or material affiliation. These findings contradict the results found in experiment one, which indicated participants were happier with experiential purchases compared to material. Mediation analyses were not conducted because of the failure to find a relationship between the type of purchase and happiness.

#### *Moderating Variables*

Even though the primary analysis failed to produce a significant effect, the impact of potential moderating variables was explored. That is, it is possible that the relationship between purchase type and happiness would be found at different levels of the moderator variables. To test for moderation, the same analytic strategy that was used in experiment one was employed. A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was performed in which

Purchase Type, then the moderator variable scores, and then the interaction of Purchase Type and the moderator variable were added into the equation. It was predicted that the addition of the interaction term (Purchase Type by moderator) would produce a significant increase in prediction over the main effects model. These analyses failed to produce any significant effects regarding SES (*standardized beta* = .45, *t* = .795, *p* = .431), materialism (*standardized beta* = .65, *t* = .756, *p* = .454), or self-actualization (*standardized beta* = .49, *t* = .637, *p* = .527), the second, third, and fourth hypotheses. Additionally, there was no difference between the purchase continuum and SES, (*standardized beta* = .11, *t* = .704, *p* = .486), the first part of the second hypothesis.

An additional analysis was performed to explore possible explanations for the failure of experiment two to replicate the findings of experiment one. This analysis explored the possibility that participants did not accurately classify purchases as being material or experiential. The purchases reported by the participants were coded by an independent rater as being either material or experiential. The ratings made by the independent judge were highly related to the participants ratings ( $r = .62, p < .01$ ). When the happiness scores were analyzed in a one factor (rated purchase type) ANOVA, as expected, experiential purchases were associated with more happiness ( $M = 7.44$ ) than material purchases ( $M = 6.88$ ); however, consistent with the original analysis this effect was not significant,  $F(1, 42) = 1.30, p = .27$ .

## CHAPTER 9

### DISCUSSION

#### Experiment 2

In accordance with experiment one, it was predicted that persons would report more happiness with experiential compared to material purchases. Specifically, the more material a purchase was rated would be associated with decreased happiness. Although the relationship between happiness and purchase type rating was in the predicted direction, it was not statistically significant. Further, the failure to find this effect was not due to participant misclassification of the purchases, i.e., the same null results were obtained when an independent rater classified the purchases.

There are, however, a number of possible explanations for the failure to replicate the findings of experiment one. First, in experiment two, the majority of the participants recalled material purchases; that is, with 34 out of 44 participants, material purchases were recalled. Overall, the average purchase rating made by the participants was 3.29 on a nine-point scale with endpoints of material (1) and experiential (9). The participants may have reported material purchases more often because they are more salient or easier to recall, or because material purchases are more common than experiential purchases. Regardless of the reason, the over representation of material purchases would make it difficult to detect a relationship between the rating of the purchase type and happiness.

Second, the difference in methodology may be the discerning factor in experimental results. In experiment one, forced choice between experiential and material purchases was utilized. Conversely, in experiment two, participants were free to recall either experiential or material purchases, with no cue from scales. Perhaps comparing

purchases decreases the happiness with the experiential purchase. When participants are not aware that there is a difference between purchase choices, experiential purchases are associated with more happiness. It may be that experiential purchases inherently make people happier, but due to comparison, participants do not report differences in happiness. Research has shown that comparison decreases happiness (Fujita, 2008; Wills, 1981; Brickman & Campbell, 1971).

Lastly, there is also a situation in which no difference in happiness between purchases would be anticipated. Specifically, if one type of purchase is not recalled any easier compared to another, then no difference in purchase happiness would be expected. Conversely, if one type of purchase is recalled more easily when associated with a particular emotion, then a difference in purchase happiness would be predicted. For example, if participants tend to recall material purchases more easily when they are associated with positive affect than experiential purchases, then material purchases would be associated with overall happiness and vice versa. In experiment two, no difference in happiness was found, possibly because there is no difference in the recollective processes. A subsequent study should be conducted in which the participants rate the purchase on the continuum, then participants dichotomize their purchase as either experiential or material. This would be done in order to obtain a participant evaluation of the type of purchase. At this point, an analysis of variance could be performed to determine the difference in recollective propensity.

## CHAPTER 10

### DISCUSSION

#### General

##### *Challenges*

*Conceptual ambiguity of material vs. experiential purchases.* As mentioned previously, the distinction between material and experiential purchases is not always apparent. It is possible to think of ambiguous situations that could be construed as either a material or experiential type of purchase (e.g., musical instruments, sporting goods). This ambiguity may lead participants to imagine inappropriate or incorrect purchases as experiential or material, thus creating validity concerns. To cope with this ambiguity, researchers have had participants self define the activity based on their goals, i.e., material purchases are activities that have the primary goal of acquiring an object while experiential purchases are something you pay to participate in (Van Boven, 2005). Using goals to distinguish these behaviors can create difficulties because it is complicated to measure intentions objectively. Correspondingly, experiment one found potential complications with purchase distinction, but with an inconclusive determination. Participants may have recalled specific experiential purchases that do not require social interaction (i.e. educational purchases). Often, however, those subsidiary interactions can be construed as an experiential purchase. In addition, in experiment two this situation was investigated and it was determined that participants were able to discriminate between experiential and material purchases. Further, Van Boven (2005) has found that participants are consistently able to distinguish between these purchase typologies with varying ethnic, economic, and regional backgrounds. In addition, motivations and

intentions have been successfully used in other lines of psychological research, e.g., aggression has been defined as behavior performed with the *intention* to harm another (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). In the same vein, possible confusion could arise based on the operational definition of discretionary purchases. There are situations in which persons may find their purchase to be both discretionary and compulsory. For example, is visiting a sick relative optional or mandatory? The situational circumstances could be viewed as mandatory because of social norms associated with love, care, and obligations towards relatives. However, another perspective might conclude that persons are autonomous and make their own choices. One must choose to make the purchase. Consequently, persons make the purchase choice at their own discretion; therefore, it becomes a discretionary purchase. To alleviate this concern, research should give the operational definition of discretionary, in addition to the definitions of experiential and material purchases to participants.

*Interaction of moderating variables.* It is likely that the interactions between the moderating variables (SES, materialism, and self-actualization) would have an influence on happiness with purchase types. That is, it is likely that there would be strong relationships between these traits. The interaction of variables leads to a challenge of interpretation, in addition to the difficulty of identifying causality and influence. Theory and previous research would offer several predictions. First, increases in materialism would be negatively associated with self-actualization. Materialists who focus on the attainment of material objects are less likely to become self-actualized (Fromm, 1976) because materialistic pursuits are associated with lower level needs. Consistent with this

reasoning, Kasser and Ryan (1993) found a focus on financial success was associated with lower levels of self-actualization.

Second, materialism would be associated with SES. In stereotypic portrayals, individuals high in SES demonstrate higher levels of materialism (Kasser, 2002). This is explained by suggesting that materialists are more motivated to acquire possessions that increase their SES. For the most part, however, researchers investigating this relationship have found the opposite trend. People lower in SES are more likely to have higher levels of materialistic aspirations compared to people high in SES (Mirowsky & Ross, 2003; Rindfleish, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997). There are several possible reasons for this relationship. A simple explanation is that persons low in SES may have had to worry about basic needs such as food, shelter, physical safety, and comfort and, therefore, become insecure. To cope with this insecurity, low SES persons may become materialistic and focus on the acquisition of possessions. Correspondingly, Sangkhawasi and Johri (2007) found that people with lower incomes accumulate material possessions to obtain the perception of higher status.

Third, lower SES would be negatively associated with self-actualization. It is plausible that people low in SES would have a difficult time meeting basic needs compared to high SES. Low SES persons have less money and are less likely to meet basic needs than high SES persons. Further, high SES persons are more likely to have a higher education and obtain better quality of occupations that are related to more self-fulfillment and increased income. As a result, low SES persons would focus more on the attainment of lower order needs and less on self-actualization than high SES persons.

*Measurement of happiness.* Another challenge for researchers examining the effects of purchases on happiness is the conceptual problems related to the measurement of happiness. This becomes a methodological challenge if different researchers have varying definitions of happiness. Although happiness has been contemplated comprehensively, until only recently has it been studied experimentally. Definitions of happiness range from an emphasis on cognitive aspects such as retrospective thought (e.g., Veehoven, 1994) suggesting that happiness is the degree to which one is satisfied with the quality of one's life, to emotional aspects such as feelings (Argyle, 1987). Overall, happiness has been described in many ways including fulfillment, gratification, enjoyment, and contentment (Argyle, 2001).

*Related constructs.* The conceptual problems associated with happiness have been exacerbated by close relationships between happiness and subjective well-being. Happiness and subjective well-being are often confused in the extant literature. Some researchers have used the terms interchangeably, assuming happiness is the same construct as subjective well-being and Diener (2000) notes that the colloquial term for subjective well-being in many studies has been happiness. Other researchers have argued that happiness and subjective well-being are entirely different constructs. For example, Alexandrova (2005) is adamant that happiness and subjective well-being are completely separate constructs. The largest group of researchers suggests happiness is one component of subjective well-being. For example, Alexandrova (2005) suggests there are two components to subjective well-being, a cognitive component and an experience component, which consists of happiness. Similarly, Vitterso (2004) proposes that subjective well-being consists of evaluative cognitions about a person's life and the



emotional responses (sadness or happiness) generated by the cognitions. Many researchers define the construct of subjective well-being to consist of a happiness component and a life satisfaction component (e.g., Alexandrova, 2005; and Stones et al., 1996).

*Happiness measures.* Given the numerous definitions of happiness and related constructs, it is not surprising that there are many different happiness measures. The most common way to measure happiness is through self-report surveys (Kalmijn & Veenhoven, 2005). Surveys vary from single-item scales to multi-item, multi-dimensional scales. At one end of this continuum, Argyle (2001) suggests happiness can be measured by a single-item question. Similarly, Van Boven (2005) suggests the appropriate way to determine happiness levels is to simply ask. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1997) use only four items in the Subjective Happiness Scale. Two of the items ask participants to characterize themselves compared to peers and two items ask them how much the happiness characterization describes them. The scale has demonstrated very high reliability, stability, and validity. In a review of these short scales, Abdel-Kahlek (1998, 2006) found that short multi-item questionnaires have adequate stability and validity. Concurrently, many scales created to measure the happiness construct have demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Andrews & Withy, 1976; Cantril, 1965), including short multi-item scales like the Bradburn's Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), and clinical instruments, like Beck's Depression Inventory (Beck, 1978). Despite the research demonstrating the validity of short happiness measures, numerous longer multi-item scales have been developed. Two reasons for developing longer multi-item

questionnaires are to avoid bias that may exist if the purpose of the study is too obvious to participants, and single-item questions lack the ability to test for internal consistency, or correlated components, within the questionnaire. Examples of multi-item happiness questionnaires are the Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness (Kozma & Stones, 1980) and the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, Martin, & Lu, 1995). The longer multi-item happiness questionnaires have also demonstrated reliability and stability (Lewis, Francis, & Ziebertz, 2002).

One of the main issues when measuring happiness concerns components of the construct. Much debate has focused research on the number of components the happiness construct should contain and the components within the happiness measures. Specifically, research has demonstrated happiness may contain two, three, or four components (Argyle, 2001). The two-component model consists of a cognitive and affective component. These are demonstrated by asking questions pertaining to satisfaction as the cognitive component and joy or elation as the affective component. Andrews and Withy (1976) demonstrate that the affective component should be subdivided, thus creating the three-component model consisting of satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect. Andrews and Withy validated the three-component model by demonstrating the satisfaction component was statistically independent of both the positive and negative affective components, while all still correlating. Research also demonstrates there is a four-component model of happiness (Headey & Wearing, 1993). This was discovered by subdividing the negative affect component into constructs resembling anxiety and depression, adding to the already existing life satisfaction and positive affect components.

A second issue with happiness measures is the use of graduated responses, commonly referred to as Likert-type scales. These measurements have a graduated number system, for example, participants must rate how happy they are from high to low. The type of scale a researcher uses depends on several factors including type of participants and question to be answered. For example, Kalmijn and Veehoven (2005) argue that from a national level, graduated scales are not appropriate. In addition, the standard deviation has come under scrutiny as to its suitability at the national level. Kalmijn and Veehoven analyzed several statistics including the mean absolute difference, the mean pair difference, the interquartile range, and the standard deviation to measure the dispersion and distribution of happiness. The statistics were deemed to have equal validity and Kalmijn and Veehoven suggest the use of standard deviations to measure happiness. Likert-type continuous variable scales and standard deviations were utilized in the current two experiments.

*Cultural influence.* As mentioned in the literature review, there potentially exists a cultural difference in preference for purchases. Lee and Kacen (2008) found that consumer satisfaction was influenced by cultural variation. Consumers from collectivist cultures (e.g., Korea) were more satisfied with an impulse purchase than consumers from cultures that emphasized individualism. Correspondingly, it is possible that varying demographics could influence purchase type happiness. For example, perhaps older persons have more discretionary income and higher-level need satisfaction; and therefore may be happier with experiential purchases. On the other hand, perhaps ethnicity influences purchase happiness, in that those of historically lower SES may be happier with material purchases. However, an investigation into demographic information yielded

no statistically significant results. Concurring with this finding, Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) found that participants were happier with experiential purchases compared to material with varying ethnic, economic, and regional backgrounds.

#### *Future Research*

There are possible alternative mediators or explanations between purchase typologies and happiness. Specifically, comparison between purchases and comparison between persons may explain this relation. Ease of comparison can be conceptualized as feature comparison between experiential and material purchases, while social comparison influences happiness via comparison with others' purchase type.

*Ease of comparison.* There are differentiating factors in comparing experiential purchases and material purchases. The features of an object are ostensibly easier to compare versus the features of an experience. Material purchases are tangible, in the present, and unchanging. For example, newly purchased electronics can be recalled by simply looking at the object. Further, the features are uniform across other objects of comparable type, even when purchasing dichotomous varieties on opposite ends of the spectrum such as inexpensive to luxury ones. Conversely, features of an experience are more abstract and subject to memory distortions. For example, the features of a recent vacation are not as easily recalled because they are not tangible and vary greatly between person, place, and experience. The ease of comparing components with material objects may facilitate the propensity to evaluate them adversely. That is, when the features of a material purchase fall short of internal expectations it is easy to contrast these features with an idealized conception. On the contrary, experiences are subjective and intricate. It

is much more difficult for expectations to fall short of an idealized conception due to the great amount of variance in experiential memories.

*Social comparison.* Social comparison is the behavior of evaluating features of one's self or life to others (Collins, 1996). Generally, persons compare themselves upwards or downwards. Upward comparisons focus on those who are in a better situation in contrast to the comparer, thus looking upward. Conversely, downward comparisons are centralized on those who are viewed in a worse situation. An upward focus tends to decrease psychological well-being and the opposite has been found for downward comparison (Wills, 1981). Some research suggests persons make upward comparisons to enhance self-improvement (Collins, 1996). Social comparison research has been utilized in psychological fields including satisfaction and happiness with life and income (Brickman & Campbell, 1971).

The concrete nature of tangible purchases may also make material purchases more vulnerable to negative social comparisons. That is, comparing features of one's own object to another's object is far easier than comparing features of one's own experience to another's experience. For example, the features of a recently purchased television can be easily compared to the features of someone else's television. People may find their own television to be smaller, dimmer, or inferior technologically compared to someone else's television. Once more, features of a recent vacation are more abstract and vary greatly on personal attributes. The taste of the food on a recent vacation is more difficult to compare to the taste of the food on someone else's vacation. Such experiences lend themselves to being more subjectively evaluated. Consequently, experiential purchases may be more resistant to negative social comparisons than material purchases. There is a considerable

body of evidence that suggests negative social comparisons reduce happiness (e.g., Wills, 1981) and frequent social comparisons reduce subjective well-being (Fujita, 2008). Further, even if persons visit the same vacation destination, eat at the same restaurants, and attend the same shows, experiences between persons will still vastly differ. Experiences are unique to that person. In addition, it is not possible to simply look at the vacation to facilitate recollection, as the experience is in the past. Photographs taken during the vacation may facilitate recollections; however, persons rarely display photographs of an unpleasant occurrence (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Photographs will thus perpetuate the remembrance of a pleasant or joyful experience; therefore, more happiness would be associated with experiential purchases compared to material.

*Elements of purchase.* The moderators investigated in the current studies have been individual difference variables (SES, materialism, self-actualization). There are, however, a number of elements of the discretionary purchase that may influence its ability to produce happiness. One potential element is the positivity of the outcome. For example, a purchase could be dichotomized as having a positive outcome or a negative outcome. Obviously, discretionary experiences that lead to negative outcomes would be associated with less happiness. However, persons may respond differently to discretionary material and experiential purchases that have negative outcomes. For example, it is possible that persons have more difficulty overcoming negative material purchases because the unsatisfactory object is still present. Future research should investigate the cathartic response to returning the material object with the negative outcome. It is plausible that returning the unwanted item will alleviate some of the negative emotions associated with it.

Another element of the discretionary experience that may influence the amount of happiness produced is the amount of money spent. It is possible that high cost purchases would elicit more happiness because they are associated with more benefits. For example, buying an expensive television will give better picture quality than a less expensive television. Further, purchases that are more expensive are associated not only with the expenditure of more money but also with the expenditure of more time and effort (Molesworth & Suortti, 2002). A substantial body of research exploring effort justification effects has indicated that persons often become more positive towards objects and situations associated with large amounts of effort (see Van Overwalle and Jordens (2002) for a review). That is, persons avoid cognitive inconsistencies by favorably evaluating outcomes on which they have expended a large amount of resources. For example, paying a large sum of money for an automobile that you dislike would produce cognitive inconsistency. To avoid this inconsistency, a person could change their mind about the automobile and decide to increase positive emotions around the purchase.

Prior expectations about the purchase may also influence the amount of happiness produced by the purchase. It is possible that prior expectations produce consistency effects. That is, persons persuade themselves that the purchase has produced the emotional state that is consistent with their expectations. Schnarrs (2000) suggests that persons, to avoid inconsistencies in their beliefs, change their perceptions of their purchases to match their prior expectations about the purchase. Therefore, if a person expects the purchase to make them happy they convince themselves that the purchase has truly made them happy. With discretionary purchases, it is likely that most persons have

positive expectations about the purchase (i.e., few persons make discretionary purchases in an effort to create negative emotions). There are a number of areas of research that indicate persons are capable of this type of alignment in expectations (e.g., experimenter expectance effects (Intons-Petersons, 1983) and teacher expectancy effects (Rosenthal, 1990)).

Alternatively, it is possible that prior expectations act as a comparison point. That is, persons evaluate the emotional outcome produced by the purchase in comparison to their prior expectations about the emotional outcome. Consequently, if persons expect the purchase outcome to make them extremely satisfied and the outcome only produces moderate levels of satisfaction, they may report reduced levels of happiness. Exceeding the expectation may lead to increased levels of happiness. The impact of comparison points on evaluations is well established in a number of literatures. For example, research examining social comparison theory has demonstrated the type of individuals that a person compares him/herself to acts as a set point that influences subsequent self-evaluations (see Suls, Martin, and Wheeler (2002) for a review).

The comparison effects described above will rarely occur if persons are able to accurately estimate emotional outcomes for purchase activities. If persons are accurate about how a purchase will make them feel, then expectations will match outcomes and there will be no upward or downward comparison effects. Research has indicated, however, that persons are not good at estimating how long a purchase will make them happy, often overestimating happiness (e.g., Wood & Bettman, 2007). The extant literature has not examined how expectations would affect spontaneous purchases. It is



plausible that because no prior expectations of the purchase exist, participants would be more accurate in estimating happiness at time of purchase.

## CHAPTER 11

### SUMMARY

Research has demonstrated that people are happier with experiential purchases compared to material items. One mediator that explains this relationship is impact on the self. Experiential purchases are more central to positive self-identity than material purchases. The acquisition of experiences may lead a person to view the self more favorably due to the positive stereotype associated with experiential people. Further, experiential purchases may satisfy the personal needs of development and growth more than material acquisitions (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). It was predicted that interpersonal relationships would mediate purchase types and happiness. Discretionary experiential purchases ostensibly foster more social contact than discretionary material purchases (Millar & Thomas 2009; Van Boven, 2005), which is a key component to happiness (Argyle, 2001). Contrary to expectations, interpersonal relationships did not mediate the relation, even though there was a higher propensity for interpersonal relationships to be associated with experiential purchases compared to material. There were also moderating influences on discretionary purchases and happiness.

The amount of happiness produced by discretionary purchases is moderated by individual differences in socioeconomic status (SES). Persons low in SES were happier with material purchases compared to experiential purchases. Contrary to expectations, however, persons high in SES were not happier with experiential purchases more so than material purchases. Material purchases may have a more influential effect compared to experiential purchases for constructs associated with SES such as wealth, occupation, and education. Also contrary to expectations, individual differences in materialism and self-

actualization did not have a moderating influence on purchase type and happiness. It was reasoned that materialistic and low self-actualized persons would find the pursuit of material possessions as a means by which they attempt to obtain happiness because of insecurity and basic need satisfaction. Alternatively, persons lower in materialism and higher in self-actualization, who places less value on discretionary material purchases, may be more likely to associate discretionary experiential purchases with happiness because of higher-level meaning and need satisfaction. Contradicting predictions, there was no difference in self-reported happiness with purchases in relation to materialism or self-actualization. One potential bias in this study was the forced choice response to either an experiential or material purchase. To examine the potential consequences of this methodology, a subsequent experiment was conducted.

In experiment two, participants freely recalled three purchases and rated them on an experiential/material continuum. It was predicted that the more material a purchase was rated would be associated with less happiness and lower levels of SES; and in accordance with experiment one there would be no difference in materialism or self-actualization. It was found in experiment two that self-reported happiness was influenced by purchase type, though not statistically significant, and contrary to predictions there was no difference in the happiness with purchase type continuum with regards to SES. Consistent with predictions there was no difference in levels of happiness with materialism or self-actualization.

Two distinct discretionary purchase types are material and experiential. Experiment one demonstrated that people are happier with experiential purchases compared to material ones. Impacts on the self mediated purchase type and happiness,

while interpersonal relationships did not. Further, discretionary purchase types and happiness were moderated by individual differences in socioeconomic status, with low SES persons reporting more happiness with material purchases compared to experiential. Contrary to predictions there was no difference in happiness with purchases for high SES persons, or for the materialism or self-actualization moderating variables.

Table 1

Summary Table of Path Model of Impact on the Self as Mediating Variable

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1			
Regress Impact on the Self on Purchase Type	.54	5.70	$p < .0001$
Step 2			
Regress Happiness on Impact on the Self	.42	4.08	$p < .001$
Step 3			
Regress Happiness on Purchase Type and Impact on the Self	.10	.82	$p = .42$

Table 2

Summary Table of Path Model of Interpersonal Relationships as Mediating Variable

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Step 1			
Regress Interpersonal Relationships on Purchase Type	.36	3.45	$p < .001$
Step 2			
Regress Happiness on Interpersonal Relationships	.26	2.39	$p < .05$
Step 3			
Regress Happiness on Purchase Type and Interpersonal Relationships	.24	2.11	$p < .05$

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for SES Moderator Variable

Variable	B	SE	Beta
Step 1			
Purchase Type	.47	.152	.33*
Step 2			
Purchase Type	.49	.15	.35*
SES	.17	.14	.13
Step 3			
Purchase Type	2.45	.69	1.73*
SES	.17	.14	.13
Purchase X SES	-.39	.14	-1.41*

Note. R square = .111 for Step 1; Change in R square = .016 (p = .243) for Step 2;

Change in R square = .09 (p < .005) for Step 3

\*p < .005

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Materialism Moderator Variable

Variable	B	SE	Beta
Step 1			
Purchase Type	.41	.16	.29
Step 2			
Purchase Type	.42	.16	.29*
Materialism	-.09	.11	-.09
Step 3			
Purchase Type	.14	.52	.09
Materialism	-.09	.11	-.09
Purchase X Materialism	.06	.11	.21

Note. R square = .084 for Step 1; Change in R square = .008 ( $p > .05$ ) for Step 2; Change in R square = .004 ( $p > .05$ ) for Step 3

\* $p < .005$



Table 5

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Self-Actualization Moderator Variable

Variable	B	SE	Beta
Step 1			
Purchase Type	.44	.16	.30
Step 2			
Purchase Type	.44	.16	.30*
Self-Actualization	.03	.16	.02
Step 3			
Purchase Type	-.09	.99	-.06
Self-Actualization	.04	.16	.03
Purchase X Self-Actualization	.09	.16	-.37

Note. R square = .092 for Step 1; Change in R square = .000 ( $p > .05$ ) for Step 2; Change in R square = .004 ( $p > .05$ ) for Step 3

\* $p < .005$

### Figure Captions

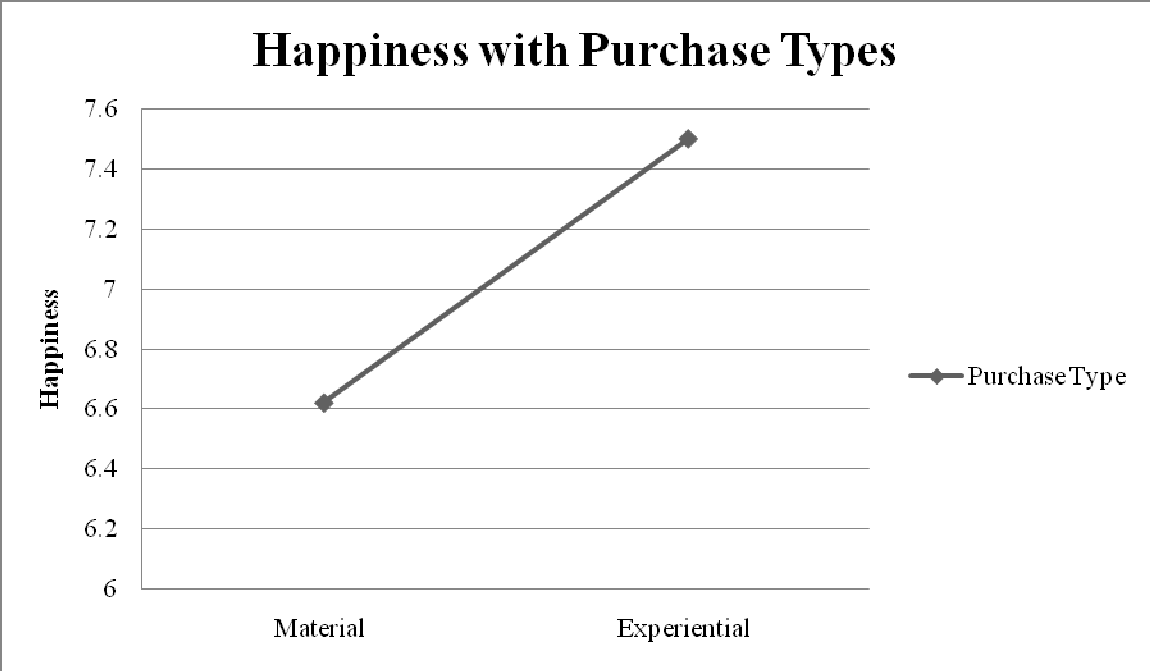
Figure 1. The overall difference between purchase types on happiness.

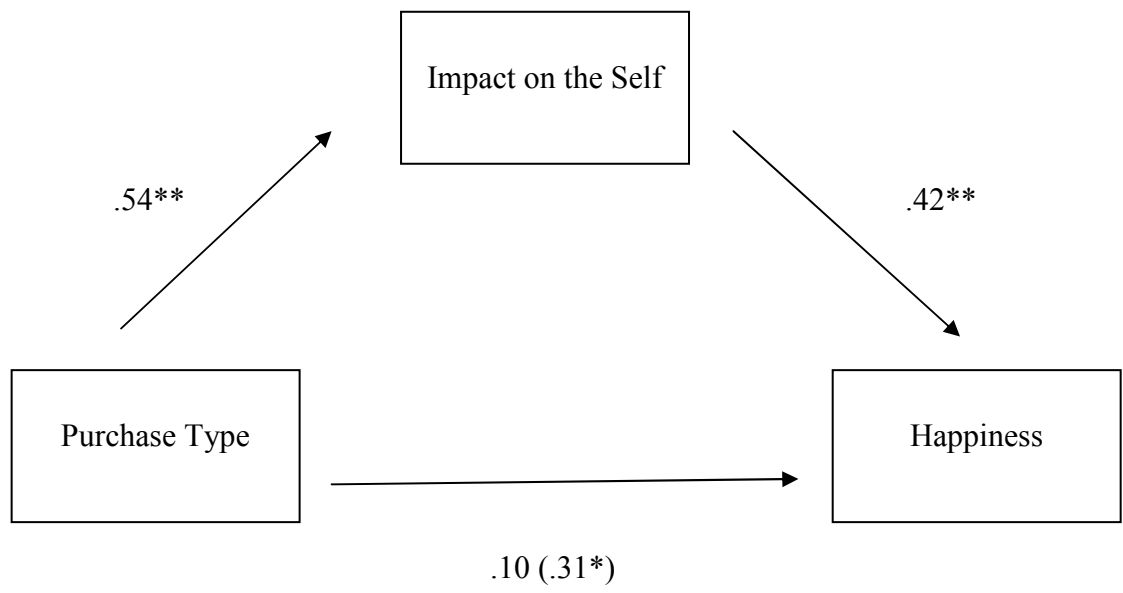
Figure 2. The path model examining the mediating role of Impact on the Self between purchase type and happiness.

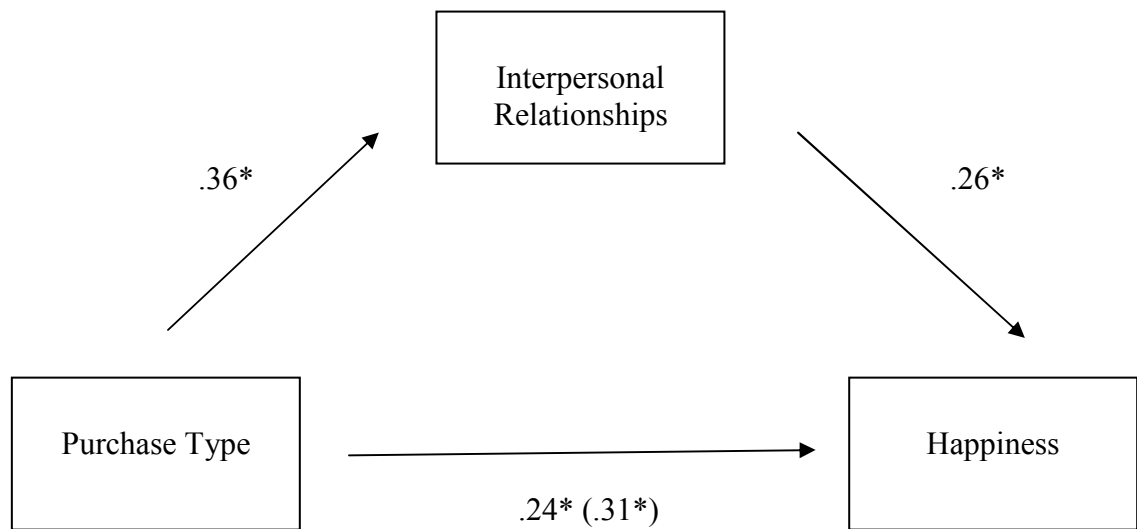
Figure 3. The path model examining the mediating role of Interpersonal Relationships between purchase type and happiness.

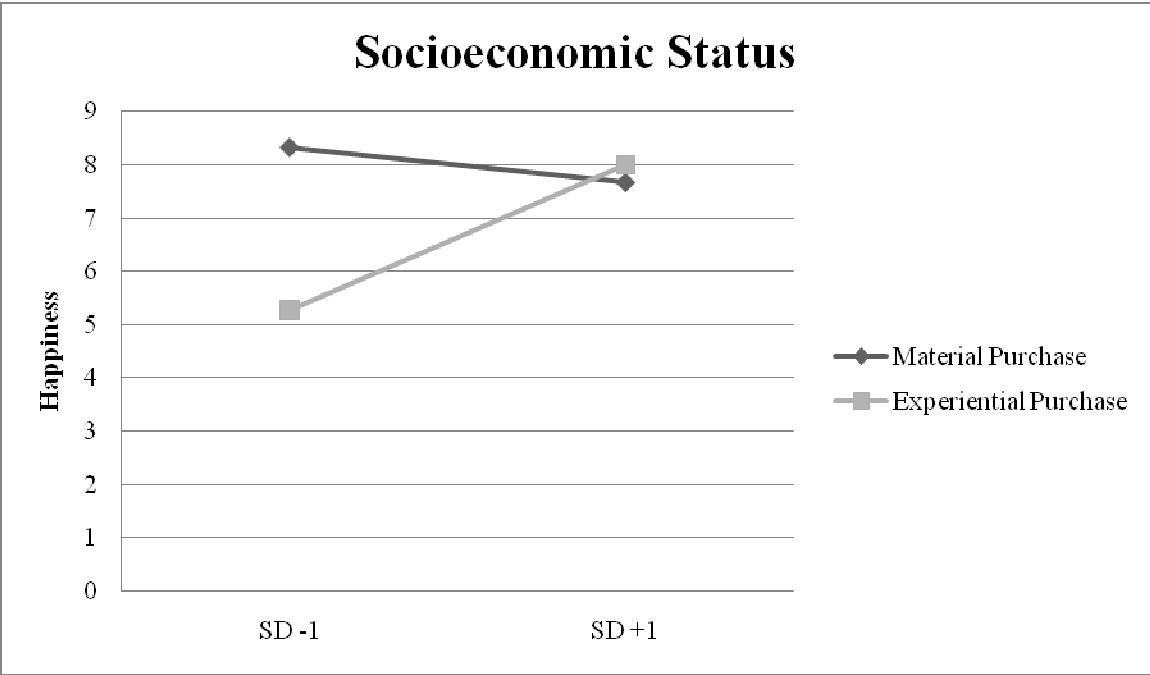
Figure 4. The moderating role of Socioeconomic on purchase type and happiness.

Note. The coefficients marked with an asterisk (\*) indicate significance at the ( $p < .05$ ) level, the coefficients with two asterisks (\*\*) indicate significance at the ( $p < .001$ ) level, and the coefficient in brackets indicates beta for the relationship when the mediator is not controlled.









## APPENDIX 1

### ADVERTIZEMENT

This is a study on happiness and social psychological variables. You will be required to read a paragraph and answer a questionnaire. This experiment will take no longer than 30 minutes of your time and you will receive ½ (one-half) research credits. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

## APPENDIX 2

### SCRIPT

Thank you for participating in this experiment. We are interested in your happiness with a recent life event and social psychological variables. Please read and sign the consent form and let me know if you have any questions. Furthermore, if you have questions after the experiment you may contact the researchers on your consent form.

Please read the paragraph and answer the questionnaire. Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return it to me (the experimenter).



### APPENDIX 3

#### PURCHASE PARAGRAPHS

##### Material

A material purchase is: Material purchases are purchases that have the purpose of acquiring a material object and are tangible. Further, they may be taken with a person and brought to different locations, they are not fleeting and remain in the present, and they are something that may be touched or held.

Please recall your most recent material purchase for more than \$100. That is, think about a recent discretionary purchase of an object that you obtained and kept in your possession.

##### Experiential

An experiential purchase is: Experiential purchases are purchases that have the purpose of acquiring a life experience through participation in an event. Experiential purchases are not tangible, and cannot be held. The purchase has a finite amount of time and allows the purchaser to a certain occurrence or experience.

Please recall your most recent experiential purchase for more than \$100 where the primary purpose of the purchase was to acquire a life experience. That is, think about some recent discretionary activity you paid to participate in.

## APPENDIX 4

### QUESTIONNAIRE

**Bolded words were deleted**

1. What did you purchase?

2. How much money did you spend on the purchase?

3. Why did you choose this purchase?

Please complete the following questionnaire with 1 being the lowest and 9 being the highest.

**Happiness with purchase:**

4. How happy did the purchase make you?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

5. How much did the purchase contribute to your happiness?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

6. Would you have been happier purchasing something else?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

Please complete the following questionnaire with 1 being the lowest (or disagree) and 9 being the highest (or agree).

**Trait Materialism Scale:**

***Success:***

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

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

8. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

9. I place emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

10. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

11. I like to own things to impress people

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

12. I pay attention to the material objects other people own

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

***Centrality:***

13. I usually don't buy only the things I need

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

14. I don't try to keep my life simple as far as possessions are concerned

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

15. The things I own are important to me

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

16. I enjoy spending money on things that aren't practical

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

17. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

18. I like a lot of luxury in my life

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

19. I put more emphasis on material things than most people I know

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

***Happiness:***

20. I don't have all the things I really need to enjoy life

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

21. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

22. I would be happier if I owned nicer things

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

23. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

24. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

**SES Scale:**

25. What was your housing status compared to the average American family at age 16 with *1 being the lowest and 9 being the highest?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

26. What was your family wealth compared to the average American family at age 16 with *1 being the lowest and 9 being the highest?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

27. What is the highest completed level of maternal (mother's) education?

1. No High School
2. Some High School
3. Completed High School
4. No College but completed high school
5. Some College
6. Completed College
7. No Graduate School but completed college
8. Some Graduate School
9. Completed Graduate School

28. What is the highest completed level of paternal (father's) education?

1. No High School
2. Some High School
3. Completed High School
4. No College but completed high school
5. Some College
6. Completed College
7. No Graduate School but completed college

8. Some Graduate School

9. Completed Graduate School

29. What is your annual household income? \_\_\_\_\_

30. What is your parental household income? \_\_\_\_\_

A discretionary purchase is an optional purchase made toward nonmandatory items such as food and clothing.

31. What percent of household income was made toward discretionary (optional) purchases at age 16?

1. 10%

2. 20%

3. 30%

4. 40%

5. 50%

6. 60%

7. 70%

8. 80%

9. 90%

32. What percent of household income is currently made toward discretionary (optional) purchases?

1. 10%

2. 20%

3. 30%

4. 40%

5. 50%

6. 60%

7. 70%

8. 80%

9. 90%

### **Self-Actualization**

Please complete the following questionnaire with 1 being the lowest (or disagree) and 9 being the highest (or agree).

33. I do not feel ashamed about any of my emotions

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

34. I feel I must do what others expect me to do

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

35. I believe that people are essentially good and can be trusted

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

36. I feel free to be angry at those I love

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

37. It is always necessary that others approve of what I do

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

38. I don't accept my own weaknesses

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

39. I can like people without having to approve of them

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

40. I fear failure

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

41. I avoid attempts to analyze and simplify complex domains

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

42. It is better to be yourself than to be popular

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

43. I have no mission in life to which I feel especially dedicated

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

44. I can express my feelings even when they may result in undesirable consequences

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

45. I do not feel responsible to help anybody

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

46. I am bothered by fears of being inadequate

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

47. I am loved because I give love

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

Please complete the following questionnaire with 1 being the lowest) and 9 being the highest

48. How much time was spent with another person in relation to the purchase with *1 being no time and 9 being entire time?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

49. How much the purchase fostered a relationship with another person with *1 being not at all to 9 completely?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

50. How much did the purchase contribute to conversation and/or discussions with others  
*with 1 being not at all and 9 being completely?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

**Impact on the Self**

51. How much the purchase contributed to your self-image with *1 being low and 9 being high*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

52. How important was the purchase to your self-growth with *1 being low and 9 being high?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

53. How important was the purchase to you as a person with *1 being low and 9 being high?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

54. How meaningful was the purchase to you with *1 being low and 9 being high?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

55. Did the behavior make you feel more positive about yourself with *1 being low and 9 being high?*

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

Age\_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 5

### EXPERIMENT TWO PARAGRAPH AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Please recall three different purchases and fill out the questionnaire below

Please describe your purchases:

Purchase 1:

Purchase 2:

Purchase 3:

A material purchase is: Material purchases are purchases that have the purpose of acquiring a material object and are tangible. Further, they may be taken with a person and brought to different locations, they are not fleeting and remain in the present, and they are something that may be touched or held.

An experiential purchase is: Experiential purchases are purchases that have the purpose of acquiring a life experience through participation in an event. Experiential purchases are not tangible, and cannot be held. The purchase has a finite amount of time and allows the purchaser to a certain occurrence or experience.

Is your FIRST purchase completely material (1) to completely experiential (9)?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

Is your SECOND purchase completely material (1) to completely experiential (9)?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

Is your THIRD purchase completely material (1) to completely experiential (9)?

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

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