

The Effect of Self-consciousness and Materialism on Compulsive Buying and Conspicuous Consumption of American Female College Students

자의식과 물질주의가 미국 여대생의 충동구매와 과시소비성향에 미치는 영향에 관한 연구

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초록

본 연구의 목적은 미국 여대생의 자의식, 물질주의성향, 충동구매와 과시적 소비성향 간의 관계에 관하여 조사하는데 있다. 상징적 자기완성이론을 이론적 근거로 하여 가설을 설계하였으며, 설문지 조사법을 이용하여 자료를 수집하였다. 편의표본추출법을 적용하여 미국 중서부지역의 한 대학교의 여대생 315명을 연구대상으로 설문조사를 하였으며, 최종적으로 296명의 응답을 연구결과분석에 이용하였다. Stepwise 회귀분석을 통한 분석 결과 공적 자의식은 물질주의성향과 충동구매성향 및 과시소비성향에 정적 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났으며, 사적 자의식은 과시소비성향에 부적 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 또한, 단순회귀분석을 통한 분석 결과 물질주의성향과 충동구매성향 및 과시적 소비성향 간에 정적인 관계가 있는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구는 자의식, 물질주의성향, 충동구매와 과시소비성향 간의 관계 메커니즘을 증명해 보임으로써, 사회 심리학적 소비자 행동연구에 이론적 틀을 제시하였다. 또한, 본 연구결과는 미국 여대생을 표적 시장으로 하는 기업이 표적소비자의 소비행동과 심리를 이해하는데 중요한 자료로 이용될 것으로 기대된다.

주제어: 자의식, 물질주의성향, 충동구매, 과시소비성향

I. Introduction

In capitalistic and industrialized countries (e.g., the United States), materialism has been a pervasive value. If materialism is common in a society, people are likely to develop external and materialistic desires and goals (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Materialists view acquisition of material goods as central to their life goals, an indicator of success and a key to happiness (Richins & Dawson, 1992). When people consider materialistic values, they seem to pay attention to financial success and social recognition (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Materialism is related to individuals' desires, use of money, motivation to work, and social behaviors (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Materialism plays a critical role in making purchasing decisions and behaviors (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004).

Material goods are not only consumed for practical reasons to make life more convenient and easier (e.g., cars as a means of transport), but also used to present social standing and socio-economic status as signs of social identity (e.g., a luxury house and clothing as symbols of social status) (Dittmar, 2004). While materialistic values have permeated daily life, the motivation to shop and spend has changed from physical and functional needs to expression of self-identity and life activity (Dittmar, 1996).

A demand for luxury brands and conspicuous consumption are likely to be stimulated by materialism. Materialistic values predispose people toward a strong commitment to identity construction through material goods and toward conspicuous consumption of luxury brands which are used for a display of wealth, power, and status (Dittmar, 2004; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Vigneron and Johnson (1999) point out the increase in demand for

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conspicuous and status brands. According to a Goldman Sachs survey of 89 international jewelry and accessory retailers, expensive luxury brands are expected to continuously generate high retail gains, but low-priced brands are expected to decline (Women's Wear Daily, 2007). With the increase in desire for conspicuous and status brands, luxury brand markets have been cultivated in the United States. Another survey of 39 apparel and accessories companies reported that in 2006 upscale fashion companies increased their number of stores with an increase of 12% over 2005 levels (Retail News, 2007).

In a materialistic society, another trend may be an increase in excessive spending and compulsive shopping. High expectations about material goods may lead people to engage in addictive and compulsive buying. If people strongly value material success and wealth, they tend to have more anxiety and depression, to purchase inordinate amounts of goods, and to show compulsive consumptions (Graham, 1999; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Compulsive buying may consist of a segment of purchasing behavior and an increase in normal consumer behavior. It has been reported that compulsive buyers are estimated to constitute from 2 % to 8 % of the general adult population in the United States (Black, 2001). Studies on compulsive buyers have found that the majority of compulsive buyers are young women (Black, 2001; d'Astous, 1990; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). According to Roberts and Jones (2001), 9% of college students were reported as compulsive buyers. It has been noted that since college students are less knowledgeable about personal finance, they tend to show irrational credit card use and excessive and compulsive spending behaviors (Roberts, 1998; Roberts & Jones, 2001).

Although the problematic consumption behaviors of female college students have been observed, research on this population's conspicuous consumption and compulsive buying behaviors has been limited. Moreover, research on examining what individual factors (e.g., self-consciousness) and/or environmental factors (e.g., materialistic value) play a critical role in facilitating compulsive buying behaviors and conspicuous consumption is needed. Thus, the purposes of the present study are (1) to examine the effect of individual differences in self-consciousness on materialism, compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption, (2) to investigate the impact of materialism on compulsive buying and conspicuous

consumption, and (3) to examine the relationship between compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption. The present study provides theoretical implications by showing the mechanism how compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption are stimulated in materialistic environments. Based on understanding conspicuous consumption and compulsive buying behaviors of female college students, the study also provides managerial implications.

II. Literature Review

1. Symbolic Self-Completion Theory

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Wicklund and Gollwitzer's symbolic self-completion theory (1981). The starting point of the theory is "a commitment to a self-definition, and once people fall short on a symbolic dimension they move toward substituting an alternative symbol of completeness for the lacking one" (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, p.112). People have a goal of defining themselves and are unwilling to lack self-definition and tend to try to achieve and maintain a complete identity and ideal characteristics. Within the context of self-completion, if people perceive shortcomings in their self-concept, they will engage in self-symbolizing actions (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981).

Dittmar and Drury (2000) point out that people tend to think that consumer goods function as important material symbols of personal and social identity. When they feel insufficiently self-complete and identify differences between their actual and ideal selves, people can become involved in using material symbols and in excessive and compulsive buying (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Dittmar & Drury, 2000). People may consider materialistic possessions as giving them a sense of security when they face self-doubts. The investment in materialistic possessions may be one attempt to overcome uncertainties about their capability and self-concept (Braun & Wicklund, 1989).

2. Materialism

Materialism is defined as "an orientation which views

material goods and money as important for personal happiness and social progress" (Ward & Wackman, 1971, p.422), or as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Belk, 1984, p. 291). According to Belk (1984), materialism can be described as the personal traits of possessiveness, nongenerosity, and envy. Possessiveness is characterized by personal concern about control or ownership of one's possessions. Nongenerosity is described as an unwillingness to share one's possessions with others. Envy is defined as the desire for, and resentment of other's possessions.

Richins and Dawson (1992) divide materialism into three domains: The acquisition centrality, the role of acquisition in happiness, and the role of possessions in defining success. Acquisition centrality explains that materialism is a lifestyle. Materialists tend to emphasize that material possessions, acquisition and wealth are at the center of their lives (Richins & Dawson, 1992; Sirgy, 1998). Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness is described as the orientation emphasizing possessions as a source of satisfaction and well-being in life. Materialists tend to think that possessions are used by individuals to achieve an individual's happiness and self-satisfaction (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Possession-defined success is described as the judgment of success based on one's possession of material goods (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialists tend to evaluate personal qualities of others according to the amount and quality of possessions (Dittmar & Pepper, 1994) and to value possessions as an evidence of success and status (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

3. Compulsive Buying

Compulsive buying is characterized by excessive spending and inappropriate shopping (Black, 2001). According to O'Guinn and Faber (1989), compulsive buying is defined as "chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative events or feelings" (p155). According to research comparing compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers, compulsive buyers are more likely to be women and tend to be younger than non-compulsive buyers (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Compulsive buyers tend to have lower self-esteem (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989) and to be more influenced by

peers (d'Astous, Maltais, & Roberge, 1990). Compulsive buyers are more likely than non-compulsive buyers to enjoy shopping (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), engage in the consumption associated with social status (d'Astous & Tremblay, 1988), have favorable attitude toward image-oriented advertising (d'Astous & Bellemare, 1989), and be motivated to improve their social image (d'Astous, Maltais, & Roberge, 1990).

4. Conspicuous Consumption

Conspicuous consumption can be defined as "people's desire to provide prominent visible evidence of their ability to afford to luxury goods" (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001, p.348). The economic theory of leisure class explained that conspicuous consumption is used to display wealth, power, and status (Veblen, 1998). Packard (1961) applied the Veblen's idea of conspicuous consumption to modern society and suggested that people purchase products to show a high level of status to themselves and others.

According to Bearden and Etzel (1982), luxury products which are publicly consumed are more likely to be conspicuous than those which are privately consumed. Solomon (1983) stated that people value clothing as a symbol reflecting status. Clothing with well-known or luxury brand names may be perceived as a symbol of wealth and status (Prendergast & Wong, 2003). The conspicuous consumption associated with luxury or prestige brands may be used for a display of wealth, power, and/or status, and well-known and visible brands are likely to dominate the conspicuous segment of the consumers (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Mason (1981) indicated that people have a desire to impress others and display the ability to pay particularly high prices for a prestigious product. The perceived price of a product tends to influence the judgment of its quality. People who consider expensive products as having high quality are likely to perceive high price as having high prestige (Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993).

5. Self-consciousness

According to James (1890), self can be conceived as

having three components: material self, social self and spiritual self. The material self involves material possessions which play an important role in shaping one's identity related to one's body and clothes. The social self is concerned with one's recognition and attention in relation to others. The spiritual self is composed of a person's inner or subjective being.

Like James others have considered self as having various aspects. Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss (1975) studied self-consciousness as an approach to self-concept. Self-consciousness is defined as the "consistent tendency of persons to direct attention inward or outward" (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975, p. 522) and is considered as having three dimensions: public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety. Public self-consciousness is related to "a general awareness of the self as a social object" from others' perspective. Private self-consciousness is related to "attending to one's inner thoughts and feelings." "Social anxiety is defined as a discomfort in the presence of others" (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975, p. 523).

III. Development of Hypotheses

1. Self-consciousness and Materialism

Research on public self-consciousness reported that those who have high public self-consciousness tend to consider physical appearance and fashion for their effect on their public image (Miller & Cox, 1982; Ryckman, Robbins, Thornton, Kaczor, Gayton, & Anderson, 1991). Publicly self-conscious people tend to be sensitive to their social images and identity, to be anxious about negative evaluation from others (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), and to strive to impress others and use strategic self-presentation (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). Thus, a strong relationship between public self-consciousness and materialism can be expected.

Chatterjee, Hunt, and Kernan (2000) explained that inner-directed people tend to be concerned with internal and personal accomplishments, while other-directed people tend to be influenced by social approval and the opinions of external references. Inner-directedness can be

related to the private self and other-directedness can be related to the public self. Chatterjee, Hunt, and Kernan (2000) found positive relationships between materialism and other-directedness and suggested that materialists may use goods to express themselves socially and reflect their success. Schroeder and Dugal (1995) found that public self-consciousness and social anxiety were positively related to materialism. Wong (1997) also found a relationship between self-consciousness and subscales of materialism. In Wong's study, the public self was positively related to success, happiness and centrality and social anxiety was positively associated with envy and nongenerosity.

Based on the previous arguments, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H1. There will be relationships between self-consciousness and materialism.

H1-1. Public self-consciousness will be positively related to materialism.

H1-2. Private self-consciousness will be negatively related to materialism.

H1-3. Social anxiety will be positively related to materialism.

2. Self-consciousness, Compulsive Buying and Conspicuous Consumption

Research on self-concept and self-image has reported a relationship between self-concept and consumer purchase of goods. Consuming and possessing goods may play an important role in expressing and achieving social identity (Dittmar, 1996), presenting social status (McCracken, 1990), and enhancing self-image (Dittmar, 2001). Moreover, people who are concerned about possessions as a means of enhancement of self image and as symbols of personal and social identity are likely to be involved in impulsive buying and compulsive buying (Dittmar, 2001) and conspicuous consumption.

Doherty and Schlenker (1991) found that those who are high in public self-consciousness tend to be more concerned about impressions received by others, to be more fashion-conscious, and to use clothing and makeup more in order to affect their public image. The importance

of public image and self-presentation may be associated with compulsive buying. Excessive shoppers and compulsive shoppers tend to purchase more fashionable clothes, make-up, and jewelry than others to enhance their self-image and appearance (Black, 2001; Dittmar, 2001; Lee, Lennon, & Rudd, 2000).

Gould and Barak (2001) found a positive relationship between public self-consciousness and conspicuous consumption. Bushman (1993) emphasized that people who are publicly self-conscious may be more concerned about the brand names of clothing or accessories and they may be motivated to try to make a good impression. Therefore, it can be postulated that public self-consciousness involving in the reactions of others to the self may be positively associated with compulsive buying or conspicuous consumption and that private self-consciousness focusing on inner thoughts and feelings may be negatively associated with compulsive buying or conspicuous consumption.

Among Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss's (1975) three dimensions of self-consciousness (i.e., public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety), research on compulsive buying has focused on anxiety. Compulsive buyers tend to have more stress with higher anxiety than non-compulsive buyers (DeSarbo & Edwards, 1996; Valence, d'Astous & Fortier, 1988). Addictive or compulsive buying can be motivated by a desire to escape from anxiety (DeSarbo & Edwards, 1996; Peel, 1985). Compulsive buyers are more likely to show irrational shopping and spending behaviors in order to reduce their stress associated with social anxiety. If the activity of shopping and spending contributes to relieving compulsive buyers' anxiety when they are in stressful situations, the activity can be repeatedly and addictively used by compulsive buyers (DeSarbo & Edwards, 1996).

H2. There will be a relationship between self-consciousness and compulsive buying tendencies.

H2-1. Public self-consciousness will be positively related to compulsive buying tendencies.

H2-2. Private self-consciousness will be negatively related to compulsive buying tendencies.

H2-3. Social anxiety will be positively related to

compulsive buying tendencies.

H3. There will be a relationship between self-consciousness and conspicuous consumption.

H3-1. Public self-consciousness will be positively related to conspicuous consumption.

H3-2. Private self-consciousness will be negatively related to conspicuous consumption.

H3-3. Social anxiety will be positively related to conspicuous consumption.

3. Materialism, Compulsive Buying and Conspicuous Consumption

The connection between materialism and consumption behaviors has been studied. Materialism has been related to conspicuous consumption and status consumption regarding the symbolic meanings of possessions. Materialists tend to place importance on possessions, which may play an important role in symbolizing their success and the status of their life (Fournier & Richins, 1991). Materialists tend to be concerned with purchasing goods that are socially visible and convey social status, and they are likely to purchase excessive number of these goods (Fournier & Richins, 1991; Graham, 1999; Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004).

Conspicuous consumption as well as compulsive buying can be associated with materialism. Graham (1999) explained that possession-defined success was associated with conspicuous consumption and an increased level of consumption. Materialists not only consider prestigious brand names (Fournier & Richins, 1991), but also are driven to purchase excessively or compulsively because they attempt to reduce the discrepancy between the self and an ideal standard of comparison (Graham, 1999). People who engage in conspicuous consumption and excessive consumption are likely to purchase goods as a symbol of status to compensate for their perceptions of their shortcomings and inferiority (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Dittmar, 2001).

Research also has suggested a relationship between compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption. Compulsive buyers are more likely to buy appearance-related and socially visible products.

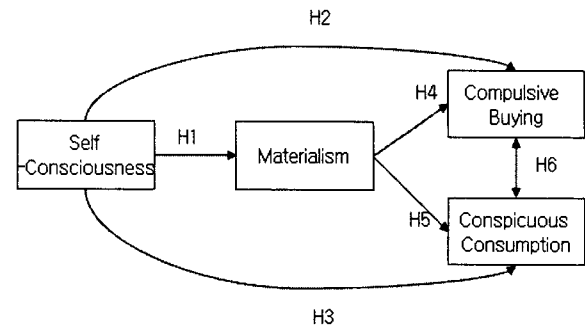
According to Black (2001), female compulsive buyers commonly purchased clothes, shoes, jewelry or make-up. In Lee, Lennon, and Rudd's research (2000) on compulsive buying tendencies in television shopping, compulsive shoppers are more likely to buy clothing, jewelry, cosmetic and exercise equipment in television shopping. Miltenberger et al. (2003) found that the majority of compulsive buyers purchased clothes and also products related to house or vehicle, jewelry and cosmetics. Compulsive buying tends to be associated with buying with social status (Roberts & Martinez, 1997). Compulsive buyers are motivated to match their perception of socially desirable appearances (Elliot, 1994) and to continuously increase their conspicuous signals of wealth and power (Bell, 1998).

- H4. Materialism will be positively related to compulsive buying tendencies.
- H5. Materialism will be positively related to conspicuous consumption.
- H6. Compulsive buying tendencies will be positively related to conspicuous consumption.

IV. Method

1. Instrument

The instrument used for this study consisted of a self-administered questionnaire containing measures of self-consciousness, materialism, compulsive buying, and conspicuous consumption, and demographic items. To measure participants' materialism, Richins and Dawson's (1992) eighteen-item materialism scale was used. Items used a seven-point Likert format anchored by 'strongly agree' (7) at one end and 'strongly disagree' (1) at the other end. The measure is based on three subscales: success (six items); centrality (seven items), and happiness (five items).



[Figure 1] The Conceptual Model of Self-consciousness, Materialism, Compulsive Buying Tendencies, and Conspicuous Consumption

Richins and Dawson reported high reliability. Coefficient alpha was calculated separately for the items comprising the three factors and for the eighteen items as a single scale. The reliability correlations were .82, .86, and .82 for the centrality, happiness and success subscales, respectively, and .87 for the combined scale.

Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss's Self-Consciousness Scale (1975) was used in order to measure respondents' self-consciousness. Fenigstein et al. (1975) reported high reliability. Total score, .80; public self-consciousness, .84; private self-consciousness, .79; social anxiety, .73. Twenty-three items used a seven-point Likert format with 'extremely characteristic' (7) at one end and 'extremely uncharacteristic' (1) at the other end.

To assess compulsive buying behavior, a five-point Likert-type Compulsive Buying Scale (Faber & O'Guinn, 1992) was used. Seven items were presented with 'strongly agree' (1) at one end and 'strongly disagree' (5) at the other end. According to Faber and O'Guinn, a score of -1.34 or less would place a subject two standards beyond the mean. The criterion (-1.34)¹⁾ was selected as the cutoff point for dividing respondents into compulsive and non-compulsive buyers. Faber and O'Guinn (1992) reported high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .95).

On the basis of this literature review, sixteen items were developed to address conspicuous consumption. Four

1) Q1. If I have any money left at the end of the pay period, I just have to spend it; Q2. I felt others would be horrified if they know my spending habits; Q3. I have bought things though I could not afford them; Q4. I wrote a check when I knew I did not have enough money in the bank to cover it; Q5. I bought something in order to make myself feel better; Q6. I felt anxious or nervous on days I did not go shopping; Q7. I made only the minimum payments on my credit cards.

Compulsive Buying Scoring Equation = $-9.69 + (Q1 \times .33) + (Q2 \times .34) + (Q3 \times .50) + (Q4 \times .47) + (Q5 \times .33) + (Q6 \times .38) + (Q7 \times .31)$ If score is ≤ -1.34 , subject is classified as a compulsive buyer (Faber and O'Guinn, 1992). The reversed score is used for mean and range.

items from Prendergast and Wong's Specific Motives for Luxury Brands (2003), five items from Kilsheimer's Status Consumption scale (1993) (as cited in Eastman, Fredenberger, Campbell, and Calvert, 1997) and seven items from Sproles and Kendall's Brand Consciousness Scale (1986) were used to measure conspicuous consumption. Reliability of each scale was reported: Prendergast and Wong, .74; Kilsheimer, .61; Sproles and Kendall, .75. The sixteen items used a seven-point Likert format with 'strongly agree' (7) at one end and 'strongly disagree' (1) at the other end.

The demographic items addressed age, year in school, major, ethnicity, and family and individual incomes. In addition, two questions were asked: (1) "How much do you usually spend when purchasing a casual clothing ensemble?" and (2) "How frequently do you buy clothing for yourself?" The first question was close-ended, with eleven response categories: \$ 1 - 25, \$ 26 - 50, \$ 51 - 75, \$ 76 - 100, \$ 101 - 150, \$ 151 - 200, \$ 201 - 300, \$ 301 - 400, \$ 401 - 500, \$ 501 - 1000, and More than \$ 1000. The second question was also close-ended, with seven response categories: More than once per week, once per week, 2-3 times per month, once per month, 2-3 times per month, once every 4-6 months, and once per year.

2. Sample and procedure

The research strategy of the study was survey methodology. The survey and research were reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. Female college students were sampled because compulsive buying appears to influence and be pervasive among women and to have an age of onset in the late teens and early twenties (Black, 2001). Questionnaires were distributed to a convenience sample of 315 students from a Midwestern university.

Descriptive analyses were used to address sample characteristics. To test the effect of self-consciousness on materialism (H1), compulsive buying (H2) and conspicuous consumption (H3), stepwise multiple regressions were used. In order to test the effect of materialism on compulsive buying tendencies (H4) and conspicuous consumption (H5), simple regressions were used. To test the relationship between compulsive buying

tendencies and conspicuous consumption (H6), correlation analysis was used. SPSS 14.0 was used to analyze data.

V. Results

1. Sample Characteristics

Responses from 296 respondents were used in data analysis. The average age of respondents was twenty-one years old, and the majority of the sample were Caucasian (81.1%), followed by African American (7.4%), Hispanic American (4.7%) and Asian American (4.7%). Most respondents majored in Textiles and Clothing (77.3%). The respondents consisted of juniors (32.4%), seniors (30.4%) and sophomores (27.7%). Ninety-six respondents (64.5%) earned less than \$1,000 monthly individual income, and the monthly family income of 51% of respondents was more than \$6,000. To investigate additional characteristics of respondents, compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers were classified using Faber and O'Guinn's screener (1992). Forty-four respondents (14.9%) were classified as compulsive buyers, those who had scores of -1.34 or lower. Seventy-two respondents (24.3%) spent between \$51 and \$ 75 when purchasing a casual clothing ensemble. Seventy-eight respondents (26.4%) bought clothing 2-3 times per week.

2. Reliabilities

Reliabilities of self-consciousness, materialism, compulsive buying tendencies and conspicuous consumption were calculated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Because self-consciousness was divided into three subscales (i.e., private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety), Cronbach's coefficient alpha of each was computed.

The Self-Consciousness scale was reliable ($\alpha = .80$), and three of the items were reverse-scored. Since each subscale was reliable (α Private Self-Consciousness = .70; α Public Self-Consciousness = .74; α Social Anxiety = .83), scores from each subscale were summed and averaged. The Materialism Scale was reliable ($\alpha = .88$) and the eight items

were reversed. Scores from eighteen items were summed and the sums were averaged, and the averages were used as the measurement of materialism.

The Compulsive Buying Scale was reliable ($\alpha = .72$). According to the Faber and O'Guinn's screener (1992), the item scores were weighted and summed and used as the measurement of compulsive buying tendencies. Since lower scores reflect more compulsive buying tendencies, scoring was reversed to test hypotheses. Therefore, higher scores reflected higher levels of compulsive buying tendencies. According to Faber and O'Guinn, the criterion (-1.34) was selected as the cutoff point for dividing respondents into compulsive and non-compulsive buyers.

Principal components factor analysis was performed as a data reduction technique on the sixteen conspicuous consumption items. Using a minimum value of 1.0 as a criterion and a scree plot in the principal component analysis, one factor was identified. Items were excluded if they loaded at less than .40 on a factor. Finally, 16 items were used for the Conspicuous Consumption measure. The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .92$), three of the items were reverse-scored, and sixteen items were summed and averaged.

3. Hypothesis Testing

In order to test the relationship between self-consciousness and materialism (H1), the relationship

between self-consciousness and compulsive buying (H2), and the relationship between self-consciousness and conspicuous consumption (H3), stepwise multiple regressions were used.

The first stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of self-consciousness (private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety) on materialism. The result of the analysis revealed that scores on public self-consciousness and social anxiety were significantly related to materialism but private self-consciousness was not related to materialism: $[F(2,291) = 44.14, p < .001]$. Public self-consciousness and social anxiety accounted for 23% of the variation in materialism. The standardized coefficient for public self-consciousness ($\beta = .47$) indicated that this variable was positively related to materialism. Therefore, Hypothesis 1.1 was supported. Since a positive relationship between social anxiety and materialism was expected, the standardized coefficient for social anxiety ($\beta = -.33$) indicated that the variable was negatively related to materialism. Therefore, Hypothesis 1.3 was not supported. In addition, Hypothesis 1.2 for private self-consciousness was not supported (see Table 1).

Another stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of self-consciousness (private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety) on compulsive buying tendencies. The result of the analysis revealed that scores on public self-consciousness were significantly related to compulsive buying tendencies, but private self-consciousness and

<Table 1> Stepwise Multiple Regression Analyses for Testing H1 through 3

H	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t	R	R ²	F	df
H1.1	Public Self-consciousness	Materialism	.47	8.64***	.48	.23	44.14***	2,291
H1.3	Social Anxiety		-.33	-6.12***				
H2.1	Public Self-consciousness	Compulsive Buying Tendencies	.16	2.81**	.16	.03	7.89**	1,284
H3.1	Public Self-consciousness	Conspicuous Consumption	.44	6.78***	.41	.17	19.47***	3,292
H3.2	Private Self-consciousness		-.14	-2.18*				
H3.3	Social Anxiety		-.28	-5.06***				

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

social anxiety were not significantly related to compulsive buying tendencies: [$F(1,284) = 7.89, p < .01$]. Public self-consciousness accounted for 3% of the variation in compulsive buying tendencies. The standardized coefficient for public self-consciousness ($\beta = .16$) indicated that the variable was positively related to compulsive buying tendencies. Therefore, Hypothesis 2.1 was supported. However, Hypothesis 2.3 for social anxiety and Hypothesis 2.2 for private self-consciousness were not supported (see Table 1).

The last stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of self-consciousness (private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness, and social anxiety) on conspicuous consumption. The result of the analysis revealed that scores on public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness and social anxiety were significantly related to conspicuous consumption: [$F(3,292) = 19.47, p < .001$]. Public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, and social anxiety accounted for 17% of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The standardized coefficients indicated that public self-consciousness ($\beta = .44$) was positively related to conspicuous consumption, and private self-consciousness ($\beta = -.14$) and social anxiety ($\beta = -.28$) were negatively related to conspicuous consumption. Therefore, Hypothesis 3.1 for public self-consciousness and Hypothesis 3.3 for private self-consciousness were supported. However, a positive relationship between social anxiety and conspicuous consumption was expected (see Table 1). Therefore, Hypothesis 3.3 for social anxiety was not supported.

In order to test the relationship between materialism and compulsive buying tendencies (H4) and the relationship

between materialism and conspicuous consumption (H5), simple regressions were used. To test the relationship between compulsive buying tendencies and conspicuous consumption (H6), correlation analysis was used.

A simple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of materialism on compulsive buying tendencies. The result of the analysis revealed that materialism was significantly related to compulsive buying: [$F(1,282) = 44.82, p < .001$]. Materialism accounted for 14 % of the variation in compulsive buying tendencies. The standardized coefficient for materialism ($\beta = .37$) indicated that the variables were positively related to compulsive buying tendencies (see Table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

The second simple regression analysis was used to examine the effect of materialism on conspicuous consumption. The result of the analysis revealed that scores on materialism were significantly related to conspicuous consumption: [$F(1,292) = 222.84, p < .001$]. Materialism accounted for 43 % of the variation in conspicuous consumption. The standardized coefficient for materialism ($\beta = .66$) indicated that the variable was positively related to conspicuous consumption (see Table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

The correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between compulsive buying tendencies and conspicuous consumption. The result of the analysis revealed that scores on compulsive buying were significantly related to conspicuous consumption: [$r = .31, p < .001$]. Thus, the result revealed that compulsive buying was positively related to conspicuous consumption (see Table 2). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

<Table 2> Simple Regression Analyses for Testing H4 through 5 and Correlation Analysis for H6

H	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Standardized β	t	R	R ²	F	df
H4	Materialism	Compulsive Buying Tendencies	.37	6.59***	.37	.14	44.82***	1,282
H5	Materialism	Conspicuous Consumption	.66	14.89***	.66	.43	222.84***	1,292
H	Variable	Variable	r					
H6	Compulsive Buying Tendencies	Conspicuous Consumption	.31***					

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

VI. Discussions and Implications

The overall purpose of this research was to investigate the relationships among self-consciousness, materialism, compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption. This study found more compulsive buyers than previous research. Approximately 15% of respondents were classified as compulsive buyers. Roberts and Jones (2001) reported 9% as compulsive buyers among college students. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) classified 8% of respondents as compulsive buyers among the general population. Lee, Lennon, and Rudd (2000) found 10% of compulsive buyers among television shoppers. According O'Guinn and Faber (1989), d'Astous (1990), and Black (2001), compulsive buyers tend to be younger and tend to be women. Because the respondents were female and young college students, they may have more compulsive buying tendencies than the general population.

This study provided evidence for links among self-consciousness, materialism, compulsive buying tendencies and conspicuous consumption. This study found positive relationships between public self-consciousness and materialism, between public self-consciousness and compulsive buying, and between public self-consciousness and conspicuous consumption, and a negative relationship between private self-consciousness and conspicuous consumption. The results are consistent with previous research on materialism (Schroeder & Dugal, 1995), conspicuous consumption (Wong, 1997), self-consciousness (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991), and consumption behavior (Gould & Barak, 2001). Schroeder and Dugal (1995) and Wong (1997) found a positive relationship between public self-consciousness and materialism.

Publicly self-conscious people are more likely to value materialistic possessions and believe that these possessions reflect their identities, success, status and happiness. Since publicly self-conscious people tend to consider their social images and others' approval of their appearance and impressions, they are likely to consume and possess materialistic goods that enhance their social images and status and to engage in compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption (Dittmar, 2001; McCracken, 1990). On the other hand, privately self-conscious people

consider inner thoughts and personal accomplishments rather than their appearance and social images, so they are not likely to engage in consuming goods which present their social status and wealth.

This study found negative relationships between social anxiety and materialism and between social anxiety and conspicuous consumption. The results are not consistent with previous research. Wong (1997) found that social anxiety was positively associated with materialism. Wong (1997) used Belk's scale (1985), including possessiveness, envy, and nongenerosity as measurement of materialism. However, the current study used Richins and Dawson's scale (1992), including success, centrality, and happiness as measurement of materialism. Wong found that envy and nongenerosity were positively related to social anxiety but that success, happiness and centrality were not significantly related to social anxiety. In addition, although positive relationships between social anxiety and compulsive buying were expected (DesSarbo & Edwards, 1996; Valence, d'Astous, & Fortier, 1988), this study found no significant relationships between social anxiety and compulsive buying.

The results of this study provide strong evidence of positive relationships among materialism, compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption. Materialists are likely to purchase socially visible goods, such as prestige brand names (Fournier & Richins, 1991; Graham, 1999), and to be involved in compulsive buying in order to reduce their perceived shortcomings and to enhance their social images (Braun & Wicklund, 1989; Dittmar, 2001).

It is possible to apply the symbolic self-completion theory to the study. A person is willing to define self and the defining self is subjective to the acknowledgement of others. When he or she perceives shortcomings and inadequateness in his or her self-identity, he or she tend to engage in self-symbolizing actions (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). If people define self-associated with materialistic acquirements, it may be difficult to complete their identity and achieve characteristics. In a materialistic society, people are likely to use material goods as a means of self-enhancement (Belk, 1985) and as a symbol of status and success (Pinto, Parente, & Palmer, 2000). Compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption may play roles as coping strategies. If materialists perceive shortcomings of their goals, they might buy luxury or well-known brands

and engage in conspicuous consumption and compulsive buying (Dittmar, 2001).

The results of this study provide useful information about a particular consumer group, American female college students. College students can be seen as a target in a lucrative market. Luxury brand markets are growing continuously and marketers recognize that people have increased the demand for possessions that enhance appearance and materialistic values. People who show compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption tendencies might be an important target for luxury brand makers and retailers. However, retailers need to admit that an ethical responsibility exists to recognize compulsive buying behaviors. Based on understanding how materialism and consumption behaviors are stimulated and related, they should avoid indulging compulsive buyers.

Regarding the results of the present study, several limitations associated with generalizing the findings can be recognized. The research reported a higher rate of compulsive buying. The reason could be due to the characteristics of the sample, female college students who majored in a specific field (i.e., Textiles and Clothing). Therefore, the results may not be able to be generalized to the general population of female college students.

Future research may study materialism, self-consciousness, compulsive buying tendencies and conspicuous consumption among the general population or among college students in general. Research on compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption found that age and gender are associated with compulsive buying behavior (Black, 2001; O' Guinn & Faber, 1989). Therefore, future research may focus on the comparison of conspicuous consumption and compulsive buying tendencies among different gender and age groups.

Previous research on compulsive buying (Lee, Lennon, & Rudd, 2000) points out that television shoppers tend to engage in compulsive buying, and media reflect materialistic images to which television shoppers may compare themselves. It is possible to apply symbolic self-completion theory to research on compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption in television shopping. In addition, compulsive buying and conspicuous consumption of Internet shoppers could also be studied by applying symbolic self-completion theory.

Key words : self-consciousness, materialism, compulsive buying, conspicuous consumption

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