



Locomoting toward well-being or getting entangled in a material world: Regulatory modes and affective well-being

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ABSTRACT

Two studies were conducted to examine the impact of two basic self-regulatory orientations—locomotion and assessment (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003)—on materialistic values. We hypothesized that, because assessment is associated with great concern over self-evaluation—particularly as it applies to social comparison and extrinsic motivation—it should promote materialistic concerns which in turn should decrease affective well-being. In contrast, owing to high levels of task involvement and intrinsic motivation, locomotion is expected to be negatively associated with materialism and well-being. In Study 1, we found that individuals in an assessment mode as opposed to a locomotion mode were more likely to rate materialistic choices as more normative. In Study 2, we found that materialism and negative motives for earning money mediate the relationship between regulatory orientations and well-being. Implications and avenues for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Imagine a psychologically and physically active person, intrinsically motivated and concerned with being always occupied, with avoiding excessive downtimes, with being continuously involved in new projects and changes. This person will very likely be characterized by high self-regulatory locomotion orientation—that is, a strong concern for action and movement (Higgins et al., 2003; Kruglanski et al., 2000).

From a somewhat different perspective, imagine instead a reflexive person, always immersed in what could have been, in judging and comparing one's self, peers and colleagues in an attempt to reveal errors and imperfections. This description closely resembles that of a person characterized by a highly self-regulatory assessment orientation—that is, a strong concern for comparison and evaluation (Higgins et al., 2003; Kruglanski et al., 2000).

In the present work, we argue that assessors—because of their strong tendency to evaluate situations and to engage in social comparisons—will be more likely to endorse a materialistic orientation (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sirgy, 1998) and will be more likely to be negatively motivated to acquire money (*negative motives*; Srivastava, Locke, & Bartol, 2001). In contrast, locomotors—because of their strong commitment to action accompanied by a low tendency toward social comparison—will be less likely to embrace materialistic concerns. Furthermore, we claim that the opposite association of the two regulatory modes with a materialistic orientation is responsible for different levels of experienced affective well-being.

Before describing the studies we will introduce regulatory mode theory (Kruglanski et al., 2000) and the concepts of materialism and negative motives for money, in order to provide the proper background prior to presenting our hypotheses.

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1.1. Regulatory modes and well-being

Most deliberate human behaviors comprise activities in two essential regulatory modes: a mode of locomotion and a mode of assessment. Assessment “constitutes the comparative aspect of self-regulation concerned with critically evaluating entities or states, such as goals or means in relation to alternatives in order to judge relative quality” (Kruglanski et al., 2000, p. 794). This mode is typified by self-examining questions such as, “What are my options?”, “Are there any other possibilities worth considering?”, “Which alternative is best?”, “What should I do in the future?” Individuals engaged in an assessment mode are preoccupied with such evaluations in relation to standards and reference points (see Higgins et al., 2003). By contrast, the locomotion mode “is the self-regulatory aspect concerned with movement from state to state and with committing the psychological resources that will initiate and maintain goal-directed progress in a straightforward manner, without undue distractions or delays” (Kruglanski et al., 2000, p. 794). In the locomotion mode, individuals emphasize “doing”, “getting on with it”, or “making something happen” (see Higgins et al., 2003) over critical evaluation. Indeed, individuals engaged in a locomotion mode might refrain from critical evaluation if “stopping to reflect” would be seen to halt or hinder steady movement from state to state.

There is substantial evidence (Higgins et al., 2003; Kruglanski et al., 2000) that stronger locomotion is associated with a commitment to prompt action, the ability to remain focused on a task and conscientiousness. In contrast, assessment is strongly associated with a focus on self-evaluation, fear of invalidity, self-consciousness, need for social comparison and greater sensitivity to various deviations from or discrepancies with external standards. On the whole, this pattern of relations strongly supports regulatory mode conceptualization of persons high in locomotion as individuals who quickly initiate action and then maintain it without disruption, experiencing a high level of task involvement, and of persons high in assessment as individuals focused on the evaluative aspects of self-regulation in relation to standards and reference points that can change over time. As far as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is concerned, Kruglanski et al. (2000) found that locomotion is positively related to intrinsic motivation by applying several measures of motivational orientation, whereas assessment has been found to relate to extrinsic motivation (see also Pierro, Kruglanski, & Higgins, 2006).

For the purposes of the present research, it is important to mention that previous work has directly or indirectly suggested that regulatory modes are differentially associated with well-being. For example, Hong, Tan, and Chang (2004), testing for possible interaction effects of the two modes on depressive moods and life satisfaction, found that individuals high in locomotion but low in assessment had lower depressive moods and a higher degree of life satisfaction. Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, and Stocker (2007) have shown that high levels of locomotion are positively associated with couples' well-being, whereas parallel associations with assessment were negative. Hui and Bond (2010), studying the impact of social axioms such as a reward for application and social cynicism on subjective well-being found that the negative impact of social cynicism was mediated by assessment mode while the positive impact of a reward for application was mediated by an orientation toward locomotion. Finally, in studying fit between personality and culture, Fulmer et al. (2011) have shown that the positive relationship between locomotion orientation and well-being is stronger in cultures characterized by high levels of locomotion orientation.

Although a clear picture has emerged with respect to the association of regulatory modes and well-being, research has not yet addressed whether the opposite impact of the two modes on well-being could be due to variations in attitudes toward material possession and money.

1.2. Materialism, negative motives for money and well-being

Materialism is defined as “a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 308) and as “the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions” (Belk, 1984, p. 29). Materialism therefore reflects a strong emphasis having been placed on possessions, financial attainment, status and appearance (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004).

Different types of antecedents to materialism have been considered previously (Kasser et al., 2004). Among those psychological factors underlying materialistic orientation there is a great degree of convergence around the notion that materialism is connected with and originates from feelings of self-doubt, uncertainty, low self-esteem and low estimations of self-worth (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Chang & Arkin, 2002; Chaplin & John, 2007; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Solberg, Diener, & Robinson, 2004). Interestingly, as was noted above, locomotion is negatively associated with all such variables promoting materialism, whereas assessment is positively associated with those same variables. This provides indirect support for our hypothesis that regulatory modes are associated with materialistic value orientations.

Most research pertaining to materialism has focused on its consequences, with results consistently showing a negative association with happiness and life satisfaction. Such results have proven to be consistent across several studies, conducted in several countries (Chan & Joseph, 2000; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003; Saunders & Munro, 2000; Sirgy, 1998; Solberg et al., 2004).

Kasser et al. (2004), in an attempt to explain the relationship between materialism and SWB, have argued that well-being is derived largely from the satisfaction of basic human needs such as security, competence, connection to others and autonomy. Individuals with a highly materialistic orientation would be expected to have lower SWB because their focus is tilted toward materialistic and extrinsic goals—such as financial success and fame—thereby subtracting from the amount of time and potential level of involvement available to be devoted to reaching intrinsic goals such as personal growth and commu-

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