

# Experiential or Material Purchases? Social Class Determines Purchase Happiness



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## Abstract

Which should people buy to make themselves happy: experiences or material goods? The answer depends in part on the level of resources already available in their lives. Across multiple studies using a range of methodologies, we found that individuals of higher social class, whose abundant resources make it possible to focus on self-development and self-expression, were made happier by experiential over material purchases. No such experiential advantage emerged for individuals of lower social class, whose lesser resources engender concern with resource management and wise use of limited finances. Instead, lower-class individuals were made happier from material purchases or were equally happy from experiential and material purchases.

## Keywords

social class, happiness, experiential purchases, material purchases, socioeconomic status, open data, open materials, preregistered

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Which should people buy to make themselves happy: experiences or material goods? Research on discretionary purchases provides a simple answer: For greater happiness, “buy more experiences and fewer material goods” (Dunn, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2011, p. 115). This recommendation favors spending money on experiences over the acquisition of tangible objects. We refer to greater happiness resulting from experiential over material purchases as the *experiential advantage*.

Recent work has helped clarify why and when people derive greater happiness from experiential than material purchases. For instance, relative to material purchases, experiential purchases tend to be more closely connected to the self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012) and invoke less rumination (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). Furthermore, the experiential advantage is attenuated when the purchased experience does not involve other people (Caprariello & Reis, 2013) and when consumers are high in materialistic values (Zhang, Howell, Caprariello, & Guevarra, 2014). In addition, material purchases can provide more frequent instances of momentary happiness than experiential purchases (Weidman & Dunn, 2016). Nonetheless, when considering long-term

happiness, researchers have largely found support for the experiential advantage (Gilovich, Kumar, & Jampol, 2015).

In world economies with growing inequality in wealth, however, long-term purchase happiness may depend on the landscape of resources in people’s daily lives. Social class is defined by access to material and other resources (e.g., wealth, education, occupation) and is reflected in a person’s subjective assessment of their position vis-à-vis others in society (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012).

There is good reason to believe that the experiential advantage holds true primarily for individuals of higher social class. A growing body of evidence suggests that these individuals are focused on their “own internal states, goals, and emotions” (Kraus et al., 2012, p. 549). That is, higher-class individuals seek self-development, self-expression, and uniqueness (Stephens, Fryberg,

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Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). This orientation might best be met through purchasing experiences, given that experiences tend to “constitute a greater part of the self than do material possessions” (Carter & Gilovich, 2012, p. 1304). Thus, people with more resources, who tend to value self-development and self-expression, should be happier from purchasing experiences than material goods.

Lower-class individuals, in contrast, live in a world with less financial, educational, and occupational resources. In this landscape of greater constraints and uncertainty (Kraus et al., 2012), lower-class individuals are more likely to be concerned about resource management and wise use of limited finances (Fernbach, Kan, & Lynch, 2015). This orientation might best be met through purchasing material goods. Unlike experiential purchases, material purchases provide practical benefits each time they are used, are physically long lasting, and often possess resale value (Tully, Hershfield, & Meyvis, 2015; Weidman & Dunn, 2016). Thus, people with less resources, who tend to value spending money wisely, may not show an experiential advantage and instead may be equally happy from both types of purchases or actually happier from material purchases.

Despite increased research on the experiential advantage, little attention has been paid to the influence of people's existing resources. This is surprising given that Van Boven and Gilovich's foundational paper (2003) included a national survey (Study 2) demonstrating that higher-class respondents (those with greater income and education) reported an experiential advantage, whereas some lower-class respondents (those lowest in education) were “slightly more likely” to show a *material advantage* (i.e., greater happiness from material purchases than from experiential purchases; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003, p. 1196). We are unaware of any other research exploring the effects of social class on the experiential advantage.

The present research was designed to investigate purchase happiness within the context of resources available to people in their daily lives. Higher- and lower-class individuals frequently make discretionary purchases (e.g., movie tickets or accessories; Experian Simmons, 2011). Given that discretionary spending is designed to promote happiness and not to fulfill basic needs (e.g., electric bills), we can ask how social class relates to happiness from experiential and material purchases.

## Meta-Analysis of Past Research

We first conducted a meta-analysis comparing happiness from experiential and material purchases among college students—a key demographic examined in previous research on the experiential advantage. As a

whole, college students are of middle-to-high social class, yet national data indicate that students at private institutions (with higher tuition costs) are on average from wealthier families than students at public institutions (with lower tuition costs; calculated using the statistical tool at <http://nces.ed.gov/datalab>; see also U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In light of this, we used institution-level social class in an initial test of whether social class moderates the experiential advantage.

We located 23 studies (average  $N = 119$ ) conducted between 2000 and 2012 at seven U.S. universities. As reported in greater detail in the Supplemental Material available online, the meta-analysis overall revealed an experiential advantage— $g = 0.35$ ,  $k = 23$ ,  $T = 0$ , 95% confidence interval (CI) = [0.28, 0.41];  $Q = 26.14$ ,  $p = .25$ . Findings suggested that social class moderates this effect: Students at schools with higher tuition costs<sup>1</sup> showed greater experiential advantage than students at schools with lower tuition costs ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $k = 23$ ,  $z = 2.42$ ,  $p = .015$ ). Furthermore, students at private institutions reported significantly greater experiential advantage— $g = 0.46$ ,  $k = 9$ ,  $T = 0$ , 95% CI = [0.35, 0.57]—than students at public institutions— $g = 0.29$ ,  $k = 14$ ,  $T = 0$ , 95% CI = [0.22, 0.35],  $Q_B(1) = 7.16$ ,  $p = .001$ . Thus, with institution-level proxy indicators of social class, our meta-analysis provided sufficient support for our ideas to launch the three subsequent studies.

## Study 1: Comparative Survey

In Study 1, for which we adapted the procedure from Van Boven and Gilovich (2003, Study 2), participants recalled an experiential and a material purchase they made in the recent past and then indicated which made them happier. We amended Van Boven and Gilovich's (2003) procedures by using a continuous (vs. dichotomous) measure of comparative purchase happiness and by focusing on purchases made in the recent past (rather than throughout the participant's lifetime). We predicted a main effect of social class on comparative purchase happiness, reflecting lower levels of experiential advantage among lower- compared with higher-class participants.

## Method

A total of 209 adult U.S. residents participated on Amazon Mechanical Turk (52% women; age:  $M = 38.39$  years,  $SD = 12.83$ ). The target sample size ( $N = 200$ ) was determined before data collection began, and a total of 209 participants actually completed the study. Participants were asked to “think about a recent experiential purchase and object purchase that you made to increase your happiness.” No further information about

the definition of these purchases was given. Comparative purchase happiness was assessed with the question, "Between the two purchases, which made you happier?" Responses were reported on a 7-point scale from  $-3$  (*definitely experiential purchase*) to  $3$  (*definitely object purchase*), which we reverse-coded in the analysis so that positive numbers indicated an experiential advantage and negative numbers a material advantage.

Next, participants reported their social class using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler & Stewart, 2007). Participants were shown a ladder with 10 rungs and given the following instructions:

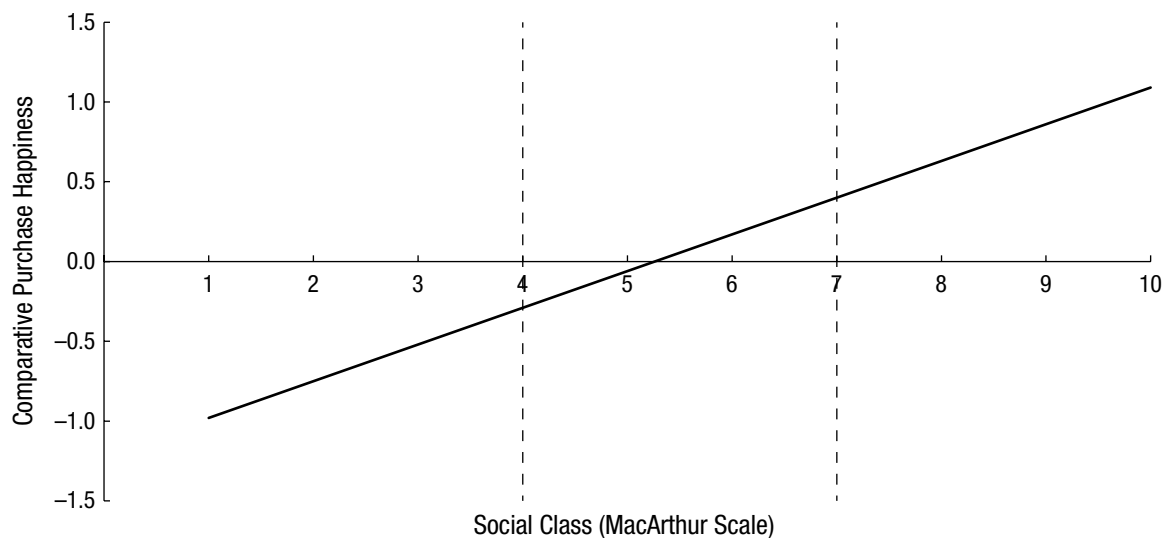
Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in the U.S. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off—those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off—who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on this ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Participants indicated the number of the rung on which they believed they stood. The measure was scored from 1 (*highest*) to 10 (*lowest*), which we reverse-coded for analysis so that higher numbers would indicate higher social class.

In the past, researchers have measured social class through objective indicators of income, education, or occupation or have used the MacArthur Scale to capture subjective assessment of all three aspects. For predictions of health, political preference, and cognition, the MacArthur Scale typically parallels or outperforms objective indicators of social class (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Brown-Iannuzzi, Lundberg, Kay, & Payne, 2014; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009). For brevity, we report only the results obtained with this measure. Results with other social class indicators that were included in this study are reported in the Supplemental Material. Participants also reported demographic attributes: The racial and ethnic composition of the sample was approximately 81% White, 5% Black, 5% Hispanic, 6% Asian, 1% Native American, 1% Pacific Islander, and 1% other. The mean household size was approximately 3 ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ).

## Results

**Social class predicts comparative purchase happiness.** As hypothesized, a regression analysis predicting comparative purchase happiness from social class revealed that social class positively predicted happiness,  $b = 0.23$ ,  $t(207) = 3.39$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Fig. 1). To interpret these results, we estimated the values at which happiness ratings significantly differed from the scale midpoint of 0, or equivalent happiness from the two purchases. Consistent



**Fig. 1.** Results from Study 1: mean comparative purchase happiness as a function of participants' social class. Positive numbers on the y-axis indicate experiential advantage, and negative numbers indicate material advantage. The dotted vertical lines indicate the points at which comparative purchase happiness was significantly different from 0. Social class was determined using the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler & Stewart, 2007).

with our hypotheses, results showed that the experiential advantage emerged at higher levels of social class (above 7.04),  $t(207) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ , and the material advantage emerged at lower levels of social class (below 4.04),  $t(207) = -1.98$ ,  $p = .05$ .

**Additional analyses.** Comparative purchase happiness was not predicted by age, size of household, or race ( $ps > .21$ ). Women ( $M = 0.10$ ,  $SD = 1.93$ ) were marginally happier with experiential over material purchases than were men ( $M = -0.40$ ,  $SD = 1.99$ ),  $t(207) = 1.84$ ,  $p = .067$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , but including gender in the regression model did not affect the significance of social class.

## Discussion

Study 1 replicated the experiential advantage found among higher-class respondents by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003, Study 2). Using a more sensitive, continuous measure of comparative purchase happiness, however, we found that lower-class participants showed a material advantage. This effect is consistent with the idea that lower-class individuals' limited resources lead them to value the wise use of resources, perhaps favoring tangible purchases.

The within-participants design in Study 1 required participants to make an explicit comparison between experiential and material purchases. In so doing, participants may have been sensitized to the characteristic benefits of each purchase option, along with the overall social desirability of experiential purchases (Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010). These comparisons are inherent in many purchases in daily life, given that people often compare alternatives, with some comparisons involving experiential and some involving material options. However, some purchases also are made separately, and thus a between-participants design is informative.

## Study 2: Between-Participants Study

To evaluate the separate effects of experiential and material purchases on happiness, we conducted a pre-registered study in which participants rated their happiness after recalling either an experiential or a material purchase. Echoing Study 1, we predicted an interaction between social class and purchase type such that lower-class participants would show lower levels of experiential advantage than higher-class participants.

## Method

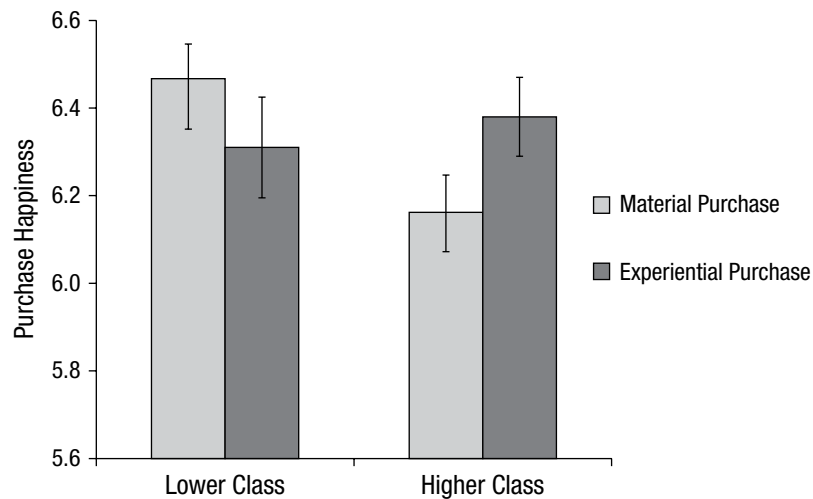
A total of 500 U.S. residents (54% women, age:  $M = 41.42$  years,  $SD = 14.45$ ) participated through a national panel company; the target sample size was determined at

preregistration. A power analysis based on the average effect size from our meta-analysis ( $d = 0.34$ ) indicated that a minimum of approximately 400 participants would be needed to obtain .80 power. Because the meta-analytic effect included within-participants and between-participants designs, an indirect measure of social class, and a relatively limited sample of participants (i.e., college students), we selected a target sample size of 500 to adequately power the key Purchase Type  $\times$  Social Class interaction. Participants were preselected to be high or low in social class on the basis of the available criteria in the panel survey (higher class:  $> \$80,000$  annual household income and at least a bachelor's degree; lower class:  $< \$30,000$  annual household income and a high school degree or less).

Each participant was randomly assigned to recall either an experiential or a material discretionary purchase. After reading a definition of the purchase type (e.g., Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), they described their purchase and indicated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) their response to the question, "When you think about this purchase, how happy does it make you?" As a manipulation check (Tully et al., 2015), we asked participants to indicate whether the purchase recalled was a material or an experiential purchase (material = 1, experiential = 2). All participants in the final sample indicated that they recalled the correct purchase type.

Participants also responded to a set of exploratory questions about purchase price (in dollars), time elapsed since purchase (in months), purchase category (coded into 1 of 11 categories, e.g., "clothing and jewelry"), individual differences in materialism (Materialism subscale of the Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness scale; Richins & Dawson, 1992), experiential buying tendency (Experiential Buying Tendency Scale; Howell, Pchelin, & Iyer, 2012), subjective happiness (Subjective Happiness Scale; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), and feelings of financial concern: "Generally, how concerned are you about managing your finances?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Finally, participants reported demographic attributes: The racial and ethnic composition of sample was approximately 78% White, 9% Black, 5% Latino, 5% Asian, 1% Native American, and 2% other. A final sample of 469 participants (54% women, age:  $M = 41.63$  years,  $SD = 14.39$ ) remained after removal of 31 participants who indicated that they could not recall a purchase that fit the description of either a material or an experiential purchase. Higher-class participants ( $M = 6.77$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) ranked themselves higher on the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status than lower-class participants ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 2.42$ ),  $t(335.89) = 12.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , which confirmed the effectiveness of our selection criteria for social class.



**Fig. 2.** Results from Study 2: mean happiness from experiential and material purchases as a function of participants' social class. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

## Results

**Social class predicts purchase happiness.** As hypothesized, a regression model predicting purchase happiness from purchase type (material = 0, experiential = 1), social class (lower class = 0, higher class = 1), and their interaction revealed only the predicted interaction effect,  $b = 0.38$ ,  $t(465) = 2.01$ ,  $p = .045$  (see Fig. 2). Simple-slopes analyses revealed a marginally significant experiential advantage among higher-class participants (material:  $M = 6.16$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ; experiential:  $M = 6.38$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ),  $b = 0.22$ ,  $t(465) = 1.76$ ,  $p = .079$ , and similar levels of happiness from experiential and material purchases among lower-class participants (material:  $M = 6.47$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ; experiential:  $M = 6.31$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $b = -0.16$ ,  $t(465) = -1.13$ ,  $p = .26$ .

**Additional analyses.** In exploratory analyses, we tested separate regression models in which purchase type, social class, and their interaction were entered as predictors of materialism, experiential buying tendency, subjective happiness, and log-transformed values for purchase price, respectively. Relative to higher-class participants, lower-class participants reported higher levels of materialism (lower class:  $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ; higher class:  $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $b = -0.58$ ,  $t(465) = -3.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ; lower levels of experiential buying tendency (lower class:  $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ; higher class:  $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ),  $b = 0.46$ ,  $t(465) = 3.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and lower levels of subjective happiness (lower class:  $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ; higher class:  $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ),  $b = 0.36$ ,  $t(465) = 2.42$ ,  $p = .016$ . They also recalled less expensive purchases (lower class:  $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ; higher class:  $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ),  $b = 0.21$ ,  $t(465) = 3.15$ ,  $p < .002$ . No other significant effects emerged.

These and additional exploratory analyses are discussed in the Supplemental Material.

## Discussion

In the between-participants design in Study 2, in which participants reported happiness from either a material or an experiential purchase, the experiential advantage again depended on social class. A significant interaction between social class and purchase type emerged, indicating that higher-class participants showed a marginally significant experiential advantage, whereas lower-class participants showed similar levels of happiness from experiential and material purchases. Exploratory analyses further revealed that lower-class participants reported stronger beliefs that material purchases bring happiness than did higher-class participants, and higher-class participants reported greater proclivity to purchase experiences to gain happiness than did lower-class participants.

Despite the significant interaction, the simple slopes did not attain conventional significance levels in Study 2. Although social class moderated the experiential advantage in both Study 1 and Study 2, weaker simple effects emerged in the between-participants design in Study 2.<sup>2</sup> The within-participants design in Study 1 may have provided greater control over random error; the same participants rated both purchases. Additionally, the prior design created a uniform comparison across purchase types that apparently highlighted the advantages of experiential purchases for higher-class participants and the advantages of material ones for lower-class participants. Thus, comparative differences between purchases may be heightened when people directly

evaluate the features of experiences against material goods in within-participants designs.

### Study 3: Experimental Manipulation of Resource Availability

In Study 3, we tested the causal effect of social class as a moderator of the experiential advantage and manipulated the critical mind-sets associated with high or low availability of current resources. We adapted a prior manipulation in which participants were temporarily placed into a context of resource abundance associated with higher-class individuals or resource deprivation associated with lower-class individuals (S. M. Tully, personal communication, September 13, 2014). We anticipated that the experiential advantage would be moderated by the resource-availability manipulation, such that participants primed with resource deprivation would show lower levels of experiential advantage than those primed with resource abundance.

### Method

A total of 402 adult U.S. residents participated on Amazon Mechanical Turk (59% women, age:  $M = 37.74$  years,  $SD = 12.13$ ). The target sample size of 400 was determined a priori on the basis of the power analysis reported in Study 2. After reading the definition of the purchase types (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), participants recalled a discretionary purchase of each type. The order of the experiential and material prompts was randomized. For the second listed purchase, participants were asked to recall one “similar in price” to the initial one.

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the two resource-availability conditions. Participants imagined that their monthly income had either increased by 50% (resource-abundance condition) or decreased by 50% (resource-deprivation condition). Participants wrote for 3 min about how they would budget with their new monthly income. Attention to the manipulation was assessed with the prompt, “I just imagined that my income [*increased by 50% or decreased by 50%*].” As a manipulation check, we asked participants to rate how they would feel in the hypothetical situation they had been asked to imagine (1 = *very financially constrained*, 9 = *very financially comfortable*) and to indicate where they would place themselves on the MacArthur Scale considering their newly increased or decreased monthly income (10 = *very top*, 1 = *very bottom*). The manipulation checks were standardized and combined,  $r(400) = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Participants then imagined that 6 months had passed after they started living with the adjusted income. As in Study 1, comparative purchase happiness was assessed. To standardize the time frame, we varied

(between participants) whether participants reported comparative purchase happiness when thinking of the purchases they had recalled earlier in the study or when envisioning new purchases (similar to the ones they recalled) they might make now. The responses were coded on a 7-point bipolar rating scale with  $-3$  (*definitely the material purchase*) and  $3$  (*definitely the experiential purchase*) at each end of the scale and *about the same* in the middle. The order of anchors was randomly counterbalanced between participants.

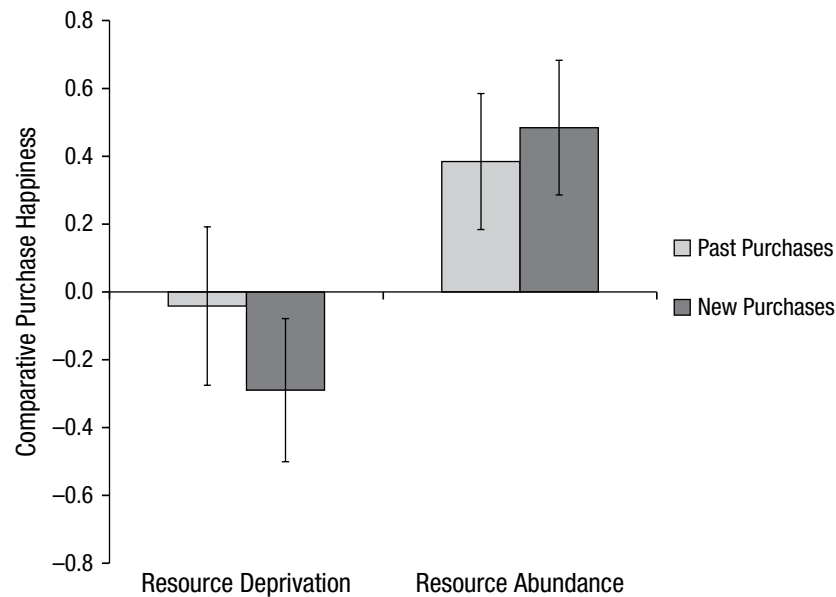
Finally, participants reported demographic attributes: race/ethnicity (approximately 80% White, 6% Black, 5% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 1% Native American, 1% Pacific Islander, and 2% other), annual household income, and personal educational attainment. As a manipulation check, participants indicated the extent to which their recalled purchases fit experiential and material definitions (1 = *Yes, both purchases fit the definitions provided*; 2 = *No, at least one purchase was wrong*), compared the purchases on price (using a 3-point scale: *the material purchase was less expensive, they were similar in price, or the experiential purchase was less expensive*; adapted from Tully et al., 2015, Study 1), and provided a price (in dollars) for each.

The final sample of 384 participants (58% women, age:  $M = 37.55$  years,  $SD = 11.99$ ) excluded 4 who failed to correctly identify the income increase or decrease manipulation and 14 who indicated that one or both of their purchases did not correctly fit the definition. As anticipated, participants in the resource-abundance condition perceived greater resources ( $M = 1.56$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) than those in the resource-deprivation condition ( $M = -1.54$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ),  $t(382) = 31.62$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Results

**Resource-availability effects on comparative purchase happiness.** As hypothesized, a 2 (resource availability: abundance vs. deprivation)  $\times$  2 (time frame: past purchase vs. future purchase) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on comparative purchase happiness yielded only a main effect of resource availability,  $F(1, 380) = 7.85$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$  (see Fig. 3). An experiential advantage emerged in the resource-abundance condition ( $M = 0.43$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ), in which there was a mean comparative purchase happiness significantly different from 0 (the scale midpoint of equivalent happiness between the two purchases),  $t(190) = 2.99$ ,  $p = .003$ . In the resource-deprivation condition, the mean comparative purchase happiness was in the opposite direction ( $M = -0.19$ ,  $SD = 2.27$ ), indicative of a material advantage; however, it did not differ significantly from 0,  $t(192) = -1.14$ ,  $p = .25$ .

Comparative purchase happiness did not vary with participants' age, race, income, education, or gender, and these variables did not interact with resource availability



**Fig. 3.** Results from Study 3: mean comparative purchase happiness as a function of resource-availability condition and whether participants were asked to think about past purchases or new purchases. Positive numbers on the y-axis indicate experiential advantage, and negative numbers indicate material advantage. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

in predicting comparative purchase happiness,  $ps > .25$ . Also, order of purchase recall (material first or experiential first) and order of the anchors for the comparative purchase happiness response scale had no effects in predicting comparative purchase happiness, all  $ps > .23$  (see the Supplemental Material).

**Additional analyses.** As would be expected given that participants recalled their experiential and material purchases before the resource-availability manipulation, the two conditions did not differ in the kinds of purchases recalled (see the Supplemental Material). Furthermore, separate 2 (resource availability)  $\times$  2 (time frame) ANOVAs on log-transformed price values for the experiential and material purchases revealed no significant differences across conditions. Including these log-transformed price variables as covariates in the key 2  $\times$  2 ANOVA on comparative purchase happiness did not alter the main effect of resource-availability condition,  $F(1, 374) = 8.74$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ .

## Discussion

In Study 3, we used an experimental manipulation to test whether imagining an increase or a decrease in personal financial resources was sufficient to sway participants' happiness from their experiential and material purchases. Participants primed with resource abundance reported an experiential advantage, whereas

participants primed with resource deprivation reported similar levels of happiness from experiential and material purchases. These results demonstrate the causal role of resource availability in guiding purchase happiness and are particularly compelling given that the manipulation of resource availability was completed after participants recalled their initial purchases. Because comparable happiness effects remained when participants rated purchases they would make in the future, specific features (e.g., purchase category, price) of recalled purchases were not responsible for differential purchase happiness.

## General Discussion

People want to become happier, and there are clear benefits of understanding how best to allocate one's resources to optimize happiness. According to our findings, such understanding depends on social class—the landscape of resources already available to people making the purchase. Across studies, we found that higher-class participants with abundant resources were made happier from purchasing experiences than material goods. However, lower-class participants with limited resources did not benefit more from experiential purchases. They were happier from material purchases in Study 1, which involved a direct comparison between purchase types. In the remaining studies, they were equally happy from both purchases.



We argue that social class influences purchase happiness because resource abundance focuses people on internal states and goals, such as self-development, self-expression, and the pursuit of uniqueness (Kraus et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2012; Stephens et al., 2007), whereas resource deprivation orients people toward resource management and spending money wisely (Fernbach et al., 2015; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). These fundamentally different value orientations translate into different purchase motives held by people from higher and lower classes (Lee, Priester, Hall, & Wood, 2018).

Emerging research on the psychology of social class illustrates the limitations of focusing on higher-class individuals and neglecting the perspective of lower-class individuals, who make up a significant portion of the U.S. population (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). Thus, the popular recommendation for experiential purchases might lead lower-class individuals away from the happiness they could achieve from material goods. There appears to be no single answer to the question of whether to spend on experiential or material purchases for the most happiness. Although our society tends to praise the pursuit of experiences (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and criticize the pursuit of material goods (Van Boven et al., 2010), the pursuit of material goods should not be overlooked as a route to happiness for those who currently possess very little.

### Action Editor

Marc J. Buehner served as action editor for this article.

### Author Contributions

All authors developed the study concept and design. J. C. Lee collected all data, J. C. Lee and D. L. Hall analyzed the data, and all authors interpreted the results. All authors contributed to the collection and estimation of the effect sizes of the meta-analytic data.

### Acknowledgments

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### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared that there were no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship or the publication of this article.

### Supplemental Material

Additional supporting information can be found at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0956797617736386>

### Open Practices



All data and materials have been made publicly available via the Open Science Framework and can be accessed at <https://osf.io/uyadw/>. The design and analysis plans for Study 2 were preregistered at <https://osf.io/r5bme/register/5730e99a9ad5a102c5745a8a/>. The complete Open Practices Disclosure for this article can be found at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0956797617736386>. This article has received badges for Open Data, Open Materials, and Preregistration. More information about the Open Practices badges can be found at <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/publications/badges>.

### Notes

1. Tuition costs were based on study year (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>) and then converted into 2012 dollars (the last year of an included study) using the Consumer Price Index.
2. In an earlier version of a between-participants study, reported in the Supplemental Material, we found similarly small social class effects with the MacArthur Scale but found nonsignificant effects with other indicators of social class.

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