

Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe

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ABSTRACT

Does money bring happiness? This study was undertaken to understand and analyze the relationship between materialism and happiness. The sample consists of on young male and female students in the age group of 18-21years belonging to service class family and living in the tri-city of Chandigarh, Panchkula and Mohali. For the purpose of study respondents were selected randomly who were administered the structured questionnaire to measure happiness and materialism using Oxford Happiness questionnaire, Richards and Dawson Materialism Scale. Descriptive analysis, correlations, and t-ratios was applied to the data. Results revealed non- significant relationship between materialism and happiness. Gender difference was also studied.

Keywords: Gender, happiness, materialism.

The pursuit of happiness is acknowledged as the main purpose of human life. Man, in his journey from the womb to the tomb, longs for happiness. But this wish leaves so many questions behind like “what is happiness”, “where does it come from”, “is it achievable by every human being”, “how to make increments in it”, etc. To common man happiness means a face with a big smile, mind without tension, joy, pleasure and contentment with one’s life. And to a psychologist, happiness is a greater quality of life, higher life satisfaction, better subjective well-being, self-actualized behavior, etc. Buddha says, “there is no way to happiness, but happiness is the way”. In modern times life has become so complex that human beings have to devise ways to cultivate happiness. Philosophically, happiness means living a good life. The religious view proposes that ultimate happiness is only achieved by overcoming cravings in all forms. In Indian mythology, The Geeta, preaches happiness to be the very nature of self. Besides, income is also considered to be good source of happiness (Diener, Horowitz & Emmons, 1984).

Chekola (1975) defined happiness as the realizing of a life plan along with the absence of an attitude of being displeased with or disliking one’s life and a disposition to experience favorable feelings and attitudes associated with the realizing of one’s life plan.

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Received: April 27, 2017; Revision Received: July 28, 2017; Accepted: August 15, 2017

Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe

According to Csikszentmihalyi (2003), happiness operates on the principle of fulfilling wants and needs.

Materialism

Materialism is a persistent belief which embodies that the continued acquisition of possessions will lead to greater happiness as well as satisfaction in life, and lack of possessions will lead to dissatisfaction in life. Materialistic individuals have been found to value items that are consumed publicly such as money, cars, clothing, houses etc. and possess public meaning rather than valuing items with private, personal and subjective meanings. Now days, commercials often pair happiness with products we need to buy like advertisement of “Coke” says “open happiness” and Panasonic says “bring home happiness”.

Richins and Dawson (1992), considered materialism as a value (the basic enduring belief that it is important to own material possessions) rather than a behavior or personality variable. This includes beliefs about acquisition centrality and the role of acquisitions in happiness and success.

The social constructionist perspective by Dittmar and Pepper (1992) proposed that material goods are viewed as symbols of identity whose meanings are socially constructed. Cognitive development theorists proposed that in order to associate possessions with satisfaction or envy to other's possessions, a minimal level of cognitive development is necessary. The psychosocial theory by Erikson (1972) described eight psychosocial stages in a life time of an individual. The possessions most valued by subject at different ages are tended to reflect their psychosocial stage.

Diener (2003) stated that wealth predicts happiness better in poorer nations than in richer ones. However, some of the researches have reported a negative relationship between happiness and materialism (Belk, 1984, 1985). Kasser (2002) also found that materialism works against happiness. Unhappiness might generate a need for materialistic possessions and more wealth. Swinyard, Kau and Phua (2004) reported that happiness is negatively related to overall materialism.

Researches have tried to explore the gender differences in happiness and materialism and some of them have found no gender differences in happiness (Mohan, Yarcheski & Yarcheski, 2005). Similarly in materialism, Chan (2003) found no gender differences whereas some researches found males to be higher on materialism (Archenreiner, 1995; Kamieni & O' Cass, 2000).

The present study is being done to find out whether striving for possessions bring happiness to them or become a source of unhappiness? Considering the objective of the study, existing review of literature following hypothesis has been framed.

Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe

H₁: It is expected that there exists a negative correlation between materialism and happiness.

H₂: It is expected that gender difference exists on materialism and happiness.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The sample comprises of 60 participants (30 males and 30 females) in the age range of 18-21 years, undergraduates, financially dependent on parents, belonging to service class, from middle socio-economic strata. The sample has been collected from the tri-city of Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

Exclusion criteria

1. Married
2. Earning
3. Belonging to business class families.

Research Design

The aim of the present investigation was to study relationship between materialism and happiness. An attempt was also made to explore the gender differences occur on these variables. In the study, materialism was studied from two perspectives: one as a collection of personality traits and other as a value. Descriptive analysis, correlation, and t-ratio was applied to the data.

Measures

In the present study following measures have been used:

1. **Materialistic Values Scale (Richins & Dawson, 1992):** It consists of 17 items pertaining to various materialistic values. Respondent has to rate each item as to the degree to which they possess them using the five-point Likert scale. Reported reliability- co-efficient alpha of the scale is .80 to .88.
2. **Oxford happiness questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002):** It consists of 29 items relating to the happiness of an individual. Respondent has to rate each item as to the degree to which they feel happy using the six-point likert scale. Reported reliability of the scale is .62.

RESULTS

Results (table-1) revealed non- significant correlation between the materialism and happiness. Correlation, mean, S.D and t-ratio was applied to the data. Results (Table 1) revealed non-significant relationship ($r= 0.73$) between materialism and happiness. Besides, results revealed significant gender difference on materialism ($t=1.55$, $p\leq 0.05$) and no gender difference emerged on happiness (Table 2).

Table 1: Correlation analysis between happiness and materialism

		Happiness	Materialism
Happiness	Pearson Correlation	1	0.73
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.160
	N	60	60
Hope	Pearson Correlation	.073	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	
	N	60	60

Table 2: Mean S.D and t- ratio of males and females on materialism and happiness

Variables	mean	SD	Std. error mean	t-ratio
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Materialism	48.27	50.67	6.005	5.915
Happiness	118.53	116.73	11.793	15.583

DISCUSSION

The aim of present study was to explore the relationship between materialism and happiness and to study the gender differences on them. The results of the present findings did not support the hypothesis which expected a negative relationship between materialism and happiness. However, results revealed non-significant correlation between materialism and happiness. Materialism as the belief states that life satisfaction can come from acquiring possessions. While materialism and its assumption that things will make one happy has been ill founded. There are two reasons why wealth does not ensure happiness. Firstly people adapt to their financial circumstances. No matter how well off they become, their wealth becomes stale and they seek something bigger, better and more fulfilling. The second reason is their tendency to compare their wealth with those who have more. Brickman, Coates and Janoff Bulman (1978) reported that individuals who won the large sum of money in lotteries experienced a spike in happiness but adapted back to normal levels of happiness overtime. This finding has been replicated in later studies showing that although people might derive initial satisfaction from a pay raise (Parduccia, 1995) or new purchase (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), the emotional effects are either small or short lived.

Further, results revealed that gender differences did exist as far as materialism is concerned with females are higher on materialism than males. Gender differences have been found in materialism by Kasser and Ryan (1993) & Achenreiner (1995). Kameini and O’Cass (2000) has found that males to be higher on materialism as compared to females. The reason behind the gender difference on materialism could be found in biological perspective. According to this perspective, men and women have different anatomies and thus behave differently in terms of attitudes, beliefs, behavior etc.

On the other hand, results revealed non-significant gender differences on happiness. Existing researches have supported the present findings. Collette (1984) found no gender differences in life satisfaction and happiness. Mohan, Yarsheski & Yarsheski (2005) found no gender differences in happiness. However the sources of happiness may differ for males and females.

Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe

For males sexual activity, sports, being liked, good social life, etc. bring happiness on the other hand for females helping others, having a closed family, being loved by loved ones are the sources of happiness.

The present study has its own limitations. First limitation lies in small sample size. Another limitation may be found in methodological issue. It may have possibility that people may be somewhat blind to their own materialistic ambitions.

In future studies, psychological barriers to limiting materialistic pursuits and happiness need to be explored. Future research also needs to improve the perceived happiness.

Acknowledgments

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interests: The author declared no conflict of interests.

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Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe

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How to cite this article: Aggarwal S (2017). Being Materialistic Makes You Happy or Not: A Probe. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, Vol. 4, (4), DIP:18.01.041/20170404, DOI:10.25215/0404.041