



**MSc Thesis**  
**Marketing and International Business**

**Buying Happiness**

The relationship between self-concept clarity and materialism  
mediated through identity bolstering

**Amna Hasecic**

Supervisor: Auður Hermannsdóttir  
September 2020



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VIÐSKIPTAFRÆÐIDEILD

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Amna Hasecic

Final thesis for MSc degree in Marketing and International Business

Supervisor: Auður Hermannsdóttir

School of Business

Department of Social Sciences – University of Iceland

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## **Abstract**

In today's contemporary society, our material possessions have a lot of meaning to us and even indicate who we are as individuals. We define ourselves and others define us by the things we own, thus we tend to seek a preferred identity by identity bolstering. Identity bolstering is seeking material objects that are believed to get us closer to our desired identity. Many studies indicate that identity and the self-concept are strongly influential with regard to materialistic tendencies. The objective of this study was to examine if the relationship between materialism and self-concept clarity is mediated through identity bolstering. To conduct the study quantitative methodology was used with relevant measuring scales as well as an electronic convenience sample to obtain data. In total, 445 individuals participated in the study.

The results showed that identity bolstering does function as a significant mediator between self-concept clarity and material values. Individuals with low levels of self-concept clarity, which defines those who are less confident in who they are, experience more identity bolstering and therefore seek to bolster their identities by obtaining certain material objects. Consecutively, those that experience identity bolstering have higher levels of materialism, which indicates that those who tend to obtain material objects to get closer to a desired identity are more materialistic than others. By way of explanation, the mediation becomes a system among the three constructs, self-concept clarity, identity bolstering and material values.

The results also indicated that the more self-concept clarity an individual has or the more confident an individual is in him or herself, the less materialistic they seem to be. The results of the current study likewise showed that the higher one's confidence in him or herself is, the less likely one is to seek material possessions to bolster a desired identity. These results are consistent with other studies that focus on formation of identity based on materialism and consumption.

The economy and the marketplace itself are in many cases driven by the consumers desire for identity bolstering and their self-concept clarity. Knowing this can give a company and the larger economy a better understanding of what lies behind the consumer behavior that is the motivation and the driving force of the world.

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# 1 Introduction

A consumer is a powerful character who holds all the authority, whether it is forcing production or inspiring innovation. The future of the planet even lies in the hands of a consumer. His or her choices speak volumes when it comes to protecting the environment for the next generations. Nevertheless, a consumer in today's culture is a sensitive and naïve character who is weak and easily fooled in his quest to buy happiness in the world's commodities. To quote Madonna, "we are living in a material world" where material things can have more meaning to us than our experiences and spiritual journeys. We seem to build our self-esteem and shape our identities with objects that say the things about us that words cannot. We also seem to form relationships with things rather than with each other without even realizing. We are defined by things and define ourselves with things. We try to buy our worth, but nothing seems to make us feel more worthless than the things we buy. This belief that we as individuals are nothing more than the things that we own is called materialism. Materialism is the belief in material and self-existent things (Lange, 2016). Consumerism appears to sell us a special kind of fantasy that we try to present in our materialistic values.

Gabriel and Lang (2006) point out that living life to the fullest has slowly but surely become equivalent with consumerism. In the last couple of centuries our culture has shifted from striving to fulfill our basic needs with consumption to striving to fulfill our *desired* needs. In that time, those desired needs became our basic needs and consumerism took over as a way of life. Consumption, like Baudrillard (1998) pointed out, was once viewed as natural because individuals consumed to satisfy a particular need; later on, consumption stopped being simply a need and started defining one's social status. It has been widely discussed that consumption choices are highly linked and influenced by an individual's self-development (Oyserman, 2009). In that case, worldly possessions are wildly important and consumer attachment to those possessions is defined as materialism (Belk, 1984). Materialistic activities that individuals engage in within their daily lives are said to define and construct their identity (Schroeder & Dugal 1995). That is generally because products are used as transfers of signals between the individual possessing them and the product itself (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010). Clammer (1992) claims shopping is not just about obtaining and purchasing of

products but mainly about buying of identity. Identity is described as a subjective perception that an individual believes or holds for oneself (Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge & Scabini, 2006). But like all other subjective meanings, identity is composed of complicated social interactions of culture and local environment with material possessions certainly being a big part of that environment (Drury & Reicher, 2000).

In Mittal's study (2015) on self-concept clarity and its role in consumer behavior, the term identity bolstering is used when an individual is defining their fuzzy identities through material goods, and therefore, seeks certain products as identity bolsters. Consumer identities are known to be big factors in consumption behaviors (Mittal, 2015). Marketing and consumer behavior studies have conducted that consumers do not just purchase products because of their features, but also to bolster or enhance their identities (Levy & Rook, 1999). Individuals use many ways to express their identities and self-concept and using material objects to do so is common (Mittal, 2006).

Who we think we are has a lot of influence on our feelings and behaviors. The term self-concept clarity is described as the degree to which one's self-concept is clear, positive, stable and consistent (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalley & Lehman, 1996). If an individual's self-concept is not clear or well defined, then they are more likely to be affected by outside influences, such as values found in materialism (Gil, Kwon, Good, & Johnson, 2012). Some individuals know without a doubt who they are, what they enjoy, and what they dislike. These persons can be said to have high self-concept clarity. On the other hand, there are individuals who are confused and indecisive, and can thus be said to have low self-concept clarity (Campbell, 1990). There have been some studies conducted on the relationship between self-concept clarity in consumer behavior and materialism (Miller, 1995; Gil et.al. 2012; Smith, Wethington, & Zhan, 1996; Mittal, 2015). For example, socially motivated consumption is linked to low self-concept clarity, which might indicate that by having low self-concept clarity, one is prone to desires of the materialistic world and therefore uses consumption as a way to bolster one's identity (Gil et. al. 2012). On the other hand, having high self-concept clarity can in many cases lead to high self-esteem which might reduce the desire to bolster one's identity through consumption (Campbell, 1990).

Do individuals' materialistic values depend on their high or low self-concept clarity? And are individuals with low self-concept clarity more prone to materialism



through identity bolstering? Overall, is materialism through identity bolstering dependent on an individual's self-concept clarity?

The presence of high or low self-concept clarity are traits that may influence identity bolstering in individuals and can also impact personal consumption and longing for material items along the way. To the author's best knowledge, identity bolstering by itself has not been studied before as an individual study in the context of materialism. As well as being a fairly new term, there are limited amounts of studies found in relation to identity bolstering. Consumers seem to look for validation in the goods that they buy and might have the need to bolster their identity through these goods. Is it just indecisive, confused individuals that look for such validation, or are we all prone to social influences and the "what ifs" in the world of commodities?

With this in mind, the objective of this study is to examine if the relationship between self-concept clarity and materialism is mediated through identity bolstering. Self-concept clarity is an important attribute when it comes to consumption and materialism, as noted above, and identity bolstering may be so as well.

The value of this project is to gain an understanding on identity bolstering as a certain behavior that might influence materialism. It is also a way to look at self-concept clarity as a trait in people that affects an individual's identity bolstering while simultaneously driving materialistic values depending on how confident an individual is in his or her self-concept. In a time where every effort is made to improve and rise consumer satisfaction, it is quite important to understand the overly influential consumer. Moreover, in a time where consumerism and the longing of material values are two of the main issues of today's fight against climate change, it is useful to look at the psychology and the behavior aspects behind these challenges. Is it perhaps due to our uncertainty in who we are as individuals that we continue to look the other way? This awareness on consumer values and behavior could be insightful, especially when it comes to consumer knowledge and how behaviors can have an impact on the marketplace and the living environment itself. In the following discussion we continue to analyze the deeply meaningful terms of consumerism, materialism and identity. Next, we will look at behavior research in self-concept clarity.

## 2 Consumerism

In today's developed world, many of us seem to be controlled by the relationship we have with consumer goods. The term consumerism describes that relationship as a lifestyle where we buy in an excessive way and are immensely absorbed by consumption (Miles, 1998; Gabriel & Lang 2006). Consumerism can also be characterized as unnecessary consumption or consumption that is more than what is considered necessary for normal circumstances. People's lives are defined by their relationship with consumer goods, and their self-image and identities are said to be shaped by this relationship (Miles, 1998). Bauman (2005) says that consumerism stands for production and distribution as well as gaining and handling of symbolic products. Western societies can be recognized as consumer societies because their economies run on consumerism. The society only functions with the help of the consumers who buy and consume products rather than functioning mainly on the act of production of products (Bauman 2005).

Around the same time that capitalism was established in western society in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, consumerism developed alongside it. The beginning of consumerism can be traced to the industrial era in England when products began to be produced faster. During this time, work was more rewarding, prices fell, and consumers' purchasing power increased rapidly. A particular consumer culture developed where individuals started buying things that they wanted, instead of only buying the necessities. The public was not only presented with the things that they needed but also the things that they *desired*. This led to 'wants' slowly becoming 'needs'. People started to communicate their self-identities through their consumption, and a situation occurred where the symbolic value of consumers' personal possessions were heightened with social meaning (Miles, 1998).

Consumerism is said to be mainly tied to social patterns and meanings where individuals follow the social pattern of their group rather than making personal or financial decisions on their own (Southerton, 2013). In their book "*Unmanageable Consumer*", Gabriel and Lang (2006) talk about the consumer as a communicator. The theory is that possessions and goods represent significant meanings and a way for individuals to express themselves and communicate. "We want to buy things not because of what things can do for us, but because of what things mean to us and what they say about us" (Gabriel & Lang, 2006 p. 47-48). This implies that goods and possessions are as

useful as words when it comes to telling stories and communicating. The products we own and buy are filled with symbolism. The consumption of those products not only tells us who we are as people, but ownership of these products has a way of putting us in groups and classes within our societies. Possession, in some cases, can even provide a way for us to change our social circumstances (Todd, 2012). For example, Baudrillard (1998) suggests that consumption is a form of expression where people use objects to position themselves in society and among social groups. This suggests that individuals do not buy material objects because of the usefulness that they bring, but rather because of the identity or status that the objects bring to them. In this case, consumerism is described as an unequal extension of value and wealth. A person may thus draw a sense of themselves, and their wealth, through comparison with others who have similar material possessions to them. In some cases, it is more important for people to have more *than others*, then simply to just have more. This is a classification of wellbeing where the individual assesses one's life and searches for meaning in it by comparing themselves to others (Brown & Vergragt, 2016).

### 3 Materialism

Consumerism, an overall classification of the manner acquisition is used in modern society, is closely linked to materialism which as a value system has been greatly studied. Belk (1985) described materialism as a belief that possessions and belongings are the cause of happiness. Richins (2004) defines materialism as “the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods to achieving major life goals or desired states” (Richins, 2004 p. 210). In this case, an individual that has high material values believes that possessing certain items can get him or her closer to a life goal, success or overall happiness (Richins, 2004). According to Belk (1984, 1985), materialism is the belief that individuals who possess desired luxuries are happier than those who do not. It is also believed throughout modern societies that most possessions move from being regarded as luxuries to later being regarded as necessities as soon as a vast number of individuals get access to them. In that case, an object loses its fascination, novelty, and the ability to signal desired status when it becomes common and ordinary (Belk, 1984, 1985). Frank (2000) argues that in today’s contemporary world, everybody is consumed by “luxury fever” where marketers are constantly creating new fashions and intentionally limiting supplies. Twitchell (1999) suggests that even though materialism is defined as a problem, we as individuals may not be materialistic enough, as can be seen in how rapidly we get rid of one possession for another that is newer and more sparkling. Materialism heightens the acquisition and possession of objects to become a primary value, on a similar level as religion. Therefore, it is likely to be an individual characteristic (Hunt, Kernan, Mitchell, 1996).

Materialism is a difficult and versatile concept that has been studied in numerous fields like psychology, consumer behavior, economics and marketing (Larsen, Sirgy & Wright, 1999; Mannion & Brannick, 1995). Materialism can be considered both from a sociocultural context as well as from an individualistic context (Hunt, Kernan & Mitchell, 1996). According to the sociocultural perspective, materialism applies to a culture where a large majority of individuals are known to highly value material possessions (Larsen, Sirgy & Wright, 1999). The United States is an example of a highly materialistic society, and it is said to be more materialistic than any other in the world (Belk & Pollay, 1985). From an individualistic perspective, materialism refers to an individual who strongly

values materialistic possessions (Larsen, Sirgy & Wright 1999). Particularly, a person who has materialistic values and pursues material possessions which can also include income and wealth (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Like sociocultural materialism, individual materialism is also said to be increasing in most places in the world (Lim, Ting, Khoo & Wong, 2012).

Muncy and Eastman (2008) discussed the importance of understanding materialism in consumer research. They state that materialism boosts economic wealth in societies, which is why it is essential to know how it progresses. Another reason for understanding materialism is the negative aspect materialism has on a society as well as the environment as a whole. Even though materialism increases the overall revenue in a society, the rise of materialism always has its consequences (Muncy and Eastman, 2008). Analyzing individual differences in materialism can contribute valuable insight into consumer behavior.

Materialism has also been studied and perceived in various ways. For example, it has been conceptualized as an attitude, belief, behavior, value and a mood (Belk, 1985; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Many measuring scales have been developed to measure individual materialism, such as Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism value scale. Richins (1994), as mentioned before, defined materialism as a 'value'. A value, however, is defined as a lasting belief which can guide an activity and reasoning in a specific situation (Rokeach, 1973). Richins and Dawson (1992) describe the scale through building on three dominating values in materialism: acquisition centrality, happiness, and success. Acquisition centrality is the symbolism that individuals tie to possessions as well as the acquisition of items that are important to individuals. Happiness refers to the belief that owning certain desirable possessions will make you happier, and success refers to the belief that a person's success is reliant on his or her possession of material goods (Richins & Dawson, 1992). People that are high in materialism are said to use possessions as signals of success, it also applies that they use those possessions noticeably as a signal of success to others (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

### **3.1 Materialism and life satisfaction**

As mentioned before, materialism is a form of belief that material goods are the cause of happiness and in some cases, unhappiness. It is important to note that materialism is not the practice of consuming things, but rather the way we view such consumption. Consumerism can be problematic, particularly in how it exploits the environment and people (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, materialism goes further than simple consumption, and it signifies unreasonable, extravagant and needless consumer desire based on a belief, whether true or false. As these characteristics indicate, materialism is something that is usually regarded as negative (Schor, 1998).

The belief that happiness lies in the having and buying of things is a misplaced one (Campbell, 1987). For example, Baudrillard (1998), theorizes that consumerism is an endless search for happiness, and consumer culture has changed how people regard happiness. He also believes that real happiness does not exist in the buying of things, but within people themselves. The predominant world view suggests that with economic growth, equality will increase, and individual happiness will increase with it. However, according to Baudrillard, it has not been proven that with gained economic growth comes social equality. Individuals are regularly reminded, through marketing efforts and in society, that buying things is essential to gaining happiness; and that without buying those things, people are constantly haunted with the fear of missing out (Baudrillard, 1998). For that reason, it is hard to overlook the correlation between the growth of marketing and the growing consumerism in the last decades. Consumption is frequently believed to be the result of heightened advertising activities (Jung & Seldon, 1995; Lischka, Kienzler & Mellmann, 2014), and advertising is said to be one of the driving forces of consumerism. It presents “the good life” while serving as motivation for consumer behavior (Zinkhan & Prenshaw, 1994) and, in that sense, materialistic values as well.

Even though the common belief is that having more leads to a better life, Csikszentmihalyi (1999) notes that there is no research or evidence showing that material well-being corresponds with subjective well-being. On the contrary, studies show that there is a negative relationship between materialism and overall satisfaction with life (Richins & Dawson, 1992, Dawson & Bamossy, 1991, Swinyard, Kau & Phua, 2001, Ahuvia & Wong, 1995). According to Borgmann (2000), consumption weakens human

engagement with reality and makes it hard for individuals to live a fulfilled life. Consumption through modern technology enables us to consume without an overview of the situation or the knowledge of the after effect that it causes both on ourselves and to the environment. This can cause loss of satisfaction because our mental health and even our surroundings start to waste away in the aftermath (Borgmann, 2000). There are many studies that associate materialism with reduced wellbeing (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Belk, 1985). For example, Jackson (2005) points out that in the UK, consumer spending has expanded rapidly in the last three decades and more than doubled, but life satisfaction at the same time has remained the same. Belk (1984, 1985) found primary confirmation that traits such as non-generosity, envy, and greed have a negative relationship with happiness and life satisfaction. Later on, other studies conducted that materialism has a negative relationship with personal finances and career achievements and furthermore, a positive relationship with social anxiety, reliance, and self-criticism (Dawson, 1988; Schroeder & Dugal, 1995; Wachtel & Blatt, 1990). In other findings, Richins (1987) found that individuals that are high in materialism are overall more dissatisfied with their life than those who are low in materialism. Later, Richins and Dawson (1992) also found that materialism has a negative relationship with various domains of life satisfaction and well-being in regard to family, friends, fun, and overall life. Individuals with high materialistic values also consider possessing luxury goods as a sign of personal happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

## 4 Consumer identity

In today's present-day society, we as consumers have a multitude of choice: of employment, of a partner, and of what products to consume. The fact that we have these choices has opened up new possibilities when it comes to developing an identity (Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

Some elements of identity are fixed and cannot be changed, such as their names, parents or birth year (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Vignoles et.al (2006), like Erikson (1968), argues that identity is influenced both by people's psychosocial process, as well as, by their environment and culture. Erikson's (1968) view was that a psychological identity is not fixed, but rather something that can be attained with the help of other individuals. Some people inherit identities from their parents, while others constantly search for different identities to experiment with. The concept of an identity being fluid instead of fixed asks the question "who am I?", and it gives us the notion that it is a product of mental work, achievement, and something that is nurtured and protected in the process (Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

The significance of consumer goods in this development process is very influential (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). A more contemporary notion is that self-identity is not an element of social attribution but rather an individual's choice. From that notion, one can argue that individuals look to possessions when it comes to obtaining an identity (Belk, 1988). Earlier on, Belk (1984) also argued that individuals move from an ascribed identity to personally achieving an identity. Dittmar (1992) envisions goods and possessions as expressive and materialistic symbols of identity. Her studies also suggest that possessions can reflect one's identity in terms of what gender one is, and even social status. Actions, on the other hand, are often guided by an individual's identity motives and goals which signifies one's drive for a certain identity and simultaneously away from an unwanted identity (Vignoles et.al, 2006). Identity motives are guides for identity construction which affects many behavior outcomes including consumerism (Vignoles et.al, 2006; Lynn & Snyder, 2002).

As Gabriel and Lang (2006) suggested, our choices give us the opportunity to develop an identity, and materialistic culture helps with this development. However, at the same time, it also threatens this attempt. Whether a product is associated with a



certain brand or not, a product becomes a part of a person's extended self and temporarily boosts one's identity and self-esteem (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). In this sense, like Baudrillard's (1998) past research, Gabriel and Lang (2006) focus on the addictive nature of consumption. Even though it temporarily satisfies narcissism and bolsters identities, in the long run, it can cause dissatisfaction and emptiness. Gabriel and Lang (2006) describe a consumer as a lot of things. They can be an identity seeker, a communicator, an explorer or driven by desire. By some, identity is seen as a construction where the main goal is for it to be "completed" and on a personal level. That goal usually requires acceptance in a group that one wants to belong to (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Contemporary studies also find identities to be multiple, diverse, and flexible while being both individually and group aligned. It is irrational to think that present-day globalization and stressful lives do not affect modern identity construction. For example, job loss, divorce, and technical advantages all have an effect on our identity seeking both in the present and in the long run (Bauman, 2005; Beck, 1992). Erikson (1968) noted that identity exploration is typical in industrialized societies. That fact may be even truer today than it has been in days gone.

#### **4.1 Identity bolstering**

Mittal (2015) uses the phrase identity bolstering when individuals use material objects to boost their unclear identities. In sociology, the term identity bolstering is used somewhat as support to help individuals sustain or repair a favored identity (Mickey & Wingfield, 2018). Looking at these descriptions, one can define identity bolstering as something that helps strengthen one's preferred identity, whether it being through some social aspects of life or material possessions. Therefore, it can be assumed that individuals seek to boost their desired identities through consumption of items that they believe will get them closer to the identity that they desire to have.

Many studies argue about the notion that materialism is used to form identities, building on Belk's (1988) "extended self" study. In Belk's study, goods and even some activities are used to develop an identity (Belk, 1988; Ahuvia, 2005; Shankar, Elliott & Fitchett, 2009). The approaches in which materialism and identity align are many, and occasionally do not have to be defined by luxurious and unnecessary goods. For example, Smith (2007) suggests that the goods that individuals display in public do not display one's

true self. Products that are used in private, on the other hand, such as religious goods or under garments, are the products that are valuable when one is developing an identity. Dilley (2009) has researched the importance of local food when it comes to identity formation. Food is a product that is not intended for identity bolstering, but it can be an important identity bolster for individuals from a certain nationality, such as cheese to the French or pasta to the Italians. Individuals invest time, wealth and identity into goods and possessions, while simultaneously struggling to keep up with the differentiation and the status symbol that those possessions transfer to them (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). In an example, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) discuss the deeply rooted and die-hard Harley-Davidson community. They apply acts to distinguish themselves from individuals that are new to the community and struggle at the same time to keep their uniqueness and identity intact.

In more contemporary research, Ruvio and Belk (2013) question to what extent the Internet has affected consumption and identity bolstering. Identity signaling and bolstering now appears frequently online, indicating dematerialization in the form of displaying and manifesting status and social identity in the number of followers. In the present day, this sort of social symbolism can even be more noticeable and distinctive than other possessions like cars or houses (Ruvio & Belk, 2013). Even though the value of the symbolism we get from our online presence is not material per se, it can lead to a boost in consumption. All of these studies above show the relevance of identity development when it comes to consumption and materialism, but as we also know from other research, materialism and the consumer culture of today can also negatively impact wellbeing.

Studies show that consumption is more about meeting psychological needs than material needs (Hamilton, 2009). Hamilton (2009) suggests that when consumers are asked to change their consumption habits, they look at it as a “sort of death”, explaining that consumers would then have to abandon the identities they have created with their consumption. This goes some way to explaining why people struggle to take climate change seriously. Individuals in developed countries are so dependent on their social identities and excessive consumption that they do not see any prospect of changing their consumer behavior (Hamilton, 2009). Consumers use objects that they buy to bolster and build up an identity that they desire, while simultaneously judging other individuals based

on their consumption choices (Escalas & Bettman 2003; Belk, Bahn, & Mayer 1982). While people want to associate with a desired group, they also want to differentiate themselves by signaling a clear identity.

The term 'identity signaling' involves both fitting in to a certain group and differentiating oneself from other groups that signal undesired characteristics (Berger & Heath, 2007). Consumer culture of idealized images leads to disconnect among consumers because people can find themselves incomplete or flawed in comparison to those ideal images. Idealized images in advertisements hold a promise that one's life could be on that ideal path by using a certain product (Richins, 1991). The message is usually simple: that people need only to buy a particular product idealizing an image that the consumer looks up to, and that purchase will solve the issue. Strannegard and Dobers (2010) argue about the meaning of advertising when it comes to identity construction. According to them, marketing messages have more influence than other more rational signals for identity construction and contemporary advertising is even seen to be destructive to life satisfaction and wellbeing. They determine that advertising can boost general and long-term consumption and that it encourages many actions and behaviors that have wrong values as normal. In fact, many messages are said to be both damaging for the individual and for the social and natural environment (Strannegard & Dobers, 2010). The promise is that consumption will get you closer to a desired identity. Individuals are encouraged to purchase an item 'because you are worth it'. Individuals buy products for the hope to complete an identity that they are building and an identity that might symbolize features that they are lacking (Dittmar, 2008).

## 5 Self-concept

The self-concept has often been classified as the real or the essential self (Gentry, Doering & O'Brien 1978). Some studies, on the contrary, have argued that the self-concept has more elements and is simply not restricted to just being a one form of a self (Belch 1978). Those studies suggest that the self-concept has two factors, the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept. The ideal self-concept is described as the ideal image of one's identity and character that one wishes he or she was (Belch 1978). This ideal self-concept has often been specified as the "idealized image" or the "desired self" (Sirgy, 1982).

For a long time, it has been implied that consumer self-concepts can be defined by the products that are possessed and used or by the worth that those certain products have to consumers (Tucker, 1957). Both products and services are said to have a fixed image that is not just determined by the physical nature of the product but by other elements as well, like marketing, advertising and price. These images can, likewise, be constructed by other more subjective elements like the stereotype of the conventional user of the product (Levy, 1959; Grubb & Grathwohl 1967). Levy (1959) argued that a consumer does not focus on the usefulness of a product and that his or her behavior is undoubtedly affected by symbols that appear when objects are identified in the marketplace. Levy's (1959) theory refined consumer behavior research to the possible power that consumer self-concepts have on consumerism. When a certain image is projected on a product, individuals are said to favor products with images that are compatible with their own self-concepts (Levy, 1959), whether that of their actual self-concept or their ideal self-concept.

It has been noted in a study by Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) that a person's self-concept is of great worth. People's behavior is usually aimed to protect and enhance their self-concept. At the same time individuals' acquisition, presentation and use of a product communicates to other people what one finds meaningful and symbolic. Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) also argue that everything points out to the consuming behavior of people. Individuals are guided toward enhancing and bolstering their self-concepts through consumption of products as meaningful symbols. In most cases, people that are considered highly materialistic, use luxury items to build and boost their self-concept by

associating the symbolic significance of those items on to their identity (Belk, 1985; Dittmar, 1994, 2008; Richins 1994; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

## **5.1 Self-Concept Clarity**

In more recent research on self-concept, the idea of self-concept clarity has come into focus. Self-concept clarity consists of an individual's belief in themselves (Campbell et.al. 1996). Some individuals seem to know exactly who they are; they know their worth, where they stand on important issues and things they admire or despise. They know their strengths and weaknesses and have goals that they pursue and values that they set. Other individuals, on the other hand, do not have a clear self-concept and are indecisive and not as confident in who they are. Self-concept clarity can be seen in the former example, when individuals do have a clear self-concept, while self-esteem is seen as people's overall view on who they are as people - bad or good, attractive or unattractive and so on. Self-concept clarity refers to when people have organized, stable and clear views about themselves (Campbell et. al., 1996; Campbell, 1990; Stinson, Wood & Doxey, 2008). The link between the two subjects of self-concept clarity and self-esteem has been well determined (Baumgardner, 1990; Bigler, Neimeyer & Brown, 2001; Campbell, 1990). Nezlek and Plasko (2001) have conducted research on self-esteem, concluding that daily events in individuals' lives could lead to differences in self-esteem which then had an effect on an individual's self-concept clarity. They proposed that self-concept clarity was influenced by how much self-esteem a person had (Campbell, & Lavallee, 1993; Baumgardner, 1990; Nezlek, & Plesko, 2001).

It is important to note that self-concept clarity is autonomous from self-esteem. The difference between the two mainly lies in doubt and certainty. A person might have beliefs about him or herself that might either be true or untrue, but another person might hold those same beliefs in complete certainty. Self-esteem lies in doubt while self-concept clarity lies in the certainty (Campbell, 1990). Individuals that are said to have low self-concept clarity are not only more prone to low self-esteem but high stress, nervousness and depression as well (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993). Factual conclusions in studies also show that individuals with low self-esteem are less confident when they define their own qualities, less confident when they define themselves overall, and over time their descriptions of themselves are unstable (Baumgardner, 1990;

Campbell, 1990). Campbell (1990) and Bigler, Neimeyer and Brown (2001) found that high self-concept clarity is negatively correlated with depression and anxiety. Low self-concept clarity, on the other hand, is positively correlated with bad reactions to failure (Stucke & Spore, 2002). A long-term research study concluded that individuals with high self-concept clarity are more likely to be perfectionists with definitive preconditions and demand for themselves. Perfectionism is related to raised stress, unrealistic high standards and even self-discipline for not being able to achieve certain goals (Campbell & Di Paula, 2002; Hewitt & Flett, 1993). This indicates that having high self-concept clarity does not in itself ensure positive results (Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2000).

To the author's best knowledge, not much research has been conducted on self-concept clarity in behavior studies overall. Mittal's (2015) study found that self-concept clarity has an effect on consumers' general life satisfaction. The study showed that low self-concept clarity can result in many negative traits when it comes to consumption, for example, purchasing doubt, materialism and even consumers using objects as a source for identity bolstering (Mittal, 2015). Campbell (1990) showed that people with different levels of self-concept clarity react to external forces in different ways. People that are low in self-concept clarity are more exposed to the influences of social and cultural values that are in one's environment. Vartanian's (2009) research showed a negative relationship between self-concept clarity and cultural ideas of attractiveness among women. A more recent study further showed that self-concept clarity is negatively linked to social comparison bias related to appearance (Vartanian & Dey, 2013).

It has been argued that in Eastern cultures people tend to behave in ways that minimizes self-confusion (Coleman & Williams, 2013). Building on this assumption, collective consumption patterns are affected by individual's self-concept clarity where they try to avoid goods and possessions that might increase self-confusion (Miller, 1995). According to Campbell (1990), people with low self-concept clarity are both more vulnerable to the social environment and more dependent. In addition, it is suggested that high self-concept clarity has a negative relationship with socially motivated consumption. Individuals that conduct socially motivated consumption seek to form their identity through the social environment, while individuals with high self-concept clarity go their own way in forming an identity or already have a strong identity to behold (Gil, Kwon, Good, & Johnson, 2012). Furthermore, individuals who tend to not be sure of who

they are and indecisive are more dependent on external motivations including the idealization of materialism (Smith, Wethington, & Zhan, 1996).

## 6 Methodology

As noted in the introduction, the objective of this study is to examine if the relationship between self-concept clarity and materialism is mediated through identity bolstering. To do so, quantitative methodology was used with relevant measuring scales which will be presented in the following chapters among data collection and participants.

### 6.1 Data Collection and Participants

An electronic convenience sample was used in the study to obtain data and every effort was made to reach a diverse group of individuals. The questionnaire was posted on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. A couple of various Facebook groups were used to reach a diverse group of people and in the introduction text participants were informed of the focus of the study. The results give a good idea of the general consumer attitude when it comes to materialism, self-concept clarity and identity bolstering. In total, 445 individuals participated in the study. More information about participants can be found in Table 1.

*Table 1. Age, gender and education of participants*

Age		Gender		Education	
20 years and younger	6,5%	Male	17,5%	Elementary school	13,1%
21-25 years	13,1%	Female	70,4%	Industrial training	6,5%
26-30 years	19,1%	Gender neutral	0,4%	High school degree	20,7%
31-40 years	15,8%			Undergraduate degree from a university	30%
41-45 years	10,8%			Postgraduate degree from a university	25,2%
46-50 years	8,8%			Doctorate degree	0,7%
51-55 years	9,9%			Other	3,8%
56-60 years	5,2%				
61-65 years	5,9%				
66 years and older	5,0%				



## 6.2 Measurement

To measure materialistic values, the 15-item Material Value Scale (MVS) by Richins and Dawson (1992) was used. The scale is a shortened version of the original 18-item MVS scale (Richins and Dawson, 1992). The questions were on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1: “strongly disagree” to 5: “strongly agree “. The scale has been shown to evaluate all three components of materialistic values including success, acquisition centrality and happiness. Item scores can be summed within the three dimensions to form an indication for each dimension of success, acquisition centrality and happiness, they can also be summed over all items to form a complete MVS score (Richins and Dawson, 1992).

Self-concept clarity was measured with the original 12-item Self-Concept Clarity (SCC) scale developed by Campbell (1996). As in the previous scale, the SCC scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The scale portrays a single factor and can be considered unidimensional.

Together with those two scales, a 7-item scale was developed by the author of the study to measure identity bolstering. The scale was inspired by Mittal’s (2015) study on self-concept clarity. Mittal measured “products as bolsters” with two items; “I buy things just to keep up with others” and “I am constantly seeking products in the marketplace to bolster my personality”. Those two items were not used in the current study but the ideology of them inspired the 7-item identity bolstering scale developed by the author. An example of the items used in the current scale are “I buy certain products to get closer to the person I desire to be” and “When I shop, I think about the impression the item might have on others”.

The identity bolstering scale was developed in Icelandic and translated into English while the Material Values and the Self-Concept Clarity scales were translated into Icelandic from English. The questionnaire was accessible in both the Icelandic and English languages.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to answer four background questions including gender, age group, country of origin and education. Before the questionnaire was shared on numerous social media channels, the list was pre-tested by three individuals in person and by ten individuals online, in order to make sure that there were no mistakes in the questionnaire and to make sure that the questions asked had the

right meaning to them. The measuring instruments can be found in the Appendix part of the study.

## 7 Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for the items used to measure material values. A reliability analysis was conducted for the construct as a whole and ended up being very good ( $\alpha=0,848$ ) which made it possible to combine the items into one variable, material values. Like noted above the material values scale is divided into three dimensions. A reliability analysis was also conducted for each dimension which made it possible to combine the dimensions into three different variables.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Material Values

Constructs, dimensions and items	N	Sf	Mean
<b>Material Values (<math>\alpha = 0,848</math>)</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>0,62</b>	<b>2,53</b>
<b>Success (<math>\alpha = 0,698</math>)</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>0,79</b>	<b>2,53</b>
I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.	504	1,22	2,65
Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.	503	1,03	2,04
I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success. *	500	1,23	3,25
The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	501	1,12	2,43
I like to own things that impress people.	499	1,26	2,78
<b>Acquisition Centrality (<math>\alpha = 0,632</math>)</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>0,68</b>	<b>2,80</b>
I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned. *	499	0,89	3,75
The things I own aren't all that important to me. *	500	1,09	2,86
Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	501	1,23	3,02
I like a lot of luxury in my life.	501	1,19	2,73
I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know. *	501	0,90	3,19
<b>Happiness (<math>\alpha = 0,805</math>)</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>0,89</b>	<b>2,30</b>
I have all the things I really need to enjoy life. *	500	1,09	3,92
My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	500	1,25	2,44
I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things. *	500	1,06	4,08
I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	500	1,21	2,36
It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.	500	1,28	2,68

\*Items that have been reversed.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the items used to measure self-concept clarity. A reliability analysis was also conducted for the construct and the coefficient alpha ended up being  $\alpha = 0,898$  which indicated that the items could be combined into one variable, self-concept clarity.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for self-concept clarity

	N	Sf	Mean
<b>Self-concept clarity (<math>\alpha = 0,898</math>)</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>0,81</b>	<b>3,33</b>
My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another. *	446	1,08	2,92
On one day I might have one opinion about myself and on another day, I might have a different opinion about myself. *	448	1,19	3,56
I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am.*	448	1,21	3,00
Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be. *	446	1,22	2,73
When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I really was like. *	447	1,18	2,60
I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.	447	1,21	3,30
Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself. *	447	1,20	2,32
My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently. *	447	1,20	2,55
If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another day. *	447	1,17	2,38
Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone what I'm really like. *	446	1,20	2,29
In general, I have clear sense of who I am and what I am.	445	0,96	2,88
It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want. *	444	1,33	2,84

\*Items have been reversed

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the items used to measure identity bolstering. Like before a reliability analysis was conducted, which ended up being ( $\alpha=0,901$ ) and the items were combined into one variable, identity bolstering. Looking at the descriptive statistics for identity bolstering the results show that participants more often disagree with the statements of identity bolstering then agree.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for identity bolstering

	N	Sf	Mean
<b>Identity bolstering (<math>\alpha = 0,901</math>)</b>	<b>446</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>2.01</b>
I buy certain products to get closer to the person I desire to be.	446	1,19	2,13
When I shop, I think about how others will portray me with the item I want to buy.	446	1,19	2,07
When I shop, I shop for the person I desire to be.	446	1,29	2,42
When I shop, I imagine what others will think of me if I buy a certain item.	446	1,29	2,07
I buy certain products, to fit in.	446	1,10	1,90
When I shop, I think about the impression the item might have on others.	446	1,13	2,24
I think about how a particular item I want to buy reflects on me from the outside.	445	1,25	2,20

Spearman's correlation analysis was conducted among material values, self-concept clarity and identity bolstering. The analysis was conducted in order to examine whether there is a relationship between the three constructs and the background of the participants with regard to education and age.

There was a significant negative correlation between material values and age ( $r_s(444) = -0.392$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The correlation coefficient between material values and age was -0,39 indicating a moderate relationship. This indicates that the younger an individual is, the higher levels of materialism he or she might have. There was also a significant positive correlation between age and self-concept clarity ( $r_s(444) = 0.330$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The correlation coefficient between self-concept clarity and age was 0,33 indicating a moderate relationship. Meaning the older you are the higher self-concept clarity you possess. There was a significant negative correlation between age and identity bolstering ( $r_s(443) = -0.473$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The correlation coefficient between identity bolstering and age was -0.47, indicating a moderate relationship. According to these results, the higher the persons tendency to identity bolstering is, the younger the person tends to be.

When it comes to education there was no significant relationship between material values and education and between identity bolstering and education. On the other hand, there was a significant positive correlation between education and self-concept clarity ( $r_s(427) = 0.103$ ;  $p < 0.034$ ). The correlation coefficient between self-

concept clarity and education was 0.10 which indicates a weak relationship. No significant correlation was found between identity bolstering and education.

An independent t-test was conducted to examine the difference between the three constructs: materialism, self-concept clarity and identity bolstering in regard to gender of the participants. The study found that there was no difference between the genders on materialism ( $p=0,459$ ), self-concept clarity ( $p=0,140$ ), or identity bolstering ( $p=0,259$ ).

### **7.1 Mediation effect of identity bolstering**

To test the mediation hypothesis, linear regression analyses were conducted and compared to the four conditions of the mediation effect according to Baron and Kenny (1986). Before the linear regression analysis was conducted, its assumptions were examined. The VIF values for all variables were in the range of 1.000-1.307 and the Tolerance values were in the range of 1.000-0.765, which means that multicollinearity was not present. Cook's values were under one, so no outliers could be resorting the results. At the same time, the residual elements were found to follow the normal distribution and there was a liner relationship between the variables. The dot graph did not show any variance. The assumptions of the regression analysis were therefore met, and the analysis could be continued. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5.

First a linear regression analysis was used to investigate whether self-concept clarity could significantly predict participants' material values. This analysis indicated that the first condition of Baron and Kenny's four conditions of mediation effect was met because the model explained 8,4% of variance and the self-concept clarity was a significant predictor of material values,  $F(1, 446) = 40,767$ ;  $p < 0,001$ . In other words, the first condition was met since self-concept clarity significantly increased the likelihood of material values. The more self-concept clarity an individual experience's, the less material values he or she has ( $\beta = -0.224$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ).

For the second condition, the results showed that self-concept clarity explained 23,5% of the variance in identity bolstering. This means that self-concept clarity is a significant predictor of identity bolstering ( $F(1, 444) = 136,102$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). This indicates that when an individual experience more self-concept clarity, they also experience less

identity bolstering. Condition two was met since self-concept clarity significantly increased identity bolstering ( $\beta = -0.563$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ).

The third condition was met as well since identity bolstering is significantly associated with material values ( $F(1, 445) = 178,550$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ). Identity bolstering explained 28% of the variance to material values.

Finally, the fourth condition was met since the B coefficient for self-concept clarity ( $B = -0.224$ ) was lower when identity bolstering was added to the model ( $B = -0.029$ ). The results showed that material values significantly mediates the relationship between self-concept clarity and identity bolstering among the participants of the study, ( $F(2, 443) = 194,899$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ).

## **7.2 Relationship between dimensions**

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted among self-concept clarity, identity bolstering and the three dimensions of material value: success, acquisition centrality and happiness. As mentioned in the literature review, Richins and Dawson (1992), conceptualize materialism as a value that has these three dimensions.

The results showed a weak relationship between self-concept clarity and the dimension of success, ( $r(448) = -0.294$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). Identity bolstering and success, on the other hand, was found to be strongly positively correlated ( $r(446) = 0.519$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that when identity bolstering increases, the dimension of success tends to increase as well. Furthermore, this means that individuals with high levels of identity bolstering are more likely to evaluate one's own and others' success based on their possessions.

When it comes to acquisition centrality, the results showed a weak relationship between self-concept clarity and acquisition, ( $r(446) = -0.190$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). On the other hand, identity bolstering and acquisition were found to be moderately positively correlated ( $r(444) = 0.407$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that when identity bolstering increases, acquisition tends to increase as well. As a result, we can conclude that the higher levels of identity bolstering an individual has the more his or her belief that material possessions are an important life goal.

A significantly negative correlation was found between self-concept clarity and happiness, ( $r(446) = -0.324$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). The correlation coefficient between self-concept



clarity and happiness was -0,32 indicating a moderate relationship. These results show that when self-concept clarity increases, the dimension of happiness tends to decrease. Therefore, individuals with higher level of self-concept clarity are unlikely to think of goods and money as the main path to personal happiness.

Identity bolstering and happiness was found to be moderately positively correlated ( $r(444) = 0.449$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), indicating that when identity bolstering increases, happiness tends to increase as well. We can therefore conclude that individuals with higher levels of identity bolstering are more likely to believe that owning possessions is the key to personal happiness and a better life.

## 8 Discussion

The main purpose and objective of this study was to examine if the relationship between self-concept clarity and materialism is mediated through identity bolstering.

The results showed that identity bolstering functions as a significant mediator between self-concept clarity and material values. If someone experiences high levels of self-concept clarity, then he or she is likely to report lower levels of materialism. This relationship can be explained by detailing the involvement of identity bolstering. In conclusion, individuals who reported low levels of self-concept clarity, experience more identity bolstering, and in turn, individuals that experience identity bolstering reported higher levels of materialism. The mediation is in some prospect a mechanism that occurs among self-concept clarity, identity bolstering and material values. In this case we can interpret that identity bolstering seems to explain a significant part of the relationship between self-concept clarity and material values.

In other words, the results showed that the more confident we are in who we are, the less materialistic we seem to be. The results are in comparison to other studies with similar conclusions. Mittal's (2015) study had a different approach but a similar hypothesis. He concluded that the less self-concept clarity an individual had, the more negative traits he or she held when it came to consumption and materialism, with one of those negative traits being consumers using objects as a source for identity bolstering (Mittal, 2015). Campbell (1990), in one of the original studies, also showed that individuals with particularly low levels of self-concept clarity are more exposed to the influences of the outside environment, such as social values found in materialism for example. The findings of the current study also support Gil, Know, Good and Johnson's (2012) study which found that individuals with high self-concept clarity have a negative relationship with socially motivated consumption. Their study showed that those who are involved in socially motivated consumption seek at the same time to form their identities through the social environment where materialistic values thrive (Gil, Know, Good & Johnson's, 2012). This leads us to the next section of results which support a similar conclusion.

The results of the current study showed that the higher the self-concept clarity and individual has the less likely he or she is to use identity bolstering when it comes to

material values. In other words, when an individual is certain on who he or she is, the less is the desire to use material objects to boost a desired identity. As noted above, identity bolstering is a fairly new term and has not been previously extensively studied in the context of self-concept clarity or materialism. Yet, high self-concept clarity has shown to be positively linked to forming an identity in ways that mainly rely on possessions and consumption (Gil, Know, Good, & Johnson, 2012).

It is unsurprising that the results show that when identity bolstering increases, materialism increases as well. By definition, identity bolstering is using material objects and possessions as something that boosts one's preferred identity. These results are consistent with other previous studies that show that identity formation relies on materialism and consumption, particularly in today's modern world where we have so many choices to boost our identities with (Dittmar, 1992). It has been suggested that our freedom of choice gives us the opportunity to develop a preferred identity, and our material values help with those choices (Gabriel & Land, 2006). As previously noted, it has been acknowledged that an object can become a part of a person's extended self and briefly boost one's identity and self-esteem (Gabriel & Land, 2006).

The findings of the current study indicated that individuals with high identity bolstering, or those that want to boost a preferred identity with material objects, are expected to judge both one's own success and that of other peoples based on the things that they own. The findings also indicate that the more you desire to boost a wanted identity the more your desire to impress people with material objects. Similar results suggest that the higher the urge for identity bolstering the higher the belief that owning material objects is an important life goal. Finally, and perhaps one of the most interesting findings was that the study supported other studies that indicated that possessing material objects is not the foundation of personal happiness and life satisfaction. The findings suggest that the more certain an individual is, or the higher his or her self-concept clarity, the more unlikely he or she is to think of material possessions and nice things as the road to personal happiness. These results are consistent with numerous other previous studies that show a negative relationship between materialism and overall satisfaction with life (Richins & Dawson, 1992, Dawson & Bamossy, 1991, Swinyard et al, 2001, Ahuvia & Wong, 1995). Yet, when it comes to individuals with higher levels of identity bolstering or those who want to boost a preferred identity, the results show that

they are more likely to believe that material possessions are a major path to happiness, enjoyment and a better life.

The findings of this study are noteworthy as they show that the economy and the marketplace itself is driven by our desire for identity bolstering and our self-concept clarity. The modern marketplace can, in many cases, be seen as an escape, a sign of hope and full of opportunities for many consumers suffering from low self-concept clarity and high identity bolstering. The findings suggest that our self-concept clarity and our need for identity bolstering are one of the biggest influences when it comes to making economic decisions. This kind of knowledge of the market and its consumers can give a company and even the larger economy a better understanding of what lies behind the behaviors and the motivations that are the driving forces of the world as we know it. This knowledge can also provide a foundation from which we can make the world an even better place.

The biggest limitation to this study was that the Identity Bolstering scale was developed by the author herself. The scale is therefore unvalidated and has not been test-retested to examine its stability. Nevertheless, the coefficient alpha was very favorable, and the reliability analysis therefore indicated that the scale measurements are good.

There is a lot that we do not know about identity bolstering and its impact on consumer behavior. Further studies are required to give us a bigger picture on how identity bolstering communicates in consumer behavior. It would be interesting to follow this research with further research deeper examining the effects of identity bolstering. Identity bolstering can be applied to numerous consumer behavior aspects of life, for example the choices we make in our career, where we decide to live and plenty of other conditions that rely on decision making. It would also be interesting to examine the role of self-concept clarity as an explanation to numerous consumer behaviors; for example, socially motivated consumption, impulsive buying and even goal-oriented consumption where identity bolstering can be looked at as a mediator. It would also be appealing to look at different cultures with regard to self-concept clarity and identity bolstering especially. If Western cultures are said to be more materialistic, does that mean that they are more likely to be lower in self-concept clarity and higher in identity bolstering as well? This research did not have the scale to take different nationalities into account even though this formed part of the background questions. Very few nationalities apart from

Icelanders responded to the questionnaire which made those particular results irrelevant to the current study.

In conclusion, unfortunately it seems that we can't buy ourselves happiness. The consumer might be powerful. But not that powerful.

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## Appendix 1. Introduction letter

Komið þið sæl!

Ég heiti Amna og er meistaranemi í Markaðsfræði og alþjóðaviðskiptum við Háskóla Íslands. Ég er um þessar mundir að vinna í rannsókn undir handleiðslu Auðar Hermannsdóttur sem snýr að efnishyggju og sjálfsmynd.

Það væri rosalega dýrmætt ef þú gætir tekið þér 2 mínútur til þess að svara þessari könnun fyrir mig og er það mér mikils virði að þú svarir eftir þinni bestu samvisku. Um nafnlausu könnun er að ræða og verða svör ekki rakin til þátttakenda.

Ef það eru einhverjar spurningar varðandi könnunina þá er þér meira en velkomið að senda tölvupóst á [amh23@hi.is](mailto:amh23@hi.is).

Með fyrirfram þökk,  
Amna Hasecic

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Hi!

My name is Amna and I am a master student in Marketing and International Business at the University of Iceland. I am currently working on a study under the guidance of Auður Hermannsdóttir, that focuses on materialism and identity bolstering.

It would mean a lot if you would take two minutes out of your day to answer this survey. The survey is anonymous, and the answers cannot be traced to the individual.

If there are any questions regarding the survey, please send an email to [amh23@hi.is](mailto:amh23@hi.is).

Thank you in advance,  
Amna Hasecic

## Appendix 2.

Vinsamlegast taktu afstöðu til þess hversu ósammála eða sammála þú ert eftirfarandi fullyrðingum:

1. Ég dáist að fólki sem á dýr heimili, bíla og föt.
  - Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
  
2. Að eignast veraldlega hluti er meðal mikilvægustu afreka í lífinu.
  - Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
  
3. Að eignast veraldlega hluti er meðal mikilvægustu afreka í lífinu.
  - Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
  
4. Ég legg ekki mikla áherslu á hversu mikið af veraldlegum eignum fólk á, sem merki um velgengni.
  - Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
  
5. Eigur mínar segja mikið til um hversu vel mér gengur í lífinu.
  - Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála

- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
6. Mér finnst gaman að eiga hluti sem öðrum finnst mikið til koma.
- Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
7. Ég reyni að halda lífi mínu einföldu hvað eigur varðar.
- Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
8. Eigur mínar skipta mig ekki svo miklu máli.
- Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
9. Ég hef mikla ánægju af því að versla.
- Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála
  - Sammála
  - Mjög sammála
10. Ég vil hafa mikinn lúxus í lífi mínu.
- Mjög ósammála
  - Ósammála
  - Hvorki ósammála né sammála



- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

11. Ég legg minni áherslu á veraldlegar eigur en flestir sem ég þekki.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

12. Ég á allar þær veraldlegu eigur sem ég virkilega þarf til að njóta lífsins.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

13. Líf mitt væri betra ef ég ætti vissa hluti sem ég á ekki í dag.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

14. Ég væri ekkert hamingjusamari þótt ég ætti flottari hluti.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

15. Ég væri hamingjusamari ef ég hefði efni á að kaupa fleiri hluti.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

16. Stundum angrar það mig talsvert að hafa ekki efni á að kaupa allt sem mig langar í.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Vinsamlegast taktu afstöðu til þess hversu ósammála eða sammála þú ert eftirfarandi fullyrðingum:

17. Álit mitt á sjálfri/um mér getur verið breytilegt á milli daga.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

18. Ég eyði miklum tíma í að velta fyrir mér hvers konar manneskja ég er í raun.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

19. Stundum finnst mér ég ekki vera einstaklingurinn sem ég virðist vera.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

20. Þegar ég hugsa um hvers konar manneskja ég hef verið í fortíðinni þá er ég ekki viss hvernig ég var.

- Mjög ósammála

- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

21. Ég upplifi sjaldan átök milli ólíkra hliða persónuleika míns.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

22. Stundum finnst mér ég þekkja annað fólk betur en ég þekki sjálfa/n mig.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

23. Hugmyndir mínar um mig sjálfa/n virðast breytast mjög oft.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

24. Ef ég væri beðin/n um að lýsa persónuleika mínum gæti lýsingin breyst frá degi til dags.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

25. Jafnvel þó ég vildi, gæti ég ekki sagt öðrum frá því hverskonar manneskja ég er í raun og veru.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

26. Almennt hef ég skýra tilfinningu fyrir því hver ég er.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

27. Það er oft erfitt fyrir mig að taka ákvarðanir, því ég veit ekki hvað ég vil.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

Vinsamlegast taktu afstöðu til þess hversu ósammála eða sammála þú ert eftirfarandi fullyrðingum:

28. Ég kaupí ákveðnar vörur til þess að verða líkari þeirri manneskju sem ég vildi að ég væri.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

29. Þegar ég versla, hugsa ég um hvernig aðrir sjá mig fyrir sér með þeim hlutum sem ég vil kaupa.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála

- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

30. Þegar ég versla, þá versla ég fyrir þann einstakling sem mig langar til að verða.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

31. Þegar ég versla, ímynda ég mér hvað aðrir myndu halda um mig ef ég kaupi ákveðna vöru.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

32. Ég kaupi ákveðnar vörur til þess að falla í hópinn.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

33. Þegar ég versla þá hugsa ég út í hvaða áhrif varan getur haft á aðra.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

34. Ég hugsa um það hvernig tiltekinn hlutur sem ég kaup muni endurspegl mig í augum annarra.

- Mjög ósammála
- Ósammála
- Hvorki ósammála né sammála
- Sammála
- Mjög sammála

35. Hvert er kyn þitt?

- Karl
- Kona
- Skilgreini mig hvorki sem karl né konu

36. Á hvaða aldursbili ert þú?

- 20 ára eða yngri
- 21-25 ára
- 26-30 ára
- 31-40 ára
- 41-45 ára
- 46-50 ára
- 51-55 ára
- 56-60 ára
- 61-65 ára
- 66 ára eða eldri

37. Frá hvaða landi ert þú?

- Bandaríkin
- Bosnía
- Bretland
- Danmörk
- Frakkland
- Ísland
- Noregur
- Pólland
- Svíþjóð
- Þýskaland
- Annað

38. Merktu við hæsta menntunarstig sem þú hefur lokið:

- Grunnskólapróf
- Iðnmenntun

- Stúdentspróf
  - Grunnám á háskólastigi
  - Framhaldsnám á háskólastigi
  - Doktorsgráða
  - Annað
- 

Please take a stand on how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

1. I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
2. Some of the most important achievements in life include acquiring material possessions.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
3. I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects people own as a sign of success.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
4. The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
5. I like to own things that impress people.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree

6. I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
7. The things I own aren't all that important to me.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
8. Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
9. I like a lot of luxury in my life.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
10. I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
11. I have all the things I really need to enjoy life.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
  
12. My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
  - Strongly disagree
  - Disagree



- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. I wouldn't be any happier if I owned nicer things.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. It sometimes bothers me quite a bit that I can't afford to buy all the things I'd like.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Please take a stand on how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

16. My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. On one day I might have one opinion about myself and on another day I might have a different opinion about myself.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

18. I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree

- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. Sometimes I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

20. When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I really was like.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

21. I seldom experience conflict between the different aspects of my personality.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

22. Sometimes I think I know other people better than I know myself.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

23. My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

24. If I were asked to describe my personality, my description might end up being different from one day to another day.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

25. Even if I wanted to, I don't think I could tell someone what I'm really like.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

26. In general, I have clear sense of who I am and what I am.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

27. It is often hard for me to make up my mind about things because I don't really know what I want.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Please take a stand on how much you disagree or agree with the following statements:

28. I buy certain products to get closer to the person I desire to be.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

29. When I shop, I think about how others will portray me with the item I want to buy.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

30. When I shop, I shop for the person I desire to be.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither disagree nor agree
- Agree

- Strongly agree
31. When I shop, I imagine what others will think of me if I buy a certain item.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
32. I buy certain products, to fit in.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
33. When I shop, I think about the impression the item might have on others.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
34. I think about how a particular item I want to buy reflects on me from the outside.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Neither disagree nor agree
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
35. What is your gender?
- Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to describe myself as male or female
36. In what age range are you?
- 20 years and younger
  - 21-25 years
  - 26-30 years
  - 31-40 years
  - 41-45 years
  - 46-50 years
  - 51-55 years

- 56-60 years
- 61-65 years
- 66 years and older

37. What country are you from?

- USA
- Bosnia
- United Kingdom
- Denmark
- France
- Iceland
- Norway
- Poland
- Sweden
- Germany
- Other

38. Mark the highest level of education you have completed.

- Elementary school
- Industrial training
- High school degree
- Undergraduate degree from an university
- Postgraduate degree from an university
- Doctorate degree
- Other