

Name: _____ Class: _____

You Can Buy Happiness, If It's An Experience

By Maanvi Singh
2014

This NPR article discusses the findings of a study published in Psychological Science focused on how different purchases affect happiness. This article was published on Shots, NPR's Health News blog. As you read, take notes on how people are affected by purchasing material goods and experiences.

- [1] We humans spend a lot of time waiting in lines: People queue up for days in order to get their hands on the latest iPhone, or what feels like eons¹ for a table at that hip new brunch place.

You may be better off spending time and money on the latter.² A growing body of research has shown that experiences tend to make people happier than material possessions.

And even anticipating an experience like a concert, a ski trip or what better be a really great brunch makes us happier than purchasing the latest gadgets, according to a study published Tuesday in Psychological Science.



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The study, cleverly titled *Waiting for Merlot: Anticipatory Consumption of Experiential and Material Purchases*, tracked how about 100 college students and over 2,200 randomly selected adults felt about material goods and experiences.

- [5] People got excited about both things and events. But they tended to feel more positive about experiential purchases, and their feelings about material purchases were more likely to be tinged with feelings of impatience.

"I think one aspect of that has to do with the nature of imagination," says Amit Kumar, a doctoral student of psychology at Cornell University and one of the researchers behind the paper.

"If you're waiting to buy an iPhone, you know exactly how many megapixels the camera on the new phone will have," Kumar told Shots. People often get really creative while planning out a future vacation, he says, and just thinking about all the things they'll be doing and all fun they'll be having can boost their mood.

Plus when it comes to experiences, money isn't as much of an issue, the researchers hypothesize. People may be competitive when it comes to keeping up with the Joneses,³ but tend to be less competitive about spending on experiences.

1. an indefinite and very long period of time
2. referring to the second or last mentioned of things

And as people age, they tend to find more joy in ordinary, everyday experiences like walking or gardening, compared to that trip to Fiji, another recent study found.

- [10] One reason may be that experiences give people the opportunity to bond and socialize, Kumar says. Even when you aren't guaranteed a ticket to a concert or a taco from the cool new food truck, people often enjoy waiting in line. "While waiting for concert tickets, people reported singing songs together, or people would be playing games with each other while they're waiting," he says.

And we've got proof of that right here at Shots. Editor Scott Hensley says he could buy tickets online for the Old Ebbitt Grill's annual Oyster Riot, but he much prefers going downtown first thing in the morning and waiting in line with his fellow oyster aficionados.⁴

That sounds a lot more fun than those Black Friday scuffles over flat screens and Xboxes. Indeed, Kumar and his colleagues compared news reports about people waiting in line and found that long waits for material purchases were more likely to end in violence.

We bet nobody's gotten into a fight while waiting for that oyster party.

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3. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is an idiom referring to the pattern of comparing oneself to one's neighbor as a benchmark for social class or the accumulation of material goods.
 4. a person who is very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about an activity, subject, or pastime

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes the central idea of the article?
 - A. People gain just as much joy from buying temporary experiences as they do from buying lasting products.
 - B. People like buying experiences and products, but they gain more joy from the experiences they purchase than the products.
 - C. People feel negatively about buying products and positively about buying experiences.
 - D. People gain more joy from buying experiences than buying products, but scientists have no explanation for why this happens.

2. PART B: Which paragraph from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. Paragraph 5
 - B. Paragraph 6
 - C. Paragraph 11
 - D. Paragraph 12

3. PART A: According to the information in the article, what is the relationship between happiness and anticipating experiences?
 - A. The longer people have to wait to experience something, the more anxious and less happy they become.
 - B. When people know more about what to expect from a product they anticipate buying, they experience more joy buying it.
 - C. People are less likely to try to outspend one another on experiences than products, which leads to increased happiness for those who buy experiences.
 - D. While anticipating future experiences, people often imagine what they will be like, which increases their joy and excitement.

4. PART B: Which of the following quotes from the text supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "their feelings about material purchases were more likely to be tinged with feelings of impatience." (Paragraph 5)
 - B. "If you're waiting to buy an iPhone, you know exactly how many megapixels the camera on the new phone will have,' Kumar told Shots" (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "just thinking about all the things they'll be doing and all fun they'll be having can boost their mood." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "People may be competitive when it comes to keeping up with the Joneses, but tend to be less competitive about spending on experiences." (Paragraph 8)

5. How does the final sentence of the article contribute to the meaning of the text?: "We bet nobody's gotten into a fight while waiting for that oyster party."
