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Media Relations

The More Secure You Feel, The Less You Value Your Stuff, UNH Research Shows

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DURHAM, N.H. – People who feel more secure in receiving love and acceptance from others place less monetary value on their possessions, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire.

The research was conducted by Edward Lemay, assistant professor of psychology at UNH, and colleagues at Yale University. The research is presented in the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology in the article "Heightened interpersonal security diminishes the monetary value of possessions."

Lemay and his colleagues found that people who had heightened feelings of interpersonal security – a sense of being loved and accepted by others – placed a lower monetary value on their possession than

people who did not.

In their experiments, the researchers measured how much people valued specific items, such as a blanket and a pen. In some instances, people who did not feel secure placed a value on an item that was five times greater than the value placed on the same item by more secure people.

"People value possessions, in part, because they afford a sense of protection, insurance, and comfort," Lemay says. "But what we found was that if people already have a feeling of being loved and accepted by others, which also can provide a sense of protection, insurance, and comfort, those possessions decrease in value."

The researchers theorize that the study results could be used to help people with hoarding disorders.

"These findings seem particularly relevant to understanding why people may hang onto goods that are no longer useful. They also may be relevant to understanding why family members often fight over items from estates that they feel are rightfully theirs and to which they are already attached. Inherited items may be especially valued because the associated death threatens a person's sense of personal security," Lemay says.

The research was conducted by Lemay; Margaret Clark, Aaron Greenberg, Emily Hill, and David Roosth, all from Yale University; and Elizabeth Clark-Polner, from Université de Genève, Switzerland.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

PHOTO

Edward Lemay, assistant professor of psychology at UNH.

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Editors and Reporters: The journal article "Heightened interpersonal security diminishes the monetary value of possessions" can be downloaded at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/00221031>.

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