



A Revolution of Values: Psychological Research on Materialism & its Alternatives

Tim Kasser



Martin Luther King, Jr.



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We as a nation must undergo
a radical revolution of values.
We must rapidly begin the shift
from a “thing-oriented society”
to a “person-oriented society.”

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Materialism's allure

- The percentage of incoming American First-year college students reporting it is “very important” or “essential” to be “financially well-off”:
 - 42% in the mid 1960s
 - 75% in the mid 2000s

Corporate Power

- In 2000, 52 of the largest 100 economic organizations in the world were not nations, but corporations (Mander et al., 2001)

Political Discourse

- “...the American people have got to go about their business. We cannot let the terrorists achieve the objective of frightening our nation to the point where we don't conduct business, where people don't shop” (reported in The New York Times, October 12, 2001)

Messages

- Can purchase happiness
- Important to work and consume
- Life is meaningful and people are successful to the extent they have money, possessions, and the right image

Is this true?

- Psychological costs
- Social costs
- Ecological costs

Measuring Materialism

- Values strategy (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996)
- Rate many goals, guiding principles, (e.g., family, spirituality, fun, etc.)
- Sample materialistic items
 - You will have a job that pays well
 - You will have many expensive possessions
 - You will achieve the “look” you’ve been after
 - You will be admired by many people
- Examine relative importance of goals
- All of us are somewhat materialistic

Measuring Materialism

- Survey methods (e.g., Belk, 1985, Richins & Dawson, 1992)
- Rate agreement with statements
 - Sample Items
 - My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.
 - I like to own things that impress people.
 - I like a lot of luxury in my life.
 - I would rather buy something I need than borrow it from someone else.

Psychological Costs



Diminished Happiness

Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998, 2001

- Higher:
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Physical Symptoms
 - Unpleasant emotions
 - Drug & Alcohol Use
- Lower
 - Self-actualization
 - Vitality
 - Life Satisfaction
 - Pleasant Emotions

Other researchers

- Consumer Research Literature
- Cohen & Cohen (1996) concluded that:
 - “The priority put on being rich was associated positively to almost every ... diagnosis assessed in this study.”

Found in many samples

- Types of people
 - Middle & High School students
 - College Students
 - Adults
 - Business People
- Countries
 - Australia
 - Denmark
 - Germany
 - Hungary
 - India
 - Russia
 - Singapore
 - S. Korea
 - United Kingdom

Social Costs



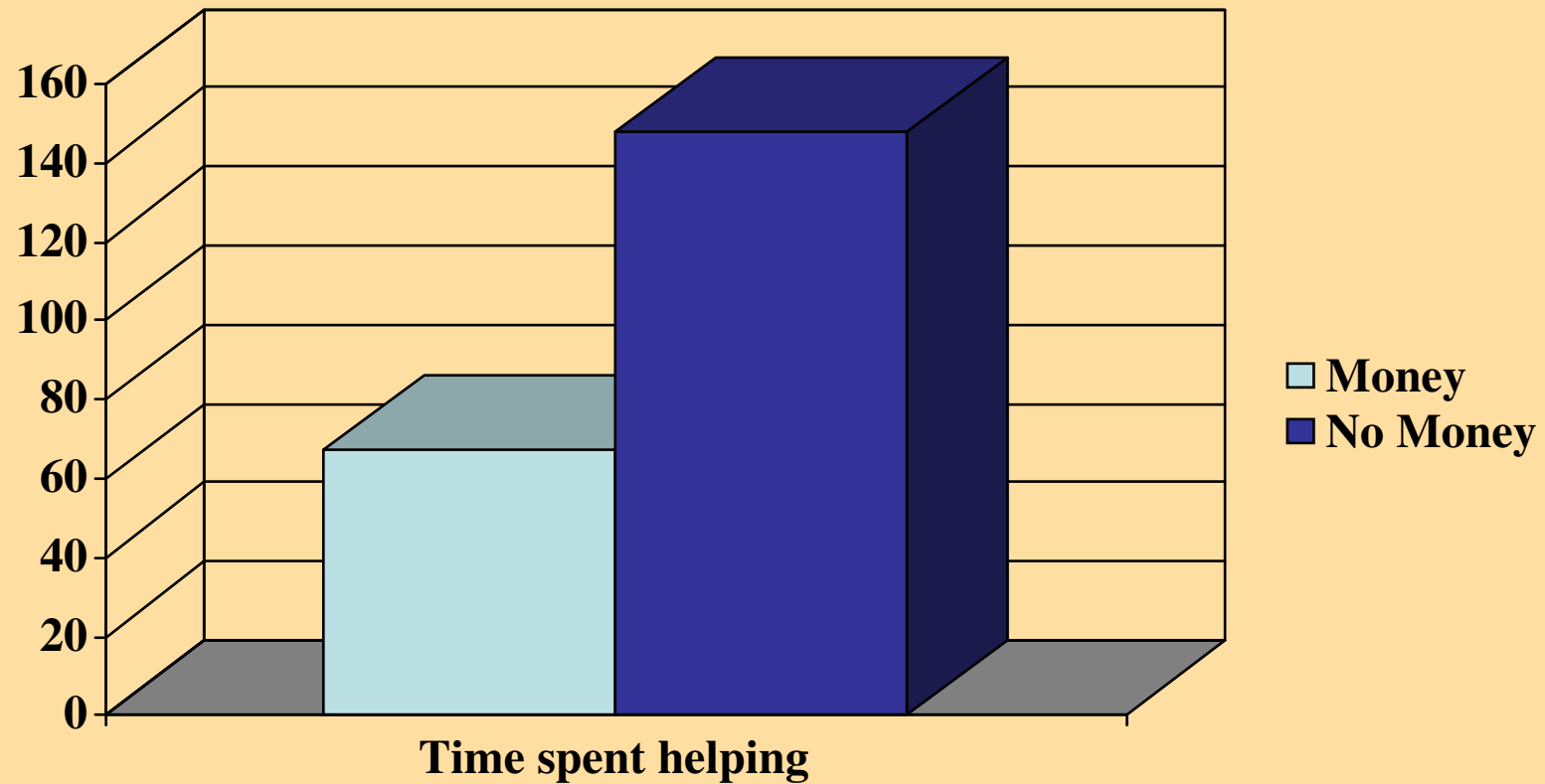
Social Behavior

- Less pro-social and more anti-social behavior
 - Cohen & Cohen (1996); McHoskey (1999); Kasser & Ryan (1993)
- More objectification
 - Less empathy (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995)
 - More Machiavellian (McHoskey, 1999)
 - More competitive (Sheldon et al., 2000)

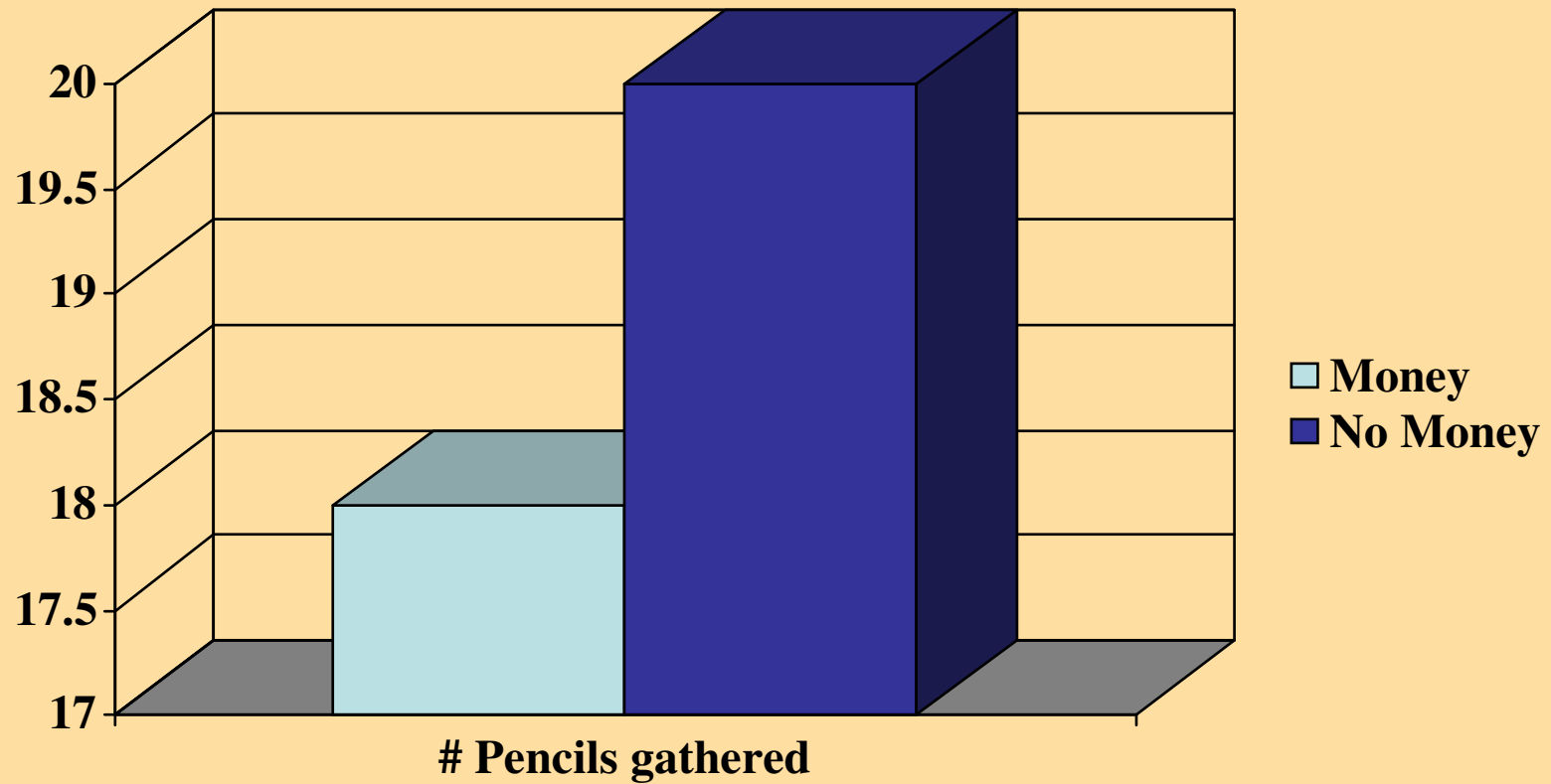
Social Behavior

- Priming studies (Vohs et al., 2006)
 - Unscramble sentences
 - Control sentence: “cold it desk outside is”
 - Money sentence: “high a salary desk paying”
 - Measured various helping behaviors

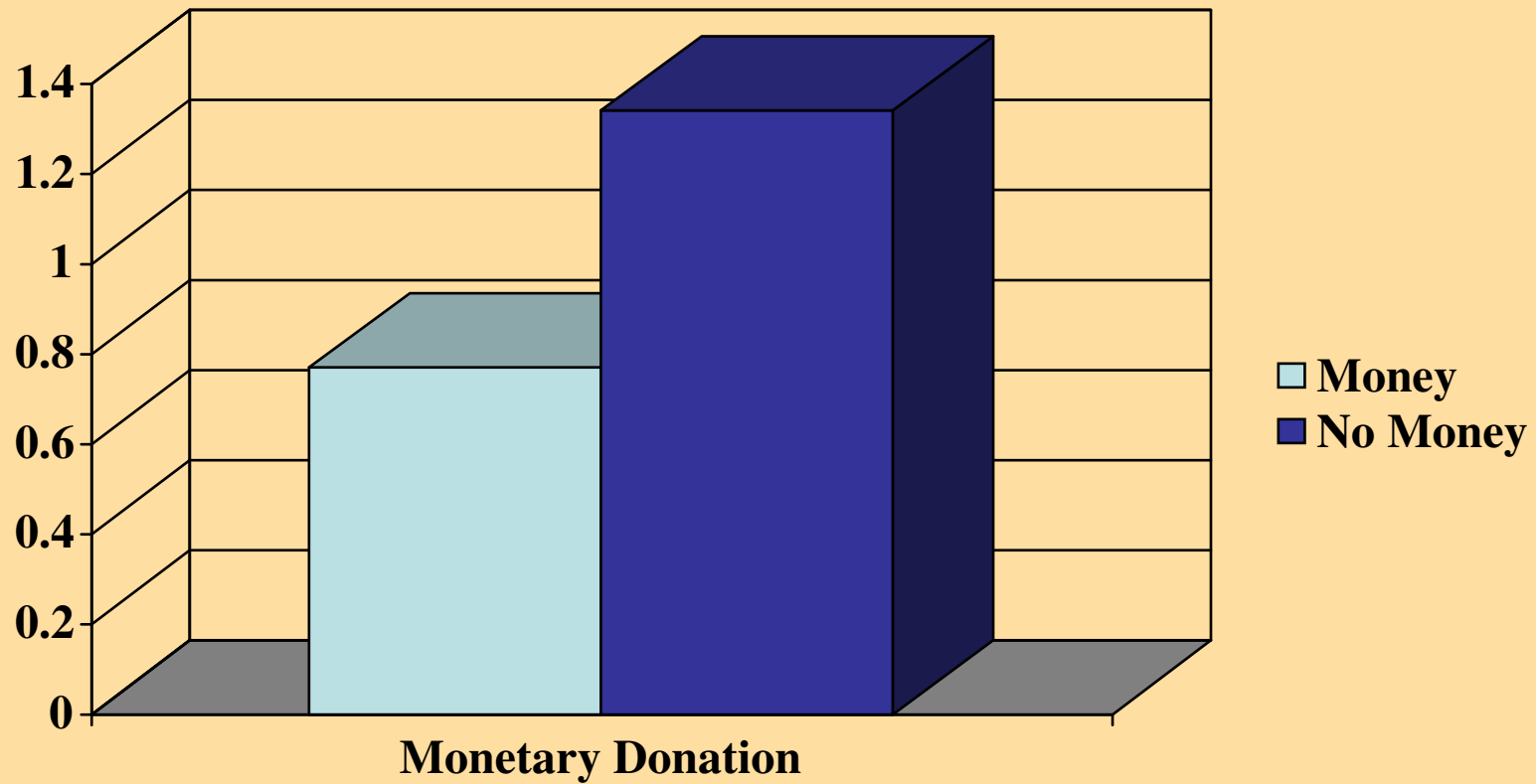
Time spent helping



Pencils Gathered



Amount Donated



Ecological Costs



Valuing the Earth less

- Schwartz (1994)
 - Less value on protecting the environment, world of beauty, and unity with nature
- Saunders & Munro (2000)
 - Lower biophilia

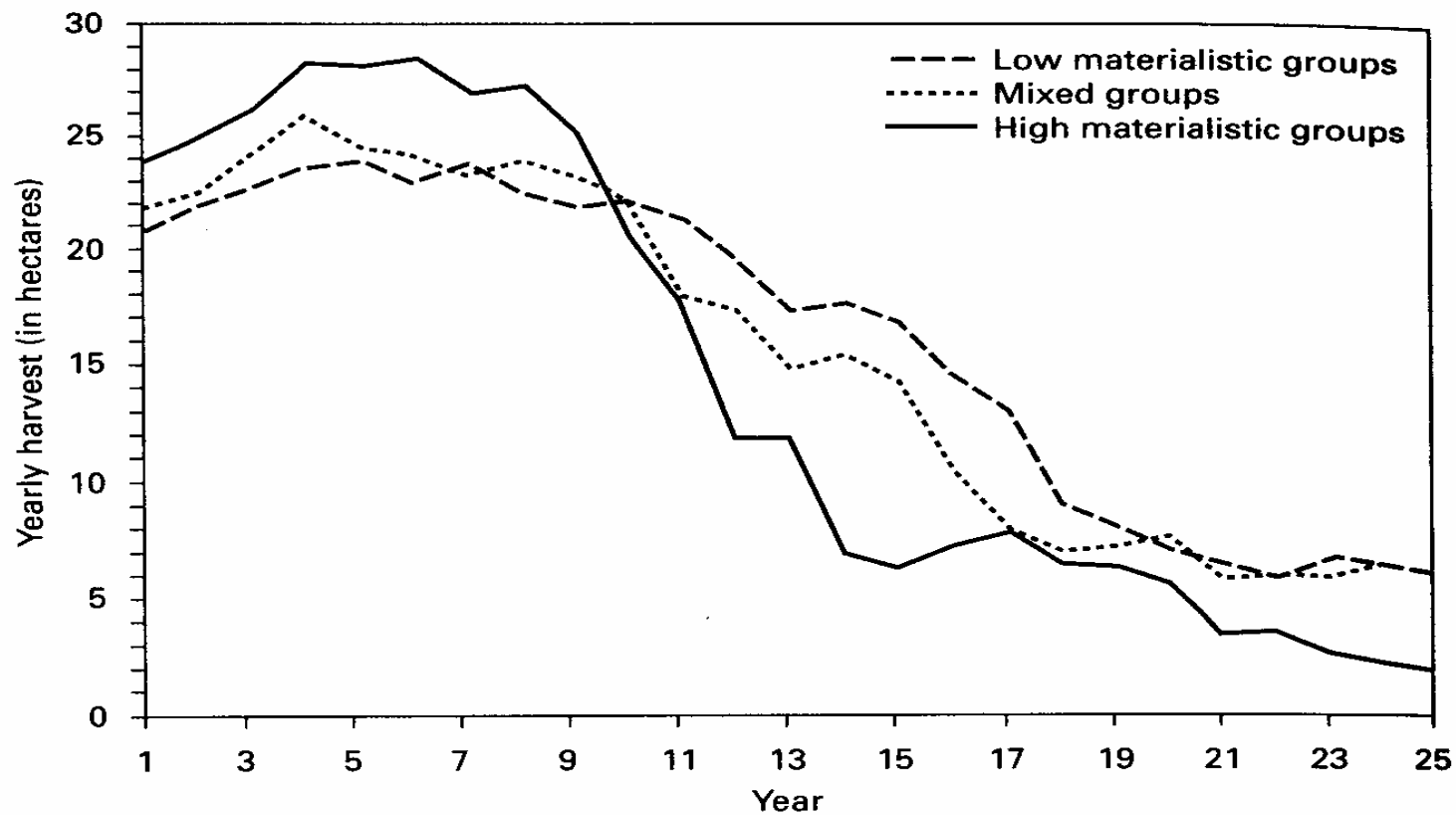
Ecological Footprint

- Number of acres people use to support their lifestyle
- Transportation, food, housing
- Brown & Kasser (2005)
 - Higher materialism, higher Ecological Footprint

Tragedy of the Commons

- Sheldon & McGregor (2000) assigned people to one of three groups:
 - All high materialistic
 - 2 high/ 2 low materialistic
 - All low materialistic
- Played a forest-management game
- High materialist groups harvested more forest more quickly
- And made less profit

Tragedy of the Commons



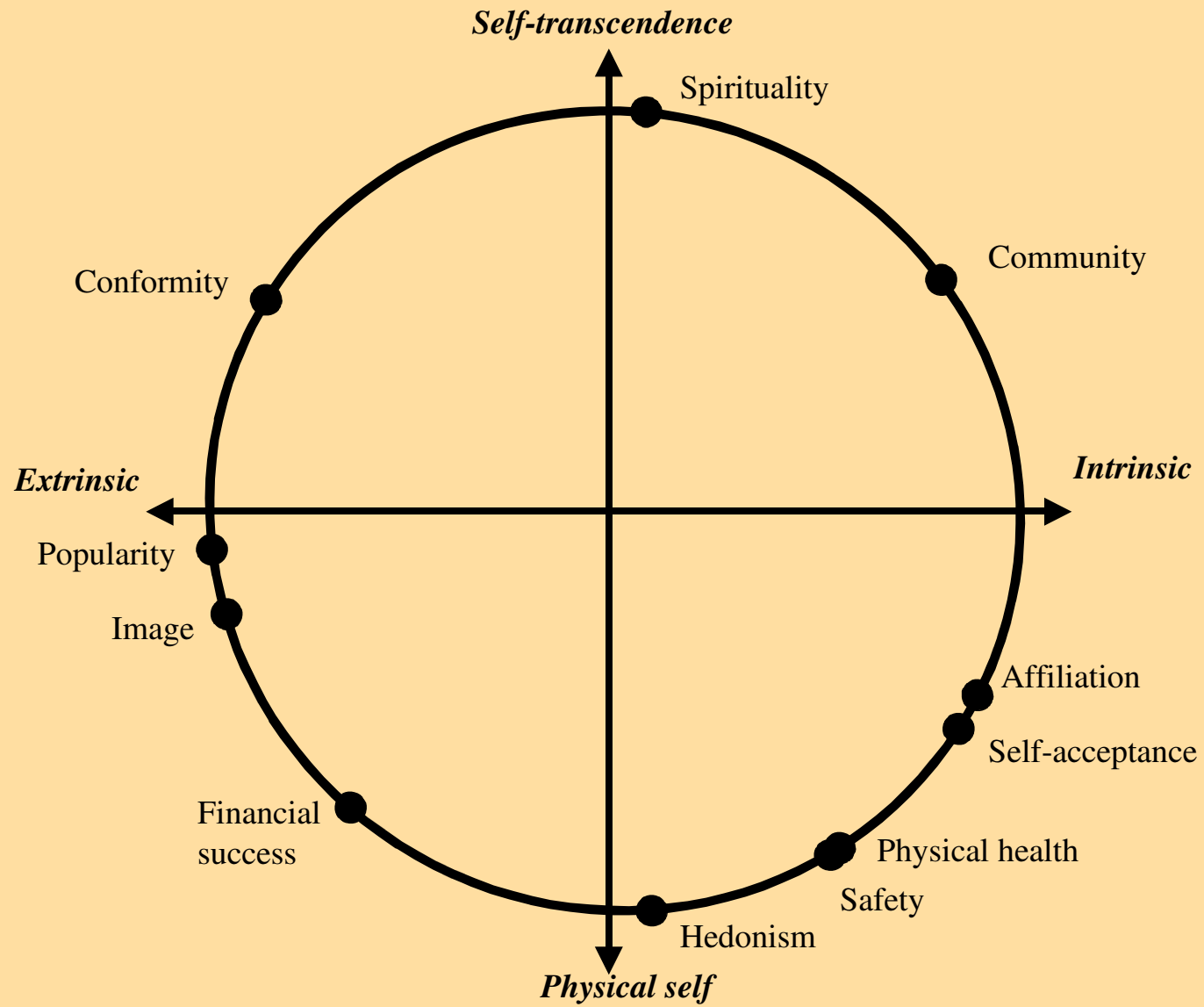
Alternatives to Materialism

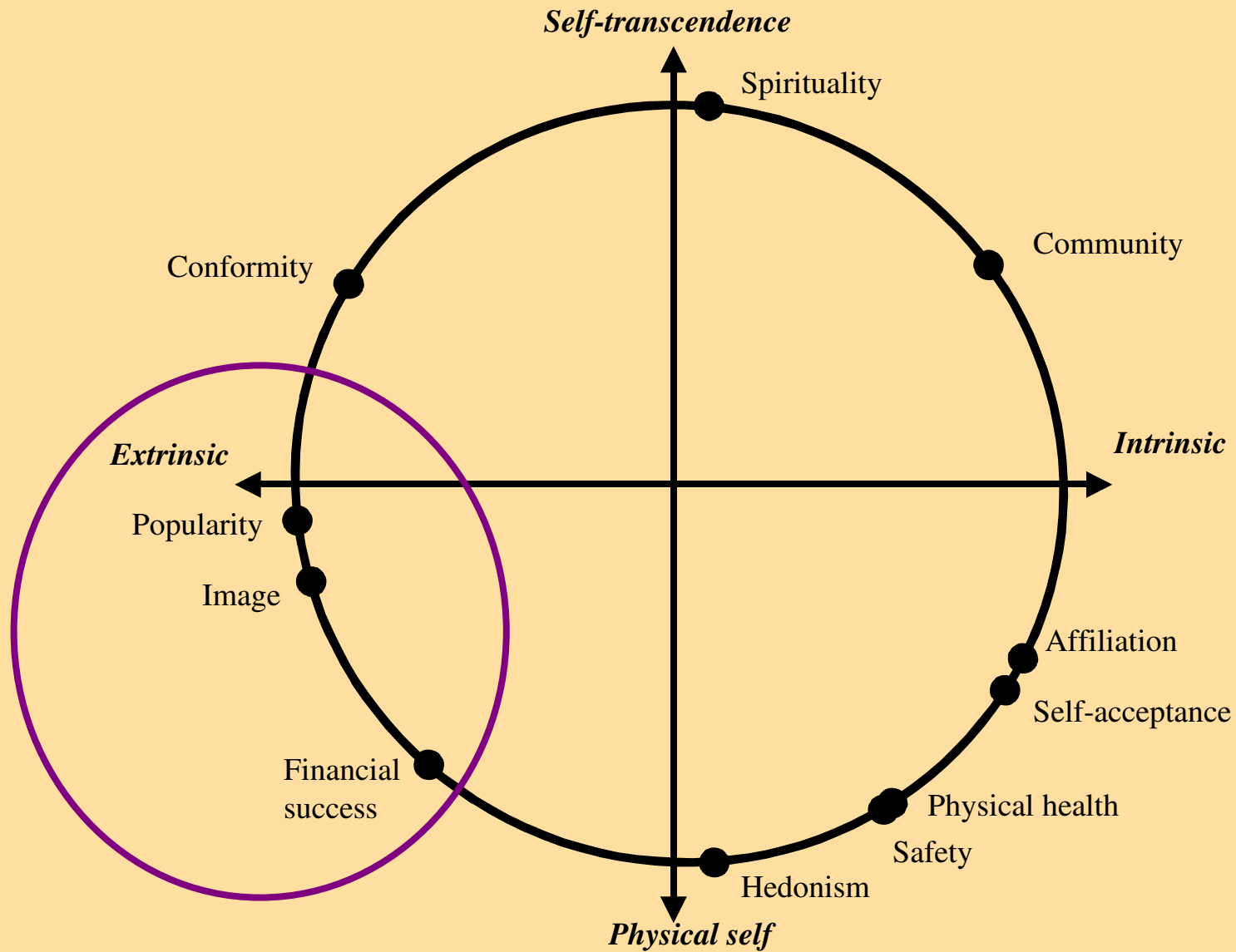
- Need to decrease the extent to which the environment encourages materialistic pursuits
- Need to pursue an alternative set of values and aims that oppose materialism

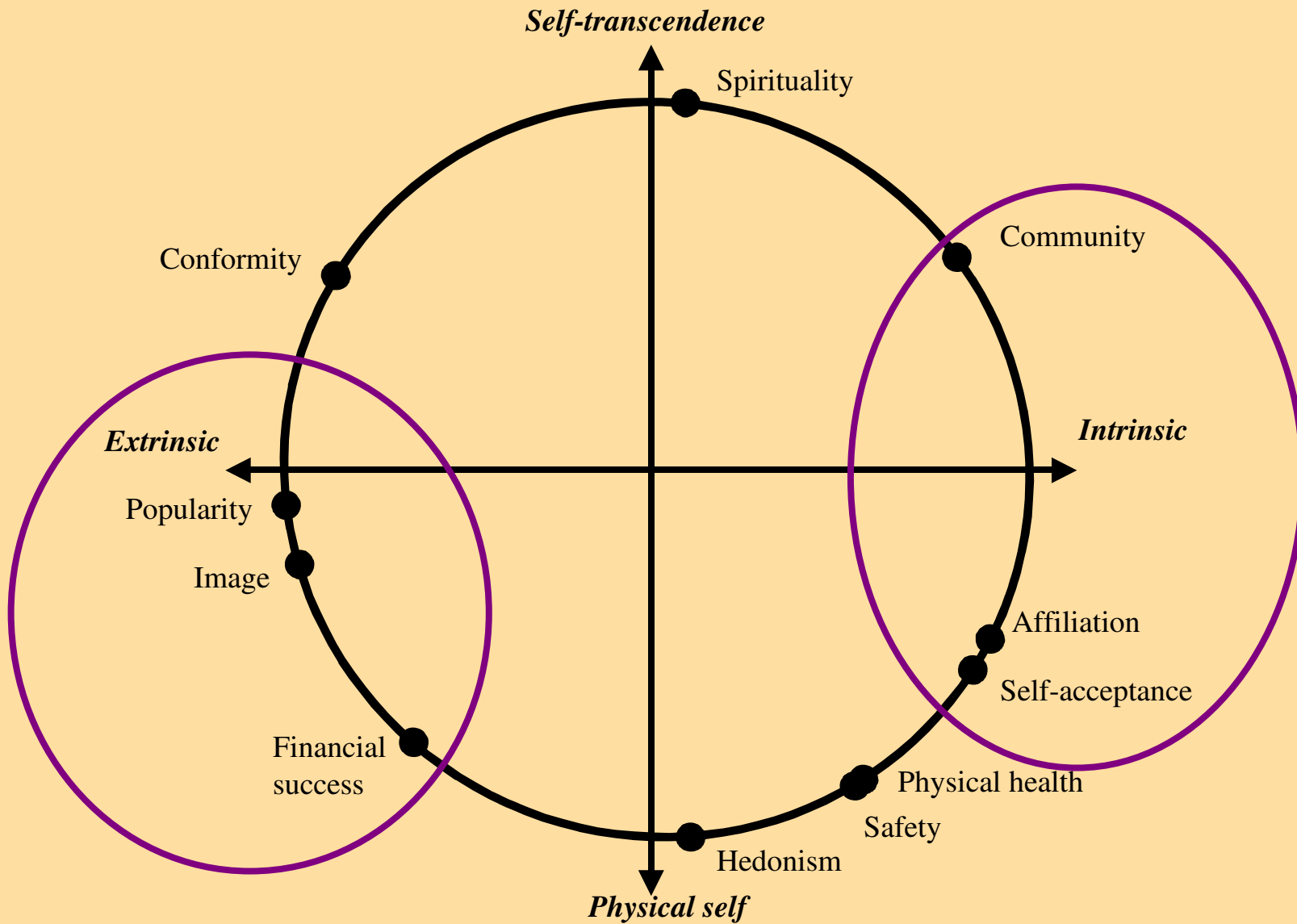
Organization of Goals

Grouzet, Kasser et al. (2005)

- Assessed aspirations in 11 domains
 - e.g., Spirituality, Hedonism, Affiliation, Health, etc.
- >1800 College students in 15 nations
- Circular Stochastic Modeling
 - Adjacent goals are consistent
 - Opposing goals are conflictual







Intrinsic Values

Kasser & Ryan (1996)

- Self-acceptance
“I will follow my interests and curiosity where they take me.”
- Affiliation
“I will express my love for special people.”
- Community Feeling
“I will help the world become a better place.”

Psychological Benefits



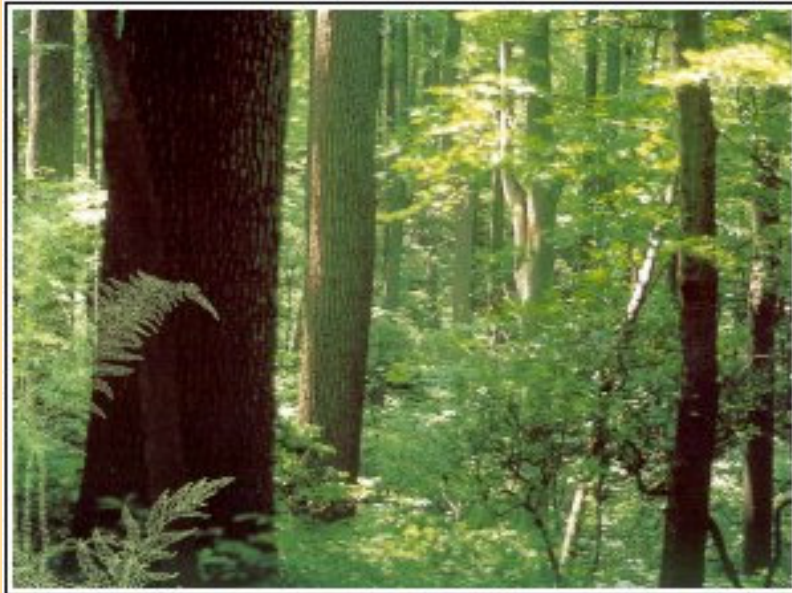
- More happiness
- More life satisfaction
- Higher vitality
- Less depression
- Less anxiety
- Fewer physical symptoms

Social Benefits



- More prosocial behavior
- More empathy
- More cooperation
- Less antisocial behavior

Ecological Benefits



- More environmentally friendly behaviors
- Lower Ecological Footprint
- Less consumption in forest dilemma game

Policy Avenues

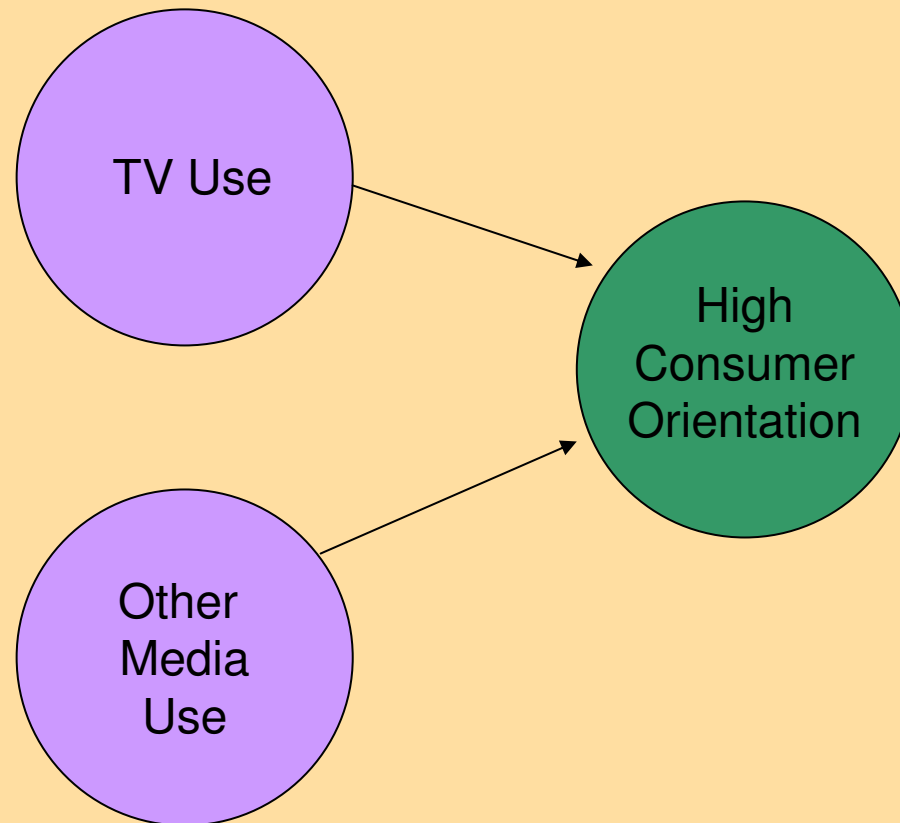
- Kids and Marketing
- Voluntary Simplicity
- Time Affluence
- Varieties of Capitalism

Kids and Marketing

- Children in schools with Channel One have stronger consumer orientation (Brand & Greenberg, 1994)
- Children who watch more TV have higher consumer values and lower well-being (Nairn, Omrod, & Bottomley, 2007; Schor, 2004)

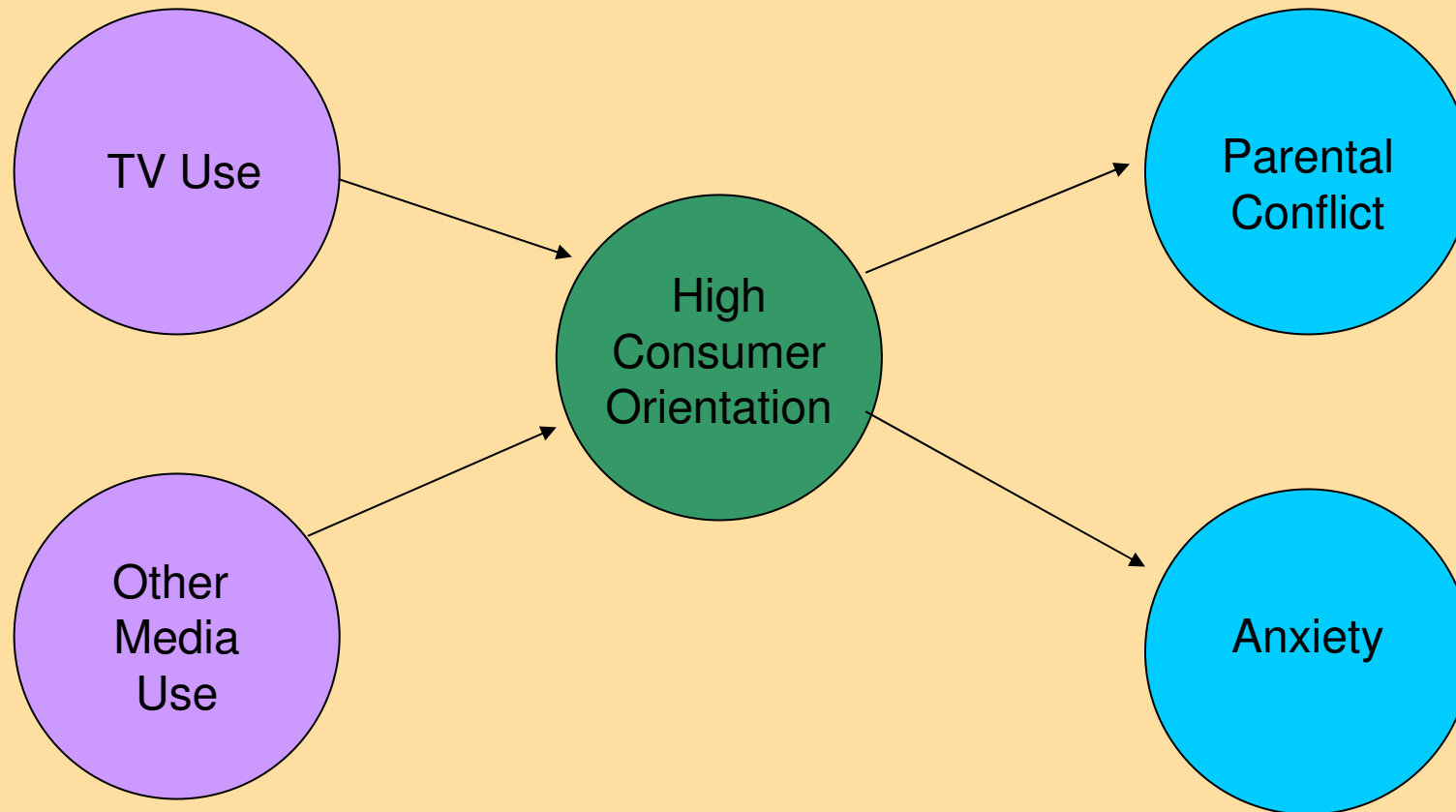
TV Use and Consumer Orientation

Schor (2004)



TV Use and Consumer Orientation

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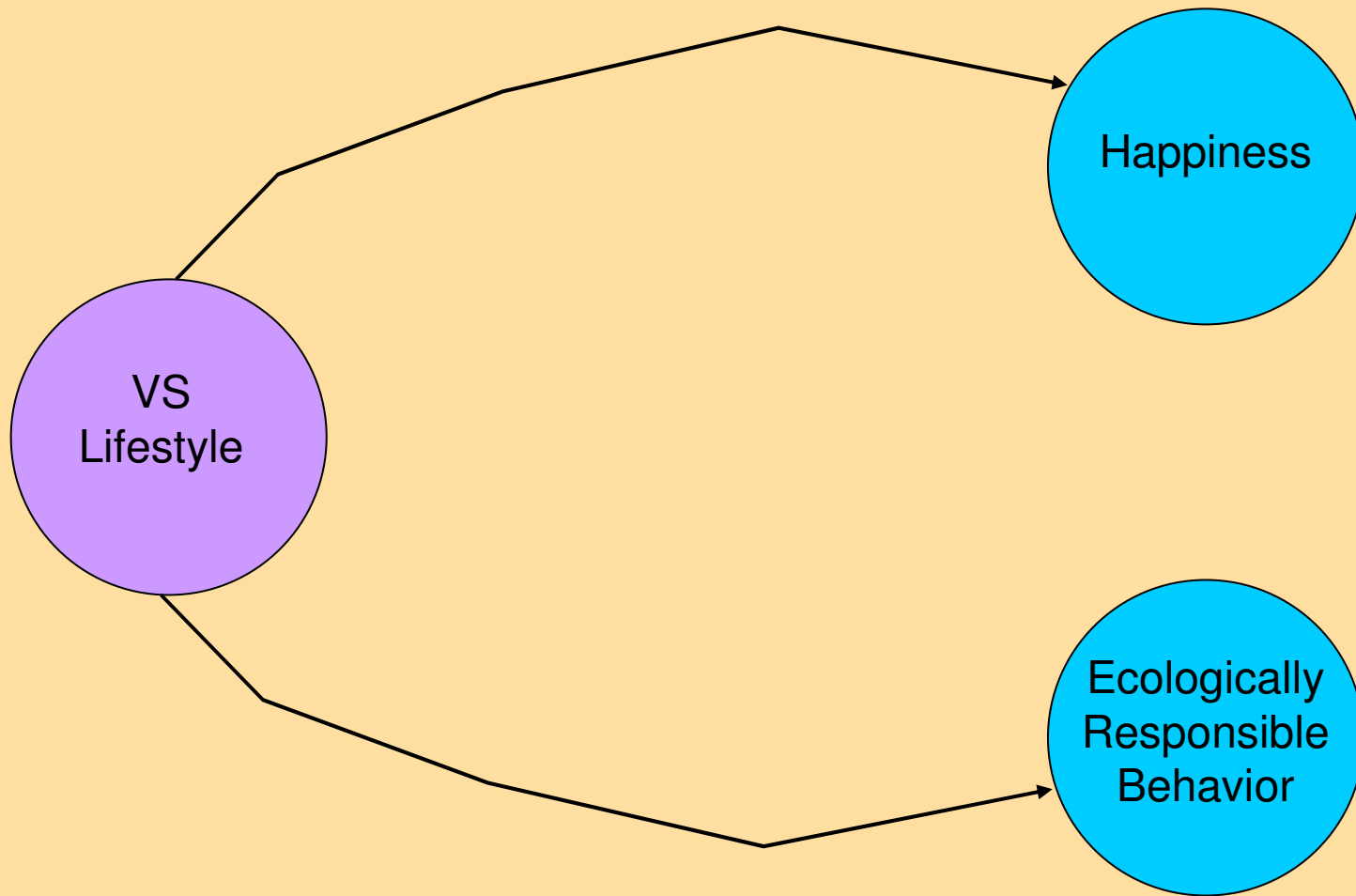


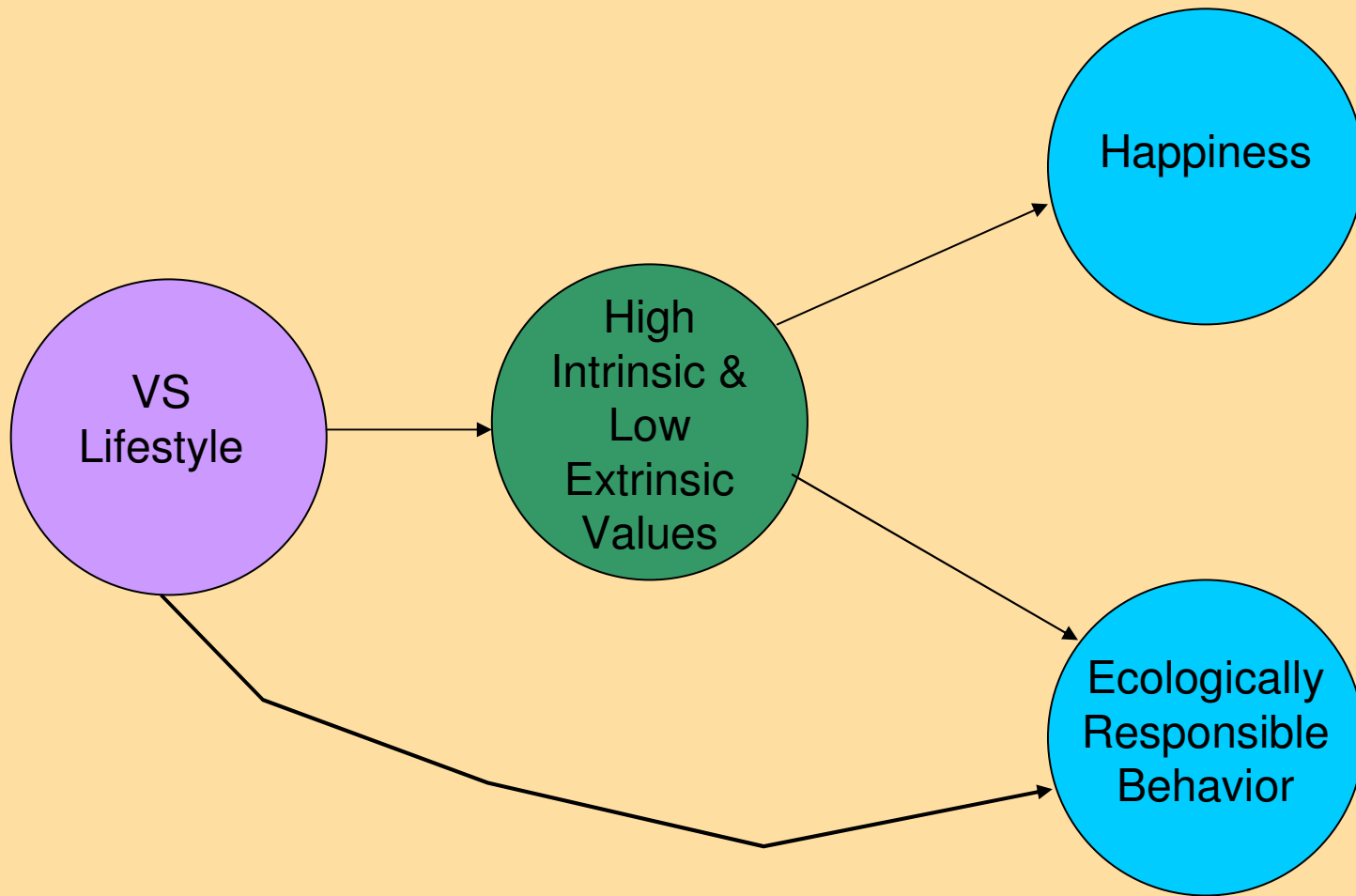
Kids & Marketing - Policies

- Tax ads to children
- Remove ads from schools
- Ban advertising to kids
- Restore FTC's power to regulate advertising to kids

Voluntary Simplicity

- Lifestyle focused on being “inwardly rich” and caring about personal growth, family, volunteer activity, and ecology (Elgin, 1993)
 - Work, earn, & consume less
- Brown & Kasser (2005) compared 200 VSrs with 200 mainstream U.S. citizens





Voluntary Simplicity - Policies

- Educate people about happiness, values, & ecology
- Educate people about debt
- Reform Health Insurance

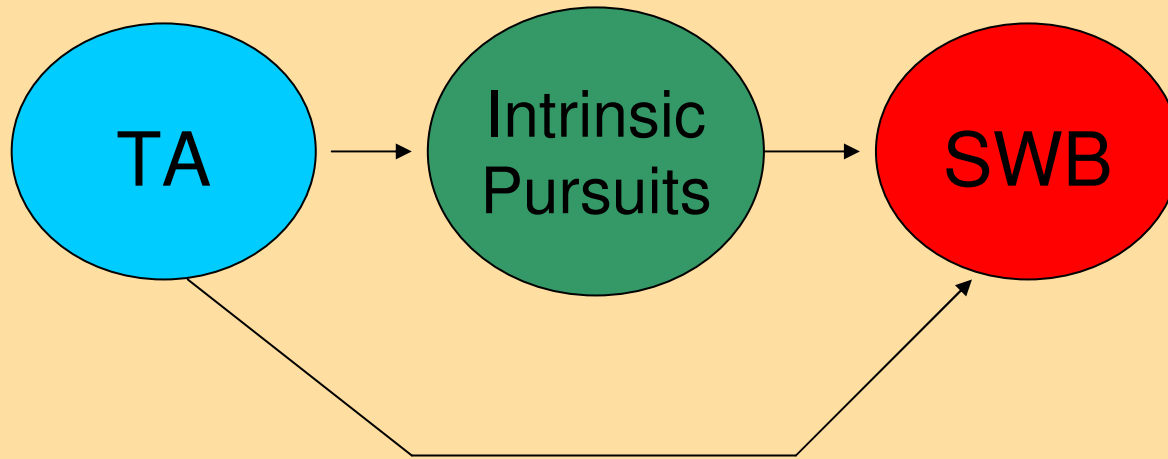
Time Affluence

- Time Poverty in America
 - Americans work 160 hours per year more than 30 years ago
 - Americans work ~9 weeks more per year than most Europeans
- Time Affluence studies (Kasser & Sheldon, in press)

Time Affluence - Study 4

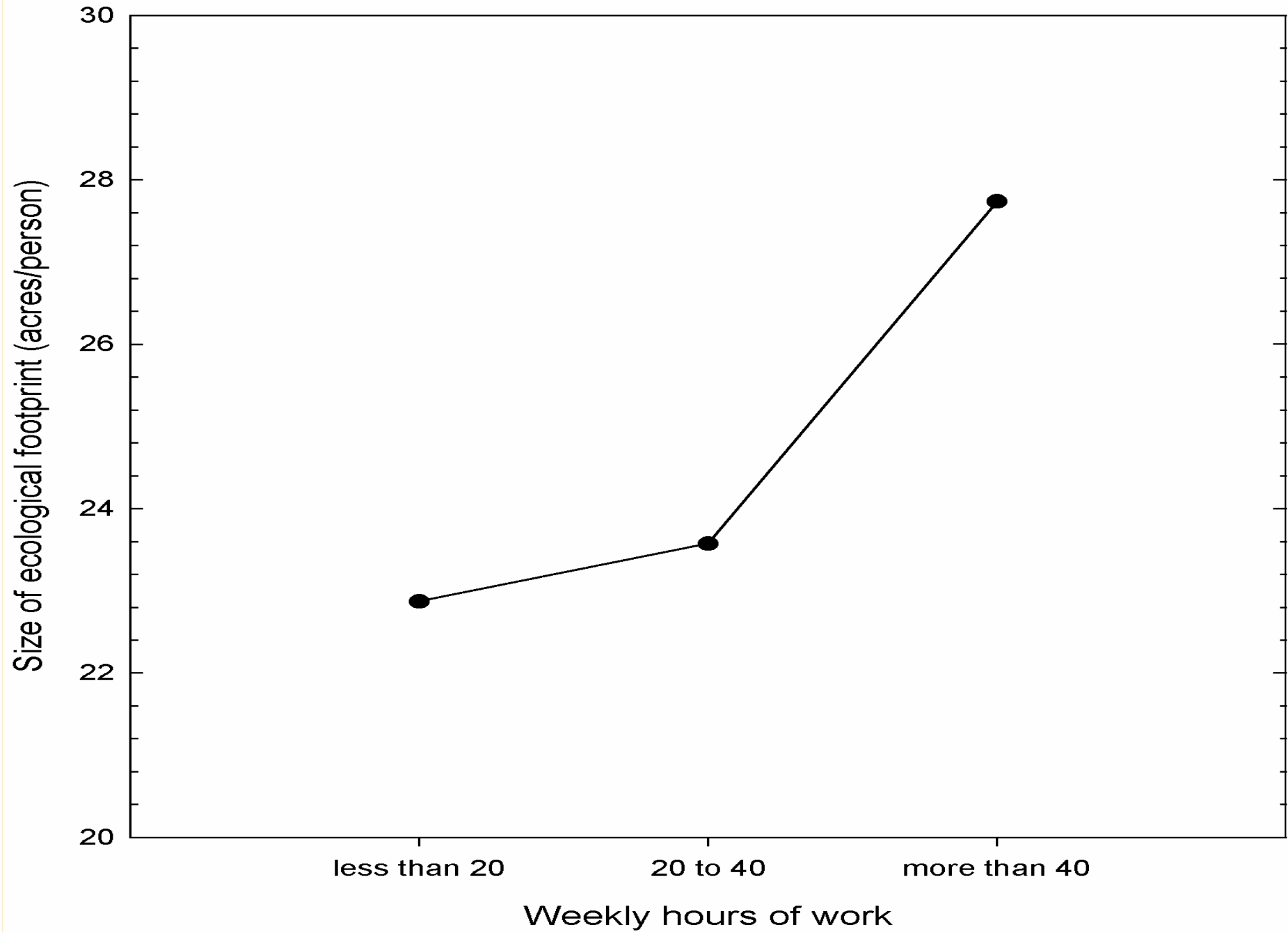
- 145 adults
- Completed measures of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect
- Completed Time Affluence measure
 - I have had plenty of spare time
 - I have felt like things have been very hectic
- Mediation variable
 - Need satisfaction from Intrinsic pursuits





Ecological Benefits of Time Affluence

- Kasser & Brown (2003)
- Same sample of VSrs and Mainstream Americans



Ecological Benefits of Time Affluence

- Rosnick & Weisbrot (2006)
- “If, by 2050, the world works as many hours as do Americans, it could consume 15-30 percent more energy than it would by following Europe. The additional carbon emissions could result in 1 to 2 degrees Celsius in extra global warming.”

Time Affluence - Policies

- Provide family leave
- Pass minimum vacation laws
- Enact overtime laws
- Move towards shorter work weeks

Varieties of Capitalism

Hall & Gingerich (2004)

- Liberal Markets
- Competitive Strategies
- High focus on profit
- USA & UK
- Co-Ordinated Markets
- Strategic Solutions
- Lower focus on profit
- Germany & Austria

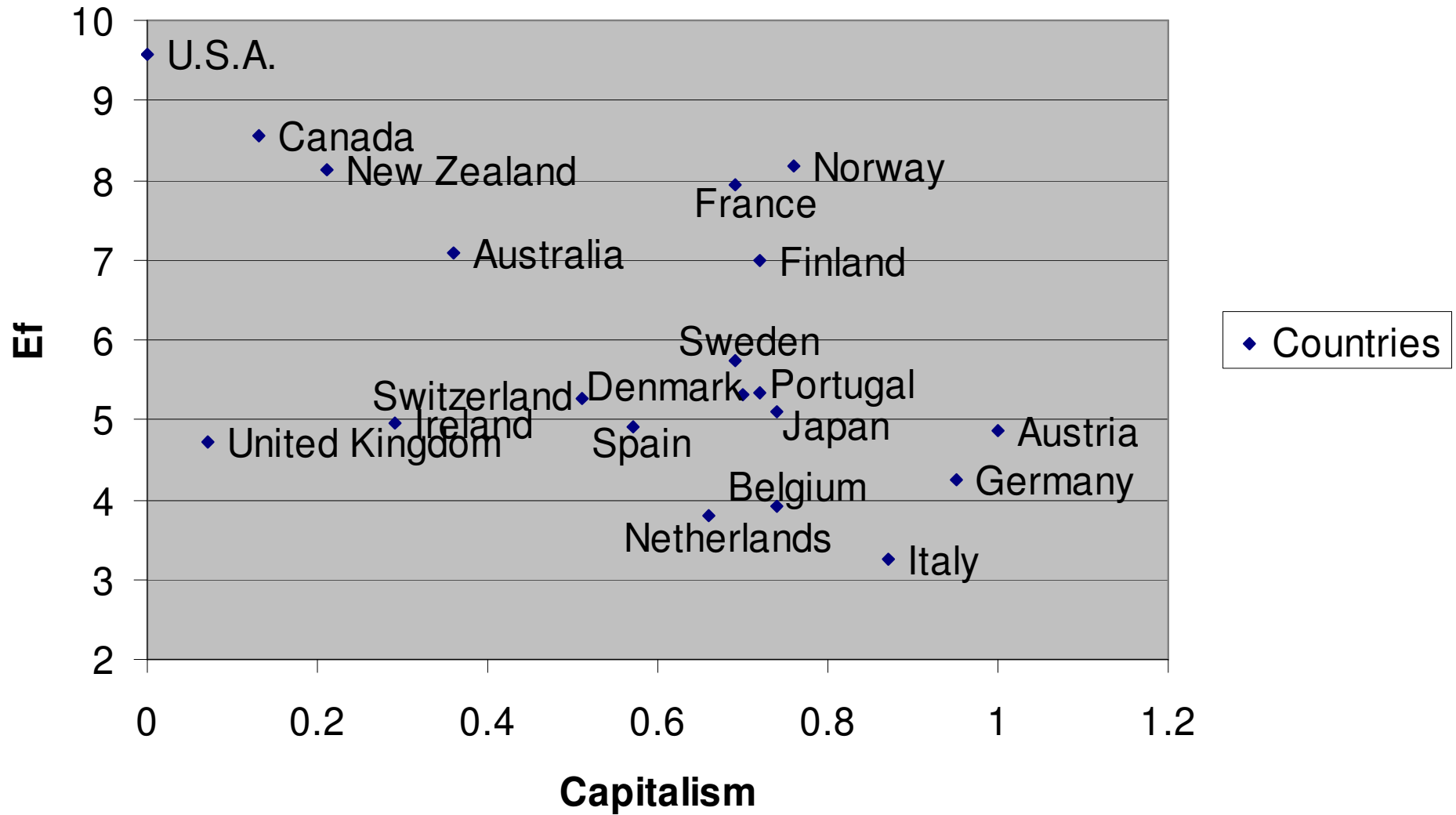
Varieties of Capitalism

- Kasser (in prep) studied 20 economically developed nations
- Assessed extent to which institutions focus on profit (liberal vs. co-ordinated market economies; Hall & Gingerich, 2004)
- Assessed citizens' ideologies focusing on profit (values for achievement and power; Schwartz, 2007)

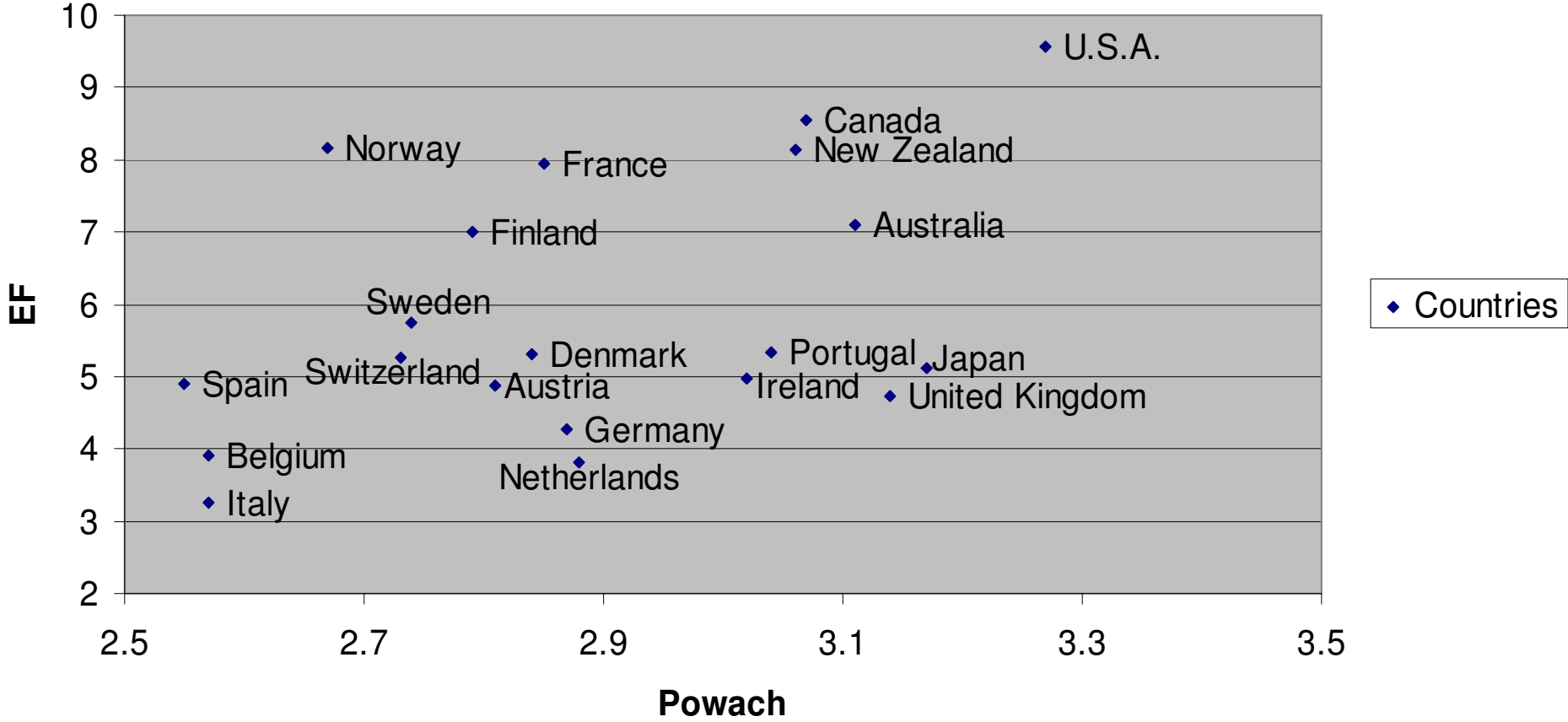
Results

- Significant associations with
 - Ecological Footprint
 - UNICEF Children's Well-Being Ranking

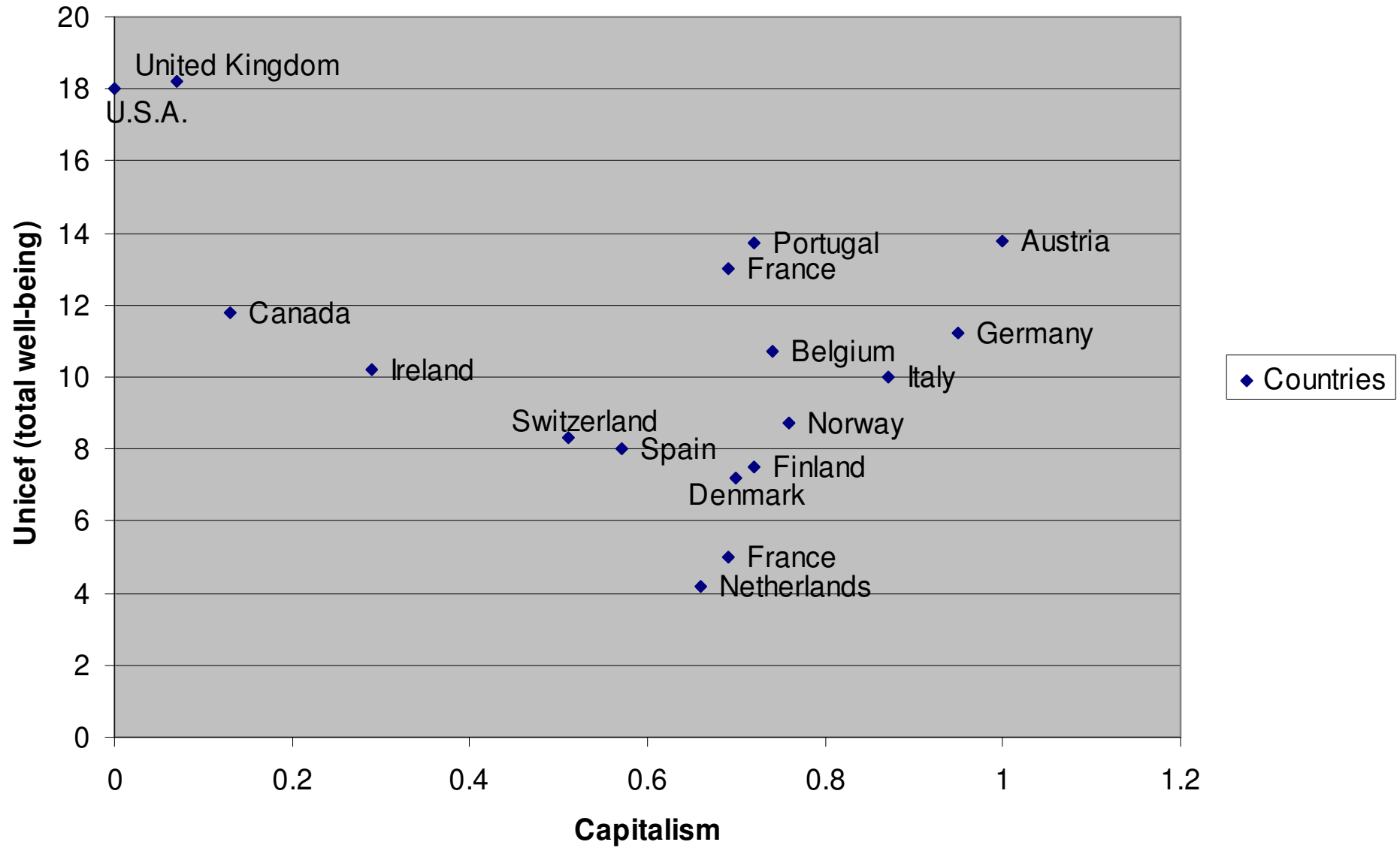
Ef vs Capitalism



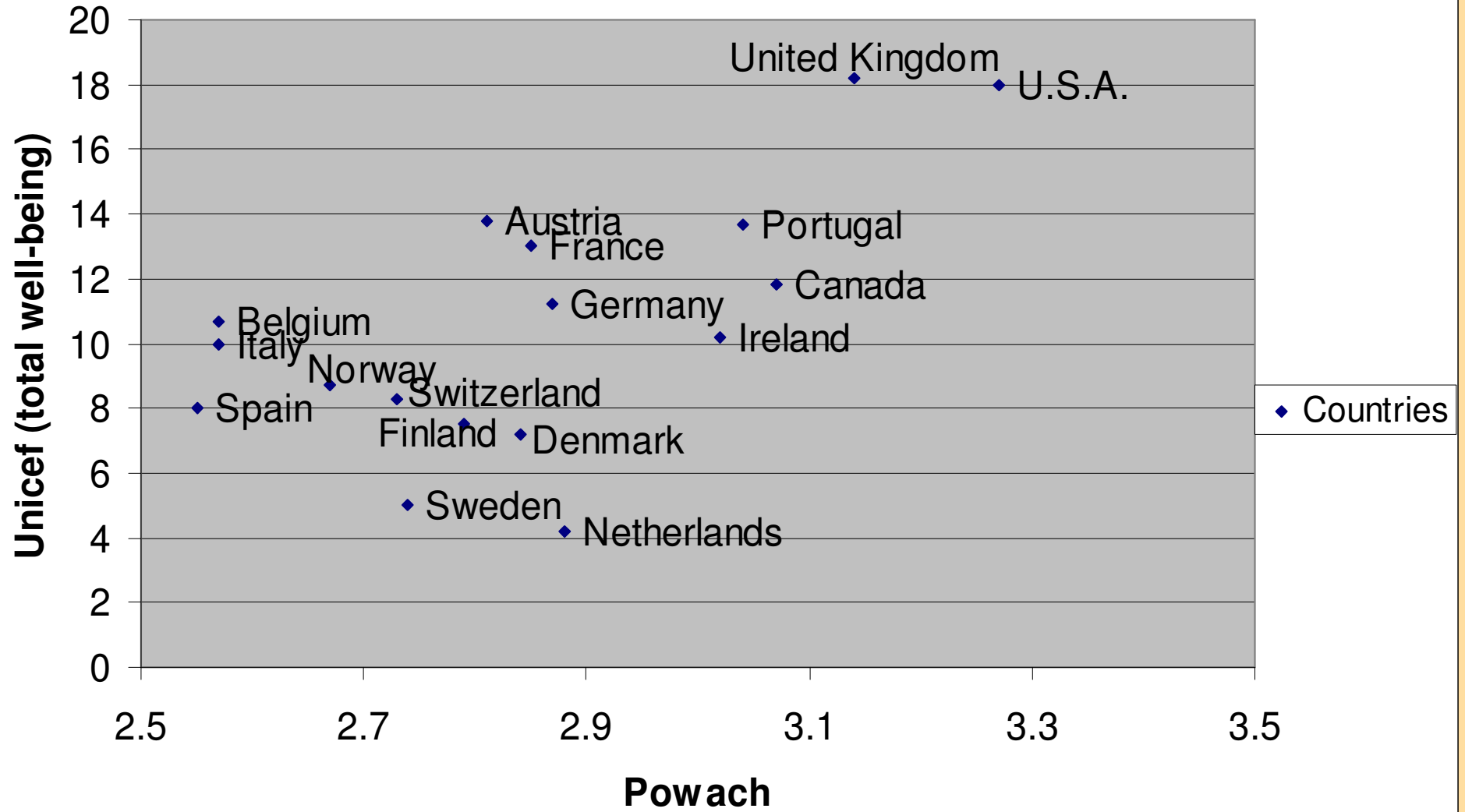
EF vs Powach



Unicef vs Capitalism



Unicef vs Powach



Results

- Significant Correlations with
 - % eating meals with parents
 - % in relative poverty
 - % feel like “an outsider”
 - Infant mortality rate
 - Teen pregnancy rate
 - % Overweight

Varieties of Capitalism - Policies

- Increase national control of labor relations
- Move from a shareholder to a stakeholder model – “economic democracy”
- Change laws regarding corporate aims and power - return to Smith’s moral virtues

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