

What Do We Really Need? Goals and Values, Security, and the Perception of Consumer Necessity

J. Ian Norris

Berea College

Chloe E. Williams

Western Kentucky University

ABSTRACT

There is a general trend for consumer goods considered luxuries to become thought of as necessities. Although the luxury/necessity distinction is central to the fields of marketing and economics, little research has examined the perception of necessity as a psychological phenomenon. Three studies examined the relationship of the perceived necessity of a variety of consumer goods to goals, values, and insecurity. In Study 1, the number of goods considered necessities as opposed to luxuries correlated negatively with intrinsic and positively with extrinsic goal pursuit. In Study 2, this pattern generalized to the distinction between needs and wants, the extent to which participants reported needing their possessions, and to materialistic values. In Study 3, the perception of necessity mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and materialism, suggesting that needing consumer products has in part a basis in interpersonal insecurity. In turn, it may facilitate materialistic consumption. © 2016 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

In 1989, roughly 1% of the U.S. population used a cell phone. By 2009, cell phone usage had reached nearly complete saturation at 97%. Most strikingly, in 2009 roughly half of those users considered the cell phone a necessity (Pew Research, 2009). In 20 years, a technological innovation largely unknown became something that many people did not think they could live without. The cell phone's meteoric rise from obscurity to necessity may be a drastic example. Nevertheless, it captures well the more general phenomenon by which consumer goods have the potential to become woven into our lives to such an extent that we think we cannot live without them. Televisions and computers, over about 60 and 40 years, respectively, are also now considered necessities by half the population. The automobile, which has been mass produced for consumers for roughly a century, is considered a necessity by nearly 90% of people. For these and other consumer products, such as air conditioning, clothes dryers, and microwaves, Pew Research has documented a steady positive linear trend between 1973 and 2006 in the proportion of people considering them necessities as opposed to luxuries, suggesting that necessity is, in part, a matter of perception.

There is little research on the perceived necessity of consumer goods in the consumer behavior literature. However, necessity is one of the primary dimensions on which people think about consumption, and perhaps

the most fundamental concern in consumer behavior (Pincus, 2004). The purpose of the current research is to examine the psychological correlates of this perception of necessity, in goal striving, values, and interpersonal security.

In general, psychological needs are viewed as immutable and universal (e.g., Maslow, 1943). The Pew Research data show that for consumer goods, the perception of necessity is more malleable. Economists often define necessity in terms of the extent to which demand for the good is affected by changes in price. Necessities are defined as relatively inelastic, meaning that demand changes less than proportionally in response to increases in price. The closer that the price elasticity of a good is to zero, the less sensitive consumer demand is to price. In fact, the one empirical study that measured the perceived necessity of consumer goods demonstrated that price elasticities correlated well with the perception of necessity, such that the more inelastic the good, the more greatly participants rated the goods as necessities as opposed to luxuries (Kemp, 1998).

There is reason to believe, however, that psychological factors play a role in the perception of necessity. At any given time, some people will consider a good a necessity and others a luxury. For instance, people are roughly evenly split as to whether the cell phone,

television, and home computer are necessities. Furthermore, although the general trend for most goods is a steady increase in the perception of necessity, a slight reversal of this pattern was observed in 2009, following the last economic recession. This may seem counterintuitive at first. In a weak economy, people would likely have more unmet needs, and thus might consider more things necessities. However, Pew suggested that the economic recession may have prompted some people to reevaluate their priorities. In so doing, they may have determined that some consumer goods were not so necessary after all. Consistent with this perspective, it was the respondents with higher incomes that considered more things necessities.

The psychological mechanisms that may underlie the perception of necessity are well captured by Juliet Schor (1999) in *The Overspent American*. Through the process of hedonic adaptation (e.g., Kahneman, 1999), material goods that once brought us pleasure no longer do—they simply become part of our baseline for material well-being. Kemp (1998) demonstrated that getting something perceived as a luxury increased with positive affect, whereas getting something perceived as a necessity merely eliminated negative affect. On the hedonic treadmill (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), ever-increasing levels of consumption over the long run are required to maintain the same standards of well-being. The treadmill effect is exacerbated through social comparison—or the phenomenon of “Keeping up with the Joneses.” If everyone gets wealthier, then no one does relative to anyone else (e.g., Hagerty, 2000). Material goods, in particular, are subject to these effects (Carter & Gilovich, 2010).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the perception of necessity may be linked to goal pursuit. According to self-determination theory (see Ryan & Deci, 2000, for a review), people have innate needs for autonomy, competence, and self-control. When people feel free to pursue goals they value intrinsically, they are happier and more satisfied when they accomplish them. Research demonstrates, however, that the pursuit of extrinsic goals, such as those for financial success and popularity, is more likely controlled by external forces, such as social comparison motives and the need to be looked on favorably by others (e.g., Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). The pursuit of such goals may facilitate material consumption. If people consider more consumer goods necessities they may work harder to make more money in order to buy them. As such, they may value extrinsic goals for financial success (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996). Likewise, they may consider more things necessities in order to achieve extrinsic goals for image enhancement and popularity. On the other hand, those who value intrinsic goals, such as self-acceptance and community, may be less likely to consider consumer goods necessities. For one, consumer goods are less likely to aid in the fulfillment of these goals. Those who do not consider consumer goods necessities may focus on intrinsic goals because they have little reason to pursue extrinsic goals.

Extrinsic goal pursuit is closely linked to the development of materialistic values (see Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004, for a review). Materialists place a great emphasis on the acquisition and consumption of material goods (Richins & Dawson, 1992). It was hypothesized that perceived necessity may facilitate such consumption in materialistic individuals. Extrinsic goals are widely thought to be opposed to intrinsic goals. Extrinsic pursuits undermine the ability to engage in more intrinsically satisfying activities, such as building community and social relationships (e.g., Grouzet et al., 2005). This is one reason for the well-documented finding that materialists are less happy (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sirgy, 1998). Beyond our basic biological needs for food, shelter, and safety, the need for social connectedness is one of the few psychological motives thought to be fundamental and universal (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; DeWall & Bushman, 2011). And yet extrinsically motivated individuals are less likely to pursue this basic need (cf. Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002).

One reason may be that both extrinsic goal pursuit (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995) and materialistic values (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Denton, 1997) are rooted in interpersonal insecurity. Insecurity is typically measured by attachment style, which is thought to depend in large part on early experiences with caregivers (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). An insecure upbringing and inconsistent caregiver attention are primary contributors to an anxious attachment style. On the other hand, neglect and a lack of caregiver attention can result in avoidant attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004).

Anxiously attached individuals strongly desire but may fail to seek and establish strong social bonds, perhaps out of their greater sensitivity to social rejection (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; DeWall et al., 2012). Avoidant individuals are less interested in establishing strong relationships and may reject them altogether (Campbell et al., 2005). Recent research suggests that anxiously attached individuals may be more materialistic in part out of a need to fill a social void (Norris, Lambert, DeWall, & Fincham, 2012). Avoidant individuals were not more materialistic, perhaps because they reject social relationships and therefore do not feel the need to fill this void (e.g., Norris et al., 2012).

Materialism may promote consumption patterns that increase one's sense of social self-worth through conspicuous consumption (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012) or through connection to a brand community (e.g., Rindfleisch, Burroughs, & Wong, 2009). Indeed, Rindfleisch et al. (2009) demonstrated that existential threats to the self increased brand identification among materialistic individuals. Material objects themselves may provide security (Clark et al., 2011). People have the ability to form attachments to their possessions (Kleine & Baker, 2004), and possessions can become an important component of one's sense of self (Belk, 1988). This may be particularly true of materialistic

individuals (e.g., Carter & Gilovich, 2012). Anxiously attached individuals have poor self-concepts (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998), suggesting a greater need to compensate with materialistic consumption. Indeed, materialistic individuals likewise have poor self-concepts (Reeves, Baker, & Truluck, 2012), perhaps in part due to the underlying influence of attachment insecurity.

In light of the hypothesis that the perception of necessity may facilitate materialistic consumption, it was hypothesized that the perception of necessity may be rooted in interpersonal insecurity. That is, anxiously attached individuals may express a need for consumer goods out of a more fundamental need for social connectedness. For instance, anxiously attached individuals are particularly susceptible to peer influence on consumption (Huang, Wang, & Shi, 2012), indicative of a strong connection between consumer behaviors and underlying social motives.

Three studies examined the relationship of the perception of necessity to goal pursuit, values, and interpersonal insecurity. The purpose of Study 1 was simply to identify a relationship between goal pursuit and the perception of necessity. The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the results of Study 1 using different measures of necessity and to extend the results to materialistic values. Finally, Study 3 tested the possibility that the perception of necessity was related to interpersonal insecurity, and further, that it played a role in the relationship between anxious attachment and materialism.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants were 76 undergraduates at a regional Southeastern University (63% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.9$). Participants first reported whether or not they considered each of 20 items a luxury or necessity (see Table 1). These items were culled from two primary sources: the previously mentioned Pew Research luxury/necessity questionnaire (2009) as well Norris and Larsen (2011), who asked participants to report the extent to which they wanted a variety of different consumer goods. Participants then completed the most recent version Kasser and colleagues' Aspiration Index (Grouzet et al., 2005). The 56-item index measures goal striving in 11 specific domains, nine of which load on the more general intrinsic or extrinsic goal orientation domains. Participants rated the importance of each of the 56 goals on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 9 (*extremely important*).

The four extrinsic goal domains (financial success, fame, popularity, conformity; $\alpha = 0.84$) were averaged to create a single extrinsic goal orientation score and the five intrinsic goal domains (affiliation, community, health, safety, self-acceptance; $\alpha = 0.79$) were averaged to create a single intrinsic goal orientation score.

Table 1. Proportion of Participants Considering Each Item a Necessity (Study 1) or a Need (Study 2).

Item	Study 1	Study 2
Car stereo system (aftermarket/upgraded)	2.63%	3.00%
Designer clothes (name-brand)	2.63%	9.00%
Nice jewelry (gold, diamond, pearls, etc.)	2.63%	8.00%
Home stereo system	3.95%	
Flat screen TV	5.26%	6.00%
Video game system	5.26%	2.00%
Mp3 player	6.58%	5.00%
Smart phone (iPhone, Blackberry, etc.)	7.89%	
DVD player	9.21%	
Digital camera	13.16%	25.00%
SUV	19.74%	
Cable/satellite TV	22.37%	
Dish washer	27.63%	
Truck	38.16%	
Laptop computer	57.89%	83.00%
Clothes dryer	64.47%	
Microwave	68.42%	
Home air conditioner	69.74%	
Cell phone	73.68%	77.00%
Car	75.00%	86.00%

Following Grouzet et al. (2005), in order that each goal domain represent the relative importance of that goal in relation to others, the grand mean of all 11 goal domains was subtracted from the mean of each goal domain prior to averaging.

Results

The proportion of participants that considered each item a necessity is presented in Table 1. The dependent measure of necessity was computed by totaling the number of items considered necessities as opposed to luxuries ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 3.23$). Due to the high negative correlation between extrinsic and intrinsic goal orientation ($r = -0.81$, $p < 0.001$), the zero-order correlations between goal pursuit and necessity were computed. Extrinsic goal pursuit was positively correlated with the perception of necessity, $r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$. Conversely, intrinsic goal pursuit was negatively correlated with the perception of necessity, $r = -0.51$, $p < 0.001$. Household income was marginally related to the perception of necessity ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.07$). Therefore, follow-up simultaneous regressions were conducted, predicting the perception of necessity from goal pursuit, controlling for income as well as gender. The effects remained significant for both extrinsic ($t(44) = 3.80$, $\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$) and intrinsic goal pursuit, $t(44) = -4.35$, $\beta = -0.57$, $p < 0.001$. No other predictors in the models were significant.¹

To determine if any specific goal domains uniquely predicted the perception of necessity, the number of items considered necessities were predicted from all 11 mean-centered goal domains. As expected, the overall

¹ This is interpreted with caution, as 27% of participants did not report household income.

model was significant, $F(10, 65) = 3.94$, $R^2 = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$. However, when controlling for the relative importance of all the goal domains simultaneously, only the desire for financial success uniquely predicted the number of items considered necessities, $t(65) = 2.30$, $\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

As predicted, Study 1 demonstrated that those who reported the pursuit of extrinsic goals for such things as financial success and popularity considered more consumer goods necessities. Likewise, those who reported the pursuit of intrinsic goals for such things as self-acceptance and community considered fewer things necessities. Furthermore, these relationships were not attributable to differences in age, gender, or wealth. Finally, of all 11 possible extrinsic and intrinsic goal domains, only the desire for financial success predicted the perception of necessity beyond the relative contributions of the other goal domains.

Because the desire for financial success uniquely predicted the perception of necessity, it was hypothesized that extrinsically motivated individuals may desire financial success in order to purchase the things that they think they need. The next study sought to extend this finding to materialistic values, which may support and encourage this consumption pattern. A slightly different approach was utilized in Study 2 as well. Using a subsample of the items from Study 1, participants reported whether they considered the items “needs” or “wants” as well as whether or not they had the items. The term necessity can be construed in a number of different ways. In Study 1, necessities were contrasted with luxuries, a common economic conceptualization of the meaning of necessity. In Study 2, “needs” were contrasted with “wants” in an effort to replicate the relationship observed in Study 1 with a more psychological conceptualization of necessity.

Along the same lines, a procedure developed by Larsen and McKibban (2008) was adopted to determine the extent to which participants wanted the things they already had. This was to rule out the possibility that any relationship of the perception of necessity to extrinsic goal orientation was related to actual necessity. That is, if participants high in extrinsic goal orientation also report more greatly needing the things they already have, the perception of necessity is likely one that is truly a matter of perception, and not simply the indication of the absence of a necessary good.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants were 101 undergraduates at a regional Southeastern University (65% female, $M_{age} = 19.9$). Participants first responded to a subsample of 10 items used in Study 1 (Table 1; from Norris & Larsen, 2011)

Table 2. Study 2 Correlations.

	Need-Have	Extrinsic	Intrinsic	Materialism
Needs	0.41***	0.21*	-0.27*	0.27**
Need-have		0.29**	-0.32**	0.32**
Extrinsic			-0.83***	0.29**
Intrinsic				-0.31**

Note Need-have is the extent to which participants reported needing the items they already owned. ***, **, and * denote significance at $p < 0.001$, 0.01, and 0.05, respectively.

with the prompt “is a [cell phone] something you need, or something you want?” They then indicated whether or not they had the item. If they had the item, they indicated the extent to which they needed the item on a 9-point scale from 0 (*do not need at all*) to 8 (*need very much*). As in Study 1, participants completed the Aspiration Index, as well as Richins and Dawson’s (1992) 18-item materialism scale. The Aspiration Index was scored as in Study 1. The materialism measure was scored by simply averaging across the items.

Results

As in Study 1, the dependent variable was simply the number of the items considered needs as opposed to wants ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.24$). The proportion of participants that considered each item a need is presented in Table 1. The number of items considered needs was positively correlated with extrinsic goal pursuit ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$) and negatively correlated with intrinsic goal pursuit, $r = -0.23$, $p < 0.05$. As predicted, the number of items considered needs was also positively correlated with materialistic values, $r = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$. Study 2 correlations are presented in Table 2.

Following a procedure developed by Larsen and McKibban (2008) for examining the extent to which people want the things they have, the extent to which participants reported needing the things that they have was examined. To compute a single score of needing what one has, the extent to which participants reported needing the items that they had was averaged and divided by the number of items that they reported having. This number was then divided by the maximum scale value (8) so that scores ranged from 0 to 1 (i.e., Larsen & McKibban, 2008; Norris & Larsen, 2011), thus effectively controlling for both (1) how many of and (2) which items the participants actually had.

As with the primary dependent measure—the number of items considered needs as opposed to wants—the extent to which participants reported needing the things that they had was positively correlated with materialism ($r = 0.32$) and extrinsic goal pursuit ($r = 0.29$) and negatively correlated with intrinsic goal pursuit, $r = -0.32$, all p 's < 0.01 .

Discussion

As in Study 1, Study 2 replicated the basic positive relationship of extrinsic goal pursuit and the negative

relationship of intrinsic goal pursuit to the perception of necessity. Study 2 further demonstrates that these relationships extend not just to consumer goods in general, but even to the subset of goods of that people actually possess. This indicates that extrinsically motivated individuals do not consider more consumer goods necessities simply because they had fewer of them. The perception of necessity appears to be a more basic psychological phenomenon, and not simply the mechanism by which basic consumer needs are filled (see Pincus, 2004). Extrinsically motivated individuals continue to perceive consumer goods as needs even after they possess them.

One possibility is that more fundamental psychological processes play a role in the perception of consumer necessity. Although it is likely that extrinsically motivated individuals may truly believe that they need designer clothes and flat screen TVs to accomplish the extrinsic goals that they value, it is also possible that the consumption of these goods is an expression of more basic needs. Given that an insecure upbringing is a strong predictor of extrinsic desires (Kasser et al., 1995) and materialistic values (Rindfleisch et al., 1997), a fundamental need for social connectedness (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995) may play a role in the perception of necessity. In short, extrinsically motivated materialistic individuals may say they need more things not just because they really need those things to accomplish their extrinsic goals, but because they really need something more fundamental: They desire but lack meaningful social connections that provide a more complete sense of identity and self-worth (e.g., Norris et al., 2012). This could explain why they not only classify more goods as necessities as opposed to luxuries but also report a greater sense of need for things they already own.

Study 3 examined the relationship of the perception of necessity to anxious attachment style. Given its strong positive relationship to extrinsic and the strong negative relationship to intrinsic goal orientation in Study 2, Study 3 focused specifically on materialistic values. As with the measurement of needing what one has in Study 2, the perception of necessity was measured on a continuous scale in Study 3. It was predicted that anxious attachment style would be positively related to the perception of necessity and, further, that the perception of necessity may also help explain the established relationship between attachment insecurity and materialistic values. That is, anxiously attached individuals may in part be more materialistic because they perceive more consumer goods as necessities.

STUDY 3

Method

Participants were 98 (67% female; $M_{age} = 19.8$) undergraduates at a regional Southeastern University. Participants completed the 12-item short form of the Experience in Close Relationships Scale

Table 3. Extent to which Each Item was Considered a Necessity (Study 3).

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Cable/Satellite TV	3.26	2.04
Car	5.50	1.51
Car stereo system (aftermarket/upgraded)	2.29	1.74
Cell phone	5.45	1.70
Clothes dryer	5.38	1.80
Designer clothes (name-brand)	2.08	1.48
Digital camera	2.30	1.61
Dish washer	3.63	2.17
DVD player	2.93	1.94
Flat screen TV	2.22	1.60
Home air conditioner	5.56	1.83
Home stereo system	2.05	1.56
Laptop computer	4.99	1.91
Microwave	4.98	1.86
Mp3 player	2.28	1.79
Nice jewelry (gold, diamond, pearls, etc.)	1.76	1.45
Smart phone (iPhone, Blackberry, etc.)	3.36	2.19
SUV	2.78	1.84
Truck	3.38	1.97
Video game system (xbox, Wii, etc.)	1.66	1.35

(ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). The measure consists of two 6-item subscales, both of which yielded acceptable reliability in our sample (anxiety: $\alpha = 0.71$; avoidance: $\alpha = 0.88$).

Participants then responded to the same 20 items used in Study 1 with the following prompt: "A necessity is something that is necessary for everyday living. A luxury is something that is not necessary for everyday living. Please indicate the *extent* to which you consider each of the following items a necessity, from 1 (*complete luxury*) to 7 (*complete necessity*)". They then completed the revised version of Richins's 15-item Materialistic Values Scale (Richins, Mick, & Monroe, 2004; $\alpha = 0.87$).

Results

Means and *SDs* for the 20 items are presented in Table 3. The extent to which participants rated each item a necessity was averaged to compute a single perceived necessity score. As in Study 2, materialism was positively correlated with perceived necessity, $r = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$. Replicating previous research (Norris et al., 2012), materialism was also positively correlated with anxious attachment ($r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$), but uncorrelated with avoidant attachment ($r = 0.09$, n.s.).

Consistent with predictions, anxious attachment was also correlated with the perception of necessity, $r = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$. Given the relatively high correlation between perceived necessity and materialism, a partial correlation was computed, controlling for materialism. The relationship between anxious attachment and perceived necessity remained significant in this analysis, $r = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$. Therefore, materialistic values could not fully account for the relationship between anxious attachment and perceived necessity.

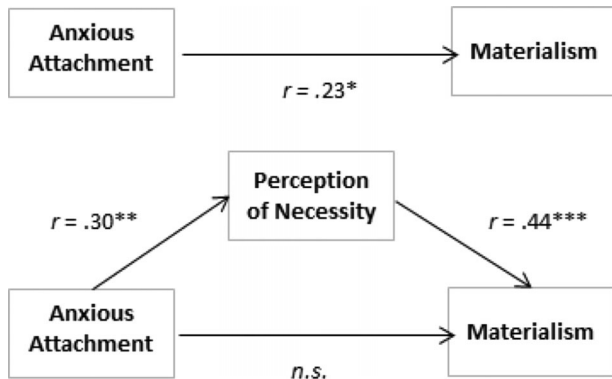


Figure 1. Direct effect of anxious attachment on materialistic values (top panel); indirect effect through the mediator, perception of necessity (bottom panel). ***, **, and * denote significance at $p < 0.001$, 0.01 , and 0.05 , respectively.

Materialistic values have been suggested as an outcome of an anxious attachment style. It was hypothesized that perceived necessity may mediate this relationship. That is, anxiously attached individuals may be more materialistic because they think they need more consumer goods, perhaps to fill the void of meaningful social connections that they need but lack. To test this possibility, the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986) was employed. By their guidelines, complete mediation occurs when the proposed mediator predicts the outcome variable when the predictor variable is also included in the model with the mediator. In this way, the mediator is able to account for all the variance that explains the relationship between the predictor and outcome variable; in this case, anxious attachment and materialism, respectively. To test this possibility, materialism was predicted from both anxious attachment and the proposed mediator, perceived necessity, in a simultaneous regression equation. Only perceived necessity remained significant in the equation, $t = 4.26$, $\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting mediation (see Figure 1). That is, although anxious attachment predicted materialism, as in prior research (Norris et al., 2012), it only did so because it predicted the perception of necessity, which in turn predicted materialism.

For a more sensitive test of mediation the bootstrapping method developed by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was also employed. A confidence interval for the size of the indirect path is generated; if the values between the upper and lower confidence limit do not include zero, this indicates a statistically significant mediation effect. The indirect path through perceived necessity was statistically significant, as indicated by finding that the 95% confidence interval (bias corrected and adjusted) for the indirect path, through the mediator, did not include zero (0.04–0.19; 5000 iterations). Thus, the perception of necessity significantly mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and materialism.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

When people say things like “I need my cell phone,” they do not literally mean that they cannot live without it. Yet the three studies reported here indicate that there are real and consequential psychological correlates of considering consumer goods necessities. Those who emphasized the importance of extrinsic goals considered more consumer goods necessities, and those who emphasized the importance of intrinsic goals considered fewer consumer goods necessities. This was true both when classifying goods necessities as opposed to luxuries (Study 1) and when classifying goods needs as opposed to wants (Study 2). It was also true of the extent to which participants reported needing the things they already had in their possession (Study 2). Like extrinsically motivated individuals, materialistic individuals also classified more goods as needs as opposed to wants (Study 2), more greatly needed the things they already had in their possession (Study 2), and perceived consumer goods necessities to a greater extent in general (Study 3).

These data are the first to identify psychological antecedents and consequences of the perception of necessity for consumer goods. As such, the studies represent an important addition to the highly understudied literature on this topic (i.e., Kemp, 1998) and raise a number of critical issues for consumer well-being as well as for additional research.

Perhaps most important is the finding that the perception of necessity may be driven by a deeper need for social connection in anxiously attached individuals, which in turn facilitates materialistic values. Given the correlational nature of the findings, definitive claims as to the directionality of these relationships cannot be made. Goals, values, and attachment style in particular are complex and multifaceted constructs that have a wide range of developmental and sociocultural antecedents and consequents. Even so, work with adolescents does suggest that attachment security is an input to materialism (e.g., Kasser et al., 2004). To the extent that anxiously attached individuals’ perceptions of necessity is an expression of an unfulfilled need for more meaningful social relationships, consumption may either substitute for or facilitate these relationships in a number of different ways. For instance, Zhou, Vohs, and Baumeister (2009) found that handling money helped ease the pain of social rejection; conversely, Clark et al. (2011) found that bolstering interpersonal security reduced the value participants placed on material objects. Furthermore, social rejection motivates consumption that promotes social connectedness (Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, & Vohs, 2011). Conspicuous consumption in particular, which is closely related to materialism (Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012) is thought to be motivated specifically to convey one’s status to others (e.g., Veblen, 1899/2009).

More generally, and perhaps in anxiously attached individuals in particular, the perception of necessity

may promote the adoption of extrinsic goals and materialistic values. Given that consumption accounts for roughly 70% of GDP, there are strong incentives for marketers and advertisers to create the perception of necessity for their products. If people think they need more things, they may adopt extrinsic goals for financial success so that they can afford them, and materialistic values to promote their acquisition and possession. Among those who are interpersonally insecure, such messages may be particularly powerful—especially when they facilitate consumption that either eases social pain or promotes connectedness (e.g., Mead et al., 2011).

On the other hand, it is also plausible that the adoption of extrinsic goals may cause people to view more consumer goods as necessities. If this is the case, necessity might be more than a matter of perception. A cell phone and an automobile might very well be necessities for those who hope to achieve financial success. By this explanation, the necessity of consumer goods might follow from the culture of capitalism in America that promotes the adoption of extrinsic goals (i.e., Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007).

It is likely that extrinsic goal pursuit and the perception of necessity are mutually influential on one another. However, this relationship may not be inconsequential. A culture that values money and fame may make people feel like they need more things to achieve those goals; likewise, the materialistic pursuit of those things that people think they need might make them more likely to pursue the financial success that makes them possible. By traditional economic measures, the increased consumption that follows from perceived necessity has a positive social impact because consumption is a marker for material well-being. However, a wide range of research demonstrates that those who pursue extrinsic goals are more depressed and lower in well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; see Kasser et al., 2004, for a review). Money brings diminishing marginal returns to happiness; although the relationship between money and happiness may be stronger than previously thought (e.g., Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008), it is weaker at higher levels of income (e.g., Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). Materialistic individuals in particular are less happy and/or lower in psychological well-being (Belk, 1985; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sirgy, 1998). Those who pursue material goals may be less happy because the pursuit of those goals conflicts with the pursuit of more intrinsically satisfying goals (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). One possibility is that the perception of necessity itself is negatively related to well-being, either directly or through a relationship with extrinsic goal pursuit and materialistic values.

This is not to understate the importance of economic growth. Many of the goods that participants in these studies reported needing were the result of technological innovation that has drastically improved the quality of life. This innovation fuels economic growth,

creates jobs, and lowers prices, which leads to greater disposable income, which increases the consumption of goods, which fuels economic growth, and so on. In the process, the socioeconomic landscape is continuously transformed by the production of new and improved consumer goods for consumption. From a more cynical perspective, and to use a phrase often attributed to Thorstein Veblen,² it may be that “invention is the mother of necessity” and the perception of necessity follows simply from the availability of these goods and the means with which to purchase them. Of course, it may actually be the case that people need more to survive in an increasingly complex economy. One hundred years ago, few people needed an automobile to get to work; now, workers in many parts of the country do. As such, the automobile may be considered a necessity to the extent that earning an income allows one to fulfill more basic human needs for food and shelter. Similarly, the cell phone may be considered a necessity to the extent that it makes social connectedness possible, which is considered a basic psychological need (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Given that the basic trend is for goods to become necessities over time, it may be that those with extrinsic goals are the early adopters at the forefront of the trend.

Even if the general trend is for more goods to actually become necessities as economies grow more complex, Studies 1 and 2 showed that participants who pursued intrinsic goals needed fewer things, and even needed the things they already had to a lesser extent. Just as extrinsic goals may encourage consumption via the perception of necessity, intrinsic goals may discourage it. This finding is consistent with the Pew Research (2009) explanation for the reversal in the trend for goods to become increasingly perceived as necessities. The recession likely made it more difficult for people to achieve extrinsic goals, such as those for financial success, and thus prompted a reevaluation of priorities. For instance, media reports in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse often highlighted the fact that the unemployed were finding new ways of enjoying time, such as with family (Abelson, 2009). A *New York Times* Economic View article (Cowen, 2009) reviewed evidence that people turn toward self-improvement goals during tough times; some evidence actually indicates health benefits of recession (Ruhm, 2007). Other media reported an increased commitment to community and volunteer work (Hawkins, 2010). Such effects would be consistent with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as people are happier when they pursue intrinsic goals associated with autonomy and self-control.

This is not to undermine the material and psychological costs of economic difficulty, but rather to indicate that when people are unable to pursue extrinsic goals they may draw on sources of intrinsic motivation for community, self-acceptance, and health. The results of

² Actually, the earliest mention of this phrase appears to be in the July 25, 1857 edition of the British legal publication *The Jurist*. This is the same year that Veblen was born.

Study 3 are consistent with this perspective: Anxiously attached individuals more likely lack meaningful social relationships that contribute to satisfactory intrinsic goal pursuit.

The current studies show a relationship between extrinsic goal pursuit, materialistic values, and the perception of necessity. They further demonstrate that the perception of necessity plays a role in the relationship of anxious attachment to materialistic values. Future research should explore the causal connections among these variables. For instance, among anxiously attached individuals, the perception of necessity may facilitate consumption that eases the pain of social rejection or promotes social connectedness (e.g., Mead et al., 2011) for different products under different conditions.

Future research should also explore the characteristics of the products themselves as well as how the construal of those products by consumers contributes to the perception of necessity. For instance, goods that facilitate experiential pursuits make people happier than those that contribute to materialistic pursuits (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). One possibility is that goods that are considered necessary for experiential reasons contribute more greatly to intrinsic goal pursuit, such as a mountain bike that promotes the development of new skills and increases physical health. It could even be that goals and values affect the very construal of the good itself (i.e., as experiential or material; Van Boven, 2005) and that the construal determines how the perception of necessity affects well-being. Consumption itself can have a positive social impact to the extent it contributes to the material well-being of the economy and the psychological well-being of consumers.

REFERENCES

- Abelson, J. (2009). For now, laid off and loving it. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from http://www.boston.com/jobs/news/articles/2009/02/23/for_now_laid_off_and_loving_it/
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173–1182.
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497–529.
- Belk, R. W. (1985). Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, 265–280.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, 265–280, 15, 139–168.
- Brickman, P., & Campbell, D. (1971). Hedonic relativism and planning the good society. In M. H. Apley (Ed.), *Adaptation-level theory: A symposium* (pp. 287–302). New York: Academic Press.
- Burroughs, J. E., & Rindfleisch, A. (2002). Materialism and well-being: A conflicting values perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 348–370.
- Campbell, L., Simpson, J. A., Boldry, J., & Kashy, D. A. (2005). Perceptions of conflict and support in romantic relationships: The role of attachment anxiety. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 510–531.
- Carter, T. J., & Gilovich, T. (2010). The relative relativity of material and experiential purchases. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 98, 146–159.
- Carter, T. J., & Gilovich, T. (2012). I am what I do, not what I have: The differential centrality of experiential and material purchases to the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102, 1304–1317.
- Clark, M. S., Greenberg, A., Hill, E., Lemay, E. P., Clark-Polner, E., & Roosth, D. (2011). Heightened interpersonal security diminishes the monetary value of possessions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 47, 359–364.
- Cooper, M., Shaver, P. R., & Collins, N. L. (1998). Attachment styles, emotion regulation, and adjustment in adolescence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 1380–1397.
- Cowen, T. (2009). Economic view: Recession can change a way of life. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 1, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/business/worldbusiness/01iht01view.19828418.html>
- DeWall, C. N., & Bushman, B. J. (2011). Social acceptance and rejection: The sweet and the bitter. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20, 256–260.
- DeWall, C. N., Masten, C. L., Powell, C., Combs, D., Schurtz, D. R., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2012). Do neural responses to rejection depend on attachment style? An fMRI study. *Social, Cognitive, and Affective Neuroscience*, 7, 184–192.
- Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2002). Will money increase subjective well-being? *Social Indicators Research*, 57, 119–169.
- Grouzet, F. E., Kasser, T., Ahuvia, A., Dols, J., Kim, Y., Lau, S., et al. (2005). The structure of goal contents across 15 cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 800–816.
- Hagerty, M. R. (2000). Social comparisons of income in one's community: Evidence from national surveys of income and happiness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 764–771.
- Hawkins, K. (2010). Happy news from the recession: 5 good things about hard times. Retrieved May 9, 2010, from <http://gimundo.com/news/article/happy-news-from-the-recession-5-goodthings-about-hard-times/>
- Huang, Y., Wang, L., & Shi, J. (2012). How attachment affects the strength of peer influence on adolescent consumer behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, 29, 558–567.
- Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 3–25). New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1993). A dark side of the American dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 410–422.
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1996). Further examining the American dream: Differential correlates of intrinsic and extrinsic goals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 280–287.
- Kasser, T., Ryan, R. M., Zax, M., & Sameroff, A. J. (1995). The relations of maternal and social environments to late adolescents' materialistic and prosocial values. *Developmental Psychology*, 31, 907–914.
- Kasser, T., Ryan, R. M., Couchman, C. E., & Sheldon, K. M. (2004). Materialistic values: Their causes and consequences. In T. Kasser, A. D. Kanner, T. Kasser, & A. D. Kanner (Eds.), *Psychology and consumer culture: The struggle*

- for a good life in a materialistic world (pp. 11–28). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Kasser, T., Cohn, S., Kanner, A. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2007). Some costs of American Corporate Capitalism: A psychological exploration of value and goal conflicts. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18, 1–22.
- Kemp, S. (1998). Perceiving luxury and necessity. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 19, 591–606.
- Kleine, S. S., & Baker, S. M. (2004). An integrative review of material possession attachment. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 8, 1–29. www.amsreview.org/articles/kleine01-2004.pdf
- Larsen, J. T., & McKibban, A. R. (2008). Is happiness having what you want, wanting what you have, or both? *Psychological Science*, 19, 371–377.
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370–396.
- Mead, N. L., Baumeister, R. F., Stillman, T. F., Rawn, C. D., & Vohs, K. D. (2011). Social exclusion causes people to spend and consume strategically in the service of affiliation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37, 902–919.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2004). Security-based self-representations in adulthood: Contents and processes. In W. Rholes & J. A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications* (pp. 159–195). New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Norris, J. I., & Larsen, J. T. (2011). Wanting more than you have and its consequences for well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 12, 877–885.
- Norris, J. I., Lambert, N. M., DeWall, C. N., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). Can't buy me love? Anxious attachment and materialistic values. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53, 666–669.
- Pew Research (2009). *Luxury or necessity? The public makes a U-turn*. Retrieved April 23, 2009, from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1199/more-items-seen-as-luxury-not-necessity>.
- Pincus, J. (2004). The consequences of unmet needs: The evolving role of motivation in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 3, 375–387.
- Podoshen, J. S., & Andrzejewski, S. A. (2012). An examination of the relationships between materialism, conspicuous consumption, impulse buying, and brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice*, 20, 319–334.
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40, 879–891.
- Reeves, R. A., Baker, G. A., & Truluck, C. S. (2012). Celebrity worship, materialism, compulsive buying, and the empty self. *Psychology & Marketing*, 29, 674–679.
- Richins, M. L., & Dawson, S. (1992). A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, 303–316.
- Richins, M. L., Mick, D., & Monroe, K. B. (2004). The material values scale: Measurement properties and development of a short form. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 209–219.
- Rindfleisch, A., Burroughs, J. E., & Denton, F. (1997). Family structure, materialism, and compulsive consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23, 312–325.
- Rindfleisch, A., Burroughs, J. E., & Wong, N. (2009). The safety of objects: Materialism, existential insecurity, and brand connection. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36, 1–16.
- Ruhm, C. (2007). A healthy economy can break your heart. *Demography*, 44, 829–844.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78.
- Schor, J. (1999). *The overspent American*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Sheldon, K. M., Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L., & Kasser, T. (2004). The independent effects of goal contents and motives on well-being: It's both what you do *and* why you do it. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30, 475–486.
- Sirgy, M. (1998). Materialism and quality of life. *Social Indicators Research*, 43, 227.
- Stevenson, B., & Wolfers, J. (2008). Economic growth and subjective well-being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (pp. 1–87).
- Van Boven, L. (2005). Experientialism, materialism, and the pursuit of happiness. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 132–142.
- Veblen, T. (1899/2009). *The theory of the leisure class* (reissue ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wei, M., Russell, D. W., Mallinckrodt, B., & Vogel, D. L. (2007). The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR)-short form: Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 88, 187–204.
- Zhou, X., Vohs, K. D., & Baumeister, R. F. (2009). The symbolic power of money: Reminders of money alter social distress and physical pain. *Psychological Science*, 20, 700–706.

Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to: J. Ian Norris, Associate Professor of Marketing, Economics and Business Program, Berea College, 101 Chestnut St., CPO 2193, Berea, KY 40404. (ian_norris@berea.edu)