

MATERIALISM, DEFENSIVE AND ASSERTIVE SELF-PRESENTATIONAL TACTICS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION

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To learn how materialism is related to defensive and assertive self-presentational tactics, and how such tactics might mediate the established link between materialism and life satisfaction, 277 undergraduates completed a battery of questionnaires. We expected that materialism would be positively related to the use of defensive self-presentational tactics, and that defensive self-presentational tactics, in turn, would mediate the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. Zero-order correlations generally supported these expectations. Moreover, results of structural equation modeling suggested that it was primarily the defensive self-presentational tactic of self-handicapping that mediated the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. We discuss our findings with respect to the protective penchant of materialistic individuals.

Materialism reflects the importance people attach to “worldly possessions,” which occupy “a central place” in their lives and “provide the

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greatest sources of satisfaction" (Belk, 1984, p. 291). Previous research (e.g., Christopher & Schlenker, 2004; Mick, 1996) has suggested that materialism is related to a tendency to manage the impressions one creates in the eyes of others; however, less research has investigated the types of impressions materialistic people wish to convey. Similarly, although much research (e.g., Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002) has investigated the relationship between materialism and well-being, less research has investigated the mechanisms responsible for this relationship. The purpose of the current research was to examine how materialism is related to defensive and assertive self-presentational styles, and how these relationships might account for the inverse relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

No shortage of research has established an inverse relationship between materialism and different measures of well-being. For instance, Schroeder and Dugal (1995) found that materialistic people tended to experience higher levels of social anxiety, and Christopher and Schlenker (2004) found that materialistic people tended to experience higher levels of negative affect. Likewise, Kasser and Ahuvia (2002) found an inverse relationship between materialism and happiness, and a positive relationship between materialism and anxiety. With respect to materialism and life satisfaction, Ryan and Dziurowiec (2001) found a negative correlation between these two variables. Across one correlational and two experimental studies, Chang and Arkin (2002) established a link between materialism and personal insecurity. Indeed, the inverse relationship between materialism and well-being appears to be a reliable one.

As mentioned, though the inverse relationship between materialism and well-being is quite reliable, less is known about the mechanisms underlying this relationship. In a review of 13 studies that examined why materialism was inversely related to well-being, Solberg, Diener, and Robinson (2004) found that the gap between what people currently own and what they aspire to own is detrimental to their subjective well-being when they are materialistic. Certainly, people's material goals may be more difficult to achieve than other goals because, as Richins (1995) noted, images of highly desirable material possessions are ubiquitous in today's American society. Indeed, self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) posits that when there is a discrepancy between some ideal image of ourselves (e.g., owning an expensive sports car) and our actual, current state of affairs (e.g., owning a 14-year-old clunker), we are likely to suffer psychological distress. Recent empirical evidence strongly suggests that some consumer practices are indeed attempts to reduce the discrepancy between one's ideal self and actual self. Dittmar (2005) found that materialism was positively related to an "ideal-self seeking" (p. 855) buying moti-

vation. In addition, among materialistic individuals, compulsive buying was driven by a need to achieve an ideal self.

Given Dittmar's (2005) finding that materialism is associated with a desire to buy things to achieve a particular identity, we might expect the desire to close the discrepancy between one's ideal and actual self to manifest itself in the social behavior of materialistic people. Specifically, in the current research, we examined how materialism is related to self-presentational tactics. Self-presentation is the process of regulating and controlling information about oneself to others, and there are individual differences in the extent to which people are preoccupied with their self-presentations (e.g., Schlenker, 1980, 2003; Schlenker & Weigold, 1990). In a study of how self-presentational concerns might be partially responsible for the relationship between materialism and well-being, Christopher and Schlenker (2004) found that the fear of negative evaluation from others mediated the relationships between materialism and both positive and negative affect. Thus, these researchers suggested that self-presentational preoccupation, at least as operationalized by a fear of negative evaluation, might be an important variable in understanding why materialism is associated with lower levels of well-being.

Although Christopher and Schlenker's (2004) research shed light on the links between materialism, self-presentation, and well-being, it did not examine the specific types of self-presentations that materialistic people might want to convey. There exist at least two broad classes of self-presentational tactics, and these two classes have different goals. Specifically, Schlenker (1980) and Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) articulated the distinction between *defensive* and *assertive* self-presentational tactics (see also Arkin, 1981). Defensive self-presentational tactics are used to protect one's identity when that identity has been called into question, whereas assertive self-presentational tactics are used to establish or develop an identity in the eyes of observers. Defensive tactics are self-protective strategies, whereas assertive tactics are self-enhancement strategies. According to Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, and Tedeschi (1999), there are five common defensive tactics, and seven common assertive tactics.

With respect to defensive self-presentational tactics, *excuses* are offered to deny responsibility for an undesirable event; *justifications* are offered not to deny responsibility for an undesirable event, but rather to explain how there is a "bright side" to the seemingly undesirable event; *disclaimers* are preemptive explanations offered in case an undesirable event should eventually occur; *self-handicapping* occurs when one places obstacles in one's path to success that allow the person and observers to avoid making inferences about the person's abilities; finally, *apologies*

are confessions “. . . of responsibility for a negative action plus an expression that the action was wrong and deserves punishment” (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984, p. 36). Indeed, these five tactics all seem to place an actor in a lower social position relative to other actors.

With respect to assertive self-presentational tactics, *ingratiation* is comprised of actions designed to make one appear likeable and agreeable; *intimidation* is comprised of actions to make one appear strong and threatening; *supplication* is comprised of actions designed to make one appear needy and helpless, so as to elicit help from others; *entitlements* “. . . are verbal claims of responsibility for positive events” (Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984, p. 42); *enhancements* are claims that the outcomes of one’s behavior are more positive than observers might otherwise believe; *blasting* is comprised of actions designed to derogate other individuals or groups in the hopes of making oneself look better by comparison; finally, *exemplification* is comprised of behaviors designed to make one appear highly moral and upstanding.

Whereas the correlation between an ideal-self seeking buying motivation and materialism may suggest a connection between materialism and assertive self-presentational styles, evidence suggests otherwise. For example, emerging empirical evidence (e.g., Christopher, Deadmarsh, & Saliba, 2007; Hunt, Kernan, Chatterjee, & Florsheim, 1990) suggests that materialistic people believe they cannot control their outcomes or other outcomes that affect them. Thus, perhaps materialistic people will not use assertive self-presentational tactics because they do not believe they can control how effectively they use them, and thus fear widening the discrepancy between their ideal and actual selves in the eyes of others.

Buttressing the notion that materialistic people will refrain from engaging in assertive tactics, Christopher, Morgan, Marek, Keller, and Drummond (2005) examined how Jones and Pittman’s (1982) five self-presentational styles of intimidation, self-promotion, ingratiation, supplication, and exemplification were each related to materialism. Christopher and colleagues used Leary, Kowalski, Martin, and Koch’s (2004) Self-Presentational Styles Inventory, which is an 80-item adjective checklist to which respondents indicate the extent to which they do or do not want to appear a certain way to other people. Across two studies, it was found that materialistic individuals wished not to convey particular images, but rather, they wanted to avoid conveying certain images. Specifically, materialistic individuals wanted to avoid supplicating (i.e., appearing needy and helpless) and ingratiating (i.e., appearing likeable and agreeable). Both images assume that one is subservient or in a position of lower power than others. In Tedeschi and Melburg’s (1984) taxonomy, ingratiation and supplica-

tion were assertive self-presentational tactics. However, both of these tactics place an actor at a lower social position relative to another. To the extent that materialistic people are not living up to their ideal selves, they would likely not want to engage in social behaviors that would exacerbate such a discrepancy. Christopher and colleagues (2005) speculated that perhaps materialistic people, who tend to have low self-esteem, an external locus of control, and are insecure, do not believe that they can execute the behaviors necessary to intimidate (i.e., appear strong and powerful) or self-promote (i.e., appear competent). Instead, materialistic people desire to avoid projecting images that suggest they are dependent on or weaker than others. This potential desire of materialistic people raises the possibility that materialism may be associated only with self-presentational tactics that preserve or do not harm one's image (i.e., defensive self-presentational tactics) rather than self-presentational tactics that create or enhance an image (i.e., assertive self-presentational tactics).

Much like how materialism has been demonstrated to be inversely related to well-being, the notion of defensive self-presentation has been demonstrated to be more predictive of lower well-being than assertive self-presentation. For instance, Schlenker and Leary (1982) discussed how socially anxious individuals may be prone to using disclaimers before a public performance to preemptively assuage the effects of making an undesired impression on others. Schlenker, Britt, Pennington, Murphy, and Doherty (1994) described how personal responsibility can lead to greater self-engagement in a task, allowing for stronger commitment and more determination to complete that task. However, the use of certain defensive self-presentational tactics, such as excuses and disclaimers, can relieve one of personal responsibility and thus of the benefits it would provide. Additionally, Lee et al. (1999) found that defensive self-presentational tactics, but not assertive self-presentational tactics, were positively related to social anxiety and external locus of control, two indices of well-being. Thus, it seems plausible that defensive self-presentational tactics might mediate the relationship between materialism and well-being.

As discussed previously, Christopher and Schlenker (2004) found that general self-presentational concern was a significant contributor to the relationship between materialism and well-being. In addition, Christopher and colleagues (2005) found that materialistic people tended to avoid self-presentational styles that placed them in a lower social comparative position relative to others (i.e., supplication and ingratiation). The current research sought to extend the work of these two investigations by examining how materialism is related to a broader set of self-presentational tactics (i.e., both defensive and assertive tactics) than

those Jones and Pittman (1982) articulated and Leary and colleagues (2004) operationalized. Furthermore, we sought to extend Christopher and Schlenker's (2004) research by learning what type(s) of self-presentational tactics (defensive and/or assertive) might significantly account for the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

We offer the following hypotheses regarding the relationship between materialism, different self-presentational styles, and life satisfaction:

- H1: Materialism will be negatively correlated with life satisfaction.
- H2: Materialism will be positively correlated with the use of defensive self-presentational tactics.
- H3: Defensive self-presentational tactics will be negatively correlated with life satisfaction.
- H4: Regarding the negative relationship between materialism and life satisfaction, we wanted to learn if defensive and/or assertive self-presentational styles might mediate this established relationship. Indeed, general self-presentational concerns have been suggested to mediate this relationship (Christopher & Schlenker, 2004). However, given materialistic individuals' suggested penchant for wanting to avoid appearing "weak" or "deficient" to others, we expected that defensive but not assertive self-presentational tactics would mediate the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 277 undergraduate students (176 women and 101 men) from St. Mary's College of Maryland and Albion College (MI) participated in this study in exchange for credit toward a course requirement. Our predominantly White sample ranged in age from 16 years to 24 years ($M = 18.81$ years, $SD = 0.93$ years).

MATERIALS

Materialism. We used Richins and Dawson's (1992) 18-item materialism scale. Participants used a 1 (*I strongly disagree with this statement*) to 5 (*I strongly agree with this statement*) range to respond to items such as "I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things" and "I don't pay much attention to the material objects other people own" (reverse-scored). This is a widely used materialism measure, and it tends to possess excel-

TABLE 1. Example Items and Reliabilities for Self-Presentational Tactics

Self-Presentational Tactic	Example Item	α
Defensive Tactics		
Justifications	"I offer good reasons for my behavior no matter how bad it may seem to others."	0.85
Excuse-Making	"When things go wrong, I explain why I am not responsible."	0.81
Disclaimers	"I try to get the approval of others before doing something they might perceive negatively."	0.73
Apologies	"I apologize when I have done something wrong."	0.71
Self-handicapping	"I put obstacles in the way of my own success."	0.60
Assertive Tactics		
Ingratiation	"I use flattery to win the favor of others."	0.77
Intimidation	"I behave in ways that make other people afraid of me."	0.76
Exemplification	"I act in ways I think others should act."	0.75
Enhancement	"I tell people when I do well at tasks others find difficult."	0.72
Supplication	"I ask others to help me."	0.70
Entitlement	"I point out the positive things I do which other people fail to notice."	0.70
Blasting	"I have put others down in order to make myself look better."	0.60

lent psychometric properties (e.g., Christopher et al., 2005; Rosenbaum & Kuntze, 2003). In the current study, $\alpha = 0.82$.

Self-Presentational Tactics. We used the Lee et al. (1999) 63-item Self-Presentational Tactics Scale. This scale measures 12 different self-presentational tactics by asking respondents how frequently they engage in certain behaviors. As seen in Table 1, five of these tactics were defensive in nature, and seven of these tactics were assertive in nature. Participants used a 1 (*very infrequently*) to 9 (*very frequently*) range to answer these items. There were five items to measure each tactic, with the exception of ingratiation, which contained eight items. Thus, scores for 11 of the tactics could range from 5 to 45, and scores for ingratiation could range from 8 to 72.

Life Satisfaction. We measured life satisfaction using Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) widely-employed five-item measure. Participants responded to statements such as "The conditions of my life are excellent" using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) range ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Covariate. Because of the established relationship between materialism and socially desirable responding (e.g., Mick, 1996), we asked respondents to complete a 13-item Social Desirability Scale (Reynolds, 1982) to measure the extent to which people desire to project positive images of themselves (e.g., "No matter who I am talking to, I am always a

TABLE 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Materialism	50.86	10.48	—																
2. Life Satisfaction	25.82	5.28	-0.20	—															
3. Social Desirability	6.23	2.61	0.34	-0.18	—														
4. Excuse-making	19.86	7.71	0.33	-0.21	0.26	—													
5. Justifications	23.96	8.05	0.16	0.01	0.13	0.64	—												
6. Disclaimers	25.03	7.26	0.22	-0.16	0.17	0.61	0.68	—											
7. Self-handicapping	17.97	6.75	0.17	-0.30	0.27	0.24	0.24	0.31	—										
8. Apologies	35.61	6.03	-0.11	0.10	-0.08	-0.05	0.16	0.24	0.09	—									
9. Ingratiation	33.64	10.43	0.38	-0.02	0.26	0.58	0.64	0.53	0.24	0.11	—								
10. Intimidation	10.38	5.67	0.15	0.00	0.16	0.08	0.18	0.05	0.16	-0.15	0.23	—							
11. Supplication	18.35	6.44	-0.09	-0.01	0.13	0.30	0.28	0.34	0.35	0.05	0.35	0.09	—						
12. Entitlement	18.56	5.93	0.26	0.11	0.15	0.55	0.56	0.45	0.21	0.02	0.67	0.18	0.37	—					
13. Enhancement	17.24	6.61	0.29	0.05	0.17	0.52	0.51	0.40	0.19	-0.11	0.58	0.22	0.33	0.76	—				
14. Blasting	15.77	6.18	0.27	-0.02	0.33	0.50	0.43	0.32	0.23	-0.05	0.49	0.25	0.27	0.50	0.48	—			
15. Exemplification	28.79	8.81	-0.05	0.27	-0.20	0.01	0.23	0.17	-0.03	0.41	0.26	0.01	0.03	0.22	0.07	0.04	—		
16. Participant sex ^a	—	—	0.03	0.01	0.02	-0.03	-0.06	-0.06	0.13	0.10	-0.08	-0.12	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.17	0.03	—	
17. Participant SES	—	—	0.00	0.01	0.12	0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.06	0.06	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	0.16	0.03	-0.07	—

Note. Correlations ≥ 0.16 are significant at $p < 0.01$. ^aFemale = 0, Male = 1.

good listener"). These items were answered "True" or "False." This measure has been used successfully in prior research (e.g., Christopher et al., 2005). In the current study, $\alpha = 0.76$.

PROCEDURE

We used somewhat different procedures to collect data from respondents at two different colleges. First, participants at St. Mary's College of Maryland completed the materials during a subject pool prescreening session at the beginning of a semester. These participants first provided demographic information, followed by the social desirability items, the life satisfaction items, the self-presentational tactics items, and finally the materialism items. Second, participants at Albion College completed the materials in groups ranging from two to 11 people in a session. Albion College participants first read and signed an informed consent that stated the purpose of the research was to examine how people behave in interpersonal situations. These participants then provided their age, sex, and ethnic background, after which they completed the materials in a randomized order. These participants were debriefed immediately after all members of a session completed their materials.

RESULTS

We analyzed the data in two phases. First, we examined the zero-order correlations among all study variables. Second, based on the findings from our zero-order correlations, we tested a model using confirmatory latent variable structural analyses with EQS computer software (Bentler, 1995). We used structural equation modeling because it allows for errors terms to covary with one another, and lets us test multiple paths simultaneously in one analysis, rather than testing the effect of one variable at a time, as in regression analyses (Klem, 2000).

ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS

Descriptive statistics and correlations among all study variables appear in Table 2. Replicating prior research (e.g., Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001) and supporting H1, we found an inverse relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. In addition, supporting H2, materialism was positively correlated with four of the five defensive self-presentational tactics: excuse-making, justifications, disclaimers, and self-handicapping. Materialism was also positively correlated with four of the seven assertive self-presentational tactics: ingratiation, entitlement, enhancement, and blasting. Interestingly, whereas Christopher and colleagues

(2005) found a *negative* relationship between materialism and ingratiation, in the current data, we found a *positive* relationship between these two variables.

With respect to life satisfaction and self-presentational tactics, we found inverse relationships between life satisfaction and three defensive self-presentational tactics: excuse-making, disclaimers, and self-handicapping, supporting H3. In addition, as mentioned previously, materialism was also related to these three defensive tactics. Except for a positive relationship with exemplification, life satisfaction was generally unrelated to assertive self-presentational styles. Thus, it appears that the use of defensive self-presentational tactics is generally associated with lower levels of life satisfaction, but that with one exception, the use of assertive self-presentational styles is generally unassociated with life satisfaction.¹

MEDIATIONAL MODEL

Because only excuse-making, disclaimers, and self-handicapping were related to both materialism and life satisfaction, only these three defensive tactics could mediate the inverse relationship between these latter two variables. We predicted that materialism would indirectly relate to life satisfaction via increased excuse-making, use of disclaimers, and self-handicapping. We tested our hypothesized model on the entire sample using structural equation modeling. First, we developed a model that included both direct and indirect paths between materialism and life satisfaction. Then, we created a nested model that included only the indirect paths between the hypothesized mediators and life satisfaction (see Figure 1). Next, we compared the fit between these two models; if there is no significant change in model fit, this means that the direct path between materialism and life satisfaction is unnecessary, suggesting full mediation.

To prepare for our structural equations analysis, we first divided each of our study scale items into indicators, using a procedure known as parceling (Bandalos, 2002). Parceling items into indicators improves the goodness of fit and reduces bias in estimations of structural parameters, compared to using individual items. In the present study, items for each

1. Lee et al. (1999) found the use of defensive and assertive self-presentational tactics to be positively correlated. We also found this to be the case in our sample, with an average correlation of 0.26 between the defensive and assertive self-presentational tactics. However, this correlation is small by conventional standards, suggesting that the defensive and assertive tactics are reasonably orthogonal.

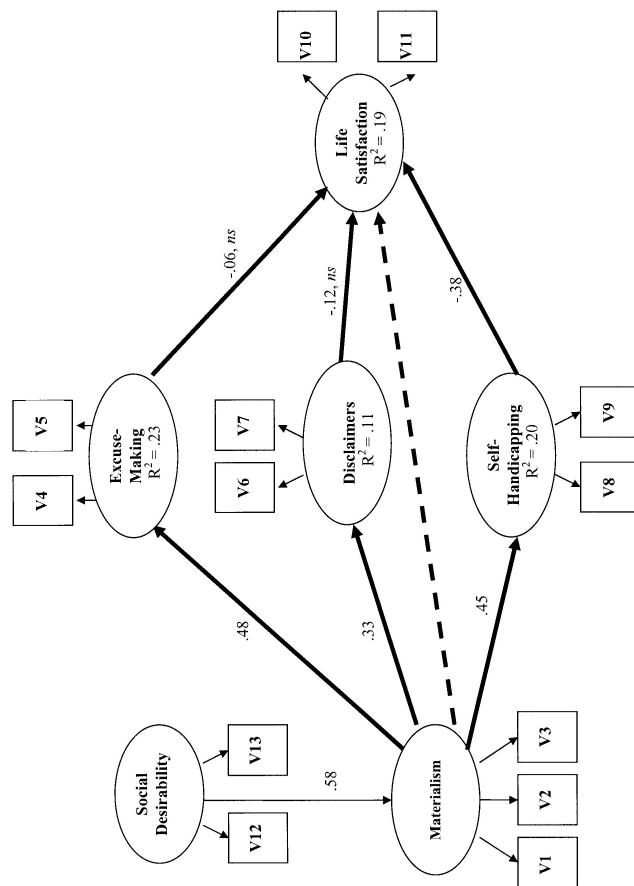


FIGURE 1. Structural Model Results. In the figure, the dashed line represents the direct path we hypothesized would be mediated by excuse-making, disclaimers, and self-handicapping. Circles represent factors. Squares represent indicators. Thicker lines represent mediational paths from the predictor to the outcome. The thinner line represents the effect of the control variable on the predictor. Standardized beta coefficients are shown. All betas are significant at $p < .05$ unless otherwise indicated.

TABLE 3. Fit Statistics and Chi-Square Comparisons for All Models

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	NFI	NNFI	CFI	$\Delta\chi^2$
Direct and Indirect Effects Model	295.81***	58	.998	.998	.999	
Indirect Effects Model	296.13***	59	.998	.998	.999	.32

Note. Each row represents the structural model performed. Analysis was conducted on the entire sample. The nested indirect effects model was compared to the direct and indirect effects model. The change in χ^2 was not significant. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

scale were randomly selected and averaged together to create indicators. Specifically, the materialism scale was parceled into 3 indicators containing 6 items each. The excuse-making scale was parceled into 2 indicators containing 3 items and 2 items; the same procedure was followed to create indicators for disclaimers and self-handicapping. The life satisfaction scale was parceled into 2 indicators containing 3 items and 2 items, and finally, the social desirability scale was parceled into 2 indicators containing 7 items and 6 items, respectively.

To conduct our analyses, we used Maximum Likelihood estimation with raw data matrices as input. We fixed scaling metrics for the latent variables by setting factor variances equal to 1.0. To handle missing data, we used Expectation-Maximization (EM) imputation. Multiple fit indices were used to assess goodness of fit (Raykov, Tomer, & Nesselroade, 1991). Specifically, the Normed Fit Index (NFI), Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are reported; fit indices exceeding .90 constitute acceptable model fit, which means that the model accounts for 90% or more of the covariance among the variables (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). In addition, chi-square statistics are reported, with a non-significant chi-square representing a close fit between the implied and observed variance-covariance matrices. However, it must be noted that in large sample sizes, the chi-square is often significant regardless of fit, which is why additional fit indices are reported. In other words, consistency across multiple fit indices provides a more reliable measure of goodness of fit than any one measure (Boomsma, 2000; Cliff, 1983; McDonald & Moon-Ho, 2002).

Table 3 summarizes the test results for the full model (i.e., direct and indirect paths) and for the nested model containing only indirect paths from materialism to life satisfaction. Both models showed high fit indices ranging from .998 to .999. Importantly, the change in chi-square between the full and nested model was not significant. Thus, the model with only indirect paths is our preferred model, because it is more parsimonious.

monious than the full model and provides just as good a fit. Indeed, the nested (indirect effects only) model fit the data very well, $\chi^2(59) = 296.13$, $NFI = .998$, $NNFI = .998$, $CFI = .999$. The model explained 23% of the variance in excuse-making, 11% of the variance in disclaimers, 20% of the variance in self-handicapping, and 19% of the variance in life satisfaction.

Figure 1 displays the standardized betas based on this model. As expected, materialism predicted significantly more excuse-making ($\beta = .48$), use of disclaimers ($\beta = .33$), and self-handicapping ($\beta = .45$). Of these self-presentational tactics, only self-handicapping ($\beta = -.38$) predicted significantly less life satisfaction; excuse-making ($\beta = -.06$) and use of disclaimers ($\beta = -.12$) also tended to predict less life satisfaction, although they did not reach statistical significance in our model. Overall examination of the indirect parameter effects revealed that materialism had a significant, indirect effect on life satisfaction through the three self-presentation tactics combined ($\beta = -.24$). However, of the three mediators, only self-handicapping emerged as a significant mediator between materialism and life satisfaction, $t(276) = -2.41$, $p < .02$, as revealed by a Sobel t -test.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we sought to extend prior research (e.g., Christopher et al., 2005; Christopher & Schlenker, 2004) that examined the relationship between materialism and self-presentational strategies. Specifically, we sought to examine how materialism is related to defensive and assertive self-presentational tactics, and how these tactics, in turn, might mediate the established relationship between materialism and life satisfaction.

As hypothesized, materialism was inversely related to life satisfaction, consistent with prior research (e.g., Ryan & Dziurawiec, 2001). Additionally, materialism was positively related to the use of four out of five defensive self-presentational tactics: excuses, justifications, disclaimers, and self-handicapping. This set of correlations supports the notion that materialistic people may be prone to protect their identities more so than less materialistic people. Somewhat surprisingly, materialism was positively related to the use of four out of seven assertive self-presentational tactics: ingratiation, entitlements, enhancements, and blasting. However, upon close examination of the four specific assertive tactics with which materialism was related, one might suggest that at least two of these "assertive tactics" contain elements common to defensive tactics. For instance, blasting requires derogating others to look good by comparison. That is, an actor needs to "rip apart" others to establish an identity of superiority. Although such behaviors may stake

one's identity on being superior, they do not require one to establish an identity based on one's own merits. With respect to ingratiation, such behaviors (e.g., complimenting others, doing favors, conforming) require an actor to assume a subservient social position relative to another person.

Our primary hypothesis, that defensive but not assertive self-presentational tactics would mediate the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction, was partially supported. Specifically, our structural equation model suggested that the tendency to self-handicap significantly attenuated the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. This finding suggests that materialistic people's tendency to use self-protective strategies may correlate with their lower levels of life satisfaction when compared to their less materialistic counterparts. When people self-handicap, they are trying to avoid taking responsibility for a potentially undesirable outcome by placing obstacles in their way of success (e.g., a student getting drunk the night before a major examination). However, there are demonstrated psychological benefits, both direct and indirect, of assuming responsibility. For example, more conscientious people have been shown to perform better when publicly accountable than when not accountable (Frink & Ferris, 1999). Furthermore, Roberts and Robins (2000) found a positive relationship between conscientiousness and the importance placed on economic goals, such as having a high-status career and having a high standard of living. Although Roberts and Robins did not explicitly examine materialism as an economic goal, it may be reasonable to assume that owning possessions could be an economic goal. Not surprisingly, observers tend to draw positive inferences about certain personal qualities of economically successful individuals (e.g., Christopher & Schlenker, 2000; Dittmar, 1992). However, not everyone will obtain such outcomes. Because materialistic people may doubt their own abilities (see Chang & Arkin, 2002), they may self-handicap to provide themselves with an excuse in case they do not reach their goals. Thus, although we had expected defensive self-presentational styles to mediate the relationship between materialism and life satisfaction, we found this to be true only for self-handicapping, a specific type of defensive style in which people hinder their own performance to disengage themselves from undesirable outcomes.

Higgins and his colleagues (1997; Higgins, Friedman, Harlow, Idson, Ayduk, & Taylor, 2001) have established a distinction between a "promotion focus" and a "prevention focus." With a promotion focus, an individual is more concerned with striving for pleasant end states (e.g., making money), whereas with a prevention focus, an individual is more concerned with avoiding unpleasant end states (e.g., losing money). It

may be that, at least with respect to self-presentation, materialistic people's desire to "prevent" undesirable images of themselves, in the form of denying responsibility for failure, is a hindrance to their well-being, but any concordant desire to "promote" desirable images is not a hindrance to their well-being.

It is noteworthy that three of the five defensive tactics were *negatively* associated with life satisfaction, whereas only one of the assertive tactics was positively associated with life satisfaction. A body of research (e.g., Mikulincer & Marshand, 1991; Taylor & Brown, 1994) suggests the use of tactics such as excuse-making has positive psychological outcomes. Our data, which pertain only to life satisfaction, suggest differently (see also Schlenker, Pontari, & Christopher, 2001). Although the use of tactics that relieve one of personal responsibility may be psychologically beneficial in the short-term, chronic use of such tactics, as was assessed in our study, may have the opposite effect.

Certainly, our mediational finding needs to be replicated across different operationalizations of well-being, both psychological and physical, with a broader age range of participants than was used in the current investigation. As DeNeve and Cooper (1998) pointed out, life satisfaction is a cognitive assessment of well-being. Other operationalizations of well-being, such as happiness, tend to be more affective evaluations of well-being. Future research would also benefit from collecting such data longitudinally to better-establish causal relationships.

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, we sampled only American respondents. Cross-cultural replications of the present study might also provide theoretically interesting comparisons. For instance, Wong and Ahuvia (1998) articulated how, in Southeast Asian cultures, luxury-based consumption may occur because of the emphasis people place on their interdependency on others. That is, people in Southeast Asia may place more emphasis on publicly visible possessions than do people in Western cultures. Conversely, people in Western cultures will place more emphasis on the private meanings of their possessions. The inverse relationship between materialism and well-being has received cross-cultural support (see Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Perhaps in a Southeast Asian population, where possessions may be used more for public than private reasons, assertive self-presentational tactics are more important in understanding the relationship between materialism and well-being. In such cultures, the emphasis on creating an image via possessions may be associated with creating an image via self-presentational tactics.

Jones and Berglas (1978) suggested that when people doubt themselves (as materialistic people are prone to do, see Chang & Arkin, 2002), there are two strategies they can employ. They can exert profound effort

to minimize the chances of failing (akin to an assertive or self-enhancement strategy), or they can self-handicap by creating impediments to their performance so as to reduce the diagnostic value of a poor performance (akin to a defensive or self-protective strategy). The current data and prior research (e.g., Christopher et al., 2005) suggests that with respect to self-presentation, materialistic people opt for the second strategy. Furthermore, this choice seems to be partially responsible for the inverse relationship between materialism and life satisfaction. Future research could investigate whether materialistic people's penchant for self-protective strategies extends to other life domains, such as economic behavior. Such investigations are necessary if we are to better understand the ubiquitous phenomenon of materialism.

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