

Misery is not miserly, says study of consumers

Those who feel blue and self-focused pay more for material goods

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Feeling blue and self-focused? Watch your wallet, says a new study into consumer behaviour.

Whether you're aware of it or not — and most consumers aren't — how you feel influences how much you're willing to pay for material goods, say researchers at several U.S. universities, including Carnegie Mellon and Harvard.

While previous research has shown the amount of money you're willing to give up for an item increases with feelings of sadness, the new study shows "self-focus" can moderate that tendency.

"Results demonstrated that the misery-is-not-miserly effect occurs only when self-focus is high. That is, self-focus moderates the effect of sadness on spending," according to the authors of the study, to be published in the journal *Psychological Science* and presented Saturday at a meeting of the Society for Social and Personality Psychology in New Mexico.

Sadness and self-focus make you spend

In a study of 13 women and 20 men, participants were randomly assigned to watch either a sad video or an emotionally neutral one. The sad video was about the death of a boy's mentor while the other was about Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

The ones who watched the neutral video were asked to write about their daily activities while those who watched the sad video wrote about how a sad situation such as the one portrayed in the video would affect them personally.

Self-focus was then measured by counting how frequently study participants used references to "I," "me," "my" and "myself" in writing their essay.

Afterward, participants were offered the opportunity to buy a sporty-looking water bottle and told they could use any amount of the \$10 they'd been paid at the beginning of the experiment to make the purchase.

Among participants primed to feel sad, those who were highly self-focused paid more for the bottle than those low in self-focus. But as the researchers point out, sadness tends to increase self-focus, making the increased spending prompted by sadness difficult to avoid.

Those primed to feel neutral did not tend to be highly self-focused and so did not pay as much for the water bottle.

The researchers suggest sadness and self-focus cause people to devalue both their sense of self and current possessions. They argue further that this devaluation increases a person's willingness to pay more for new material goods, presumably to enhance their sense of self.

Despite the big difference, participants in the sad group typically insisted that the video's emotional content didn't affect their willingness to spend more.

