

Fun shopping makes you happy

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People who attach great importance to buying or having things are often referred to as 'materialistic', which is generally regarded as being a 'bad' quality. Most people do not like to be labeled as 'materialistic' by others. In her research, Ph.D. researcher Esther Jaspers shows that judging materialism as being 'bad' lacks nuance. She shows that buying and possessing things because it gives you pleasure adds to your personal happiness, and that the possession of things as a measure of status and success adds to your financial means as well as your happiness. She will defend her thesis at Tilburg University on Wednesday, December 5.

Research shows that materialists take a more [positive attitude](#) towards spending money and incurring debts, but at the same time are more likely to be insecure, lonely and less happy. However, when you zoom in on the various types of materialism, a more nuanced picture emerges.

Three types of materialism

Three types of materialism are distinguished in the literature:

1. 'Buying in pursuit of happiness' (If I have more I will be happier)
2. 'Buying for pleasure' (I enjoy shopping and having things)
3. 'Possessions as a measure of success' (My possessions are indicative of my status and my success).

To find out if some types of materialism may have positive consequences, Jaspers investigated how these different types relate to financial means and the extent to which consumers consider themselves

happy. In her research, she uses longitudinal data sets to answer complex questions regarding the development of materialism, and the relationship between materialism and financial and subjective wellbeing.

Materialism and happiness

Previous studies have shown that [people](#) who are more materialistic are less happy. However, these studies tend to focus on materialism in general, while a distinction should be made between various types of materialism. It turns out that there is only one type of materialism that has a [negative influence](#) on happiness and this, ironically, is 'buying things in pursuit of happiness.' The more one thinks that buying and possessing more things will make one happier, the less happy one will in fact be. The other two types ('buying for pleasure' and 'possessions as a measure of success') both have a positive influence on happiness.

Materialism and financial means

Her [research](#) also qualifies two other suppositions. It confirms the lay belief that [young people](#) are more materialistic and that [materialism](#) decreases as people get older, but it also shows that it grows stronger again in late adulthood. Also in line with what one would expect, it turns out that people who are more materialistic have less savings and more debt. However, this relationship does not apply to the 'possessions as a measure of success' type, where people tend to have fewer debts and more wealth.

Provided by Tilburg University

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