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The preference for experiences over possessions: Measurement and construct validation of the Experiential Buying Tendency Scale

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There is growing support that money spent on experiential items increases an individual's happiness. However, there is minimal research on the causes and long-term consequences of the tendency to make experiential purchases. Given the importance of experiential buying for improving well-being, an understanding of the preference for experiential purchasing is imperative. Thus, we developed the Experiential Buying Tendency Scale (EBTS) to measure habitual experiential purchasing. Across eight samples ($n = 9634$), the EBTS was developed, and shown to be reliable, valid, and predictive of consumer behavior and psychological well-being. An experiential purchasing tendency was related to higher extraversion, openness, empathic concern, and reward seeking. Further, non-materialistic values predicted a preference for experiential purchasing, which led to increased psychological need satisfaction, and, ultimately, increased subjective well-being. The discussion proposes that experiential purchasing may be a function of one's sensitivity to rewards, emotional responsiveness to events, and appreciation of the world's beauty.

Keywords: well-being; happiness; consumption; materialism; experiential

'*Ever since selling linkexchange, I'd committed to living by the philosophy that experiences were much more important to me than material things*'. – Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos.com

Introduction

People generally believe that making money and obtaining material possessions will improve their lives (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007). However, materialism has repeatedly been shown to be detrimental to well-being (Belk, 1985; Dean, Carroll, & Yang, 2007; Howell & Hill, 2009; Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003; Wright & Larsen, 1993). One recent line of research suggests that certain kinds of purchases do have a positive impact on well-being. Investing discretionary resources into life experiences, rather than buying material possessions, makes people happier (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Howell & Hill, 2009; Millar & Thomas, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Therefore, it seems purchasing decisions have a significant effect on happiness and may explain why materialistic pursuits lead to lower well-being.

However, most research on materialism and well-being has focused on materialism as a trait or value, rather than examining the link between one's general buying preferences and global assessments of subjective well-being (SWB). Other researchers have noted the limitations of focusing on the effects of a singular purchasing experience, rather than on stable preferences and long-term outcomes (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). Thus, the primary goal of this study is to develop and validate the Experiential Buying Tendency Scale (EBTS) in order to measure an individual's general desire to buy experiential rather than materialistic purchases. Given the centrality of the experiential buying construct to current well-being research, a description of the experiential purchaser is an important basic step (Rozin, 2001). We aim to demonstrate the pragmatic utility of the EBTS by describing an experiential buyer's emotional, personality, and well-being profile and by linking an experiential tendency to behavioral choices. Finally, we test a path model to determine whether a tendency to purchase experientially mediates the negative relation between materialism and global assessments of SWB.

Previous research on materialist and experiential psychology

Belk (1985) describes materialism as a personality trait comprised of envy, lack of generosity, and

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possessiveness, with materialists valuing financial security over other life goals. Materialism has also been conceptualized as a cultural value, in which people focus on the satisfaction of lower level needs, such as physical safety, over higher-level needs, such as self-actualization (Inglehart, 1981). In addition, materialism has been defined as a central organizing value that leads to three orientations: (a) the belief that possessions are a source of happiness, (b) the perception that material goods indicate success, and (c) the view that possessions are central in one's life (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Even though materialists assume that possessions will allow them to experience happiness (Belk, 1985), there are robust and negative relationships between materialistic pursuits, traits, and values with well-being. For example, well-being is negatively correlated with a materialistic personality (Ahuvia &Wong, 2002; Belk, 1985; Richins & Dawson, 1992), materialistic values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992), materialistic aspirations, (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), and materialistic buying when compared to experiential buying (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Howell & Hill, 2009; Millar & Thomas, 2009; Nicolao et al., 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

There may be several reasons why materialism has been associated with lower levels of life satisfaction. An important positive predictor of materialism is an increased feeling of insecurity (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Maslow, 1954; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). When individuals experience existential insecurity, for example, they may become more materialistic as a way of coping and avoiding self-awareness (Mandel & Smeesters, 2008; Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Wong, 2009). In fact, materialism may be a typical coping mechanism for managing anxiety and insecurity, with money reliance serving as a secondary buffer and defense mechanism against negative life experiences after social support, the primary buffer, has failed (Zhou & Gao, 2008). Also, materialists' lower life satisfaction levels may be a result of having fewer social connections. For example, materialists experience difficulty in establishing close relationships (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004) and rate their relations less favorably (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Because they express less empathy and objectify people, materialists may feel alienated from others (Kasser et al., 2004). Finally, Tatzel (2003) demonstrates that those who are less materialistic are also more experiential in their consumption practices, which may be a mechanism that explains why non-materialists are more satisfied with their lives.

Compared to material purchases, individuals experience more positive emotions, happiness, and relatedness satisfaction when they allocate their resources to experiential purchases (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Howell & Hill, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003); low and high materialists are just as happy with their life experiences (Millar & Thomas, 2009). Further, people are happier when they think about their life experiences, rate life experiences as contributing more to their happiness, and consider life experiences a better use of money. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) formerly defined the difference between material and experiential investments: experiential purchases 'are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience: an event or series of events that one lives through', whereas material purchases 'are those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good: a tangible object that is kept in one's possession' (p. 1194). Although some expenditures are not easily classified into this dichotomy, participants and judges alike can identify the difference in these purchase categories and reliably categorize purchases as either material or experiential (Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and rate the degree to which expenditures are material or experiential on a continuum (Nicolao et al., 2009; Pchelin, 2011).

Recent work has attempted to understand why experiential purchases may lead to greater happiness. Howell and Hill (2009) demonstrated that there are two paths from experiential purchases to greater well-being. First, life experiences satisfy the psychological need for relatedness, which in turn, increases the feeling of vitality, and ultimately leads to greater happiness. Individuals tend to prefer and report greater happiness for life events that are experienced with others compared to solitary experiential purchases and material items (Caprariello & Reis, 2010) – this difference is due to the satisfaction of the need for relatedness. Second, life experiences (as opposed to material purchases) do not promote social comparisons because they are, possibly, more valued for intrinsic rather than extrinsic reasons. When compared to material purchases, individuals are less likely to contrast their experiential purchases to other possible experiential expenditures (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). These explanations concerning improved social ties and intrinsic motivations converge with research on materialism and decreased SWB. This suggests that experiential purchasing may be an unmeasured mediating variable in the materialism–SWB link.

While we know very little about why some individuals tend to be experiential purchasers, we can examine research on materialism (specifically the link between materialism and insecurity) for possible explanations. For example, it is possible that material purchasers are more risk averse, while experiential purchasers may have more active reward response systems, which motivate them to seek out life experiences. That is, rather than seeking out new positive emotions, materialistic purchasers may instead be attempting to address their own negative emotions, such as anxiety about financial and physical insecurities (Belk, 1985; Inglehart, 1981; Kasser & Sheldon,

2000; Maslow, 1954; Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Rindfleisch et al., 2009) by acquiring goods that allow them to make downward social comparisons (e.g., Solnick & Hemenway, 1998). In contrast, experiential purchasers may be dispositionally less anxious and their feelings of increased security may lead to an 'upward spiral' of experience acquisition and well-being, mirroring the processes described by Fredrickson's (2001) Broaden and Build Theory. Based on this model, it may be that security leads to less materialistic values (Belk, 1985), less materialism leads to more experiential purchasing (Tatzel, 2003), more experiential purchasing leads to greater levels of psychological need satisfaction (Howell & Hill, 2009) and SWB (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), and greater SWB creates more security (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). For this reason, determining an individual's purchasing style (i.e., whether the individual tends to buy relatively more material items or spend money on life experiences) is necessary to better understand the long-term consequences of habitual experiential or material buying behavior.

This study

Because no validated experiential purchasing measure exists, little is known about the chronic experiential buyer. Without such an instrument, it is impossible to create models to determine the long-term antecedents and consequences of preferring experiential rather than material purchases. Thus, the first goal of this study is to develop and validate the EBTS by: (a) demonstrating the reliability and behavioral validity (e.g., examining an experiential buying tendency as a predictor of daily discretionary spending decisions) of the EBTS across multiple groups, (b) ensuring that measuring a preference for experiential buying is not artifact of social desirability as well as establishing construct validity through informant reports, and (c) describing the experiential buyer's personality, emotional, and well-being profiles. The second goal of this study is to demonstrate the pragmatic utility of this approach by creating a model of the long-term effects of experiential purchasing.

Method: Scale development

The first author originally developed 60 items to measure general and specific behaviors, which indicate a material or experiential buying tendency. These items were examined and evaluated by two focus groups. The consensus from the focus groups was that there were too many similar items and that 60 items was unnecessary to measure this construct. Thus, the first author edited the items and deleted items that were similar. The process resulted in 17 items being retained for the first administration of the EBTS. In order to develop the EBTS, a sample of undergraduates (for Sample 1 $n = 536$) from San Francisco State University, Irvine Valley College, and Old Dominion University were recruited. All participants received course credit for taking the survey. The sample's mean age was typical of a college sample ($M = 24.28$ years; $SD = 8.26$), predominately female (69.5%) and ethnically diverse (46.3% European-American).

Participants described their experiential and materialistic purchasing tendencies by stating their agreement with items (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree) developed to measure their general predisposition toward experiential living (e.g., 'When I want to be happy, I am more likely to spend my money on material goods rather than activities and events'.) or a preference for selecting specific life experiences or material items of equal value (e.g., 'In my daily life I am more likely to spend $100 on a new outfit rather than spend $100 on dinner at a nice restaurant'). Also, participants rated how characteristic (1 = not at all; 7 = a great deal) their discretionary spending patterns are to experiential buyers' preferences (e.g., 'Some people generally spend their money on a lot of different life experiences [e.g., eating out, going to a concert, traveling, etc.]. They go about enjoying their life by taking part in daily activities they personally encounter and live through. To what extent does this characterization describe you?') or materialistic buyers' preferences (e.g., 'Some people generally spend their money on a lot of material goods and products [e.g., jewelry, clothing]. They go about enjoying their life by buying physical objects that they can keep in their possession. To what extent does this characterization describe you?'). Each participant answered a total of 17 items.

Results: Scale development

A principle components analysis (PCA) with oblique rotation (promax) was performed by including all 17 items from the original EBTS. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy indicated an adequate sample size, $KMO = 0.81$ (with the acceptable cut-off being any value greater than 0.50). An analysis of the scree plot (Cattell, 1966) and factor loadings indicated that a single factor solution would be appropriate. Also, when we attempted to extract two factors, the second factor had no items that loaded onto the factor with a value higher than 0.60. PCA demonstrated that four of the 17 items loaded onto this primary factor, each with factor loadings of 0.60 or higher – all other items loaded onto the first factor with loading less than 0.60. We repeated the PCA again to examine the factor loading with only these four items and examined the factor structure across the three different universities. Across each of the three schools,

the single-factor solution was supported with all four items loading onto the single factor. Thus, these four items were selected to examine the internal consistency of the potential EBTS. These four items were internally consistent ($\alpha = 0.78$ for the sample, and 0.79, 0.74, and 0.78 for the three schools, respectively) and dropping any additional item(s) would have decreased the construct's internal consistency. The final four items and their three different response formats (all seven-point Likert scales) are presented in Appendix.

Method: Scale validation

In order to validate the final version of the EBTS six additional samples ($n = 7102$) were recruited. All participants volunteered, received course credit, were entered into a raffle to win one of ten $25 gift cards, or volunteered in order to receive feedback regarding their scores on various psychological measures.

Sample 2 was recruited to replicate the reliability and factor structure of the EBTS on a larger older, gender-balanced, and non-student sample of internet users. This sample was also used to examine the relations between the EBTS and discrete constructs related to positive and negative emotions. Participants were 2653 respondents who completed the EBTS on the yourmorals.org website. Participants typically complete several out of the many (over 30 at the time of this study) studies featured on the site in order to receive feedback about their scores. As such, the sample for each relationship examined in conjunction with the EBTS is the entire sample's subset that took the EBTS. This represents a limitation in that we cannot run some analyses that would be possible if all participants completed all measures; however, it also provides for some degree of cross-validation as subsamples are largely non-overlapping. Participants were diverse in age ($M = 36.49$, $SD = 14.75$), well-educated (76% had completed a college degree and 26% had completed a graduate or professional degree), generally liberal (59%), and included slightly more females (52.5%). Participants completed: (a) the Behavioral Inhibition System and Behavioral Activation System (BIS/BAS) mini-scale taken from the International Personality Item Pool (Goldberg et al., 2006), which measures approach and avoidance systems activation (Carver & White, 1994); (b) the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983), which measures four distinct aspects of empathy (i.e., personal distress, fantasy, empathic concern, and perspective taking); (c) the Engagement with Beauty Scale (Diessner, Solom, Frost, Parsons, & Davidson, 2008), which measures positive emotional reactions to natural, artistic, and moral beauty; (d) the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998), which measures the participant's attachment style; and (e) the Disgust scale (Haidt, McCauley, & Rozin, 1994).

Sample 3 was recruited to verify the reliability and factor structure of the EBTS and to determine an experiential buyer's personality and well-being profile, while specifically controlling for materialistic values. Thus, to ensure that the EBTS explains unique variance in SWB and buying behavior and is thus related, but not fully overlapping with materialistic values, the Material Values Scale (MVS; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins, Mick, & Monroe, 2004) was included. The MVS measures the degree to which individuals endorse materialistic values. In Sample 3, based on prior research on materialism and consumer behavior, a variety of measures were included in order to understand and validate the EBTS. In addition to the MVS, participants completed the Big Five Mini Marker scale (Saucier, 1994). To measure well-being, participants completed: (a) The Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985); (b) The Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999); (c) The Basic Need Satisfaction in Life Scale (Gagné, 2003), which is a questionnaire that measures the psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) necessary for optimal well-being, and (d) a measure of financial security (IFDFW, InCharge Financial Distress/Financial Well-Being Scale; Prawitz et al., 2006). Sample 3 included 3149 participants who were students at San Francisco State University, volunteers recruited from popular websites (e.g., Craigslist, Facebook), or volunteers recruited by Old Dominion University students in a different experiment. The sample's mean age was older than a typical college sample ($M = 29.63$ years; $SD = 12.65$), predominately female (72.4%), and ethnically diverse (50.9% European-American).

Sample 4 was recruited to confirm the reliability and factor structure of the EBTS. This sample was also used to determine the relationship between the EBTS with a behavioral measure of buying preferences. Our behavioral measure of a preference for experiential or material purchases occurred at the end of the survey when participants were asked what type of gift card they would like to receive as possible compensation for taking the survey (a lottery was held in which one out of every 100 participants won a gift card). Three gift cards were considered materialistic (for Amazon.com, Target.com, or their favorite mall) and three were considered experiential (for a restaurant of their choice, a movie theater of their choice, or Ticketmaster.com). In models that predicted their gift card selection, we controlled for materialistic values (MVS; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Richins et al., 2004), socioeconomic status (SES; using a proxy developed by Howell, Kurai, & Tam, in press), and gender. A total of 863 participants chose to participate in the

raffle and where used for analyses. The sample was older than a typical college sample ($M = 28.46$ years; SD = 10.90), predominantly female (76.7%), and European-American (61.4%). In exchange for participation, respondents were entered into the raffle.

Sample 5 was recruited to demonstrate the temporal stability (i.e., test–retest reliability) and behavioral validity of measuring a person's experiential buying tendency. We predicted that individuals with an experiential buying style would be more likely to spend their money on services that are experiential (e.g., a spa day, a dining experience, going to the museum) or gifts (e.g., a donation, a present, etc.) as opposed to non-essential goods, which are materialistic (e.g., beauty products, jewelry, clothing, books, DVDs). To test this hypothesis, we conducted a 4-day daily spending diary (from Friday to Monday night). The test–retest reliability was examined by requesting participants from Sample 5 to complete the EBTS two times (two weeks apart) before they completed their first diary. Sample 5 included 82 students at San Francisco State University who received class credit for completing the diaries – however, 12 participants failed to complete at least three of the four diaries and were dropped from the analyses. The sample's mean age was of a typical college sample ($M = 22.00$ years; SD = 7.11), predominately female (74.7%) and ethnically diverse (44.3% European-American). At the beginning of the diary, the participants read these instructions:

> There are many ways in which people can spend their money. We are interested in how you spend your discretionary income and your non-discretionary income. Discretionary spending INCLUDES: (1) Non-essential goods (e.g., beauty products, jewelry, clothing, books, DVDs, a cell phone, iPod, television, etc.); (2) Services (e.g., a spa day, a dining experience, going to the museum, theater, a concert, travelling, snowboarding, or a boat trip); (3) Gifts (e.g., a donation, a present, etc.). Non-discretionary income INCLUDES money spent on your: (1) Housing (e.g., mortgage, rent, maintenance); (2) Utilities (e.g., electricity, water); (3) Food at home (i.e., food and nonalcoholic beverages purchased at grocery, convenience, or specialty stores); (4) Transportation (e.g., car payments, gas and motor oil, public transportation/parking fees); (5) Personal health (e.g., medical services, prescription drugs, medical supplies). Did you spend any money in the last 24 hours?

Those who spent money in the last 24 were required to 'check each option for how you spent your money in the last 24 hours' (with the eight options from the instructions listed – e.g., non-essential goods, services, etc.). To test our hypothesis, we recorded the percentage of days each participant spent money on any of the different categories list above.

Sample 6 was recruited to address the possible concern of socially desirable responding when completing the EBTS. Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich (2010) demonstrated that individuals have negative stereotypes regarding materialistic people. Thus, participants in Sample 6 were recruited to test whether a preference for experiential buying is an artifact of social desirability. In Sample 6, participants completed the: (a) EBTS; (b) the MVS; (c) The Subjective Happiness Scale; and (d) The Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Sample 6 included 295 participants who were students at San Francisco State University. The mean age was typical of a college sample (82% reporting being 24 year of age or less), predominately female (80.6%), and ethnically diverse (only 37% European-American).

Sample 7 was recruited to provide informant reports as an alternative method for establishing construct validity (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Informant reports also tend to be minimally influenced by social desirability and other biases (Vazire, 2006). In Sample 7, participants completed the EBTS and recruited two individuals as informants. For the informants the instructions ('In this section of the survey we would like to know more about the purchasing choices your friend or family member typically makes') and items (e.g., 'In general, when he/she has extra money he/she is likely to buy a…') were such that the ratings were focused on the participant. Sample 7 included 60 participants who were students at San Francisco State University. The mean age was typical of a college sample ($M = 25.12$, SD = 7.21), predominately female (76.3%), and ethnically diverse (only 36% European-American).

Results: scale validation

Evaluating the EBS's descriptive statistics, reliability, and factor structure

The descriptive statistics were remarkably similar (Table 1) across samples 2, 3, and 4 (M's 4.55–4.58; SD's 1.21–1.25); also, in all three samples the EBTS displayed a slight negative skew. The Cronbach's alpha across the three samples was consistent ($\alpha = 0.75$–0.77). We examined the factor structure of the EBTS by conducting a PCA across the three samples. For each of the PCAs, the analysis demonstrated that these four items formed a single factor solution with all four items loading onto the same factor. Factor loadings were all above 0.60 and the EBTS was able to explain 57–59% of the variance in purchasing style across the three samples.

The experiential buyer's personality, well-being, and emotional profiles

To describe the experiential buyer's emotional profile, in Sample 2, we examined the correlations between an experiential or materialistic purchasing style (i.e., low

Table 1. The factor structure, descriptive statistics, and reliability of the discretionary experiential purchasing tendency.

Items	Factor loadings		
	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
In general, when I have extra money I am likely to buy a life experience	0.88	0.84	0.83
When I want to be happy, I am more likely to spend my money on activities and events	0.87	0.83	0.80
Some people generally spend their money on a lot of different life experiences (e.g., eating out, going to a concert, traveling, etc.). They go about enjoying their life by taking part in daily activities they personally encounter and live through. To what extent does this characterization describe you?	0.66	0.73	0.75
[a]Some people generally spend their money on a lot of material goods and products (e.g., jewelry, clothing). They go about enjoying their life by buying physical objects that they can keep in their possession. To what extent does this characterization describe you?	−0.64	−0.62	−0.64
Percentage of variance explained by first Eigenvalue	59.60	57.53	57.08
Sample size	2653	3149	863
Mean	4.55	4.58	4.58
Standard deviation	1.25	1.22	1.21
Cronbach's alpha	0.77	0.75	0.75

Note: [a]Item 4 is reverse coded.

scorers on the EBTS) and a number of discrete positive and negative emotional constructs. In Sample 3, we: (a) examined the correlation between the purchasing style and materialism and (b) determined the correlations between purchasing style and (1) the Big Five personality traits and (2) SWB with all correlations holding materialism constant.

The emotional profile. Consistent with previous research on the hedonic benefits of experiential purchases, we found positive relationships (Sample 2) between an experiential purchasing tendency and global self-assessments of constructs related to positive emotions (Table 2). Specifically, experiential purchasers reported higher activation of their behavioral attraction fun-seeking (e.g., they 'like to act on a whim') and reward responsiveness systems (e.g., they 'get caught up in the excitement when others are celebrating'). Experiential purchasers reported greater engagement with natural, artistic, and moral beauty. In addition, experiential purchasers appeared to generally be more emotionally affected, as they scored higher on three of the four IRI subscales: fantasy, perspective taking, and empathic concern.

As expected, there were consistent positive relationships between a materialistic purchasing style (i.e., low experiential buyers) and constructs related to negative emotions. Those with a materialistic purchasing style scored higher on the fourth IRI subscale, personal distress, (e.g., they 'sometimes feel helpless when in the middle of a very emotional situation'). Materialistic purchasers scored higher on attachment anxiety (e.g., 'I worry a lot about my relationships') and higher on activation of the behavioral inhibition system (e.g., they 'begin to panic when there is danger'). Materialistic purchasers also scored higher on disgust sensitivity (e.g., 'it bothers me to hear someone clear a throat full of mucous').

The personality profile. In Sample 3, the correlation between an experiential purchasing style and materialism was significant and negative (r [3,147] = −0.43, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, because one goal of this study was to determine the unique relations between one's purchasing style with personality traits and SWB, all correlations controlled for materialistic values (Table 3). Individuals with an experiential purchasing tendency were extraverted, agreeable, and open to new experiences. When we regressed purchasing style onto materialism and the Big Five personality traits, the two strongest Big Five predictors of an experiential purchasing tendency were extraversion ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$) and openness to experience ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$). Though increased agreeableness and consciousness as well as decreased neuroticism were still significantly predictive of purchasing style, the sizes of their effects were all trivial (βs < 0.05).

The well-being profile. When we examined the relations between purchasing style and SWB (controlling for materialism), it was demonstrated that an

Table 2. Correlations between the experiential purchasing tendency and measures of emotional disposition.

	Behavioral inhibition and attraction				
	BIS/BAS anxiety ($N = 414$)	BIS/BAS drive ($N = 414$)	BIS/BAS fun seeking ($N = 414$)	BIS/BAS reward responsiveness ($N = 414$)	
Experiential purchasing tendency	−0.22***	0.13**	0.22***	0.25***	
	Empathy and disgust				
	IRI empathic concern ($N = 1321$)	IRI fantasy ($N = 1321$)	IRI personal distress ($N = 1321$)	IRI perspective taking ($N = 1321$)	Disgust ($N = 1129$)
Experiential purchasing tendency	0.17***	0.09**	−0.15***	0.19***	−0.12***
	Engagement with beauty and experiences in close relationships				
	Engagement with artistic beauty ($N = 442$)	Engagement with natural beauty ($N = 442$)	Engagement with moral beauty ($N = 442$)	Attachment anxiety ($N = 846$)	Attachment avoidance ($N = 846$)
Experiential purchasing tendency	0.19***	0.27***	0.23***	−0.14***	−0.14***

Notes: Participants choose to participate in one or more of the multiple studies at YourMorals.org, such that each relationship is reported based on a largely non-overlapping sub-sample.
*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, and ***$p \leq 0.001$.

Table 3. Partial correlations between experiential purchasing tendency and personality traits and SWB controlling for materialistic values.

	Personality traits					
	Materialistic values	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness
Experiential purchasing tendency	−0.43***	0.17***	0.11***	0.04*	−0.07*	0.14***
	SWB					
	Satisfaction with life	Happiness	Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness	Financial security
Experiential purchasing tendency	0.13***	0.18**	0.14***	0.16**	0.21***	0.00

Notes: The correlation between materialistic values and purchasing style is the zero-order correlation. $N = 3149$.
*$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, and ***$p \leq 0.001$.

experiential purchase type was associated with increased satisfaction with life, happiness, and psychological need satisfaction (i.e., more autonomy, competence, and relatedness; Table 3). Because of the similarity in the correlations, we created a SWB composite variable from life satisfaction and subjective happiness. As expected, the correlation between an experiential purchasing style and SWB was significant even when controlling for materialism, $r_{ab.c}(3,146) = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$.

Behavioral validation of the EBTS

At the end of the survey, participants in Sample 4 were given the choice to select the type of gift card they would like to receive if they won the raffle (three gift cards were experiential and three were materialistic). Each participant's raffle choice (coded '0' for material gift cards [for Amazon.com, Target.com, or their favorite mall] and '1' for experiential gift cards [for a restaurant of their choice, a movie theater of their choice, or Ticketmaster.com]) served as the behavioral measure of purchasing preference.

To ensure that the 'experiential gift cards' were indeed perceived to be more experiential and the 'material gift cards' more material we recruited 83 judges (62% female; $M_{age} = 34.77$ years, SD = 13.71; age ranged from 18 to 81 years) from Mechanical Turk to rate 36 different purchases (including the six gift cards) for the extent to which each purchase (e.g., sporting goods, musical instrument, clothing, a dining experience, travel, a $25 gift card for your favorite mall, a $25 gift card to the restaurant of your choice) was material or experiential. The judges read these instructions: 'Purchases can vary in the degree to which they are tangible objects that you obtain and keep in your possession (material) versus intangible events that you live through (experiential). For instance, clothing, jewelry and accessories, as well as items bought as ''collectibles'' might be considered purely materialistic purchases, whereas a new guitar, golf clubs, or iPod are material objects that provide experiences. Sometimes, we spend money on pure experiences, such as dinner and drinks with friends or a vacation.' They were then asked to rate the various purchases on a Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (*only material*) to 5 (*only experiential*). The mid-point of the scale (*equally material and experiential*) captured qualities of both types. The item order was randomized for each participant.

As expected, the judges' ratings for the most experiential purchases were outdoor activities ($M = 4.35$, SD = 1.11), travel ($M = 4.34$, SD = 1.02), and a dining experience ($M = 4.00$, SD = 1.22); the purchases rated as least experiential, and thereby the most material, were jewelry ($M = 1.42$, SD = 0.76), clothing ($M = 1.64$, SD = 0.90), and beauty products ($M = 1.80$, SD = 1.05). The three experiential gift cards (a $25 gift card for the movie theater of your choice [$M = 3.55$, SD = 1.39], a $25 gift card for Ticketmaster.com [$M = 3.44$, SD = 1.39], a $25 gift card to the restaurant of your choice [$M = 3.44$, SD = 1.42]) were each rated as significantly (all p's < 0.001) more experiential than the three material gift cards (a $25 gift card for your favorite mall [$M = 2.52$, SD = 1.26], a $25 Target gift card [$M = 2.49$, SD = 1.40], a $25 gift card to Amazon.com [$M = 2.37$, SD = 1.33]). Further, there were no significant differences among the experiential ratings of the three experiential gift cards or among the experiential ratings of the three material gift cards. Finally, there was no association between the experiential rating of the six gifts cards with age, gender, education, income, SWB, and buying tendency.

Logistic regression analysis was employed to predict the probability that a participant would select an experiential gift card. We predicted the probability of selecting an experiential gift card from one's purchasing tendency, materialism, SES, gender, the interaction between purchasing style and materialism, and the interaction between purchasing style and SES (Table 4 reports the logistic regression coefficient, Wald test, and odds ratio for each of the predictors). An omnibus test of the model was significantly better at predicting one's raffle choice, $\chi^2(6, N = 850) = 23.08$, $p < 0.001$, than a model only including the intercept. The odds ratio for experiential purchasing style indicated that, when holding all other variables constant, experiential purchasers were 35% more likely to select one of the experiential gift cards. Thus, individuals with an experiential tendency selected gift cards that were rated as being more experiential than individuals with a material buying tendency.

Table 4. Logistic regression predicting gift card choice from experiential purchasing style, materialistic values, SES, and gender.

Predictor	*B*	Wald χ^2	*P*	Odds ratio
Constant	−1.62	39.51	<0.001	0.20
Experiential purchasing tendency	0.30	9.82	<0.001	1.35
Materialism	−0.13	2.02	0.16	0.88
SES	−0.17	4.11	0.04	0.84
Gender	0.30	2.43	0.11	1.34
Purchasing tendency × materialism	−0.06	0.59	0.44	0.94
Purchasing tendency × SES	0.06	0.47	0.49	1.06

Note: All the predictors were standardized before being entered into the model.

Using Sample 5, we first examined the test–retest reliability of the EBTS. The test–retest correlation for the EBTS was 0.76 ($p < 0.001$); this relation was very similar to the internal consistency reported in Table 1 and suggested that a preference for experiential buying is stable over time. Next, we examined the behavioral validity of the EBTS. The daily diary data demonstrated that on most days, participants spent money (81.7% of the days completed, participants reported spending money on either a discretionary or non-discretionary expenditure). The most common expenditure was food for the home followed by services, transportation, non-essential goods, and gifts. Next, we examined whether an experiential buying tendency was associated with the proportion of days that participants spent money on these five frequent categories; it was determined that an experiential buying tendency was associated with an increased number of days in which at least one service (r [68] = 0.25, $p = 0.035$), gift (r [68] = 0.28, $p = 0.018$), or transportation expenditure (r [68] = 0.24, $p = 0.044$) was purchased.

External validation: testing social desirability correlations and peer ratings

Using Sample 6, we tested the possibility that a preference for experiential buying is an artifact of social desirability by examining the relationships between an experiential buying tendency and materialistic values with social desirability. First, as was demonstrated in the previous samples, the correlation between an experiential purchasing tendency and materialistic values was significant and negative (r [293] = −0.43, $p < 0.001$). Next, the correlation between an experiential purchasing tendency and social desirability was positive and significant (r [293] = 0.21, $p < 0.001$); though, the correlation between materialistic values and social desirability was stronger (r [293] = −0.34, $p < 0.001$). Interestingly, when we controlled for materialistic values, the partial correlation between an experiential purchasing style and social desirability was not significant ($r_{ab.c}$[292] = 0.07, $p = 0.21$); however, when we controlled for an experiential purchasing style, the partial correlation between materialistic values and social desirability was still significant ($r_{ab.c}$ [292] = −0.27, $p < 0.001$). Finally, we regressed subjective happiness onto an experiential purchasing style, materialistic values, and social desirability. In this model (F [3,287] = 11.17, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.11$) only an experiential purchasing tendency ($\beta = 0.15$, $p = 0.02$) and social desirability ($\beta = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$) were significant predictors of happiness – when controlling for an experiential purchasing style and social desirability, materialistic values were not related to subjective happiness.

Using Sample 7, we examined the self-informant agreement on the participant's degree of experiential buying tendency. We first tested the informant–informant agreement (i.e., 'consensus'; Vazire, 2006). The correlation between the two informants for the experiential level of the participant was significant (r [58] = 0.26, $p < 0.05$) – consistent with consensus correlation expectations between informants that typically range from 0.20 to 0.50 (Vazire, 2006). For this reason, we averaged the two informant's ratings to form a mean informant rating. Next, we examined the self-informant agreement. The correlation between the self and the average of the two informants for the experiential level of the participant was significant (r [58] = 0.40, $p < 0.05$) – again, this relation is similar to the typical self-informant correlation when using informant methods (with the typical magnitude of this relation being between 0.40 and 0.60; Vazire, 2006). Thus, these relations both support the validity of the EBTS and minimize concerns over socially desirable responding.

Method: Pragmatic utility

Sample 8 was recruited to demonstrate the pragmatic utility of measuring one's experiential buying tendency by testing a path model of the benefits of habitual experiential purchasing on psychological need satisfaction and SWB. As suggested by the pattern of correlations found in Samples 1–5, we tested a model in which emotional stability predicts increased non-materialistic values, which predict increases in experiential buying, resulting in increased psychological need satisfaction and SWB, with this increase in SWB recursively promoting lower materialism and even more experiential purchasing. Sample 8 included 1996 participants who were students at San Francisco State University, volunteers recruited from popular websites (e.g., Craigslist, Facebook), or volunteers recruited by Old Dominion University students in a different experiment. The sample's mean age was older than a typical college sample ($M = 29.44$ years; SD = 12.85), predominately female (73.9%) and ethnically diverse (45.7% European-American). In addition to the EBTS, participants completed: (a) the MVS, (b) the Big Five Mini-Marker scale (Saucier, 1994), (c) the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction scale (Gagné, 2003), and (d) the Subjective Happiness Scale as well as the SWLS (Diener et al., 1985). It should be noted that previous research has proposed that materialistic purchasing decisions may be a result of experiencing chronic negative emotions, anxiety, or insecurity (e.g., Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Rindfleisch et al., 2009), and thus, in our model a neurotic personality trait serves as a dispositional anxiety and insecurity proxy.

Results: Pragmatic utility

Building a path model to explain the non-materialism-SWB relation

Testing for mediation. Using Sample 8, we tested a model predicting that non-materialistic values would increase SWB through experiential purchasing. To test for mediation, Preacher and Leonardelli's (2001) four-stage criteria were applied. We began by testing a simple mediation model, in which we predicted that non-materialistic values (the predictor) increased experiential buying tendencies (the mediator), which increased SWB (the outcome). In this simple mediation model, we first found that even when controlling for neuroticism, non-materialistic values were associated with greater SWB ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$; satisfying the first criterion for mediation). Second, when we examined the path from an experiential purchasing tendency to SWB, even when controlling for neuroticism and non-materialism, there was a significant direct path ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$; satisfying the second criterion); also, there was a significant direct path from non-materialistic values to experiential purchasing ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$; satisfying the third criterion). Finally, when controlling for experiential purchasing, there was not a significant path from non-materialistic values to SWB (satisfying the fourth criterion). Also, there was no evidence for reverse causation – specifically, when we tested a model in which SWB mediated the path from non-materialism to experiential buying, there was no change in non-materialism–purchasing style path (violating the fourth criterion). Thus, these results support a simple mediation model in which, controlling for neuroticism, increased non-materialistic values predict more experiential buying, which leads to higher SWB.

Developing a path model to understand the non-materialism-SWB relation. In order to better understand why non-materialists may experience more SWB, we developed a path model including neuroticism (our dispositional anxiety and insecurity proxy), materialistic values, experiential purchasing, psychological need satisfaction, and SWB (i.e., life satisfaction and subjective happiness). In building the path model, we followed Stage, Carter, and Nora's (2004) suggestion that 'theoretical knowledge on the part of the researcher is critical to the successful application of path analysis' (p. 6). To follow this recommendation, we proposed the theoretical model that neuroticism would predict decreased non-materialistic values (supported by Johnson & Attmann, 2009), which would then lead to greater experiential buying (Tatzel, 2003). Greater experiential buying would then lead to greater psychological need satisfaction (as suggested by Howell & Howell, 2008 and supported by Howell & Hill, 2009), which would increase SWB (Howell, Chenot, Hill, & Howell, 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2008), and finally, a recursive path was added such that greater SWB would also lead to reduced materialism via increased feelings of security (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Mandel & Smeesters, 2008; Rindfleisch et al., 2009).

We tested the path model's fit by examining different goodness-of fit indices (Hu and Bentler [1999] for a good review of these indices). Specifically, we examined the: (a) Normed Fit Index (NFI), which demonstrates good fit when the NFI value is above 0.95; (b) Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) which has similar interpretations as the NFI; and (c) the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) which demonstrates good fit when the RMSEA value is below 0.05. The path coefficients for the model are shown in Figure 1 (all path coefficients are significant at $p < 0.001$). In this model, we constrained materialistic values and experiential purchasing tendency such that neither had direct effect on SWB. The indices of model fit demonstrated excellent goodness-of-fit (NFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.033 [90%] CI = 0.011–0.058) and the variance explained in SWB is 50%. This model demonstrates that neurotics (i.e., individuals who are chronically anxious and insecure) are likely to be more materialistic and for this reason buy more material items. Also, the relation between non-materialistic values and SWB is completely mediated by an experiential purchasing tendency and psychological need satisfaction. That is, the model predicts that non-materialists are more likely to spend their discretionary income on life experiences, which increases the degree of psychological need satisfaction they experience, and results in higher SWB. Finally, this path model was found to be recursive – greater SWB also leads to increased non-materialism.

Discussion

Though there is growing support that spending money on life experiences increases well-being (Howell & Hill, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), few, if any, studies have determined the predictors of experiential living nor have previous studies been able to assess the effects of habitual experiential purchasing. Therefore, the goal of this study was to develop a reliable and valid measure of one's preference for experiential purchasing (the EBS). Using eight independent samples, the EBTS was shown to be: (a) an internally consistent, valid, and temporally stable single-factor measure of an experiential buying tendency that was not an artifact of social desirability, (b) correlated with numerous expected emotion-related (e.g., reward responsiveness, engagement with beauty, and empathy), (c) uniquely related to personality (extraversion and openness to

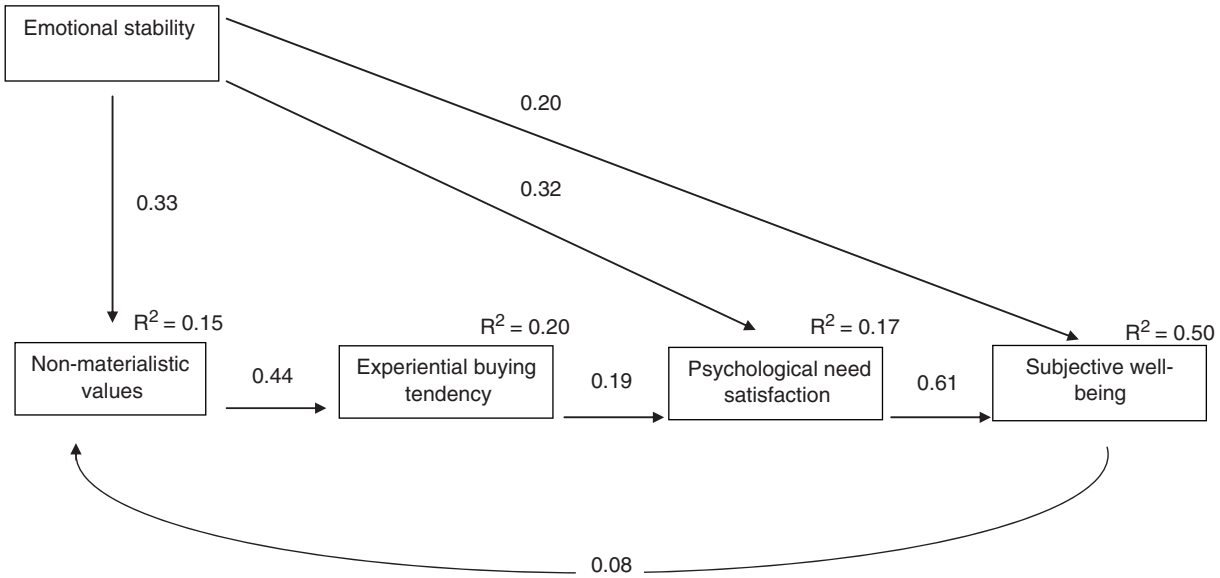

Figure 1. The path model that tested the proposed theoretical model: (a) that neuroticism will predict decreased non-materialistic values (supported by Johnson & Attmann, 2009), (b) which will lead to greater experiential buying (Tatzel, 2003), and (c) which will lead to greater psychological need satisfaction (Howell & Hill, 2009; Howell & Howell, 2008), which will increase SWB (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2008) and that greater SWB also leads to reduced materialism (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Mandel & Smeesters, 2008; Rindfleisch et al., 2009). Because materialistic purchasing decisions may be a result of experiencing chronic negative emotions, anxiety, or insecurity, in our model a neurotic personality trait serves as a proxy of dispositional anxiety and insecurity. The indices of model fit demonstrated excellent goodness-of-fit (NFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.033 [90% CI = 0.011–0.058]). All paths in the model are signification at $p < 0.001$.

experience) and SWB constructs even after controlling for materialistic values, and (d) predictive of selecting an experiential gift card as payment for study participation as well as daily spending on services, events, and gifts. Finally, the EBTS demonstrated pragmatic utility in that it allowed us to test a path model in which individual differences in experiential purchasing tendencies mediated the relationship previously found between materialism and lower SWB. Further, this path model was found to be recursive, in that greater SWB also leads to reduced materialism, resulting in an 'upward spiral' of experiential purchasing and SWB that explains how experiential purchasing benefits may accrue over the lifespan.

How does the path model extend past research?

There have been numerous theories attempting to explain the mechanisms that lead to materialists being less happy with their lives, but only recently have studies begun to consider purchasing tendencies. Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) and others (e.g., Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Howell & Hill, 2009; Millar & Thomas, 2009) have demonstrated that individual experiential purchases make people happier than individual materialistic purchases; however, due to the lack of a validated measure for experiential buying tendencies, these experiential buying studies have not examined the possible long-term benefits of a preference for experiential purchases. For example, Nicolao et al. (2009) found that participants were slower to adapt to negative experiential purchases compared to negative material purchases, leading them to consider the possibility that habitual experiential purchasing may not necessarily be associated with global assessments of well-being. The current research suggests that this is not the case. Also, even though our path model both replicates past correlational work and supports the causal paths suggested by past research, we believe these finding are only the first step toward a general model to explain why materialistic values have detrimental effects on SWB. We strongly suggest that future models examining these relations include a wide array of daily financial choices and monetary decisions to determine all the economic mediators between materialistic values and decreased psychological need satisfaction.

How emotional and personality profiles explain buying preference

As the quote that begins this article shows, some people report a preference for experiential purchases and having a validated measure of this preference allows us to begin describing these individuals. Individuals' desire for life experiences may be a function of their emotional dispositions and personality traits. The combination of their responsiveness to rewards (i.e., heightened activation of attraction to

fun-seeking) and their personality (i.e., high extraversion and openness) may predispose these individuals to choose life experiences rather than material goods. For example, it may be that experiential purchasers are driven by sensation seeking, which is mostly related to extraversion's excitement seeking facet and openness to experience's action and fantasy facets (Aluja, Garcia, & Garcia, 2003).

Our data show that experiential purchasers have more sensitive reward responsiveness systems. Because experiential purchasers are more emotionally affected by events and have a greater appreciation for the world's beauty, they may experience greater hedonic rewards from life experiences and therefore be more likely to seek out such experiences. In contrast, our results demonstrate that material purchasers experience higher behavioral inhibition system activation, more interpersonal distress, and higher attachment anxiety in intimate relationships. These correlations support past research demonstrating that materialistic values are associated with experiences of general and existential insecurity (Pyszczynski et al., 1997; Rindfleisch et al., 2009). Further, these correlations corroborate and extend previous work (Chang & Arkin, 2002; Zhou & Gao, 2008), which demonstrated that feelings of generalized anxiety, depression, insecurity, and social threat potentiate the motivation to acquire material items. For these reasons, materialists may experience more emotional stressors, especially relational stressors, and cope with these stressors by purchasing material possessions.

Experiential activities are inherently more social (Caprariello & Reis, 2010; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and for this reason fulfill the psychological need for relatedness (Howell & Hill, 2009). Considering that compared to material items, life experiences are likely to result in more social engagement, it is reasonable that extraverts prefer experiential purchases. Openness to experience may be related to experiential buying due to the diversity and variability associated with life experiences. Unlike material purchases that are mass-produced and easily replicated, every vacation, every show, and every meal provides an individual with a different experience that cannot easily be repeated again. Another possible explanation for this personality profile is that experiences may be less predictable, relatively more risky, and may have a greater outcome uncertainty. This hypothesis is supported by research showing that high extraversion and openness are linked to increased risk propensity (Nicholson, Soane, Fenton-O'Creevy, & Willman, 2005).

Finally, the Broaden and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) posits an evolutionary explanation for positive emotions that fits our current model. In times of stress or scarcity, it may be adaptive to narrow one's focus on security needs and make material purchases that have a tangible function. However, when security needs are met, it may be more adaptive to broaden one's experience and acquire new knowledge, skills, and relationships that often accompany experiential purchases. These experiences, if they do not arouse competing security concerns, may then provide increased SWB with accompanying reductions in feelings of anxiety and insecurity, encouraging further experiential purchases, and resulting in the 'upward spiral' depicted in our model. In this way, the benefits of an experiential purchasing tendency may accrue over a lifetime and individuals may develop stable purchasing habits. Thus, these results seem to indicate that the reward or inhibition systems may be underlying causes for experiential and materialistic buying preferences, and ultimately, it may be that chronic positive emotions lead to a preference for life experiences, whereas chronic negative emotions lead to a preference for material items.

Conclusion

Life experiences become part of who we are. They are woven into our memories, shape our identity, and are generally not replaceable or upgradeable. It comes as little surprise, then, that past work has shown that experiential purchases increase feelings of happiness. People have measurable preferences for experiential or material purchases. The EBTS allows researchers to better explore the psychological ramifications of habitual buying preferences. Our results demonstrate that individuals who are less materialistic are happier, likely in part, because of how they spend their discretionary income. It is hoped that the EBTS allows researchers to better identify experiential and materialistic buyers in order to examine when and why they prefer and benefit from their respective purchasing styles. For example, some goods may be thought of by different people in different ways, and it may be the perception of what one buys that may actually drive hedonic effects (e.g., see Carter & Gilovich, 2010, Study 6). Future research should distinguish the features that differentiate life experiences from material items and determine whether perceptions of these features differ across individuals with different buying tendencies. Being able to identify and understand these tendencies is crucial if social scientists are to realize their stated goals (e.g., Dunn, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2011) of helping improve individual consumption patterns in ways that are beneficial to SWB.

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Appendix. The EBTS

In this section of the survey we would like to know more about the purchasing choices you are typically more likely to make. A material item is something tangible, such as jewelry or clothes. An experiential item is something that is intangible, like going out to dinner or going on vacation. Using the scale below as a guide, indicate your preferences.

Item 1. In general, when I have extra money I am likely to buy...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A material item						A life experience

Item 2. When I want to be happy, I am more likely to spend my money on...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Material goods						Activities and events

Item 3. Some people generally spend their money on a lot of different life experiences (e.g., eating out, going to a concert, traveling, etc). They go about enjoying their life by taking part in daily activities they personally encounter and live through. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						A great deal

Item 4. Some people generally spend their money on a lot of material goods and products (e.g., jewelry, clothing). They go about enjoying their life by buying physical objects that they can keep in their possession. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						A great deal