

# money and consumption

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## outline

ps comments

money and consumption obsession

one thing to read about it; another to experience it

the bottomline: consumerism— > wage slavery/labor  
commodification (the more you consume, the more (wage)  
slave you are)

Lexus=happiness?

i wish i hadnt worked so hard

some literature

bonus: bad capitalism

first flip the class and work on papers, discuss my comments;  
QandA

## make it look like a published paper

- again to get an A, it's gotta be a publishable paper
- make it look like one!
- everything, amount of lit, etc, structure, feel, etc
- see the journals like johs, sir, ariq
- yes i may be obsessed with data and stata, but paper does need theory and lit
- we're at the stage it needs to start looking nice, publication quality
- also dont forget abstract and keywords

## describe data in detail

- at very minimum like a para
- what kind of sampling (eg random)
  - representative of what? ctry, muni, etc?
- what data collection (eg face-to-face)
  - do make sure whether you need sampling weights!; eg fine with gss, wvs; but need for brfss
- what non-response rate

## control vars must be motivated by lit!

- dont just run a bunch of regressions with random stuff!
- do read about what predicts your DV, cite it!!! and control for it!

## do have meaningful des sta

- again never ever do inferential stats like regressions without des sta
- not only mindless summarize: mean, std, min, max
- always have a bunch of hist of all key vars
- do tabs and crosstabs! eg counts of drug use; and counts of 2 drug uses (crosstabs)

## practical or substantive sig

- not only look at stat sig but also at practical or substantive significance and interpret it
- eg Ebschay's 1pt on 1-10 swb scale is like 3 steps on health (.3) say from very poor to fair; also across countries one of the largest effects
- can also use beta (fully standardized) coefs



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## **we have so much stuff—and we dont realize it!!!**

- again everyone except bottom decile (min wage or ~20k hh inc) has better qol than everyone except top decile 100 years ago (Bok, 2010)
- in 1890 most would live on 1\$ adj for inflation (J Peterson youtube)
- perhaps the most incomprehensible thing today: materialism/conspicuous consumption
- arguably in couple decades or couple centuries humans would wonder what are we doing now with suburbs, mc mansions, SUVs, etc: all human energy geared towards stuff and never enough, never satiated

## so much stuff and yet so unhappy

- true as per Pinker (eg “Enlightenment Now”) and Peterson (youtube): we never had so much
- 
- at the same time: opioid epidemic, loneliness, anxiety, and mental health, eg [\(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010\)](#)

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## **ditch consumption!—many did it**

- maybe most famously Henry David Thoreau; excellent and relevant “Walden” ([Thoreau, 1995 \[1854\]](#))
- a more modern example is [Tesson \(2013\)](#)
- I kind of did it too: lived in Cali Colombia in a regular/local housing—rent was less than \$100/mo; i mostly lived on <20/day
- and was one of the happiest, if not the happiest, time in my life
  - social relationships
  - nature
  -
- you don't really need much of the stuff you think you need: pov standard changes, too; eg hot water wasn't

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## the capitalist gets you twice; first:

- you're wage slave, not as bad as actual slave, but still a slave, you're not free (Chomsky, 1997, Stefan, 2010)
- you have to sell yourself on the market, you're commodity (labor commodification)
- you have to find work, and go there, and do as told mon-fri 8-5
- or else: you're homeless
- 
- elaboration: "the market becomes to the worker a prison within which it is imperative to behave as a commodity in order to survive" (p. 36)"  
(Esping-Andersen, 1990); also: Easterlin (2009), Lane (2000), Scruggs and Allan (2006)

## but then, second, and overlooked:

- (again, you're wage slave to get the dollars from the capitalist) but then instead of investing it and becoming a capitalist yourself (or at least spending as little as possible so you're off the hook as much as possible)
- you give it back to the capitalist (buy stuff you don't need)
- so that you must continue to be a wage slave
- and the cycle continues, you never become free
- the more you consume, the more (wage) slave you are
- 
- elaboration: see readings in sec "some literature"; and on syllabus under today; eg my <https://theaok.github.io/junk/gssLonnieRubia-lg-nov11.pdf>



## woke capitalism (Ramaswamy, 2021)

- capitalism adapts, it became woke
- corporations supporting it, eg Amazon's public endorsement of BLM
- so what?
  - it gets more palpable to the masses
  - looks less pernicious, even friendly
- it preaches social responsibility, sells whatever ideology sells well at the time
- still same old principle—the only responsibility of a company is profit (Friedman, 1970), nothing else
- it must be this way—this is how the system works

## to be fair

- of course capitalism has multiple benefits!
  - (and people run to it, eg Venezuela to Colombia)
- notably the very best system we know to produce stuff
- and we arguably needed it to rebuild after the WW2
- but now we don't really need much more stuff ([Klein, 2014](#), [Leonard, 2010](#))
- indeed, we may actually need less, ie degrow! ([Kallis, 2011](#), [Kallis et al., 2012](#))
  -
- if you're interested in Marxist perspective read David Harvey, arguably leader of the field today, eg ([Harvey, 2016, 2014, 2012, 2011, 1999, 1985](#))

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## the obsession

- Okulicz-Kozaryn and Tursi (2015)
- perhaps East Europeans are miserable because they are obsessed about luxuries
- cars are a perfect example
- in Poland and Ukraine a black shiny BMW is the best thing in the world, greatest happiness, but is it?

## car has changed our lives

- much truth in popular wisdom:  
"car has changed our lives"
- especially in America, cannot imagine our life without a car
- car is typically the second biggest purchase we make (after the house)
- in poor neighbourhoods too—houses may be falling apart, no money for proper nutrition, but there's plenty shiny Cadilacs and SUVs

fancy car, fake people, fake happiness



marketing babble to make you feel special



**STYLE VS. STYLISH.  
PASSION WINS.**

## conspicuous/wasteful consumption

- arguably, much of car consumption is conspicuous or wasteful
  - (Veblen, 2005a,b)
- yes, some are useful eg:
  - Toyota Corolla, Prius, Honda Civic
- yet many are wasteful, eg:
  - Lexus, BMW, Chrysler, Land Rover
  - you buy them to show you are better than other people
  - as the above ads indicate



## public v private transportation

- let's take a public policy perspective
- cars are substitutes for public transportation
  - the more cars, the less (worse) public transportation
  - eg given limited public money can either build hwy or rail
- the US infrastructure is made for cars
  - and the US has terrible public transportation

## theory/hypotheses

- car may increase happiness (livability theory)
  - unlikely that Lexus increases livability more than Corolla
  - or in Europe, compare cheap VW with pricey BMW
- car may have no effect or decrease happiness
  - given limited resources, if we buy a car, we do not buy something else
  - and given that much of car consumption is a waste, we end up less happy

## theory/hypotheses

- per hedonic treadmill theory, we get used to pecuniary goods
- at macro scale, according to MDT, we do not become any happier; also see ([Frank, 2012, 2005](#))
- hence, one frugal car per household helps; more is a waste resulting in no happiness

# data

- psid, but just one year

# OLS of happiness

	b1	b2	b3	b4
own car				
1 car	-0.03	-0.05	-0.09*	-0.13***
2 cars	0.26***	0.20***	0.10*	-0.05
3 cars	0.30***	0.22***	0.10*	-0.02
4 or more cars	0.22***	0.12*	-0.01	-0.15*
total family income		0.00***	0.00***	0.00***
rent a dwelling			-0.18***	-0.07**
other than own/rent			-0.29***	-0.19***
num of child in hh				0.04***
health				0.20***
male				-0.06*
married				0.28***
age				-0.03***
age2				0.00***
state dummies	no	no	no	yes
constant	7.70***	7.68***	7.85***	7.50***

# OLS of happiness

	c1	c2	c3	c4
car \$ 0-5k	-0.03	-0.03	-0.06	-0.05
car \$ 5-15k	0.11*	0.09+	0.02	-0.05
car \$ 15-23k	0.23***	0.19***	0.09+	-0.00
car \$ 23-35k	0.33***	0.27***	0.15**	0.03
car \$ > 35k	0.36***	0.24**	0.11	-0.05
total family income		0.00***	0.00***	0.00**
rent a dwelling			-0.19***	-0.04
other than own/rent a dwelling			-0.27***	-0.13+
number of children in household				0.04**
health				0.20***
male				-0.07
married				0.29***
age				-0.03***
age2				0.00***
year in which acquired first car				
state dummies	no	no	no	yes

but may be reverse causality

- rev causality being upset first go shopping second

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# Kondo 16 The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up

- a recent popular practical guide
- it advises how to declutter and get rid of most stuff
- Kondo and Scott (2016)

# Veenhoven 21 Happiness and Consumption: A

## Research Synthesis Using an Online Finding Archive

- strikingly we don't know much swb and consumption
- this gives some overview of the studies
- an attempt to cover much of it
- but can't cover all the studies these days, just too much out there
- [Veenhoven et al. \(2021\)](#)

# Leonard 10, 'The story of stuff: How our obsession with stuff is trashing the planet, our communities, and our health-and a vision for change

- one of my fav!
- an ex-greenpeace activist in lively language demonstrates how bad is consumerism
- and see her website, and there's good info for kids
- and bunch of youtube vids
- [Leonard \(2010\)](#)

# Joye 20, A diminishment of desire: Exposure to nature relative to urban environments dampens materialism

- a useful fascinating recent psy study
- exposure to nature decreases materialism
- Joye et al. (2020)

# Schwartz 04 The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less

- a fascinating little book arguing counter-intuitive point
- usually, as opposed to what we think, the more choice does not help
- Schwartz (2004)

# Scitovsky 76 The joyless economy: An inquiry into human satisfaction and consumer dissatisfaction

- an old but timely classic
- rare to find economist (Bob Frank is another one) that acknowledges that consumption does not lead to happiness
- Scitovsky (1976)

# Csikszentmihalyi 00 The costs and benefits of consuming

- Csikszentmihalyi is definitely one of the top 10 happiness scholars
- maybe the most incisive one
- read all he wrote
- [Csikszentmihalyi \(2000\)](#)



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## bad capitalism (more on capital later)

- “Greed, envy, sloth, pride and gluttony: these are not vices anymore. No, these are marketing tools. Lust is our way of life. Envy is just a nudge towards another sale. Even in our relationships we consume each other, each of us looking for what we can get out of the other. Our appetites are often satisfied at the expense of those around us. In a dog-eat-dog world we lose part of our humanity.” Jon Foreman
- “If you’re not a leftist or socialist before you’re 25, you have no heart; if you are one after 25 you have no head”  
(Apocryphal)

## welfare/redistribution

- No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, clothe, and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, clothed, and lodged.

Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, Bk. 1, Ch. 8.

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