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## EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT MATERIALISM VS. SELF-ESTEEM AND READINESS FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT IN YOUNG PEOPLE

The aim of the paper is to present an analysis of the relationship between explicit and implicit materialism, self-esteem, and readiness for self-improvement in teenagers. We carried out two studies. In the first one, we examined what object and activity categories are linked to teenage happiness and how the category of happiness associated with possessing things is linked to materialistic teenage attitudes. The second study looked into the associations of implicit materialism with implicit materialism, self-esteem, and readiness for self-improvement. The obtained results showed that (a) five categories of teenage happiness can be distinguished: people and animals, interests, sport, achievements, material possessions and money; (b) as initially assumed, implicit materialism is positively linked to explicit materialism and negatively linked to both self-esteem (Study 2) and readiness for self-improvement (Studies 1 and 2). However, no significant relationship was observed between explicit materialism and self-esteem or readiness for self-improvement.

**Keywords:** adolescent; implicit and explicit materialism; self-esteem; readiness for self-improvement.

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## INTRODUCTION

We live in times when one of the most important values has come to be the possession of wealth and material goods. It is commonly believed that money and everything it can buy will give a person fulfillment and a happy life. In fact, it is difficult to escape such a belief, since consumerism has become a basic element of modern culture (Zawadzka, 2014). At the same time, the results of a number of studies show that materialistic aspirations decrease happiness instead of increasing it and that they have a negative effect on relationships with other people (cf. Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Kasser & Ryan 1993, 1996; Kasser, 2002). It is disturbing that the youngest Poles – school and university students – exhibit the highest levels of materialism-related indicators and purchase the largest amounts of goods (Czapiński, 2015). These people are the easiest to lure with the promises conveyed by the ubiquitous commercials: in order to be happy, you must simply own the latest model of tablet or more branded clothes. While the literature on materialism in adults is well-established, studies on materialism in children and youth are still scarce. One of the issues addressed in the few existing studies into young people's materialism is the association of materialism with a low sense of self-worth. Studies of American young people revealed that their materialism was associated with low self-esteem (Chaplin & John, 2007; Park & John, 2011). At the same time, in other studies, authors found that young people's materialism was associated with low self-realization (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996) as well as with a decrease in interest in learning and with worse school performance (Ku, Dittmar, & Banerjee, 2014). For this reason, in the present study we decided to analyze the association of materialism with self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement (i.e., striving to improve one's own characteristics, skills, or health; Zawadzka, 2014) in Polish teenagers.

The results of American studies suggest the limitations of measuring materialism using explicit materialism scales, which stem from the need for social approval. It was found that materialism measured in this way may be underestimated or overestimated (e.g., American adults present themselves as less materialistic while American teenagers present themselves as more materialistic than they actually are) (cf. Chaplin & John, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Mick, 1996). For this reason, in the present study we decided to measure not only explicit but also implicit materialism, which is free from the tendency to give answers consistent with social expectations.

The aim of the present paper was to investigate the relation between implicit and explicit materialism and to analyze the associations of implicit and explicit

materialism with self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement in Polish teenagers.

The present paper broadens knowledge on issues of teenage materialism in several ways. First, studies to date have analyzed the links between implicit and explicit materialism on American children and adolescents, whereas there have been no studies on these links in Polish teenagers. Second, in the present paper we present the possibility of using the method of happiness collage to measure implicit materialism – for the first time on a sample of Polish teenagers. Third, the results of research showing the significant negative association of self-esteem with explicit materialism in American teenagers (Chaplin & John, 2007) have not been confirmed before in studies of Polish teenagers. The presented research fills this gap and expands the scope of previous analyses to include the testing of the links between implicit materialism and self-esteem. Fourth, in our study we analyzed the associations of explicit and implicit materialism with readiness for self-improvement, which have not been investigated so far.

## **THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH**

### **Materialism, self-esteem, and self-improvement**

Materialism is defined from three perspectives: personality traits, beliefs, and life aspirations (cf. Górnik-Durose, 2002). From the perspective of personality traits – materialistic people are identified based on the weight they attach to the possession of goods in life, which manifests itself in the lack of generosity and in concentration on possessing and accumulating goods (cf. Belk, 1985). From the perspective of beliefs – it is assumed that materialism is a system of fixed beliefs that the most important thing in life is to possess goods and to combine possession with success and happiness (cf. Richins & Dawson, 1992). From the perspective of life aspirations – materialism is assumed to be related to the importance attached to striving for wealth, fame, and physical attractiveness in life (cf. Kasser, 2002).

The problem of sources and consequences of materialistic attitudes has been the subject of many studies on adults (cf. Górnik-Durose, 2002; Kasser, 2002; Zawadzka, 2014b), but there are still few Polish studies on this issue devoted to youth. Looking for the sources of the materialistic attitude, scholars have discovered that the level of materialism in young people is significantly associated with parents' values and parental attitudes. Research results confirm that what

contributes to the formation of a materialistic attitude is mother's materialistic values (Flouri, 1999) and parental attitudes, particularly the father's, involving excessive control as well as rejecting and excessively protective ones (Górnik-Durose & Dziedzic, 2013; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Poraj-Weder, 2013). Apart from socialization in the family, another frequently identified cause of materialistic attitudes is economic deprivation. The research conducted so far reveals that young people from families with a lower socioeconomic status score higher on scales measuring materialism than young people from families with a higher socioeconomic status (Kasser, Koestner, & Lekes, 2002).

Young people in the period of life called adolescence experience an identity crisis and look for identity in various ways. Additionally, this period is connected with intensive biological and psychological changes. Such a situation threatens the sense of self-worth. Consequently, as shown by research results, the high level of materialism in youth is accompanied by low self-esteem (Chaplin & John, 2007). What is more, the association between materialism and self-esteem is even stronger when implicit rather than explicit self-esteem is considered (Park & John, 2011). It has also been found that in late childhood and early adolescence (age 12-13), when self-esteem decreases, the level of materialism grows. By contrast, in late adolescence (age 16-18), when self-esteem increases, the level of materialism in teenagers goes down.

Due to the period of life and the tasks and roles connected with it, teenagers' materialism differs from adults' materialism. It is known that there are differences in the level of materialism between children and youth – between the age of 8 and 16 the level of materialism increases (Achenreiner, 1997). Materialism in youth manifests itself mainly in seeking happiness through buying, collecting, and possessing material goods, and striving to achieve financial goals (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003). The results of studies conducted on children and young people in countries where the culture of consumption is already deeply rooted are alarming – most of them confirm that concentration on materialistic aspirations considerably lowers well-being in children and youth. A high level of materialism is associated with lower self-realization as well as lower satisfaction with life, lower vitality, a larger number of depressive symptoms, a higher level of anxiety, somatic health problems (e.g., more frequent headaches), behavioral disorders, and a stronger tendency to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., Auerbach et al., 2010; Cohen & Cohen, 1996; Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci 2000; Kasser et al., 2013; Zawadzka, 2013).

Research also shows that materialism in youth is linked with attitude towards study and learning. In a study on children aged 9 to 14 (Goldberg et al., 2003), it

was found that materialistic children liked school much less than nonmaterialistic ones and cared much less about good school performance; they also made more purchases and were more interested in new products. In a different study of American teenagers it was confirmed that materialism was associated with worse school performance (Froh et al., 2011).

The few cross-cultural studies conducted so far have confirmed in further countries – e.g., in the United Kingdom or in China – that materialism decreases motivation to learn and leads to worse school performance (Ku et al., 2014). Moreover, it has been determined that exposure to the media and to advertising is of great significance in shaping young people's materialistic attitudes (until about the age of 14) both in individualistic cultures (cf. Chaplin & John, 2007; Churchill & Moschis, 1979) and in less individualistic ones (cf. Bujzen & Valkenburg, 2003). In research on American and Chinese youth, a link was also observed between materialism and the influence of peers, who become the main source of identification and acceptance for teenagers (Chan & Prendergast, 2007; Chaplin & John, 2005).

#### **Explicit and implicit attitudes towards materialistic values**

Attitude in the traditional sense – understood as a relatively stable evaluation of people, objects, and concepts – consists of three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral (e.g., Wojciszke, 2000). The emotional component comprises emotional reactions to the object of attitude, the cognitive component is thoughts and beliefs, and the behavioral component is behavior. Explicit attitudes are those that people profess consciously – those that they are able to refer to and easily identify. Implicit attitudes, in contrast, are involuntary and uncontrolled: they influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors beyond the person's consciousness (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Nosek, 2007). Scholars agree that neither explicit nor implicit attitudes are better predictors of behavior, which can be determined by both types of attitudes in various situations. It is therefore advisable to investigate both types (Chybicka, Kosakowska, & Karasiewicz, 2008).

The studies on attitudes towards materialistic values in children that have been conducted in Poland to date were devoted to explicit attitudes. A different instrument in use is the *Youth Materialism Scale* (YMS), constructed specifically in order to study this age group (Goldberg et al., 2003, Zawadzka & Lewandowska-Walter, 2016).

Children and young people notice, however, that more and more is said about the negative consequences of striving to possess material goods. They listen to the public discourse in which materialism is more and more often recognized as an undesirable phenomenon (though frequently only on the declarative level). As a result, traditional “paper-and-pencil” tests no longer perform their role: new instruments are needed in order to measure implicit materialism – the hidden attitude towards wealth and the possession of goods. An instrument that makes it possible to measure implicit materialism is happiness collage, developed by L. Chaplin and D. John (2005), American scholars investigating materialism in children and youth. Investigating the influence of materialism on children and young people, Chaplin and John observed that materialism could be determined with reference to answers to the question of what makes the child or teenager happy. The authors decided to use the category of “happiness” because it is a concept comprehensible to young children and teenagers alike (cf. Lewis & Michalson, 1983). At the same time, measuring materialism in relation to the concept of happiness makes it possible to study attitudes towards wealth and possession beyond the participants’ consciousness, as opposed to asking them directly about their attitude to goods and possession (which is how explicit attitudes towards materialism are tested). In other words, measurement using happiness collage enables investigators to analyze what makes children and young people happy: whether these are material goods, such as new clothes, roller blades, or laptops, or whether these are, for instance, meetings with friends, pursuing passions, or walking the dog. Aware of the possibilities offered by happiness collage, we decided to use this instrument in the present study and test the link of the two types of materialism – explicit and implicit – with self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement.

### STUDY 1

The first study had an exploratory character and was meant to serve the achievement of three aims. The first aim was to determine what gives teenagers happiness – in other words, to identify the general categories of things, people, and phenomena that influence young people’s experience of happiness. The second aim of the study was to test the relations between implicit materialism (which focuses the person on the concept of happiness, while the level of materialism is determined on the basis of the participant’s choices concerning what constitutes his or her happiness; possessions and money are masked by other

categories of objects – e.g., people, achievements, sport) and explicit materialism (which focuses the person on beliefs concerning the link between possession and happiness in life). The third aim was to test the link of teenage materialism with family socioeconomic status and with attitudes towards practicing sports as an indicator of the attitude of readiness for self-improvement. Readiness for self-improvement is the willingness to strive for improving one's own traits, skills, or health (Zawadzka, 2014b). Sport is one of the main activities taken up by teenagers; it constitutes a very important area of efforts aimed at self-improvement and at developing self-control in this period of life (Coelho e Silva, Figueiredo, Elfeink-Gemmer, & Malina, 2008). Consequently, attitude towards practicing sports is a manifestation of readiness for self-improvement. Based on the research conducted by previous investigators, reporting negative associations of family socioeconomic status with materialism (Kasser et al., 2002), we assumed that a lower socioeconomic status of the family would be associated with a higher level of materialism. Moreover, drawing on studies that showed a decrease in willingness to engage in learning and self-realization (cf. Ku et al., 2014; Kasser & Ryan, 1993), we indirectly assumed that positive attitudes towards practicing sports would be negatively related to teenage materialism.

## METHOD

### Sample

The participants were 58 students: 39 girls and 19 boys from middle schools located in Gdańsk and Gdynia, Poland: two public and one charter middle school. Their mean age was  $M = 13.26$  ( $SD = 0.58$ ). The young people came from families with an average and slightly above-average level of material welfare. The study was conducted in February and March 2015.

### Instruments and procedure

**Measurement of happiness-related categories.** We measured the categories using a questionnaire consisting of questions and instructions prepared for the purposes of the present study. The participants responded to questions and instructions concerning what made them happy in life (*Write what makes you feel happy; List the things/objects/appliances that make you feel happy; List the*

people who make you feel happy; List the events, situations, and activities that make you feel happy) and to questions concerning the activities and interests of Polish teenagers (*Which of your achievements are you the most proud of? List them; What are your interests? List them*). Based on the participants' answers, three measures of materialism were also distinguished, namely: the number of objects (the category of "material objects," e.g., a tablet, a laptop, a phone) that give happiness, the number of nonmaterial objects (from the other categories distinguished) that give happiness, and the implicit materialism index (the index was the ratio of the number of material possessions to the number of nonmaterial objects that give happiness; cf. Chaplin, 2009).

**Measurement of readiness for self-improvement.** Readiness for self-improvement was measured by means of scales testing attitudes towards practicing sports, including 10 sports that are the most popular among teenagers. The subjects answered questions concerning the level of pleasure experienced when practicing 10 sports (e.g., football, volleyball, table tennis, running) using a 5-point scale (1 – *definitely doesn't give me pleasure*, 5 – *gives me great pleasure*). What we took into account in the analysis was the sum score for all the answers.

**Youth Materialism Scale (YMS;** Goldberg et al., 2003; Polish adaptation in Zawadzka & Lewandowska-Walter, 2016). The YMS consists of 10 items and measures teenagers' materialism, understood as a desire to purchase and possess material goods, a desire to possess money to purchase these goods, and a desire to have jobs that will ensure the constant possibility of buying anything one wants in the future. Participants respond to the items on a 5-point scale (1 – *strongly agree*, 5 – *strongly disagree*). The reliability of the YMS in the tested group of teenagers was  $\alpha = .70$ .

**The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status** (Goodman et al., 2001). The instrument consists of a 10-point ladder on which participants indicate the financial status of their family compared to other families. The ends of the ladder are: 1 – *worst off*, 10 – *best off*.

The study was conducted in classrooms during the general education class, in the presence of teachers, who had previously obtained parents' consent to the children's participation in the study. The participants sat in such a way that they would not disturb one another. After being introduced to the purpose of the study in a general way, they received a questionnaire that consisted of questions and instructions concerning the sources of their happiness, pleasure derived from practicing sports, and family socioeconomic status as well as the YMS. The study took about 25-30 minutes and was anonymous. When it was over, the investi-

gator explained its purpose and, to thank the teenagers for participation, gave a cinema ticket to a randomly selected participant.

## RESULTS

### Types of categories of objects connected with happiness in teenagers

The main aim of the study was to collect young people's answers the questions of what gave them happiness. In response to the open-ended instruction: *Write what makes you happy*, the young people listed the following causes of happiness (we took into account all answers given by at least 5% of the participants): friends and colleagues (50%), parents (27.6%), music (25.9%), sport (22.4%), playing games (12.1%), eating/sweets (12.1%), good grades (10.3%), cinema/film (8.6%), animals (6.9%), reading (6.9%), pursuing passions (5.2%), trips (5.2%), jokes (5.2%), free time (5.2%), singing (5.2%), other happy people (5.2%), getting on well with family and friends (5.2%).

The most frequent answers to the question *What objects make you feel happy?* were: a computer (50%), a mobile phone (41.38%) a television set (17.24%), a tablet (13.79%), headphones (10.34%), a bicycle (6.89%), new clothes (8.62%), an MP3 player (6.89%), shoes (5.17%), a skateboard (3.44%), money (1.79%), a house (1.79%), a car (1.79%), and roller blades (1.79%). On average, one person named  $M = 2.10$  ( $SD = 1.72$ ) objects.

In the quantitative content analysis we included over 800 answers concerning what made young people feel happy. Each answer was rated by two judges in terms of which category it belonged to. Ultimately, five categories were distinguished *a posteriori*: "interests," "material possessions," "people and animals," "achievements," and "sport," which made it possible to develop an instrument – collage, used in the main research.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the teenagers usually gave answers classified into the "interests" category. The dominant type of answer was hobbies that can be labeled as serving the purpose of satisfying the need for self-development and as preferably done on one's own (e.g., playing musical instruments, reading, playing games). Meetings with friends or going to parties were mentioned less often. The category that ranked second in terms of the number of answers was "material possessions," mainly electronic gadgets. The most frequently mentioned ones among them were tablet, laptop, and phone. Some of the participants mentioned items connected with their passions, such as horse-riding equipment or Manga

comics. The third place in terms of the number of indications belonged to the “people and animals” category. The answers included not only family members (e.g., mother, father, grandparents) and friends, but also celebrities and idols. The “achievements” category comprised mainly answers concerning success at school, for example having good grades, completing a grade with distinction, or taking a high place in thematic, artistic, and sports competitions. “Sport” was the least often indicated in the study – the sports that appeared in the answers were mainly popular and widely available ones, such as football, volleyball, basketball, or swimming. What the judges classified into the “other” category was indications not fitting into the remaining categories (e.g., peace or no tests).

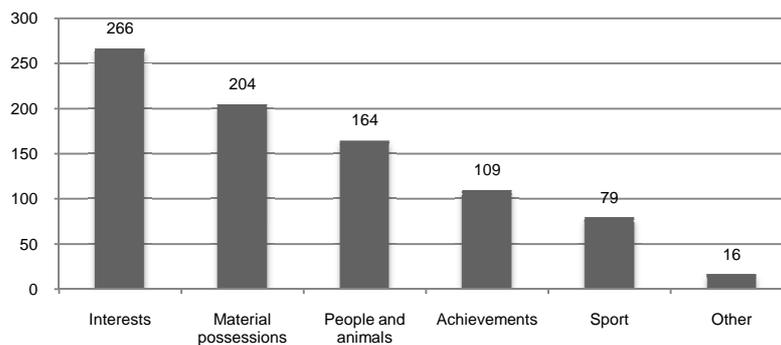


Figure 1. The number of answers included in the analysis and classified into particular categories.

Based on the participants’ answers, we also distinguished three measures of materialism, two of them being: the number of objects (the category of “material possessions,” e.g., tablet, laptop, phone) that give happiness and the number of nonmaterial objects (from the remaining categories) that give happiness. Following the authors of the research instrument, we also analyzed the third measure – namely, the implicit materialism index, being the ratio of the number of pictures presenting material possessions selected by the participant to the number of pictures presenting nonmaterial objects (cf. Chaplin & John, 2005).

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics – Study 1*

Variables	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Number of material objects	0.00	9.00	2.10	1.72
Number of nonmaterial objects	0.00	3.00	1.04	0.86
Material to nonmaterial objects ratio	.00	.54	.23	.11
Youth Materialism Scale	13.00	38.00	26.30	6.49
Family socioeconomic status	3.00	10.00	6.25	1.86
Practicing sports	20.00	50.00	35.43	7.02

### Categories of happiness, explicit materialism, and readiness for self-improvement

The analysis of Pearson's  $r$  revealed statistically significant negative correlations between the number of objects from the nonmaterialistic category mentioned by the participants and explicit materialism ( $r = -.28, p < .035$ ). The more nonmaterial objects a teenager listed in response to the question of what made him or her happy, the lower he or she scored on materialism. We found no significant correlation between explicit materialism and the number of listed objects from the materialistic category of happiness ( $r = .06, ns$ ).

It also turned out that the number of objects from the materialistic category of happiness correlated significantly positively with family socioeconomic status ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ). The higher the children rated the economic status of their family, the more material possessions they listed in response to the question about happiness.

Based on the analysis of Pearson's  $r$ , we found a significant negative correlation between the number of objects chosen from the materialistic category of happiness and readiness for self-improvement, whose indicator was the attitude towards practicing sports:  $r = -.27, p < .05$ . This means that the more material possessions a teenager chose in response to the question about happiness, the more negative attitude he or she had towards practicing sports.

Thus, we established in Study 1 what the materialistic and nonmaterialistic categories of teenagers' understanding of happiness comprised. As hypothesized, we demonstrated that materialism was associated with lower readiness for self-improvement. Contrary to expectations, we found that family socioeconomic status was positively associated with teenage materialism.

Study 1 was exploratory, and therefore in order to verify the associations measured in it concerning the link between materialism and readiness for self-improvement as well as to determine how explicit and implicit materialism is related to self-esteem, we conducted Study 2.

## STUDY 2

The aim of the study was to analyze the links of implicit materialism (investigated using the method of happiness collage) with explicit materialism, self-esteem, and readiness for self-improvement. We used three research instruments: the *Youth Materialism Scale (YMS)*, the *Self-Esteem Scale*, and the *Scale of Readiness for Self-Improvement*. In research on American young people it was demonstrated that there is a negative link between materialism and teenagers' self-esteem (Chaplin & John, 2007; Kasser, 2005; Park & John, 2011). It was also observed that in early adolescence a decrease in self-esteem is associated with an increase in teenage materialism (Chaplin & John, 2007). As regards readiness for self-improvement, it is connected with a tendency to improve one's own traits, abilities, and well-being (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995) and thus constitutes a natural way of enhancing one's competence and maintaining the sense of self-worth (Sedikies & Strube, 1997); this corresponds with the idea proposed by Kasser and colleagues (2004) that one of the causes of materialism is the lack of satisfaction of psychological needs, including the need for competence and self-acceptance. As already stated – the answers given to questions in a scale measuring explicit materialism may be subject to distortion due to people answering them in line with the dominant cultural expectations (cf. Chaplin & John, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Mick, 1996). Research conducted on young Poles reveals that being a materialist is perceived negatively (Czepielinda, 2014). We therefore assumed that implicit materialism would be associated with a decrease in self-esteem and with readiness for self-improvement to a greater degree than explicit materialism.

In Study 2, we formulated four hypotheses relating to the presented theories and research findings:

H1: Materialism measured by means of collage will be significantly positively associated with materialism measured by means of the YMS.

H2: Materialism measured by means of collage will be significantly negatively associated with scores on the Self-Esteem Scale.

H3: Materialism measured by means of collage will be significantly negatively associated with scores on the Scale of Readiness for Self-Improvement.

H4: Self-improvement and self-esteem will explain implicit materialism to a greater extent than explicit materialism.

## METHOD

### Sample

The participants were 100 students: 46 boys and 54 girls. The mean age in the sample was  $M = 14.44$  ( $SD = 0.86$ ). The participants were middle school students from the Pomorskie Voivodeship, Poland, from families with average and slightly above-average level of material welfare. The study was conducted in March and April 2015.

### Instruments and procedure

**The happiness collage method** (Chaplin & John, 2005). Happiness collage is an instrument consisting of five cork boards with captioned pictures on them representing five categories: Board 1 – “sport,” Board 2 – “hobby,” Board 3 – “people and animals,” Board 4 – “material possessions,” Board 5 – “achievements,” plus one empty board. A study starts with a presentation of a set of objects on the five cork boards. Next, each participant is asked to choose those pictures from the five boards that show what makes him or her happy and to place them on the separate cork board (the empty one – without pictures; see Appendix 1). After the completion of the task, the participant is asked to explain briefly why he or she has chosen those particular pictures (the purpose of this is to specify what the choice actually concerned: material objects or nonmaterial circumstances related to them). The participant gives an explanation for each picture. The investigator writes down the participant’s answers and takes a photo of the collage arranged by the participant. The level of materialism for a particular person is computed as the ratio of the number of pictures from materialistic categories to the number of pictures from nonmaterialistic categories chosen by that person.

**Youth Materialism Scale** (YMS; Goldberg et al., 2003, cf. Zawadzka & Lewandowska-Walter, 2016). As in Study 1, the YMS was used also in this case.

The reliability of the scale measured by means of Cronbach's in the study sample ( $N = 100$ ) was acceptable and equal to  $\alpha = .78$ .

**Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale** (SES; 1965, adapted into Polish by Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, & Łaguna, 2007) is used to measure general attitude towards oneself – self-esteem. The scale consists of 10 items concerning self-beliefs. Young people respond to each item using a 5-point scale (1 – *strongly disagree*, 5 – *strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale measured by means of Cronbach's test in the study sample ( $N = 100$ ) was acceptable and equal to  $\alpha = .63$ .

**The Scale of Readiness for Self-Improvement** (SRSI; Zawadzka, 2014; Zawadzka & Szabowska-Walaszczyk, 2011). The scale measures readiness for self-improvement understood as the intention to strive to improve one's traits, skills, health, or well-being. This instrument consists of 14 items that make it possible to measure two variables: readiness to improve oneself (e.g., "I strive to really improve my traits"; "I actively strive to be a better person," "Working on my character is important for me") and readiness to take care of one's health (e.g., "I strive to really improve my health," "I often control my health condition"). Responses to the items of this instrument are indicated on a 5-point scale, from 1 – *not at all true about me*, to 5 – *very true about me*. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability analysis showed a high reliability of both subscales:  $\alpha = .82$ , for Readiness to Improve Oneself and  $\alpha = .71$  for Readiness to Take Care of One's Health. In view of the scope of the present analysis, we used a subscale of the SRSI – namely, the Readiness to Improve Oneself scale.

**Procedure.** Before the study, the teenagers' parents consented to their participation. The study was conducted on an individual basis with each student. The investigator invited a student to the research room, located in the school, and said in very general terms what the study was about. Next, the participant arranged a collage. After arranging the collage, he or she completed the questionnaires. When the tasks had been completed, the investigator thanked the participant and answered the teenager's questions, if there were any, concerning the study.

## RESULTS

**Correlations of implicit and explicit materialism with self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement.** Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for all the variables measured in Study 2.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics – Study 2*

Variables	Min.	Max.	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Implicit materialism	0.00	5	0.32	0.51
Explicit materialism	10.00	45	25.89	7.41
Self-esteem	20.00	44	32.86	5.28
Readiness to improve oneself	18.00	54	41.15	6.85
Readiness to take care of one's health	3.00	15	10.28	2.66

In order to test the hypotheses, we performed an analysis of Pearson's *r* correlations. The analysis revealed statistically significant associations of materialism measured by means of collage with each of the remaining measures.

In accordance with hypothesis H1, materialism measured by means of collage correlated significantly positively with materialism measured by means of YMS ( $r = .33, p < .001$ ). The obtained results confirmed hypotheses H2 and H3 as well: the level of materialism measured by means of collage was negatively related to self-esteem ( $r = -.21, p < .05$ ) and readiness for self-improvement: both readiness to improve oneself ( $r = -.30, p < .01$ ) and readiness to take care of one's health ( $r = -.17, p < .80$  – a result at the statistical tendency level). To sum up, it can be concluded that the higher was the level of materialism measured by means of collage, the higher was the materialism measured with YMS and the lower were both self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement in the tested teenagers.

It should be added that the correlations of materialism measured by means of YMS with the Self-Esteem Scale and the Scale of Readiness for Self-Improvement were not statistically significant.

### **Self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement as predictors of explicit vs. implicit materialism**

We performed a hierarchical regression analysis in which the explained variable was implicit materialism (Model 1) and explicit materialism (Model 2). The predictors in both models were self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement. Model 1 turned out to be statistically significant after the introduction of each of the tested variables, namely: self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement ( $R = .31, R^2 = .10, F(3, 96) = 3.51, p < .02$ ), while Model 2 was not statistically significant in either of the two steps,  $F(3, 96) = 1.80, ns$ . Thus, both self-esteem and readiness to improve oneself explained implicit mate-

rialism but were not predictors of explicit materialism (cf. Tab. 3). This means that a decrease in self-esteem and readiness for self-improvement stemmed from seeking happiness in material possessions and money. Positive attitude towards buying and money was not significantly associated with self-esteem or readiness for self-improvement.

Table 3  
*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Coefficients. Dependent Variable: Implicit Materialism – Study 2*

Predictors	$\beta$	$t$	$\Delta R^2$	$F$
Step 1				
Self-esteem	-0.21	-2.10*	.04	4.39*
Step 2				
Self-esteem	-0.11	-1.07		
Readiness to improve oneself	-0.27	-2.05*		
Readiness to take care of one's health	0.02	0.13	.06	2.98*

Level of significance: \*  $p < .05$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In Study 1 we found that, when asked what gave them happiness, young people most often mentioned nonmaterial causes, such as family ties or having a passion, rather than wealth or buying gadgets. We also established that the teenager's (explicit) materialism is higher if fewer nonmaterial objects (rather than material ones) bring happiness to his or her mind (Study 1). This state of affairs may to some extent explain the absence of the hypothesized statistically significant association of increased explicit materialism with lowered self-esteem in the tested group (Study 2). Research shows that young Poles have a negative stereotype of a person attaching excessive importance to material goods (Czepielinda, 2014). It can therefore be supposed that, at the of explicit level of attitudes towards materialism in teenagers, material goods and wealth do not "add value" to a person, since they are not socially approved values.

The results of research conducted on American young people are different – explicit materialism in that case is associated with low self-esteem. This may stem from the fact that the attitude to materialism is still different in young Americans than in young Poles. Scores on explicit materialism are inflated in the case of young Americans, which is related to cultural models promoting materialistic values as a path to success and happiness in life (Chaplin & John, 2007).

It should be added that the internalization of this type of values is considerably influenced by upbringing in the family and access to consumption goods. Some indications that the cultural models preferred among Americans will gain ground in Polish society in the course of further economic development are provided by the results of Study 1: children from families with higher declared economic status indicated a higher number of material possessions in response to the question about happiness.

Except one hypothesis, concerning the relation between explicit materialism and self-esteem, the remaining hypotheses were confirmed. It turned out that in the tested group of Polish teenagers implicit materialism was significantly associated with low self-esteem (Study 1) and low readiness for self-improvement (Studies 1 and 2). This means it is not so much the declared preference for materialistic values as actually (though not consciously) seeking happiness in the possession of material objects (or rather specific brand images) that lowers self-esteem and willingness to improve oneself. Moreover, in the presented study we established that self-esteem and readiness to improve oneself are good predictors of materialistic understanding of happiness in young people. This can be interpreted as showing that the lower is the self-esteem and the greater is the unwillingness to take action to change oneself, the higher is the level of implicit materialism.

An interesting result, though contrary to the assumptions and findings of American research, is the one showing a positive relation between family socioeconomic status and teenage materialism (Study 1). This result is consistent with the discourse according to which the sources of materialism lie, on the one hand, in poverty (economic deprivation in the family), and on the other – in excess (growing up in the culture of consumption). The study of Polish teenagers reveals that high (rather than low) self-reported family socioeconomic status is associated with materialism.

The obtained results show one other important thing – *happiness collage* based on a materialistic and nonmaterialistic understanding of happiness is a very useful instrument in exploring the issue of young people's materialism (cf. Chaplin & John, 2007). Study 1 confirmed that the happiness of Polish as well as American teenagers can be related to five categories of objects/events: interests, people and animals, sport, achievements, and material possessions. These categories are the basis for obtaining an answer regarding what makes children and young people happy. Further studies using this method should be conducted in order to test its reliability and validity, which is necessary to construct a commonly available instrument enabling the measurement of implicit materialism.

The results of both studies indicate that it is the measurement of implicit materialism by means of collage that makes it possible to fully identify the negative influence of materialism on teenagers' well-being – namely, on their self-esteem and readiness to improve themselves (which is related to self-realization).

In further studies on materialism and well-being in children and youth, both implicit and explicit materialism should be examined, since only this kind of measurement will reveal the essence of the relations tested. Another outcome of these studies can be effective efforts of psychologists, parents, and teachers to better understand the sources of happiness in children and youth as well as to prevent the negative effects of materialism if necessary.

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## APPENDIX 1

A SAMPLE HAPPINESS COLLAGE  
BY A MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT

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