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Self-compassion, the 'quiet ego' and materialism

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Abstract

The research is an investigation of self-compassion and materialism. Self-compassion is when an individual has a caring, non-judgmental view of the self. This quality has been related to lower depression, less negative emotion and higher psychological health (Neff, 2003). Materialism has been consistently associated with low subjective well-being and unhappiness. A related concept is that of the 'quiet ego', which is a less competitive, less self-centered individual with more concern with connecting with others and with personal growth (Wayment et al., 2015). Therefore, it is hypothesized that highly materialistic individuals will be lower in self-compassion and have a fear of compassion from others and towards others and that self-compassion and fears of compassion will mediate the relationship between materialism and low subjective well-being. As materialistic individuals are more likely to be competitive and individualistic, it is hypothesized that the 'quiet ego' will be negatively related to materialism. These hypotheses were investigated using a set of questionnaires with 423 undergraduate participants. The results indicated a relationship between materialism and fear of compassion for others and of responding to the compassion of others. Materialism was also negatively related to the 'quiet ego' and related constructs such as: mindfulness, satisfaction with life and generativity. Self-compassion, fears of compassion and the quiet-ego were also found to mediate the relationship between materialism and measures of well-being. The results are consistent with several theoretical explanations for the development of materialism. It is possible that increasing self-compassion,

reducing fears of compassion and 'ego-quieting' procedures could be developed as methods of reducing materialistic tendencies.

Keyword: Psychology

1. Introduction

Self-compassion is when an individual has a caring, non-judgmental view of oneself, including one's inadequacies and failures (Neff, 2003). Self-compassion has been related to lower depression and negative emotion and higher psychological health. According to Neff (2003), self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem and can be a better predictor of well-being in some cases. Neff (2003) argues that self-compassion offers all the benefits high self-esteem, such as higher subjective well-being and better overall adjustment without the drawbacks: such as the potential for narcissism and self-centeredness. According to Neff (2003), self-compassion has none of these issues and can be elevated without increasing these attributes in the individual. Self-compassion is also more amenable to change compared to self-esteem, which can be difficult to increase in the case of low self-esteem (Neff, 2003). One factor that has been consistently related to low self-esteem and subjective well-being is that of materialism (Dittmar et al., 2014; Chaplin and John, 2007). Self-compassion, materialism and wellbeing may have a communality as lack of self-compassion has also been related to lower well-being and self-esteem (e.g., Gunnell et al., 2017).

Materialism involves a focus on the acquisition of possessions that becomes the central motivator and path to happiness in an individual's life (Richins and Dawson, 1992). As Nagpaul and Pang (2017) have argued, the majority of the research on materialism has examined the negative psychological effects of materialism rather than the possible antecedents or underlying causal mechanisms for the development of materialistic traits or values. Social-cultural influences have been mentioned by researchers such as Richins and Chaplin (2015), Kasser et al. (2004) and Ahuvia and Wong 2002. Richins and Chaplin (2015) have found that parenting practices that reward achievements with material goods as being influential in the development of materialism. Kasser et al. (2004) discuss the socialization process which models and reinforces materialistic values which become internalized. Ahuvia and Wong (2002) describe developmental experiences whereby the individual becomes more materialistic because of feelings of deprivation relative to others. These three sets of social-cultural explanations fall under what Nagpaul and Pang (2017, p. 601) refer to as the "…socialization pathway…" to materialism. These types of influences may run counter to the development of self-compassion and compassion for others as materialistic values emphasize attributes antithetical to compassionate values such as achievement, superiority to others, dominance, power and hedonism (Karabati and Cemalcilar, 2010; Watson, 2016; Nagpaul and Pang, 2017).

The second type of antecedent is the "…self-esteem repair pathway…" (Nagpaul and Pang, 2017, p. 611). Materialism has been viewed as an attempt to repair self-esteem as the individual compensates for feelings of emptiness when positive experiences of personal growth, interpersonal connections and autonomy are not present (Nagpaul and Pang, 2017, p 611).

Vonk and Smit (2012) discussed the concept of contingent, intrinsic self-esteem whereby the individual evaluates whether or not his or her actions are congruent with the self and involve personal growth. This contrasts with contingent, extrinsic self-esteem which is dependent upon external validation by others and is negatively associated with well-being. Nagpaul and Pang (2017) found that extrinsic, contingent self-esteem was related to materialism whereas intrinsic, contingent self-esteem was related to intrinsic concerns such as: personal growth, genuineness and congruence (p. 612). This form of self-esteem has been found to positively correlate with self-compassion, whereas extrinsic, contingent self-esteem is negatively related (Nagpaul and Pang, 2017). Therefore, it is likely that self-compassion is also negatively related to materialism.

1.1. Materialism and insecurity

According to the motivational theory of materialism, the development of these traits or values is the result of "…a failure to meet higher order psychological needs, such as the formation of close loving relationships with others…" Burroughs et al. (2013), p. 19. The lack of fulfillment of these needs leads to insecurity which people attempt to alleviate with the attainment of inanimate objects. One possible factor in the development of materialism is attachment insecurity which can lead to the replacement of attachment with people to attachment with possessions. According to Norris et al. (2012), anxiously attached individuals are more likely to develop materialistic values. Difficulties with attachment have also been found with lack of self-compassion, instability of self-esteem and psychological entitlement (Rothman, 2009; Foster et al., 2007; Moreira et al., 2016). Therefore, it is likely that highly materialistic individuals will be low in self-compassion and it is also likely that materialism will be related to a fear of compassion, both for self and for others.

1.2. Materialism and the escape from the self

Donnelly et al. (2016) apply escape-theory (Baumeister, 1988, 1990) to materialism in terms of the six stages of escape. 1. Materialism is an escape from the self in that the individual has excessively high standards and fails to reach these high materialistic aspirations. 2. This failure results in self-blame, so the central focus is upon the self. 3. This self-awareness is deemed to be aversive when the individual is aware of the failure to reach unrealistic standards. 4. Emotional distress is a consequence of this aversive state of self-awareness. 5. The individual will engage in more concrete,

present-focused thinking in attempt to reduce distress. 6. Finally, according to Donnelly et al. (2016), the more concrete thinking leads to more impulsive behavior as the higher-level thinking processes that control impulsivity are inhibited (p. 299). One central aspect of the escape theory of materialism is the notion of self-blame when the materialistic individual fails to reach highs standards of materialistic aspirations. The individual is likely to be overly self-critical and may believe that this is necessary to maintain these high standards and being more self-compassionate means lowering those standards. Therefore, escape theory would predict that materialists are lower in self-compassion.

1.3. Resistance to self-compassion

There are several reasons why individuals are resistant to self-compassion, many of these are likely to be related to materialism. According to Neff (2003), individuals may be overly self-critical and associate self-compassion with narcissism or self-centeredness. In addition, resistance to self-compassion may be due to the belief that in order to be motivated, an individual needs to be harsh and self-critical and that being self-compassionate reduces motivation (Neff, 2003). These sets of beliefs that are barriers to self-compassion may also inhibit those higher in materialism from being self-compassionate, as the materialistic individual is more likely to be self-critical, hard-driving and competitive towards materialistic goals and self-compassion may be seen as counter to these pursuits (e.g., Wachel and Blatt, 1990; Bauer et al., 2012).

1.4. Materialism and the quiet ego

Related to the notion of self-compassion is the concept of the 'quiet ego', which is a less competitive, less self-centered individual with more concern with connecting with others and with personal growth (Bauer and Wayment, 2008). As materialistic individuals are more likely to be competitive and individualistic, it is hypothesized that the 'quiet ego' will be negatively related to materialism. High materialism is a trait more likely to be related to the notion of the 'noisy ego' whereby the individual is focused upon getting attention through material acquisition and consumption rather than upon personal development. Therefore, related concepts such as entitlement, meaning in life, subjective well-being and generativity will also be measured. Investigation of these relationships may further the understanding of the relationship between materialism and low subjective well-being.

Materialism has been conceptualized as a trait composed of possessiveness, non-generosity and envy (Belk, 1985). According to this view, the materialistic individual wants to acquire and retain possessions, is not likely to share with others and is envious of the possessions that others have and wants to acquire those possessions. Richins and Dawson (1992) have defined materialism in terms of a set of values:

centrality, happiness and success. Acquiring material objects is central to one's life, the path to happiness and the measure of the individual's success.

Given these two conceptions of materialism, the personality-based approach (Belk, 1985) and the values-based approach (Richins and Dawson, 1992), it is possible that there is a different relationship between materialism and self-compassion and the quiet ego. Therefore, both measures are used in the study.

1.5. Hypotheses

H1: Materialism will be negatively related to self-compassion and positively related to a fear of compassion from others and for others. These relationships are likely, given the previously discussed set of possible influences on the development of materialism: socialization, self-esteem repair, escape from the self, and the possible relationship between materialism and resistance to self-compassion.

H2: Materialism will be negatively associated with the "quiet ego" and related constructs: mindfulness, satisfaction with life and generativity. These relationships are hypothesized given the competitive, individualistic values of the materialistic individual which contrasts with the characteristics of the "quiet ego", a less competitive individual that is more connected to others in terms of sense of self.

The second set of hypotheses concern the well-established relationship between materialism and low subjective well-being. Overall, given the theoretical arguments presented above, it is hypothesized that self-compassion and fears of compassion for self and others will mediate the relationship between materialism and well-being and therefore add to the incremental validity in the prediction of well-being with materialism.

H3a: Self-compassion will be a negative indirect mediator the relationship between materialism and well-being, generativity and meaning in life.

H3b: Fears of self-compassion will be a negative indirect mediator in the relationship between materialism and well-being, generativity and meaning in life.

H3c: The quiet ego will be a negative indirect mediator in the relationship between materialism and well-being, generativity and meaning in life.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Undergraduate participants, n = 423, completed online questionnaires in exchange for experimental credit at a medium sized Western Canadian University with a student composition of 80% non-minority and 20% visible minority students, including

6% aboriginal students. The participants had an average age of mean = 20.47, SD = 3.82 and 72.68% were female. The study was approved by the MacEwan University Research Ethics Board.

2.2. Instruments

Belk materialism scale: has 24 items and provides overall materialism score and three subscales that measure: possessiveness, non-generosity, and envy. The Belk uses a (1 = never to 5 = always) Likert type scale. Belk (1985) reported Cronbach's alphas of $\alpha = .57$, $\alpha = .58$ and $\alpha = .64$ for the subscales and an overall alpha of $\alpha = 66$. In terms of temporal stability, the test-retest reliability was in the range of $r = .64$ for non-generosity to $r = .87$ for possessiveness (Belk, 1985). The alpha for the full measure was, $\alpha = .61$ with the current investigation. This value is in line with previous research by Richins and Dawson (1992) that found a median alpha of $\alpha = .62$ with several samples. Materialism is measured more indirectly compared to other scales given that Belk's (1984) theory is that materialism is a combination of possessiveness, non-generosity and envy. This lower alpha with the Belk scale is likely due to greater item heterogeneity and a less direct method of measurement. This is a possible limitation of the study; therefore, the Material Values Scale (MVS) was used as well.

Material values scale (MVS): is a 15-item scale with an overall materialism score along with three subscales: Success, Centrality and Happiness (Richins, 2004). The MVS uses a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, to 5 = always). Examples of the items are: Success: "…I admire people who own expensive homes, cars and clothes…" (Richins, 2004, p. 217); Centrality: "…I like a lot of luxury in my life …" (p.217); Happiness: "…My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have. …" (p. 218). Richins (2004) obtained an overall alpha of $\alpha = .86$ and alphas of $\alpha = .77$ for success, $\alpha = .73$ with centrality and $\alpha = .75$ for happiness.

The quiet-ego scale: measures self-identity that transcends self-interest (Wayment et al., 2015). The quiet-ego scale uses a (1 = almost always, to 5 = almost never) Likert-type format and has 14 items that measure four components: detached awareness, inclusive identity, perspective taking and growth. The quiet ego is not considered to be a personality trait but "…a set of psychosocial skills and abilities that facilitate personal growth… (Wayment et al., 2015, p. 1004). The authors obtained a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .76$ for the full scale.

Self-compassion scale: Measures being kind and understanding towards oneself rather than self-critical, Neff (2003). The 26-item scale has six scales: self-kindness, self-judgement, common humanity, isolation, mindfulness and over-identification. The test uses a 5-point Likert format (1 = never to 5 = always scale) and has two factors: (1) self-kindness: self-kindness, common humanity and

mindfulness and (2) self-coldness: self-judgment, isolation and over-identification. Internal consistency for the total measure is $\alpha = .92$. The six subscales range in internal reliability from $\alpha = .75$ for mindfulness to $\alpha = .81$ for over-identification. Neff (2003) offers evidence of validity as the scale correlates negatively with depression and anxiety and positively with life satisfaction.

Fears of compassion scales: Measures fear of compassion for others, fear of responding to the expression of compassion from others and fear of self-compassion (Gilbert et al., 2011). The test uses a (1 = don't agree at all-to 5 = completely agree) Likert scale for the three scales. Fear of compassion from others is the fear of the affiliative emotions of warmth, affection and care that others may express when the individual is receiving compassion for others. This scale consists of 10 items, for example: "…being too compassionate makes people soft and easy to take advantage of…" (p.247). Gilbert et al. (2011) reported a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .78$. Fear of responding to the expression of compassion for others is a 13-item scale, for example, "…Feelings of kindness from others are somehow frightening…" (p. 247). The scale had an alpha of $\alpha = .87$ according Gilbert et al. (2011). Fear of self-compassion is a 15-item scale with an alpha of $\alpha = .85$, for example "…I fear that if I am more self-compassionate I will become a weak person…" (p. 248).

Satisfaction with life scale, Diener et al. (1985). Overall life satisfaction is measured by this 5-item instrument using a (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) Likert scale. The authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .87$ and test-retest reliability of $r = .82$ over a 2-month interval. The test also shows evidence of convergent validity as Diener et al. (1985) reported moderate to strong correlations with several other measures of life satisfaction.

Meaning in life questionnaire, Steger et al. (2006). This 10 item scale measures how important, purposeful and meaningful the respondent feels about his or her life. The test has a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) and measures two subscales: presence and search. According to Steger et al. (2006), presence measures the "…subjective sense that one's life is meaningful…" (p.85). Search for meaning measures the motivation to find meaning in one's life. The authors have obtained good internal consistency with α's ranging from .86−.88.

Loyola generativity scale, A 20-item scale measuring generativity which is the desire to aid the next generation in a variety of possible domains, parenthood, work, volunteerism etc., McAdams and Aubin, 1992). The test uses a (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) Likert scale and has temporal stability with a 3-week test-retest reliability of $r = .73$.

Psychological entitlement scale, Campbell et al. (2004). This is a nine-item scale that measures "…the experience of being deserving and entitled…" (p. 31). The scale uses a (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) Likert rating scale and

the obtained alpha was α = .85. Test-retest reliability at one and two-month intervals was $r = .70$ and $r = .72$ respectively. The test also has evidence of convergent validity, e.g. correlations with narcissism and exploitativeness; and predictive validity, e.g. the scale predicts greed, aggression, selfishness in relationships.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and gender comparisons are presented in Table 1. MANOVA for gender differences obtained an overall significant effect with a Wilk's $\lambda = .778$, $F(30,392) = 3.73$, $p < .01$. Univariate comparisons revealed higher scores for females on possessiveness and centrality with the materialism subscales. Males had higher scores on materialistic happiness. Findings of gender differences with centrality and materialistic happiness are mixed, however, higher female possessiveness is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Watson, 2015, 2016). A higher level in females and may reflect higher sentimental attachment to objects that are associated with relatives or friends (Dittmar, 1989). With self-compassion, females were higher in self-coldness and lower in self-kindness, also more detachment, self-judgment and isolation and over-identification. Males were higher on self-kindness and mindfulness. These findings are consistent with Yarnell et al.'s (2015) meta-analysis, whereby females were found to be less self-compassionate, more self-critical and engage in more negative self-talk.

3.2. Correlational analysis

Correlations between all variables are presented in Table 2. In support of hypothesis 1, Belk materialism was related to fear of compassion for others, fear of receiving compassion from others and fear of self-compassion. The MVS was related to fear of compassion for others. With the self-compassion scales the Belk was related to self-judgment, isolation and over-identification and negatively related to self-kindness, common humanity and mindfulness. The MVS correlated with over-identification, isolation and negatively related to mindfulness. In support of hypothesis 2, the Belk was negatively related to the quiet ego, generativity, meaning in life (presence), and satisfaction with life and positively related to entitlement. With the MVS, hypothesis 2 was supported with a negative relationship to the quiet ego, meaning in life (presence), satisfaction with life, and a positive relationship to entitlement.

3.3. Mediation analyses

A series of mediation analyses was conducted with the materialism measures as predictors, the well-being measures as outcome variables and self-compassion and fears

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all measures.

	α	Males $n = 124$	Females $n = 299$	Total $n = 423$	F	p	d
Belk	.61	71.91 (7.6)	72.73 (8.05)	72.5 (7.9)	.93	.33	
Poss.	.51	30.55 (4.1)	31.79 (4.3)	31.43 (4.3)	7.55	.00	.30
Non-gen.	.61	18.23 (3.9)	18.21 (3.8)	18.21 (3.9)	.03	.95	
Envy	.43	23.13 (3.9)	22.73 (3.9)	22.85 (3.8)	.95	.33	
MVS	.84	42.66 (9.2)	42.3 (8.03)	42.4 (8.4)	.17	.67	
Success	.73	13.38 (4.0)	13.20 (3.2)	13.26 (3.4)	.21	.65	
Centrality	.66	14.72 (3.3)	15.35 (3.8)	15.17 (3.2)	3.58	.06	.17
Happiness	.66	14.56 (3.3)	13.72 (3.4)	13.96 (3.4)	5.45	.02	.25
Quiet ego	.77	48.28 (6.7)	48.43 (6.4)	48.4 (6.4)	.05	.83	
Detached	.63	8.92 (2.5)	9.53 (1.9)	9.35 (2.04)	7.84	.00	.27
Inclusive ID	.69	9.04 (2.5)	9.17 (2.4)	9.14 (2.3)	.28	.59	
Perspective	.63	12.93 (2.7)	13.42 (2.7)	13.27 (2.7)	2.75	.09	
Growth	.73	16.46 (2.6)	16.87 (2.5)	16.74 (2.5)	2.03	.13	
FCompO	.84	32.72 (7.6)	32.3 (7.3)	32.41 (7.3)	.31	.57	
FcompR	.90	32.41 (10.4)	33.16 (10.1)	32.94 (10.2)	.46	.49	
FcompS	.94	36.83 (12.3)	35.35 (12.5)	35.78 (12.4)	1.23	.26	
SelfKind	.84	15.67 (3.9)	14.5 (3.9)	14.83 (3.9)	8.04	.00	.30
SelfJudge	.89	15.82 (4.15)	17.16 (4.4)	17.76 (4.8)	9.20	.00	.31
Chuman	.82	12.27 (3.5)	12.35 (3.1)	12.34 (3.3)	.06	.80	
Isolation	.80	12.23 (3.7)	13.54 (3.6)	13.15 (3.7)	11.38	.00	.34
Mindful	.76	13.36 (2.9)	12.13 (2.8)	12.48 (2.9)	16.89	.00	.40
OverID	.83	11.75 (3.3)	13.6 (3.3)	13.05 (3.4)	27.33	.00	.56
Self.Comp.	.88	41.30 (8.24)	38.97 (8.29)	39.65 (8.34)	6.95	.00	.28
Self-Cold.	.91	39.79 (9.11)	44.29 (9.48)	42.97 (9.58)	20.17	.00	.48
Generativ.	.85	65.72 (11.9)	67.0 (10.0)	66.62 (10.7)	1.27	.26	
Presence	.87	23.13 (6.7)	22.26 (6.5)	22.51 (6.5)	1.54	.22	
Search	.87	23.74 (6.8)	24.84 (6.0)	24.52 (6.3)	2.76	.09	
SWLS	.82	22.3 (6.5)	22.47 (5.9)	22.41 (6.05)	.07	.79	
Entitlement	.85	30.31 (9.4)	29.5 (9.5)	29.73 (9.5)	.65	.42	

Note: Belk = Belk Materialism Scale, Poss. = Possessiveness, Non. Gen. = Non-generosity, MVS = Material Values Scale, Inclusive ID = Inclusive Identity, FcompO. = Fear of Compassion for Others, FcompR. FompS = Fear of Compassion for Self, SelfKind = Self Kindness, SelfJudge, = Self-Judgement, Chuman = Common Humanity, OverID = Overidentification, Self Comp. = Self-Compassion, Self-Cold. = Self-coldness. Generativ. = Generativity, SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale.

of compassion as mediators (see Fig. 1). The analysis was done using bootstrapping with 10000 times resampling with replacement. In support of hypothesis h3 (a, b, c), all these analyses were significant indirect mediators in the relationship between materialism and indicators of well-being (see Table 3). The exceptions were fear

Table 2. Correlations for all measures.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Belk																			
MVS	.48																		
Quiet ego	−.43	−.30																	
FCompO	.36	.25	−.22																
FcompR	.36	.15	−.36	.34															
FcompS	.24	.16	−.31	.29	.73														
SelfKind	−.18	−.06	.28	−.01	−.32	−.39													
SelfJudge	.24	.13	−.16	.12	.38	.50	−.64												
Chuman	−.15	−.12	.32	.01	−.32	−.37	.45	−.34											
Isolation	.36	.21	−.27	.20	.49	.52	−.44	.56	−.37										
Mindful	−.29	−.19	.42	−.11	−.35	−.35	.65	−.46	.49	−.49									
OverID	.35	.26	−.25	.18	.33	.32	−.43	.56	−.23	.62	−.52								
Selfcomp.	−.24	−.14	.40	−.04	−.39	−.45	.87	−.59	.77	−.52	.84	−.47							
SelfCold.	.36	.23	−.26	.19	.48	.53	−.60	.86	−.37	.85	−.57	.84	−.62						
Generativ.	−.26	−.17	.47	−.21	−.35	−.39	.34	−.26	.37	−.42	.43	−.23	.45	−.35					
Presence	−.25	−.19	.33	−.16	−.36	−.43	.36	−.32	.40	−.45	.41	−.26	.47	.40	.60				
Search	.14	.15	.09	.21	.12	.12	−.04	.17	.07	.28	−.05	.28	.01	−.28	−.19	−.19			
SWLS	−.32	−.23	.32	−.17	−.35	−.39	.37	−.32	.37	−.43	.37	−.27	.45	.40	.43	.57	−.15		
Entitlement	.29	.34	−.19	.21	.12	.05	.17	−.18	.04	−.04	−.03	.02	.08	−.09	.07	.08	.05	−.02	

Note: Correlations above $r = .18$ are significant with the Bonferroni correction. $p = .05/171 = .0003$. Belk = Belk Materialism Scale, MVS = Material Values Scale, FcompO. = Fear of Compassion for Others, FcompR = Fear of Receiving compassion from others, FcompS. = Fear of Compassion for Self, SelfKind = Self Kindness, SelfJudge, = Self-Judgement, Chuman = Common Humanity, OverID = Overidentification, Generativ. = Generativity, SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale.
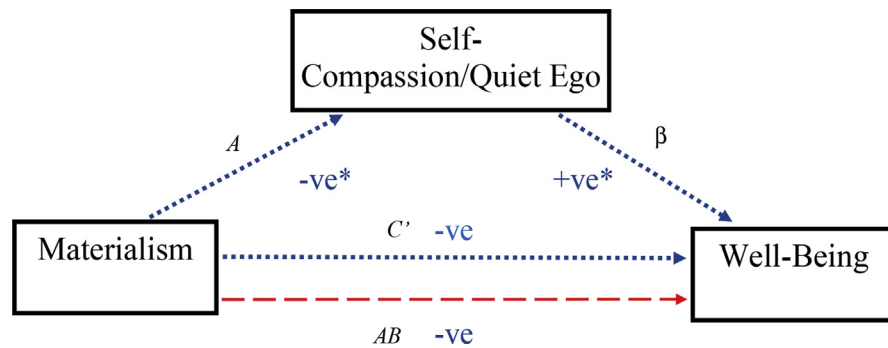
Fig. 1. Proposed model between Materialism, Self-compassion and Well-being. Path *A* from Materialism to Self-compassion will be negative, Path *A* from materialism to the Quiet Ego will be positive, *Path A from materialism to Fears of Compassion will be positive. Path *β* from Self-compassion to Well-being will be Positive, Path *β* from the Quiet Ego to Well-Being will be positive. *Path *β* from Fears of Compassion to Well-being will be negative. Path *C′* from Well-being to materialism will be negative. Indirect path, *AB*, self-compassion, Fears of Compassion or Quiet- Ego will mediate the relationship between Well-being and Materialism. ••••••••▶ = Direct Path; — — —▶ = Indirect Path.

of receiving compassion from another with the path of Belk to satisfaction with life and with the Belk and MVS predicting meaning in life with fear of receiving compassion from another.

3.4. Results summary

Overall, the results are in support of hypothesis 1 as materialism was associated with lower self-compassion, correlating with the self-coldness components of: isolation, over-identification and self-judgment and negatively with mindfulness component of the self-compassion scale.

Materialism correlated with the fears of self-compassion, including compassion for others and a fear of receiving compassion from others. Hypothesis 2 was also supported with a negative relationship with the quiet ego, life satisfaction and generativity. Hypotheses 3 a through c were supported with a significant mediation effect of self-compassion, fears of compassion and the quiet ego in 27 of 30 of the mediation analyses performed.

4. Discussion

The results demonstrate the importance of self-compassion in the relationship between materialism and wellbeing as in most of the measures employed in the study, there was a mediating effect of self-compassion, fears of compassion or the quiet ego. In terms of explaining these findings, they are consistent with the four previously presented explanations for the development of materialism: the socialization pathway, the self-esteem repair pathway, the role of insecurity in materialism, and materialism as an escape from the self. As this is a cross-sectional, correlational

Table 3. Mediation analyses: materialism predicting well-being with self-compassion and fears of self-compassion as mediators.

Bootstrap results for indirect effects (95% CI)

	C' **path**	*A*-**path**	β **path**	*AB*	**Lower**	**Upper**
Hypothesis 3a. Self-compassion						
MVS, SWLS, Self-com.	−.14	−.13	.30	−.04	−.075	−.014
Belk, SWLS, Self-com.	−.17	−.25	.28	−.07	−.238	−.011
MVS, Gen., Self-com.	−.14	−.13	.56	−.08	−.250	−.318
Belk, Gen., Self-com.	−.21	−.25	.53	−.14	−.326	−.092
MVS, Meaning, Self-com.	.014 ns	−.14	.36	−.05	−.091	−.016
Belk, Meaning, Self-com.	.002 ns	−.25	.36	−.09	−.144	−.052
Hypotheses 3b. Fears of compassion						
MVS, SWLS, Fearselfcom.	−.13	.24	−.17	−.04	−.072	−.018
Belk, SWLS, Fearselfcom.	−.18	.38	−.16	−.06	−.094	−.034
MVS, SWLS, Fearcfrom.	−.13	.18	−.19	−.04	−.063	−.013
Belk, SWLS, Fearcfrom.	−.17	.47	−.16	−.08	−.11	−.04
MVS, SWLS, Fearcother	−.15	.22	−.10	−.02	−.045	−.004
Belk, SWLS, Fearcother	−.23	.33	−.05 ns	−.017 ns	−.04	.013
MVS, Gen. Fearselfcom.	−.14	.24	−.31	−.08	−.13	−.03
Belk, Gen. Fearselfcom.	−.23	.38	−.30	−.11	−.18	−.06
MVS, Gen. Fearcfrom.	−.16	.18	−.35	−.06	−.11	−.03
Belk, Gen. Fearcfrom.	−.20	.47	−.31	−.15	−.21	−.08
MVS, Gen. Fearcother	−.16	.22	−.26	−.05	−.10	−.025
Belk, Gen. Fearcother.	−.28	.33	−.20	−.07	−.13	−.017
MVS, Meaning, Fearselfcom.	.00 ns	.24	−.16	−.04	−.07	−.017
Belk, Meaning, Fearselfcom	−.03 ns	.38	−.16	−.06	−.11	−.031
MVS, Meaning, Fearcfrom.	−.00 ns	.18	−.16	−.03	−.06	−.009
Belk, Meaning, Fearcfrom.	−.02 ns	.47	−.16	−.07	−.13	−.02
MVS, Meaning, Fearcother	−.05 ns	.22	.05 ns	.011 ns	−.014	.04
Belk, Meaning, Fearcother.	−.11	.33	.08 ns	.03 ns	−.011	.01
Hypothesis 3c. Quiet ego						
MVS, SWLS, Quiet ego	−.11	−.23	.26	−.06	−.09	−.04
Belk, SWLS, Quiet ego	−.17	−.34	.21	−.07	−.11	−.04
MVS, Gen, Quiet ego	−.04 ns	−.23	.77	−.18	−.25	−.12
Belk, Gen, Quiet ego	−.09 ns	−.34	.74	−.25	−.34	−.18
MVS, Meaning, Quiet ego	.07 ns	−.23	.45	−.10	−.16	−.06
Belk, Meaning, Quiet ego	−.07 ns	−.34	.45	−.16	−.23	−.10

Note: MVS = Material Values Scale, SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale, Self-com. = Self-Compassion Scale, Fearselfcom. = Fear of self-compassion, Fearcfrom. = Fear of compassion from another, Fearcother. = Fear of Expressing Compassion for others.

study, none of these relationships are presumed to be causal and this can be considered an important limitation of the study. However, the findings are consistent with these theoretical accounts of the development of materialism.

With socialization, the internalization of materialistic values which are antithetical to self-compassion and compassion for others is encouraged by consumer culture (Kasser et al., 2004). Kasser et al. (2004) have argued that materialistic value orientation is associated with a lack of basic psychological need satisfaction: feelings of competence, relatedness with others and with a lack of feelings of autonomy. These are attributes that are positively associated with self-compassion (e.g. Gunnell et al., 2017; Ying, 2009; Saricaoglu and Arslan, 2014), therefore the negative relationship between self-compassion and materialism is consistent with the socialization pathway to materialism.

The relationship between materialism and lower self-compassion and fear of having compassion for self or for others is consistent with the relative deprivation notion whereby the individual feels inadequate compared to others and therefore must focus upon attaining wealth and status in order to compensate (Ahuvia and Wong, 2002). This focus on achievement and acquisition impedes the ability of the individual to have the kindness to oneself or others and the materialistic competitiveness discourages the feeling of common humanity that self-compassion entails.

In the case of self-esteem repair, the results of more self-judgment, isolation, and over- identification are consistent with this possible correlate of materialism. As Karanika and Hogg (2016, p. 766) argue, self-esteem and self-compassion are on two ends of a coping continuum, with self-esteem involving conditional self-worth and threatening comparisons and self-compassion involving unconditional self-worth and non-threatening comparisons. When the participants in the Karanika and Hogg (2016) study were faced with reduced wages, unemployment and austerity measures, the more adaptive coping mechanism was to move away from the materialistic, consumer culture and towards self-compassion. The components of self-compassion: common humanity, mindfulness and self-kindness were all present in the participants. The results of the current research point to opposite nature of materialism and self-compassion as it is difficult to view one's own suffering in terms of common humanity if the individual is making upward social comparisons that materialism engenders.

The finding of a negative relationship between materialism and self-compassion is consistent with the insecurity viewpoint on materialism whereby when attachment to other people is inadequate, material possessions serve as a substitute (Burroughs et al., 2013). The relationship between entitlement, overidentification and materialistic values particularly point to the relationship between materialism, insecurity and lack of compassion for self or others.

Escape-theory and materialism are also consistent with the results particularly, the relationship with the over-identification component of self-compassion. Overidentification has been described by Neff (2003) as when "…individuals become so immersed in their current emotional reactions that other aspects of the person — those capable of alternative emotional responses or mental interpretations, for example are inaccessible…" (p. 88). This enhanced focus on emotional reactions leads to strong negative judgments and criticism of the self.

The results fit with materialism as the 'noisy ego' given the association with self-judgment, over-identification, low self-kindness, negative thinking, isolation and low satisfaction with life, lower mindfulness and lower sense of common humanity. Over-identification is much like self-pity whereby an individual becomes totally focused upon themselves and their own problems and is unaware of the problems of others. These results fit with the egocentric orientation of the high materialistic individual that is dependent on the extrinsic evaluation by others based upon level of material success. The fear of compassion for others, fear of responding to the compassion for others is consistent with the lower empathy found in highly materialistic individuals (e.g., Jacobson, 2016; Can, 2013). The results also indicate higher sense of entitlement, lower satisfaction with life, lower meaning in life and generativity with highly materialistic individuals.

According to Robinson et al. (2016), (p. 508) individuals can be resistant to self-compassion because it violates personal values such as the stoic notion of enduring difficulty without complaint and that self-compassion indicative of weakness and self-indulgence. It may be that materialistic values are also a reason to resist self-compassion, as materialism is associated with the notion of individualism, competitiveness and harsh self-criticism to attain material goals.

With materialism and fear of compassion for others, the results are consistent with the literature on helping behavior e.g. Briggs et al. (2007) with volunteerism and Lamy et al. (2016) with helping a stranger. In both of these studies, materialism was negatively related to helping. Helping behavior is related to compassion for others, therefore it is likely that materialism is negatively related to both.

Self-compassion has been found to be related to several types of well-being in a recent meta-analysis by Zessin et al. (2015) and has also been shown to be a mediator in the relationship between several psychological factors and well-being, e.g. neuroticism and physical appearance anxiety (Xu et al., 2017), self-esteem and body-image avoidance (Stapleton et al., 2017), or behavior changes in well-being in 1st year university students (Gunnell et al., 2017). Therefore, the present research finding that self-compassion mediates the relationship between materialism and well-being is consistent with other domains.

In terms of possible explanations for this relationship, Breines and Chen (2012) have found that self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. Those higher in self-compassion were less tolerant of personal weaknesses across several domains and more willing to engage in self-improvement efforts. In relation to materialism, self-compassion was found to reduce preference for upward social comparison. The implication being that as materialistic individuals are lower in self-compassion and therefore are less willing to correct personal faults without harsh self-criticism or over-identification associated with low self-compassion. This could be partly why self-compassion mediates the relationship between materialism and well-being. It is possible that materialists are resistant to change and are motivated by social comparison, so the highly materialistic response to personal flaws is to maintain materialistic goals rather than undergo personal change.

Self-compassion has been found to have a buffering effect upon negative self-feelings (Leary et al., 2007). The literature on compulsive buying is consistent with personal distress (anxiety, depression) as triggers for impulsive buying (e.g., Otero-Lopez and Villardefrancos, 2013) and that materialism is a mediator in the relationship between the correlates of materialism and compulsive buying (Islam et al., 2017). While materialism and compulsive buying are separate, yet overlapping constructs, it is possible that they share the function of buying to reduce distress and the maintenance of an unclear sense of self as Naguti and Bokeyar (2014) have argued.

The study is limited by the use of self-report and a young, undergraduate sample. To further validate these findings, future research should be conducted with an older sample and investigate the quiet-ego, self-compassion and materialism in an experimental context. Another important limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study, therefore future longitudinal designs would further strengthen any possible conclusions made about the possible relationships between materialism, self-compassion and well-being.

Some of the possible implications are that increasing self-compassion may be a method for reducing materialistic tendencies and increasing well-being. Methods to reduce fear of self-compassion and fear of compassion for others could also decrease materialism and serve to increase well-being. With the results of this research, it may be possible to develop self-compassion and 'ego quieting' procedures that will lower materialistic tendencies. As Keng et al. (2012) have found, mindfulness-based intervention have an effect upon several forms of lower subjective wellbeing such as problems with emotion regulation, anger-suppression and fear of emotion. It is possible that this type of intervention could also reduce materialistic tendencies and increase compassion for self and others. Keng et al. (2012) suggest that mindfulness and self-compassion work hand in hand as "…mindfulness allows greater clarity in developing self-compassion, whereas self-compassion

'clears the way' for mindfulness by reducing attention -interfering cognitions such as negative rumination…" (p. 277).

Declarations

Author contribution statement

David C. Watson: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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