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## Examining the Association Between Conspicuous Consumption and Subjective Happiness in Puerto Rico

*Examinando la asociación entre el consumo conspicuo y la felicidad  
subjettiva en Puerto Rico*

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**Abstract:** Over the past few decades, there has been a growing interest in psychology and other social sciences in the study of happiness. Many researchers have studied the association between happiness and variables such as health, income, social relationships, and education (Argyle, 1999; Deeming, 2013; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001). However, as some sociologists have argued, in contemporary capitalist and consumer-based societies, there is the notion that there is a relationship between happiness and consumption (Baudrillard, 1996; Bauman, 2007). Thus, the purpose of this quantitative and correlational study was to analyze the relationship between happiness and a type of consumption, specifically the conspicuous one. To answer this question, we administered the Subjective Happiness Scale to measure happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Additionally, we employed the Conspicuous Consumption Scale to assess consumption (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011). A sociodemographic questionnaire was also included for the sample description of the study. A total of 226 participants from Puerto Rico between the ages of 18 and 50 years answered the survey through Google forms. Results show a significant negative correlation between orientation to conspicuous consumption and subjective happiness, indicating a small effect size  $r(226) = -.18, p = .11$ . Therefore, results suggest that as orientation to conspicuous consumption increases, participants' subjective happiness declines.

*Keywords: consumption, happiness, Puerto Rican consumer, advertising*

**Resumen:** En las últimas décadas, ha crecido el interés de la psicología y otras ciencias sociales por el estudio de la felicidad. Muchos investigadores han estudiado la asociación entre la felicidad y variables como la salud, los ingresos, las relaciones sociales y la educación (Argyle, 1999; Deeming, 2013; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001). Sin embargo, como han argumentado algunos sociólogos, en las sociedades contemporáneas capitalistas de consumo existe la noción de que existe una relación entre felicidad y consumo (Baudrillard, 1996; Bauman, 2007). Por consiguiente, el propósito de este estudio cuantitativo y correlacional fue analizar la relación entre la felicidad y un tipo de consumo, específicamente el conspicuo. Para contestar esta pregunta, administramos la Escala de Felicidad Subjetiva para medir la felicidad (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Además, empleamos la Escala de Consumo Conspicuo para medir el consumo (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011). Por otro lado, se incluyó un cuestionario sociodemográfico para la descripción de la muestra del estudio. Un total de 226 participantes de Puerto Rico entre las edades de 18 y 50 años contestaron la encuesta a través de *Google forms*. Los resultados muestran una correlación negativa significativa entre la orientación al consumo conspicuo y la felicidad subjetiva, indicando un pequeño tamaño del efecto  $r(226) = -.18, p = .11$ . Por consiguiente, los resultados sugieren que a medida que aumenta la orientación al consumo conspicuo, disminuye la felicidad subjetiva de los participantes.

*Palabras claves: consumo, felicidad, consumidor puertorriqueño, publicidad*

## Background

The quest for happiness has been one of the main concerns of human beings since ancient times (Alcalá, 2013). But what does it really mean to be happy? This concept is very complex to define, especially because it has varied throughout history, cultures, and societies. In the West, happiness has been perceived as a personal achievement that is independent of other people and the social context (Gardiner, 2020). This Western vision is evident in the definition of Aristotle, who understood happiness as *eudaimonia*. This concept generally means "the good life" that consisted of acting in accordance with the proper function of our being (Alcalá, 2013). On the other hand, in Eastern cultures, happiness is observed as a state where the "I" is intertwined with others. Therefore, happiness is conceived as an emotion that depends on the social connections that the individual has (Gardiner, 2020). For example, this conception is seen in the oriental philosophy of Confucianism, in which happiness is obtained through harmony with others and the prevailing social order (Joshi, 2013).

More recently, in the social sciences — particularly contemporary Western psychology— attempts have been made to define happiness. According to Lyubomirsky (2001), happiness "(...) includes the experience of joy, satisfaction, or positive well-being, combined with the feeling that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile" (p. 239). Argyle and Crosland (1987) have argued that happiness contains various components. Especially, the degree of positive affect or joy experienced, the level of satisfaction and the absence of negative feelings (Qayoom, 2016). This definition is similar to the notion proposed by Diener (1984), in which happiness is composed of a combination of positive affect (in the absence

of negative affect) and overall life satisfaction (Qayoom, 2016). In line with these theoretical approaches, we define subjective happiness as an individual state of satisfaction, joy, and positive affect, combined with a general feeling that life is good (Argyle & Crosland, 1987; Diener, 1984; Lyubomirsky, 2001). This means that the evaluation of subjective happiness involves comparing oneself to others and assessing if one perceives themselves as a happy individual (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The core of this conceptualization of happiness revolves around the notion regarding the degree to which individuals possess the characteristics that are socially associated with happy individuals (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). This includes the possibility of the existence of individuals who could be satisfied with their life circumstances (e.g., job, house, family) but not perceive themselves as happy (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). This also implies that the reverse case is possible, meaning that an individual with a low-quality life could evaluate their life as happy (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999).

Happiness, as defined in these terms, has been argued conceptualized as a crucial field of study that will allow us to understand the human condition (Bourner & Rospigliosi, 2014). This growing research enterprise is associated with the important role contemporary societies assign to happiness as a top priority for public policies, coexisting with GDP as a valid measure of the success of nation-states (McKenzie, 2016). Due to happiness's societal importance, different social sciences, like psychology, economics, and sociology have developed an interest in the study of happiness in recent decades. Some of this research has revealed that happiness is the first thing people place when asked what they want most in this life (Diener, 2000). Additionally, past research

has found that factors such as better health, income, social relationships, and education have a positive relationship with happiness (Argyle, 1999; Deeming, 2013; Frey & Stutzer, 2002; Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001). Lastly, other research has identified that happiness increases due to being part of the majority group, belonging to the top of the social hierarchy, and living in a society with economic abundance and political stability (Veenhoven, 1991).

Nevertheless, there is still further research to be conducted about what, according to some sociologists, is socially perceived as the source of happiness in our late capitalist society: consumption (Baudrillard 1996; Bauman 2007). Consumption is a complex concept, as it can be defined in multiple ways. The first thing to say about consumption is that it is not only equivalent to buying or obtaining objects. As Baudrillard (1996) states, since ancient times objects have been bought and enjoyed, but not specifically “consumed” as in our times. In our society, objects do not only serve as material commodities that one buys, since they always entail a relation to external signs and social meanings (Baudrillard, 1996).

Consumption has been serving as a signifying activity in our capitalist society that is presented symbolically to us as a way of satisfying all our needs and desires (Bauman, 2007). Therefore, our societies can be better understood as consumer societies, that are constructed as a “(...) type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent, and so to speak ‘regime-neutral’ human wants, desires and longings into the principal propelling and operating force of society” (Bauman, 2007, p. 47). According to Bauman (2007), the supreme value of the consumer society is the achievement of a happy life through consumption. Nevertheless, what is

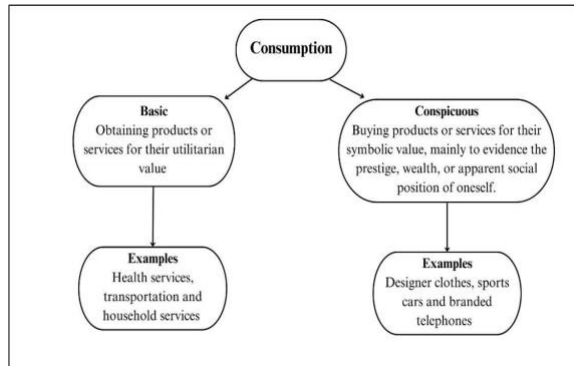
particular to consumer societies is that they appear to have a different relationship with happiness, especially because it strives for happiness in earthly life and not in a metaphysical realm (Bauman, 2007). Therefore, it is a society where the constant promise is the achievement of instant happiness, specifically through consumption (Bauman, 2007). Consequently, when companies advertise a product, they do not focus on the qualities of the product, but on how that product is necessary for the individual to be happy (Boyd, 2020).

For this reason, the fundamental function of advertising in the consumer society is not to inform the “objective” qualities of products and services, but to inform the consumer what his or her own desires are (Baudrillard, 1996). Following this theoretical line of thought, in the present study the term consumption refers to the activities that individuals perform in society to obtain and dispose products and services with the aim of satisfying their needs and desires (Carrasco, 2017). Nevertheless, it is essential to distinguish between several types of consumption. The first category corresponds to two types of consumption: basic and conspicuous. Basic consumption is defined as obtaining products or services for their utilitarian value.

Our study focuses on conspicuous consumption, conceptualized as a “(...) deliberate engagement in symbolic and visible purchase, possession and usage of products and services imbued with scarce economic and cultural capital with the motivation to communicate a distinctive self-image to others” (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011, p. 217). Therefore, this consumption is motivated not by its use value, but by a conspicuous symbolic utility that evidences the prestige, wealth, or apparent social position of the consumer (Veblen, 1899). As

an example, health services, transportation and household services are considered basic consumption. On the other hand, designer clothes, sports cars and branded telephones would be examples of conspicuous consumption, as exemplified in figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Types of consumption*



Evidently, conspicuous consumption reflects the consumer societies of our times and the consumerist culture that has emerged. As Bauman (2007) argues, “consumerist culture is characterized by the constant pressure to be someone else” (p. 137). This type of culture is based on the act of self-fulfillment through consumption, as an imperative way for individuals to distinguish themselves from others (Bauman, 2007). All individuals must consume to “preserve the social position they desire, fulfill their social obligations and protect their self-esteem, while being recognized for doing so” (Bauman, 2007, p. 81). As a result, in this consumer culture possessing conspicuous objects is merged with individual’s sense of identity (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011). In synthesis, individuals immersed in this cultural order purposefully strive to acquire, showcase, affirm, and validate their sense of self through the material possessions they possess (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011).

This type of consumption, as evidenced in past studies, is closely related to materialism (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011). This term can be understood as the belief that material possessions are the central part of life and that their acquisition leads to life satisfaction (Richins2011). Hence, conspicuous consumption-oriented people tend to be materialistic, since they think that the central value of life is to obtain more material possessions. These theoretical and empirical considerations have guided our scientific inquiry to research the following question: What is the relationship between individual’s conspicuous consumption orientation and their subjective happiness in Puerto Rico? Thus, the objective of this study was the following: to evaluate the relationship that may exist between orientation to conspicuous consumption and subjective happiness. Considering the available literature on conspicuous consumption and happiness, we built our study hypothesis (H1) as follows: there is a negative correlation between an individual's orientation towards conspicuous consumption and their subjective happiness.

It is fundamental to test this hypothesis, since Puerto Rican society is founded on a consumer-based capitalist economy (Ortiz, 2007). Consumption in Puerto Rico, since the mid- twentieth century, has been established as a symbol that refers to the ideals of progress and enjoyment (Ortiz, 2007). Particularly, this economy has been established as the way to achieve the consumer lifestyle of the dominant economic powers, especially the United States (Ortiz, 2007). Consuming and possessing objects, then, began to reconfigure social relations among Puerto Ricans as contemporary consumer subjects immersed in the emergent global consumer culture (Ortiz, 2007).

Since then, the economy of consumption has given rise to a society in which part of the

income of individuals is spent on consuming material goods and services. In 2021, for example, total disposable personal income was \$69,309.7 million, while total personal consumption expenditure was \$71,039.0 million (Junta de Planificación, 2021). Hence, in that year, personal consumption expenditures were greater than the disposable personal income in Puerto Rico.

Moreover, personal consumption expenditures were the most significant contributor to economic growth in that fiscal year, representing (19%) of the expansion (Junta de Planificación, 2021). This implies that personal consumption maintained the economy over other economic activities, such as construction (7.1%), machinery and equipment investment (8.7%), and government consumption (1.1%) expenditures (Junta de Planificación, 2021).

Being part of a consumer economy usually means that the individual must be constantly consuming. If the individual does not have the resources, they can turn to credit cards or personal loans, mortgages, car loans and so on to keep consuming (Ortiz, 2007). This results in individuals having to resort to debt to meet the consumption expectations demanded by society (Bauman, 2007). In 2021, for example, total consumer debt accounted for a total of \$21,791.0 million (Junta de Planificación, 2021). The problem is that debt, as a resource for consumption, has serious implications at the individual level. In past studies, it was found that any type of debt is negatively associated with consumer happiness, specifically when it comes to low-income consumers (Xiao et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study is important because most of the research on the topic has been conducted in other countries, so their results may not be entirely generalizable to the Puerto Rican context. In Puerto Rico,

according to the literature consulted, there is still no study that specifically addresses the topic quantitatively. However, there have been multiple studies on other consumer and capitalist economies that have addressed this question, suggesting the possibility that our findings reflect the literature. The investigations discussed in our literature review consisted principally of research conducted more than a decade ago, except for a few recent studies reviewed. Nevertheless, the sociological theorists that we follow in this article have been theorizing about conspicuous consumption since the nineteenth century, beginning with Veblen (1899). Other theorists we discuss have theorized the relationship between consumption and happiness in the twentieth century like Baudrillard (1996) and Bauman (2007) in the twenty-first century. Considering the existing theoretical and empirical research about this issue, we hope that this study contributes and encourages the production of novel research on this phenomenon. We also expect that the results of this study generate empirical evidence that can contribute to the creation of further theoretical knowledge in the Puerto Rican context.

## Literature Review

Our research question is also crucial because the existing literature has not been able to answer definitively what the relationship between conspicuous consumption and happiness is. Most of the research has been realized on consumption as an encompassing category, and not always studies execute in the distinction between the basic and conspicuous types. For example, in a study conducted in China, it was found that increased consumption of general material goods specially in individuals of the same age, education, and gender belonging to the same community increases happiness (Wang

et al., 2019). Similarly, the findings of another study in China found that increased consumption of material goods is associated with higher level of happiness (Zhu et al., 2020).

However, according to studies performed in the United States by Van Boven & Gilovich (2003), the type of consumption that correlates with happiness is not the material one. According to their findings, consumption of experiences (e.g., travel, eating out) has a more positive correlation to happiness than the consumption of material goods. According to other researchers, this type of experiential consumption is associated with more happiness because individuals were less satisfied with the consumption of material goods, since they tended to question more the options they did not choose (Carter & Gilovich, 2010).

These findings could be explained by psychological factors that mediate preference between consumption of experiences and consumption of material goods. In one study, conducted with college students in China, it was found that individuals who experienced social exclusion preferred consumption of experiences (Yang, 2020). Other researchers in China have found that consumers with higher self-discrepancy of the self (difference between actual self and ideal self) derived greater happiness from the consumption of material goods (Yu, et al., 2016). Moreover, recent studies in China have also found that the source of the income matters to consumer derived happiness, since college students purchasing items with self-earned money are more likely to report greater happiness (Jin & Li, 2022).

On the other hand, in a study conducted by Noll & Weick (2015) in Germany, certain types of consumption were found to be positively related to happiness, while others

exhibited an insignificant or negative relationship. According to the results, expanded consumption of clothing and leisure-incentivizing activities (e.g., travel, vacations) increases happiness, while consumption of household amenities, cars, or durable goods, does not (Noll & Weick, 2015). This is consistent with findings obtained by Zhang & Xiong (2015), which reported that happiness is influenced by consumption that incentivizes leisure, family time, and community time in China. Consonant with these results, another study done in the United States found that leisure consumption is associated with greater happiness, since it encourages social connectedness, contrary to the consumption of material goods which had no impact (Deliere & Kalil, 2010).

Other research has been conducted specifically on the relationship between conspicuous consumption and happiness. In a recent study, researchers in Brazil found that the level of conspicuous consumption orientation of luxurious items correlates negatively with happiness (Mota & Botelho, 2021). Similarly, the consumption of conspicuous items (e.g., chains or watches) has been associated with lower happiness in India (Linssen et al., 2011). These studies are also supported by the results of the research conducted by Winkelmann (2012). In his study in Switzerland, results showed a negative association between conspicuous consumption of material goods (e.g., luxury cars like Ferraris and Porches) and happiness.

## Method

This study was conducted employing quantitative methodology. The topic of consumption and happiness is a growing area of empirical research. As discussed in the literature review, in recent decades correlational studies between these two

variables have been conducted in different countries around the world. For these reasons, the type of study carried out in this research was correlational to assess the association between conspicuous consumption orientation and subjective happiness. In terms of research design, the study followed a non-experimental cross-sectional design. Cross-sectional research designs are characterized by collecting data in a single historical moment, in contrast to longitudinal studies (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). This research design enabled us to study quantitatively if currently there is a relationship between conspicuous consumption and subjective happiness, as pointed out by sociological theorists (Baudrillard 1996; Bauman, 2007). More specifically, the cross-sectional design was employed to observe these two variables in a specific time frame to research if conspicuous consumption and subjective happiness have a negative relationship as hypothesized in our study.

This study used data gathered from the unpublished undergraduate thesis entitled *Análisis de la felicidad y las prácticas de consumo en Puerto Rico* (Bentz-Figueroa, 2022). Data was obtained virtually through a self-administered survey that was composed of a total of 21 questions. The survey, designed to be answered within 15 minutes, utilized the online platform Google Forms, which participants accessed from their electronic devices (e.g., computer, phone, tablet). The survey implemented a restriction of allowing only one response per participant, requiring them to complete the form within a single online session. Therefore, if participants closed the Google form platform, they needed to restart the survey. Due to its online nature, participants had the flexibility to either rest between questions or answer them without interruption. The Google form did not have a time restriction, however, the

survey was designed to be answered in 15 minutes, as stated previously. Information was collected on the following variables: subjective happiness, conspicuous consumption orientation, and sociodemographic data.

## Participants

In this study, participants had to (a) be between 18 and 50 years of age (b) be able to read and write in Spanish and (c) reside in Puerto Rico. This age range was employed for the possibility of age comparisons in case the sample was representative in this criterion. The other two criteria were established to provide equal opportunity for any resident of Puerto Rico to participate in the study. Regarding sample methodology, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling was employed (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). The sample profile was composed of 73.7% women, 22.8% men, and 2.2% non-binary. In terms of race/ethnicity, most participants identified themselves as Latino/Hispanic 80.6%, others as White/Caucasian 6%, Black/African American 4.3% and multiracial 5.2%. In terms of marital status, most participants were single 47.0% and in a relationship with a partner 36.2%. The sample was composed mostly of participants aged 18 to 24 years 75.9% ( $M = 24.68$ ,  $SD = 9.94$ ). Most participants had a high school diploma 39.2%, followed by people who had some years of college 36.6%. In terms of employment, most of the participants were students 35.3%, private sector workers 16.8%, public sector workers 5.2% or had their own business 5.2%. In terms of economic status, most participants' income was between less than \$10,000 (46.6%) and \$10,001 to \$25,000 (15.1%).

## Procedure

The Institutional review board of the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), Río Piedras Campus (Approval # 2223-020) approved the study. After acceptance, data was collected throughout the month of November 2022. The study recruited participants in an anonymous form using social media applications such as Facebook and through sending out five promotion emails to the university's students and personnel. Recruitment took place principally in the psychology department within the social science faculty, alongside social media. Participants were provided with an informed consent form prior to participation that explained the objective of the study, potential risks, and benefits, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form specified that there was no direct benefit from the study. Minimal risks were discussed, such as feeling uncomfortable or experiencing fatigue while answering the questionnaire items. Participants were provided the contact information of the university's mental health services in case they experienced emotional discomfort. Additionally, participants were informed that there could be additional charges for mobile data consumption or internet connection while conducting the survey if their electronic device did not have unlimited data. On the other hand, data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. First, descriptive analyses were carried out to assess the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. Then, descriptive and correlation statistics were performed to measure the association between the variables of interest.

## Conspicuous consumption orientation

In this study, conspicuous consumption was measured using the Conspicuous Consumption Orientation (CCO) scale created by Chaudhuri & Ghoshal (2011). According to the best of our knowledge, the conspicuous consumption orientation scale has not been validated in a Puerto Rican sample or with Hispanics populations. This section of the questionnaire was composed of 11 items measuring consumers' desire to buy unique products, as well as their level of social visibility and individualism. A 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree) was used to answer the questions in the questionnaire. To score the scale, a single score for conspicuous consumption was computed by employing the mean of participant's responses to the 11 items. This scale measures conspicuous consumption on a scale from 1.0 to 6.0, indicating that higher scores reflect greater orientation to this type of consumption. On this scale, participants had an overall mean of ( $M = 2.26$ ,  $SD = 9.63$ ) on all 11 items. Regarding consistency, the scale showed a good reliability index ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

## Subjective Happiness

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) composed of 4 items was used to measure the overall subjective happiness of participants (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The subjective happiness scale has been previously validated in Puerto Rico, demonstrating a high reliability index ( $\alpha = .91$ ) (Rivera, 2021). This questionnaire was answered by a seven-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from (1 = Not very happy to 7 = Very happy) for the first question, from (1 = Less happy to 7 = Most happy) for the second question, and from (1 = Not at all to 7 = Very happy) for the third and fourth question. To score the scale, a single score for subjective



happiness was obtained by calculating the mean of the participant's responses to the four items, with the fourth item being reverse coded. This scale measures subjective happiness on a scale from 1.0 to 7.0, meaning that higher scores indicate greater happiness. On this scale, participants had an overall mean of ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) on all four items. In terms of consistency, the scale demonstrated a moderate reliability index ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

## Results

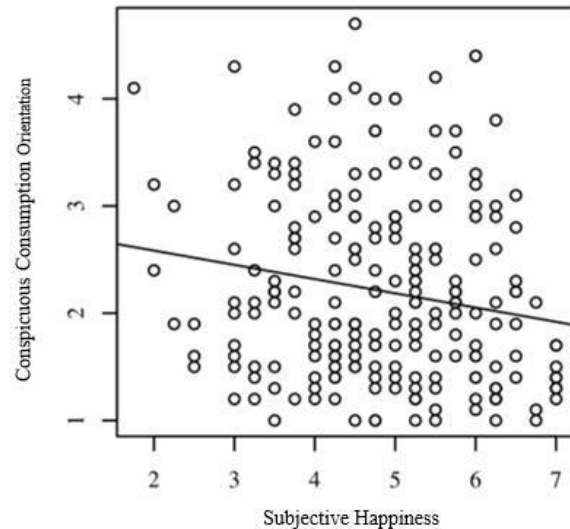
A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted between Subjective Happiness and Conspicuous Consumption Orientation. Prior to the analysis and for the purposes of complying with the assumptions of the Pearson correlation, four outliers were excluded from the correlation. Cohen's standard was used to assess the strength of the correlations. Coefficients of .10 to .29 indicated a small effect size, .30 to .49 represented a moderate effect size, and coefficients above .50 indicated a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

## Assumptions

A Pearson correlation requires linearity, meaning that the relationship between each pair of variables is linear (Conover & Iman, 1981). This assumption is infringed if there is curvature among the points on the scatterplot between any pair of variables. Figure 2 presents the scatterplots of the correlations. A

regression line has been added to assist the interpretation.

**Figure 2**  
*Scatterplots with the Regression Line Added for Conspicuous Consumption Orientation and Subjective Happiness*



## Correlation

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between conspicuous consumption orientation and subjective happiness, with a correlation of .18, indicating a small effect size ( $p = .011$ , 95.00% CI = [-.31, -.05]). This suggests that as conspicuous consumption orientation increases, happiness tends to decrease. Table 1 presents the results of the Pearson Correlation.

**Table 1***Pearson Correlation Between Conspicuous Consumption Orientation and Subjective Happiness*

Variable	1	2
1. Conspicuous Consumption Orientation	-.18* [-.31, -.05]	-
2. Subjective Happiness	-	-

*Note: \*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level. Confidence intervals are estimated at 95%*

### Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate whether there was a relationship between orientation to conspicuous consumption and subjective happiness. Conspicuous consumption orientation was significantly and negatively related to subjective happiness, supporting our hypothesis. In other words, the greater the orientation to conspicuous consumption of material goods, the lower the subjective happiness. Our findings are supported the studies in our literature that have found that conspicuous consumption of material goods (e.g., chains or watches) is associated with lower happiness (Linssen et al., 2011). Likewise, the study conducted by Mota & Botelho (2021), showed how orientation to conspicuous consumption correlates negatively with happiness. Lastly, Winkelmann (2012) also observed a negative association between conspicuous consumption (e.g., luxury cars) and happiness.

The negative association between happiness and conspicuous consumption has many possible explanations. First, according to past studies, individuals' happiness increases as their income increases, but only up to a certain threshold (Layard, 2005). That

threshold coincides with a point at which the individual's "basic" needs are satisfied. This suggests that beyond that threshold, the correlation between wealth (and probably excessive consumption) and happiness is not significant or disappears (Bauman, 2007). Conspicuous consumption, by definition, falls into this category because it is a type of consumption that goes beyond basic human necessities (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011).

Another possible explanation can be found in the fact that conspicuous consumption is associated with materialism (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011). However, many studies have shown that people with materialistic values exhibit less subjective happiness (Abela 2006; Dittmar et al., 2014). This can be because materialistic people usually have higher debt (Richins, 2011), tend to have conflicting interpersonal relationships (Kasser & Tim, 2016), and have less care for the environment (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Similarly, materialistic people focus heavily on extrinsic values such as financial success, image, or popularity, which have been negatively correlated with happiness (Stevens et al., 2011).

Lastly, these findings can also be explained by the fact that many people who have a voluntary simplicity lifestyle, a way of life contrary to conspicuous consumption and

materialism, demonstrate high levels of happiness (Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Rich, et al., 2017). One possible reason for this is that consumers who are thoughtful in their purchases, like voluntary simplifiers, tend to be happier (Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2011). Furthermore, studies have shown that people who practice voluntary simplicity focus on intrinsic values, such as personal growth, social relationships, and community involvement (Brown & Kasser, 2005). According to other researchers, people who focus more on intrinsic values than extrinsic values tend to be happier (Stevens et al., 2011).

### **Limitations and Future Areas of Study**

Although this study provides valuable empirical information on this phenomenon, it is not free of limitations. One of the limitations of this study is that the results cannot be generalized because the sample used was not representative of Puerto Rico. Participants were mostly female university students between the ages of 18-24, meaning that the study didn't manage to recruit a more representative sample. Especially considering the study was open to individuals of any gender identity, between the ages of 18 and 50 years old and open to the general population. The reason behind this result can be explained by the fact that we recruited participants in scenarios where these populations are predominant, specifically in the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus and social media. Specifically, the study was mainly promoted with undergraduate college students through the psychology department within the social science faculty, which can explain these results. We recommend that future research strives to obtain a more representative sample in these sociodemographic variables to attain statistical generalizations.

Methodologically, another limitation was that the conspicuous consumption scale was not validated in Puerto Rico, according to our knowledge. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that this scale obtained a similar consistency to that obtained by the authors who developed it. For example, in the conspicuous consumption scale, we obtained a reliability index ( $\alpha = .86$ ). In their original study, Chaudhuri & Ghoshal (2011), reported a similar reliability index ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Although the Subjective Happiness Scale was already validated by Rivera (2021), we also obtained an adequate reliability index ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Moreover, in their pilot study, Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999), reported a similar reliability index that ranged from ( $\alpha = .79$ ) to ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

We recommend that this topic be studied further to understand in depth the relationship between conspicuous consumption and happiness in Puerto Rico. If we accept the thesis that we live in a consumerist society in which we try to seek happiness through consumption, this is a fundamental topic to study (Bauman, 2007; Baudrillard, 1996). Since this is a historically a recent inquiry, and more so in Puerto Rico, it is not possible to state definitively what is the relationship between consumption and happiness, so further research is needed. However, the study of this problem can be carried out through various angles, not only the one presented in this study.

It would be interesting to investigate this topic by adding the variable of materialistic values in the Puerto Rican context, which have been positively correlated with conspicuous consumption (Chaudhuri & Ghoshal, 2011) and negatively correlated with happiness (Abela 2006; Dittmar et al., 2014). Also, a pilot study could be conducted looking at which specific types of conspicuous consumption are most

purchased (e.g., cars, watches) and whether they are related to happiness. Finally, exposure to different types of advertising (e.g., social media, television) could be measured to observe whether there are differences between groups in terms of their conspicuous consumption orientation and derived happiness.

If future studies agree with our findings that conspicuous consumption orientation is negatively related to happiness, it is necessary that all professionals interested in this topic (e.g., psychologists, sociologists) take an active role in researching and disseminating the results about this problem. This is because Puerto Rican consumers must be informed about how their happiness is related to conspicuous consumption based on the scientific evidence of the moment and not on what the consumer society proposes (Bauman, 2007). As we have mentioned, consumerism can be related to factors that are detrimental to the happiness of individuals, such as materialistic values and indebtedness. In this manner, the Puerto Rican consumer who is exposed to the problem will be better informed about this relationship, which may or may not improve his/her decisions regarding their consumer choices.

### **Compliance with research ethics standards**

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The author has no conflict of interest to disclose.

### **Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB)**

The study protocol (# 2223-020) was approved by the Institutional Committee for the Protection of Human Beings in Research (CIPSHI) of the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras Campus.

### **Informed Consent/Assent**

The research obtained an informed consent assessment that was completed by participants.

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