Cash, Money, Woes: The Match Between a Person's Level of Materialism and the Materialistic (or non-Materialistic) Character of Events Alters Affective Forecasts

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The role of self-relevant values (as operationalized via materialism) was studied as a moderator of affective forecasting. Materialists predicted high negative affect in response to a material loss (Study 1), but low negative affect in response to an interpersonal setback (Study 2). For both event types, less negativity was predicted with longer durations from event occurrence, regardless of materialism levels. Overall, these results suggest that affective forecasts can better be understood by knowledge of the extent to which the forecasted events map onto important self-values.

Many important life decisions are guided, in part, by how we think such decisions will impact us emotionally. For example, many people decide to propose to their dating partner because they believe that such a decision will ensure romantic happiness for the rest of their lives. However, current divorce rates suggest that many people who chose to marry erred in this prediction (Munson & Sutton, 2006). Such affective prediction errors are not limited to choosing a mate: Results from *affective forecasting* research suggest that people tend to inaccurately predict future happiness across a wide variety of life domains, including career promotions, sports victories, and food preferences (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003).

Recent affective forecasting research has moved beyond the mere observation of the forecasting error across different life domains and seeks to better understand the processes causing the error. This research has addressed questions related to: (1) the sources of information that are used to make affective forecasts; (2) the mental processes that contribute to the production of such forecasts; (3) the role of emotional intelligence in affective forecasting; and (4) variables that alter the extremity of the affective forecasts that are produced (Dunn, Brackett, Ashton-James, Schneiderman, & Salovey, 2006; Gilbert, Gill, & Wilson, 2002; Gilbert, Lieberman, Morewedge, & Wilson, 2004; Morewedge, Gilbert, & Wilson 2005; Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert, & Axsom, 2000).

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Following in this tradition of better understanding the cognitive processing associated with affective forecasting, the research described in the present article explored another possible cognitive influence in affective forecasting: Individual difference variables that are related to the extremity of affective forecasts made after imagining significant life events.

One way to approach individual differences in affective forecasting is to focus on how forecasts are impacted by the self-relevance or self-importance of a future event. Studies in this literature (e.g., Morewedge, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2005; Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert, & Axsom, 2000) have often used event domains (e.g., football game outcomes) of obvious personal relevance to forecasters (football fans). However, to our knowledge, research has not yet examined how the degree of event self-relevance influences affective forecasts. Accordingly, the research described in this article investigated the extent to which the affective forecast depends on the match between the characteristics of the event and the personal values held by the forecaster.

It seems reasonable to speculate that self-relevance may impact an affective forecast. Ample research has shown that self-relevant goals and values influence the way people see and respond to the world (Bargh, 1982; Moskowitz, Salomon, & Taylor, 2000). The same bias should apply to affective forecasts. Needless to say, countless individual differences might impact our affective forecasts about pertinent life events: Being a Pittsburgh Steelers fan could influence the fervor with which you anticipate the next football season, being highly politically active could influence your anticipation for the next presidential election, or being neurotic could influence your affective forecast about missing the morning train. Out of the innumerable individual differences that could be tested, the current research focused on materialism.

For our purposes, materialism is defined as a personal value in which gaining material wealth is an important life focus, and it is a well established topic within psychology (for review, see Kasser, 2002). It makes a reasonable choice for our individual difference variable for several reasons. First, it is relatively easy to construct scenarios in which equivalent amounts of material gains and losses occur. Moreover, manipulation of scenarios in such terms suggests the possibility that future lines of research can link with other seemingly relevant theoretical and empirical domains, such as Kahneman and Tversky's Prospect Theory (1979), a possibility previously suggested by Kermer, Driver-Lynn, Wilson, and Gilbert (2006).

Second, prior research exploring materialism suggests that individual differences in the construct may be powerful enough to produce effects in experimental paradigms. For example, results of one study showed that

materialists used an individual advancement strategy in social dilemmas more often than non-materialists (Sheldon, Sheldon, & Osbaldiston, 2000), even when such selfish strategies were counterproductive. Similar results emerged from a study in which participants engaged in group discussions (Sheldon & McGregor, 2000). Such effects are consistent with the importance materialists ascribe to material goods and suggest that a material setback should be particularly threatening to materialists and should result in especially dire predictions of future distress.

However, we are not suggesting that self-relevance (operationalized via materialism) alone influences affective forecasting. Instead, we raise the possibility that self relevance may interact with three specific phenomena that have already been explored within the affective forecasting literature: 1) temporal focus, 2) imagined lag, and 3) the amount of time a person anticipates thinking about an event after the event occurs. Each of these phenomena, and the possible influence of self-relevance upon each, will be discussed below.

Temporal focus refers to the tendency for humans to focus on a single event when thinking about future happiness (their wedding day, the day their divorce is finalized, etc.) while ignoring all of the mundane, common events surrounding the focal event (Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert, & Axsom, 2000). Thus, when people make their affective forecast, they do not have a particularly accurate picture of the future and tend to make errors. Research exploring temporal focus found that a diary task that asked participants to list and focus upon mundane, everyday events of life (amount of time spent eating, sleeping, working) that will surround major life events (reducing focus on that event) minimizes the affective forecasting error (Wilson et al., 2000). For example, people might normally predict intense happiness after their football teams wins the big game, but the temporal focus research suggests that predicted happiness can be tempered by inducing triumphant football fans to think about mundane activities surrounding a football victory (going to bed, paying bills, fixing breakfast, etc.) prior to making a forecast.

One might hypothesize that the moderating effects of the temporal focus manipulation vary depending on an individual's level of materialism. This moderation could occur in one of two ways. 1) Non-materialists might be easily induced to shift focus from the loss and be especially receptive to a manipulation reducing focus on that loss. Thus, low-materialists might be particularly sensitive to the focalism reduction task while high-materialists might be more rigid and unable to adjust their affective forecast when given a more accurate picture of the future. 2) Materialists, who might be especially likely to fixate on the material loss, would be especially likely to show forecasting changes in response

to a manipulation that effectively broke their event focus. In contrast, because non-materialists may not fixate on the event to begin with, their affective forecasts may not change much in response to an effective focus-reducing manipulation.

In addition to temporal focus, a second widely studied affective forecasting variable is the *imagined lag* between the event and the time specified for the prediction. Generally, people expect the strongest affective reactions to occur immediately after an event. The intensity of the affect that is predicted weakens with increases in imagined time from the event.

However, it is possible that the slope of the decrease might vary depending on the match between the characteristics of the event and the predictor's personal values. In the $200 loss scenario, for example, the value that materialists place on material goods might cause them to predict significant and lingering negative affect. Hence, while materialists may show a decrease in the extremity of the distress that they predict with increasing lag from the loss, the slope of their distress function with increasing lag may be flatter than the slope observed in the affective forecasts of non-materialists.

One final issue addressed in our studies concerned peoples' expectations about the *amount of time they would spend thinking* about the material loss in the days after the loss. The focalism explanation for affective forecasting (Wilson et al., 2000) is that a single-minded focus on the future event causes people to perseverate on their future emotions. That is, some people expect that they will often think about the event and that such thought will contribute to relatively extreme emotions. The implication is that if one can reduce the amount of time that a person expects to spend thinking about an outcome, then one will see a reduction in the extremity of that person's affective forecasts. Accordingly, Wilson et al. (2000) suggest that expectations about thinking may at least partially mediate the relations between their focalism-reduction manipulation and the extremity of affective forecasts.

This mediational effect is described herein. These examinations are important given that such mediational effects were inconsistently obtained in the Wilson et al. (2000) studies. In those studies, analyses looking at whether predicted thought mediated the relation between an event-focus-reduction manipulation and a reduction in the extremity of affective forecasts were significant in only one of the four studies reported. It is true that a meta-analysis of this mediational effect across the four studies indicated significant mediation. Nonetheless, the inconsistent emergence of the mediational effect across studies suggests a need to replicate such effects, perhaps with an eye toward finding moderators of such mediational effects.

STUDY 1: MATERIALISM AND MATERIAL LOSSES

Method

Participants Three hundred eighty eight undergraduates enrolled in psychology classes at Northern Illinois University participated in partial completion of class requirements.

Materials and Procedure Participants in all conditions completed a preliminary questionnaire that was depicted as a measure of personality. Items from the *Materialistic Orientation Scale* (Richins, 2004) were interspersed among several filler items. The *Materialistic Orientation Scale* is a revised, psychometrically tested, 9-item version of a previous 18-item scale created by Richins and Dawson (1992). The scale defines materialism as a three-faceted construct consisting of possession-defined success ("I admire people who own expensive homes, cars, and clothes"), acquisition centrality ("Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure"), and acquisition as the pursuit of happiness ("My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have"). Responses to each item were made on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*).

The mean score on this scale was 28.25 (SD = 5.97) and the scale evinced acceptable reliability (α = .76). Participants who scored below the median (29) were placed into the low materialism group (n = 187) and all others were placed into the high materialism group (n = 205).

Participants then read a description of a material setback:

> Imagine you have taken $200 out of the bank for a special purchase. You slip the $200 into your pocket and resume your normal routine for the rest of the day. Several hours later, you go to the store to make your purchase, and you realize that the $200 is no longer in your pocket. You try to retrace your steps from the day and search everywhere you can think of, but the money appears to be lost without any hope of finding it again.

Next, half of the participants completed an event focus reduction task. The task (adapted from Wilson et al., 2000) asked participants to fill out an hour-by-hour schedule for a day in the future and to complete a form that indicates the number of hours they will spend on a variety of typical daily events (going to class, eating, spending time with friends, etc.) on the same future day. In comparison, participants in the control condition completed a similar-length distracter task. This simple word association task took approximately the same time to finish as the event focus-reduction task.

After reading the material setback description, participants used a 7-point scale (1 = *Not Happy at All*, 7 = *Very Happy*) to predict their happiness level on the day of the setback and on each of two days following the events described in the vignette. They also used a 9-point scale (1 = *Not at All*, 9 = *Very Often*) to forecast the frequency with

which they anticipated thinking about the setback on the day of the material setback and on each of the next two days.

Results

The affective forecasting measure. A mixed-model analysis of variance was used to analyze predicted happiness levels on the day of the setback and two subsequent days. Focalism condition (event focus-reduction vs. control) and materialism level (high vs. low) were the between-participants variables in this analysis; the amount of time after the setback (0 days, 1 day, 2 days) was the within-participants variable.[1]

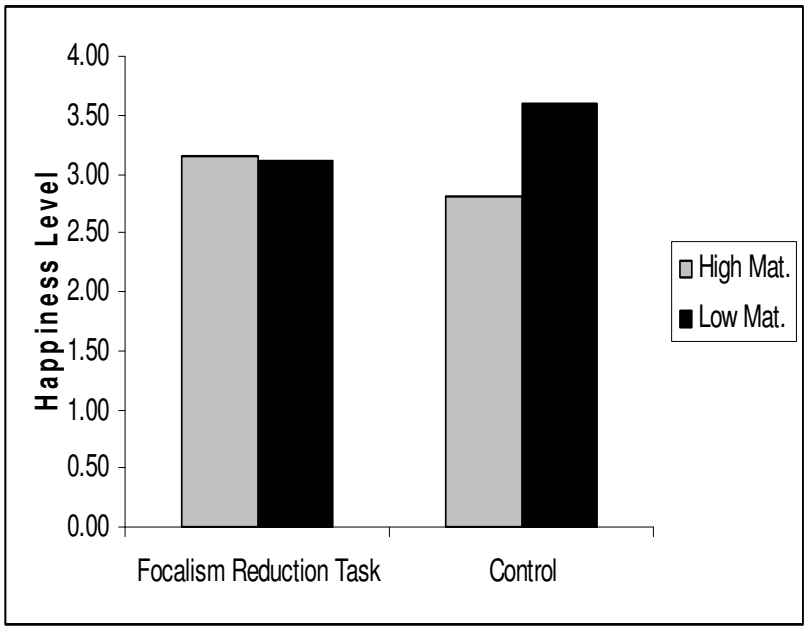

FIGURE 1 Predicted Happiness Level by Materialism Level and Focalism Reduction Task Condition in Study 1

Results showed that participants predicted that their unhappiness would decrease as temporal distance from the $200 loss increased, F (2, 776) = 506.15, $p < .001$. A statistically significant effect was also found for materialism, F (1, 388) = 5.72, $p < .05$, but this was subsumed by an interaction between focalism condition and materialism level, F (1, 388) = 6.64, $p = .01$. Examination of the means for this interaction (see Figure 1), showed that in the control condition, low materialists reported less unhappiness following the materialistic disaster than did high materialists. A subsequent test of this effect showed that it was

significant, F (1, 191) = 6.76, p = .01. This difference in the affect predictions of high materialists and low materialists disappeared following the event focus-reduction manipulation, F (1, 198) = 0.23, p = .63.

This interaction can also be examined in terms of the impact of the event focus-reduction manipulation on the affect predictions of high materialists and low materialists. The data showed that exposure to the event focus-reduction manipulation caused high materialists to predict less unhappiness than those not exposed to the manipulation. However, a subsequent test revealed that this effect only approached significance, F (1, 203) = 2.4, p = .12. In comparison, low materialists predicted less happiness following exposure to the event focus-reduction manipulation than in the control condition. Subsequent analysis revealed this effect to be statistically reliable, F (1, 185) = 4.30, $p < .05$.

The anticipated thought frequency measure. The second mixed model analyses of variance used to analyze the affective forecasts was also used to analyze the anticipated thought frequency measure. Of particular interest was whether the effects obtained on the measure would mirror those obtained for the predicted affect.

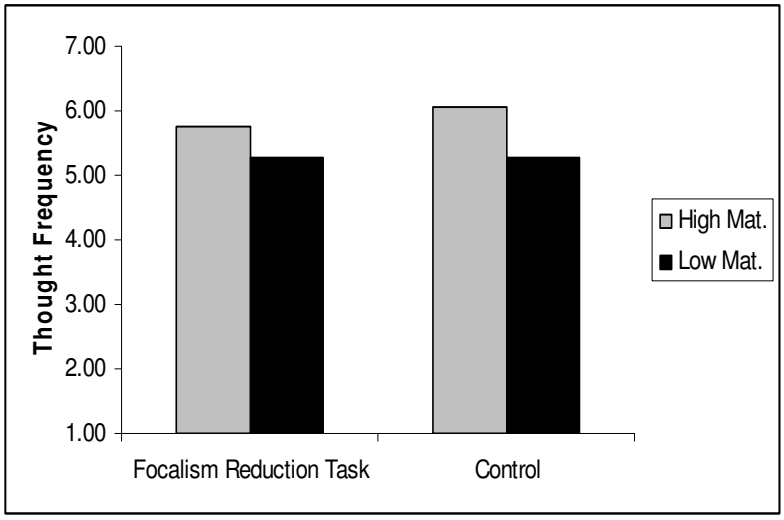

FIGURE 2 Predicted Thought Frequency for the Materialism Level x Focalism Reduction Task in Study 1

Two effects were similar. Anticipated thought frequency decreased with increasing time lag from the material setback, F (2, 776) = 236.85, $p < .001$, and materialism level predicted thought frequency [F (1, 388) = 8.294, $p < .01$; see Figure 2] such that materialistic participants predicted

that they would think about the disaster more frequently (M = 5.89, SD = .80) than would less materialistic participants (M = 5.27, SD = .89).

However, the Focalism Condition x Materialism interaction that appeared in the affective forecasts failed to emerge, F (1, 388) = 0.446, p = .505. The means for the non-significant interaction are presented in Figure 2 so that the pattern of means might be contrasted with the pattern depicted in Figure 1.

(An absence of) mediational evidence. One of the issues of interest in Study 1 was whether results from the anticipated thought measure would mediate the relation between the focalism-reducing manipulation and the extremity of affective forecasts. However, the focalism main effect did not emerge in the affective forecasts, so mediational tests were not conducted.

Similarly, a Focalism Condition x Materialism interaction did emerge in the affective forecasts. However, this interaction was not statistically reliable on the anticipated thought frequency measure. According to the Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation-testing protocol, in such circumstances no statistical mediation of the affective forecasts by anticipated thought is possible, hence, no test was conducted.

Study 1 Discussion

Study 1 provided preliminary support for the impact of self relevant values on affective forecasts. That is, materialists predicted lower levels of happiness when imagining a $200 loss than did non-materialists. While corresponding experiential data were not obtained, the Study 1 finding does suggest that self-relevance impacts affective forecasting. If generalizable, such results suggest that people may be particularly bad at predicting affective reactions to events that are most important to them (e.g., self-relevant events).

However, because materialism was not manipulated in Study 1, the results are open to alternative interpretations. One of those interpretations is that materialists are simply more reactive to negative events than non-materialists. In contrast, the proposed explanation for the results of Study 1 centers on the fact that it is the *match* between the construct measured (materialism) and the nature of the loss (loss of material goods) that was responsible for the more extreme forecasts of materialists than non-materialists.

If that explanation is correct, then high levels of materialism should not be related to especially extreme affective forecasts when imagined negative events do not involve material goods (e.g., a failed relationship). Our hypothesis is supported by the results of prior research examining individual differences in materialism and interpersonal relations. Some results from this research demonstrate that in comparison to materialists,

non-materialists seem to ascribe particular importance to interpersonal relations (Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Khanna & Kasser, 2004).

STUDY 2: MATERIALISTS AND INTERPERSONAL LOSSES

Accordingly, Study 2 replicated Study 1, with one major exception: The vignette read by participants referred to an interpersonal failure instead of a material loss. If materialists are simply more reactive to losses, they should show the same extreme affective forecasts of unhappiness observed in Study 1. However, if the hypothesis is correct and it is the match between materialism the materialistic nature of the loss that matters to affective forecasts, then one would expect this effect to disappear, or even to reverse (e.g., with non-materialists predicting greater negative affect).

Method

Participants Undergraduates (N = 174) enrolled in psychology classes at Northern Illinois University participated in partial completion of class requirements. All completed the *Materialism Orientation Scale*, short form. The mean score was 29.85 (SD = 5.91) and responses to the scale evinced acceptable reliability (α = .84). Participants who scored below the median (30) were placed into the low materialism group (n = 90); all others were placed into the high materialism group (n = 82).

Materials and Procedure The methods used in Study 2 closely matched those used in Study 1. One exception was the vignette employed. In Study 2, participants read the following description of a romantic disappointment:

> Imagine that you have been going out occasionally on dates with someone for the last two months. Though things have not yet progressed too far, you could see yourself developing deep feelings for this person. You feel that you share certain chemistry with this person. Yesterday, this person revealed that they have fun on your dates, but they would like to continue with a casual relationship in which they can date other people.

Anticipated thought ratings were assessed in the same manner described in Study 1. However, respondents made affective forecasts using semantic differential items (Osgood, 1964). The end anchors on the seven-point scales were: *Sad-Happy, Disappointed-Pleased, Distressed-Glad, Pleasant-Unpleasant, Nice-Awful, Good-Bad*. Participants indicated their response by checking one of seven dash marks between the two words. More information regarding the development and validity of semantic differential scales is available in Heise (1970).

Our use of this multi-item scale was prompted by a desire to increase the sensitivity of the affective forecasting measure. One common way to magnify effects in research is to use multi-item measures of the construct of interest (Osgood, 1964). Such measures, when both valid and reliable, typically have substantially more power than single-item measures of the type used in Study 1. Indeed, the scale yielded acceptable reliability for each of the three days (Day of Disappointment Affect, $\alpha = .97$, 1 Day After Affect, $\alpha = .96$, 2 Days After Affect, $\alpha = .95$). Hence, the items are summed separately on each of the days to obtain an affective forecast for each day.

Affective forecasts. As with Study 1, the data were analyzed using a mixed-model ANOVA. Categorically coded materialism status (materialists vs. non-materialists) and focalism condition (control vs. focalism-reducing) were between-subject variables; imagined lag from the event (0 days, 1 day, 2 days) was the within-subject variable.

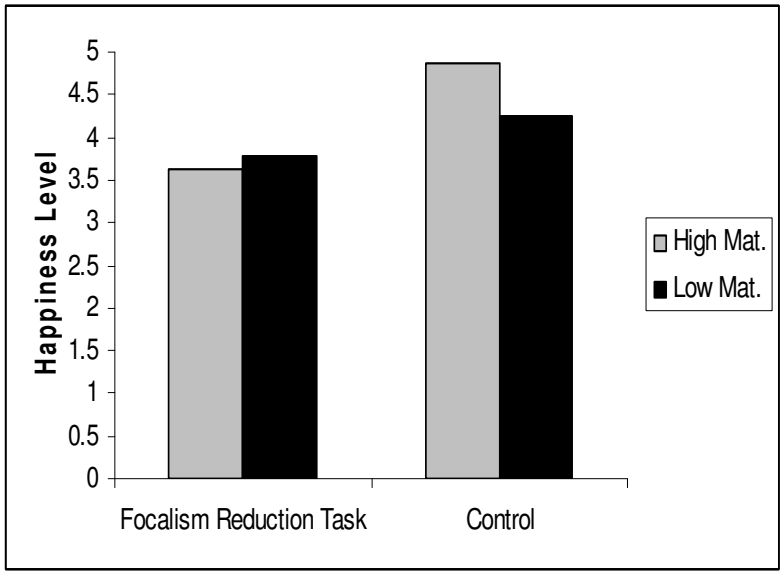

FIGURE 3 Predicted Happiness Level by Materialism Level and Focalism Reduction Task Condition in Study 2.

As in Study 1, affective forecasts became less negative ($F(2, 172) = 57.64$, $p = .001$) with increasing temporal distance from the event (0 day $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.70$; 1 day $M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.39$; 2 day $M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.38$). However, a significant Focalism Manipulation x Imagined Lag interaction (F (2, 172) = 25.94, p = .001) substantially qualifies interpretation of this main effect. The means for the interaction reveal

that participants in the control group made roughly equivalent affective forecasts across levels of temporal lag from the event (0 day M = 4.35, SD = 1.77; 1 day M = 4.47, SD = 1.30; 2 day M = 4.69, SD =1.22). In comparison, participants exposed to the temporal focus manipulation forecast extreme negative affect on the day of the event, but forecast substantially less negative affect with increasing lag (0 day M = 2.91, SD = 1.29; 1 day M = 3.74, SD = 1.38; 2 day M = 4.42, SD = 1.51).

The analysis also yielded a significant Materialism x Focalism Condition interaction, F (1, 172) = .4.03, p = .05 (see Figure 3).[2] Two additional analyses were performed to decompose this interaction. Results of one analysis showed that in the control condition, high materialists forecast *more positive* levels of post-event affect than low materialists, F (1, 85) = 5.13, p = .03. This is an important outcome, for it shows that the main effect for materialism obtained in Study 1 was most likely not a consequence of high materialists' greater reactivity to negative events. If that were the case, their interpersonal setback forecasts would be more negative than the affective forecasts of low materialists. Instead, the data suggest that it is the match between participant values and the event that determined the pattern of affective forecasts. In Study 1, materialistic participants predicted *less positive* affect (relative to non-materialists) following a materialistic setback; in Study 2, materialistic participants predicted *more positive* affect (relative to non-materialists) following an interpersonal setback.

Results of the second analysis showed that this materialism effect disappeared in the focalism condition, F (1, 89) = .352, p = .56. Hence, as in Study 1, exposure to the focalism manipulation reduced the extent to which materialism was related to affective forecasts.

Study 2 gave us the opportunity to replicate the paradoxical effect observed in Study 1. In that study, the focalism manipulation caused the affective forecasts of low materialists to become less positive. That effect was, indeed, replicated. In fact, as reflected in the means depicted in Figure 3 and in the significant focalism condition main effect [F (1, 172) = 19.33, p = .001], this focalism-induced decrease in affective forecasts was duplicated by a similar effect for high materialists.

Anticipated thought frequency. The same mixed-model ANOVA used to analyze the affective forecasts was used to analyze predictions of post-event thought frequency. The only significant effect to emerge from this analysis showed that thought frequency was expected to decrease with increasing temporal lag from the event, F (2,174) = 176.85, p =.001). All other results were non-significant [e.g., materialism level: F (1,174) = .038, p = .58, focalism manipulation: F (1, 174) = 1.13, p = .29; Materialism x Focalism Manipulation interaction: F (1, 174) = 1.96, p = .16].

The most important implication of the null effects for the focalism and materialism measures on anticipated thought is that, by the rules of mediation testing (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986), the anticipated thought measure cannot be said to mediate the relation between materialism or focalism (or their interactive combination) and affective forecasts; hence, no formal mediation tests were performed.

One might argue that this lack of mediational evidence might have been caused by the differential sensitivity of the affect and thought measures – the multi-item affect prediction scale used should have been more sensitive than the single-item thought measure. However, this argument fails to explain the results of Study 1, in which a similar lack of mediational evidence accrued when both constructs were measured using single-item scales.

Study 2 Discussion

The findings of Study 2 provide an important clarification to the findings of Study 1. Without the information provided by Study 2, one could interpret the findings of Study 1 as being caused by materialistic reactivity to negative events. Instead, high materialists demonstrated a lesser negative reaction to the imagined emotion loss relative to low materialists. The strong negative reaction appears to be related specifically to imagined material lost, and not negative events in general. Such results support the hypothesis that the extremity of affective forecasts is related to the self-relevance of forecasted event. The applicability of the materialism construct to interpersonal events fits with the results of other research showing that individual differences in materialism are related to perceptions and judgments about the interpersonal domain (Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Khanna & Kasser, 2004).

However, interpretation of the results of Study 2 in this manner is complicated by the fact that this conclusion involves integration of results from two separate studies. Ideally, certain confounds (time effects, family wise error) could have been eliminated if the authors possessed the foresight to conduct a single massive study with the same subject pool in the same semester in which the nature of the scenario presented (materialistic or interpersonal) was systematically manipulated. However, the use of such a complex experimental design for Study 1 was premature given that there was no existing finding suggesting that materialism levels would affect affective forecasts. Additionally, concerns about the current research design are muted by the fact that all participants came from the general subject population at the same university, assuring similar demographics for both experiments.

Finally, it is reasonable to argue that programmatic research often proceeds by first establishing a finding, then meaningfully manipulating

that finding (expanding it, eliminating it, reversing it). The studies described in the present article reflect exactly that model of scientific progress.

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our results contribute to the affective forecasting literature in two ways. First, they demonstrate that individual differences impact affective forecasts. Such individual difference effects have not often been reported by affective forecasting researchers (for one of the few exceptions, see Dunn, et al., 2006). Certainly, from a dispositional view, that such effects should emerge seems sensible. For example, one might expect that optimists would produce more positive affective forecasts after a negative event than pessimists.

However, results described in this article suggest that the extent to which individual differences are related to affective forecasts goes beyond such simple main effects. Instead, our results suggest an interaction between dispositional characteristics and event types such that the extremity of affective forecasts can be altered by the self-relevance of forecast events. In control conditions, negative events that were self-relevant (monetary loss to a materialist; interpersonal difficulties to a non-materialist) produced greater negativity in affective forecasts than non-self relevant events (monetary losses to non-materialists; interpersonal difficulties to materialists). Put another way, the results of the current research suggest that people may make especially extreme affective forecasts about highly important life events. Work in other areas of psychology seem to support this evidence: McIntosh found that emotional volatility is linked to perceived importance of certain life events (McIntosh, Harlow, & Martin, 1995). Additionally, the present results are in tune with approaches to psychology that emphasize the interaction of situations and dispositions in explaining thought and behavior (see Sedikides & Skowronski, 1990).

The data from these studies raise questions about the diary task used in the affective forecasting literature, which is especially important as it relates to the impact bias described earlier in this article. The prevailing explanation for the efficacy of the diary task (Wilson et al., 2000) is that thinking about mundane day-to-day events that occur after a negative or positive event leads to a more accurate, nuanced view of the future. Evidence of such moderation emerged in Study 1: High materialists showed less negativity in affective forecasts after engaging in a mental recounting of humdrum daily events than when they did not engage in such activity. However, in Study 1 such activity caused an increase in the magnitude of the negative affect predictions of low materialists. A similar pattern emerged in Study 2, but applied to both low and high

materialists: After imagining an interpersonal setback, both groups projected more post-event negativity when they also thought about the mundane events that would occur after the interpersonal setback. Additionally, the authors admit that there is the possibility that a third variable could be driving the present findings (the tendency towards rumination, the importance placed on interconnectivity with other people) that was not tested, but such potential third variables would certainly be interesting points of clarification for future research.

Such results cast doubt on the idea that the focalism manipulation breaks event focus, enabling people to think more holistically about the future. This explanation is further weakened by the lack of parallelism in results for the predicted affect and anticipated thought measures. Wilson et al. (2000) predicted that the effect of the focalism manipulation would be to reduce the extent to which people would expect to perseverate on the event (e.g., to reduce thought frequency); this reduction should be responsible for the focalism task's moderation of affective forecasts. The present data do not support such a mechanism. In neither study did results from the anticipated thought measure parallel the predicted affect measure. Hence, in neither study could anticipated thought have mediated the changes in affective forecasting that were consequent to the focalism manipulation. Clearly, the data suggest that the extent to which anticipated thought is related to predictions of affect may deserve some theoretical reconsideration.

However (and ironically, given the topic of this report), most of diary task results that came out of this research were unexpected. Any speculation about the findings described would be post hoc in nature. Therefore, it seems that future research, grounded in alternative theories for the findings, is necessary before any strong argument can be made regarding these focalism/ diary task results.

The findings described above outline two questions to be explored in future research. However, there are certainly numerous future directions for this line of research, which would replicate and extend the current findings using different self-relevant values, research paradigms, behavioral measures, and experiential data.

The fact that the self-match effects appeared across domains in our studies suggest that it may be a general phenomenon. However, such generality remains to be documented by future research. Perhaps high need for cognition is especially likely to affect a person's imagined reaction to failing an exam, or high neuroticism is especially likely to affect imagined reaction to stressful life events. Moreover, parametric studies might be useful in more specifically linking how the extent of the self-match is related to predictions of future affect and whether this linkage varies across domains or event valences.

Some of this work can be performed while replicating the present paradigm while extending it by changing or manipulating the valence of events. For example, in relation to non-materialists, materialists should be especially likely to make extremely positive affective forecasts for monetary successes, but not for romantic successes. As noted in the introduction, the use of the monetary domain also allows exploration of some of the ideas of prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). That theory suggests that losses ought to be more emotionally potent than gains. Hence, monetary losses ought to promote more predicted negative emotions than equivalent gains produce positive emotions.

However, future research is not limited to the paradigms used in the current research. For example, priming paradigms may establish a materialism-affective forecasting link. One interpretive concern with the use of personality variables is that they are not manipulated, but simply are measured. Thus, it is possible that effects can emerge that seem to be related to the measured personality variable, but instead are caused by a variable that is correlated with the measured variable. As illustrated by the work of Bargh (e.g., Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986), manipulating materialism via a priming manipulation can help to bypass such problems. One should be able to use a priming manipulation to activate the concept of materialism in some participants. One would expect those participants to predict that they would be more emotionally affected by materialistic setbacks than participants who are not primed, and also predict that they would be more likely to think about the event after it had occurred.

Finally, an additional direction that can be pursued explores the extent to which the affective forecasts made in the present article reflect accuracy or error in judgment. Because no real-life experiential data was collected, one can only speculate about such effects. The data collected elsewhere has tended to show that extreme affective forecasts also tend to be erroneous affective forecasts (e.g., Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Should this finding generalize to the data described in the present article, high materialists would tend to make especially erroneous predictions when confronted with material losses, but low materialists would tend to make especially erroneous predictions in the face or interpersonal losses. However, it can also be argued that, at least where individual difference variables are concerned, extremity does not necessarily translate into error. For example, it may be the case that materialists actually experience especially high levels of negative affect after material losses, so that their extreme predictions of negative affect actually reflect the fact that they have good knowledge of, and sensitivity to, their reactions to events. Future research should investigate such possibilities.

Clearly, then, there is much to do in this area. People make affective forecasts, and can use those forecasts to make decisions about their future. The paradox described in this article is that affective forecasts are likely to be especially extreme when events are especially self-relevant. One unfortunate aspect of this scenario is that these extreme forecasts about the events mean they may also be especially likely to be erroneous (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). Such considerations emphasize the need for understanding predictions of affect. The errors that might be induced by such predictions can only be avoided through a better understanding of the psychology underlying such affective forecasts – how predictions are generated, the sources of information used in such predictions, and the variables influencing such predictions. The present article makes a contribution to such understanding.

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Footnotes

[1]For both experiments, analyses were also conducted that treated the materialism measure as a continuous variable. The inferential implications of these analyses did not differ from the implications of the analyses that used the materialism score to place people into groups. The results of the latter analyses were used because they are easier to describe.

[2]The analysis also yielded a three-way interaction between temporal lag, materialism level, and focalism condition that approached significance, F (2, 172) = 2.58, p = .08. Examination of the means for this interaction suggested to us that this three-way interaction does not qualify the implications of the two two-way interactions reported in the main text. However, for completeness' sake, the three-way interaction is described. Means for the interaction reveal that there was no temporal lag effect in the control condition for high materialism participants, but there was a small temporal lag effect for low materialism participants. In comparison, in the focalism condition the temporal lag effect was quite robust, regardless of materialism level.