

Measuring and Testing Consumer Culture



Outline

- What are the key concepts?
- What is the theory?
- How to quantify and test this?
- First results

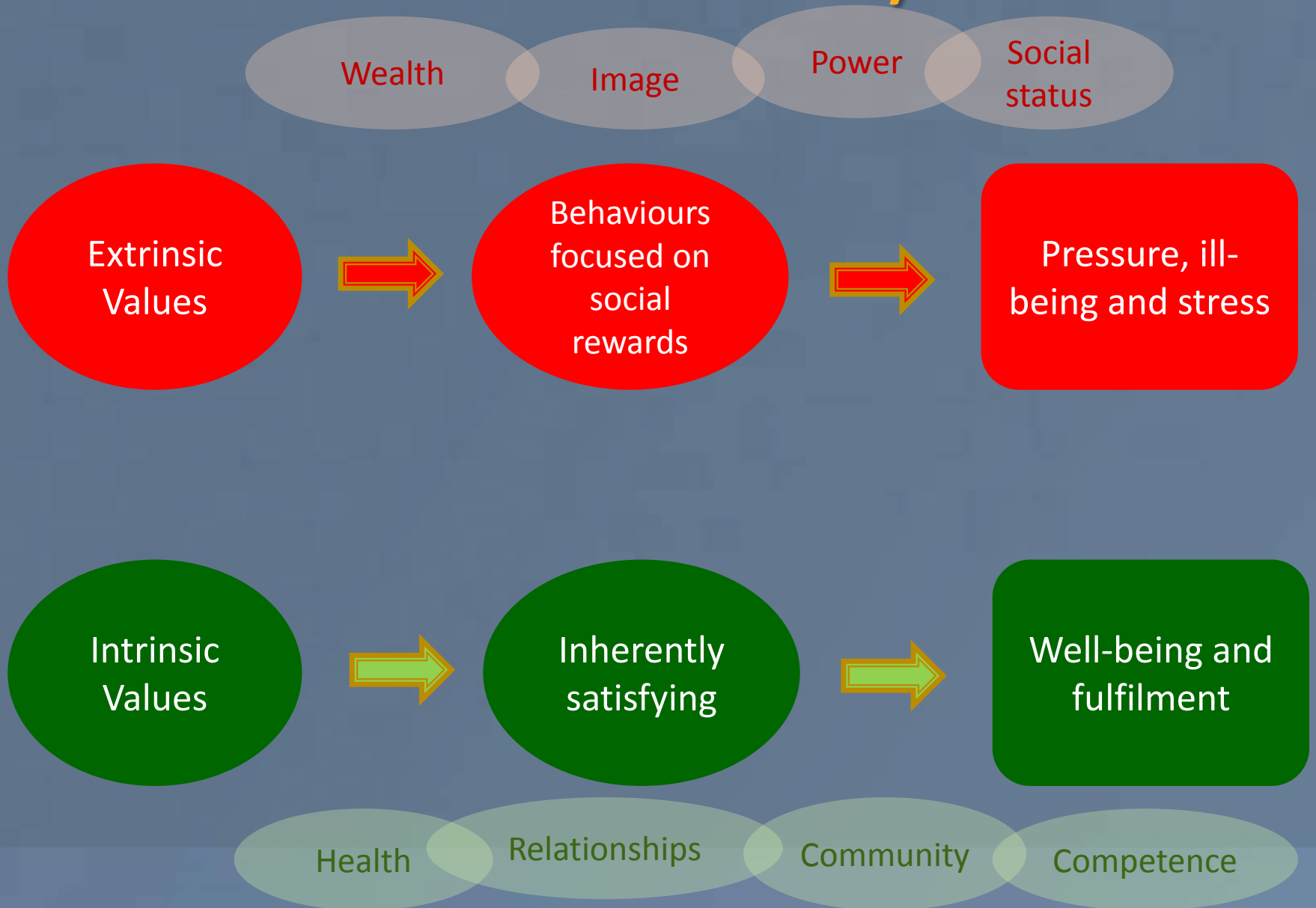
Cultural Ideals

- Wealthy and attractive people are cultural ideals we should strive towards
- Materialism and Appearance are means through which to achieve the 'ideal self'
- Portrayed as indicators of success

Self-Determination Theory

- Materialism and Appearance recognised as indicators of social acceptance and status
- People feel **pressured** to strive for these ideals
- Behaviours become controlled by **extrinsic forces**
- Takes energies away from psychologically satisfying pursuits

Self-determination theory



But is it the motives?

Does it matter if people really *value* these ideals...

or

...is it striving for them **in order to fit in?**

- Researchers have tried to tease apart the negative effects of
 - *valuing* materialism and appearance
 - being *motivated* by extrinsic or social reasons

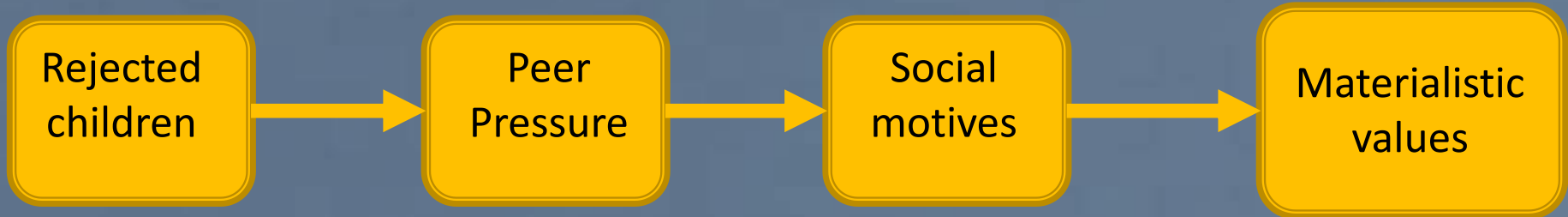
Children's motivations?

- Very little direct research on children's **motivations** for materialism and appearance

- Interview responses suggest motives are overwhelmingly **social**
 - To fit in
 - To gain acceptance
 - To gain respect

Motives predict values

- Social motives for these cultural ideals may lead to greater consumer culture values in children



Study 1

- Create questionnaires to children's motives for materialism and appearance
- How do these **intrinsic** and **social motives** for materialism and appearance relate to **children's** well-being?

Study 1

- Questionnaires distributed in two primary schools
- 150 children aged 8-11 (65 boys; 85 girls)

Materialistic Motives Scale - MMS

- *“Some children think having money and expensive and ‘cool’ things is important because...”*

	Disagree a lot	Disagree a little	Agree a little	Agree a lot
1. It makes you more popular with other children	1	2	3	4

- 4 social motives ($\alpha=.81$):
 - *“It makes you more popular with other children”*
 - *“It makes other children follow your ideas more often”*
 - *“It helps to make other children respect you more”*
 - *“You will feel more accepted by other children”*
- 3 intrinsic motives ($\alpha=.81$):
 - *“It means that you can help poor people”*
 - *“It means that you could buy nice presents for your family and friends”*
 - *“It means that you could support your family when you are older”*

Appearance Motives Scale -AMS

- **Boys:** *“Some children think having a body with big muscles is important because...”*
- **Girls:** *“Some children think having a thin body is important because...”*
- 4 social motives ($\alpha=.86$):
 - *“It makes you more popular with other children”*
 - *“It makes other children follow your ideas more often”*
 - *“It helps to make other children respect you more”*
 - *“You will feel more accepted by other children”*
- 2 intrinsic motives ($r = .52$):
 - *“It means that you’re more healthy”*
 - *“It will help you do better at sports”*

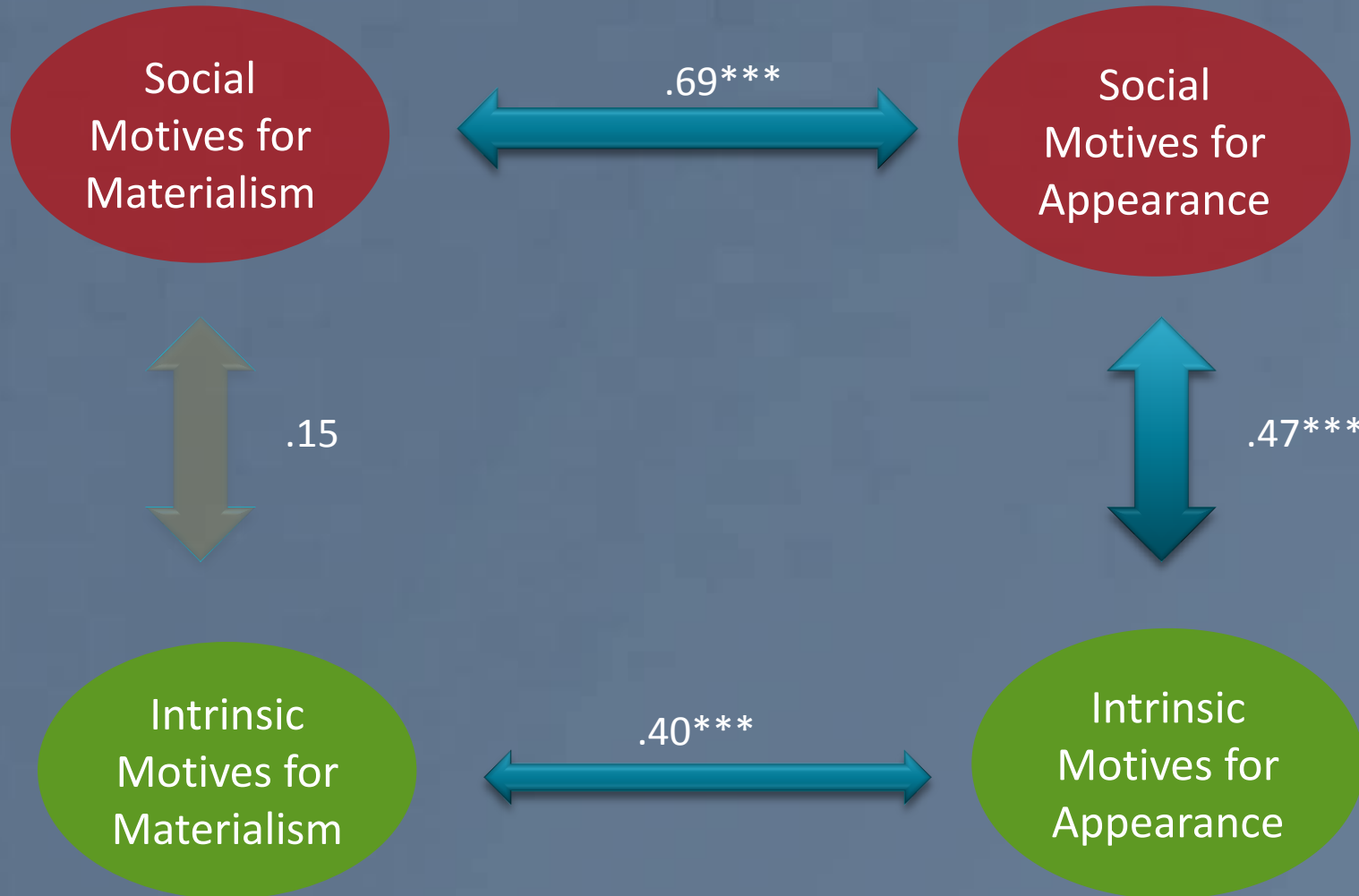
Depression

- Children's depression inventory scale [CDI-S] – Kovac ($\alpha=.82$)
- 20 sets of three statements including ten fillers

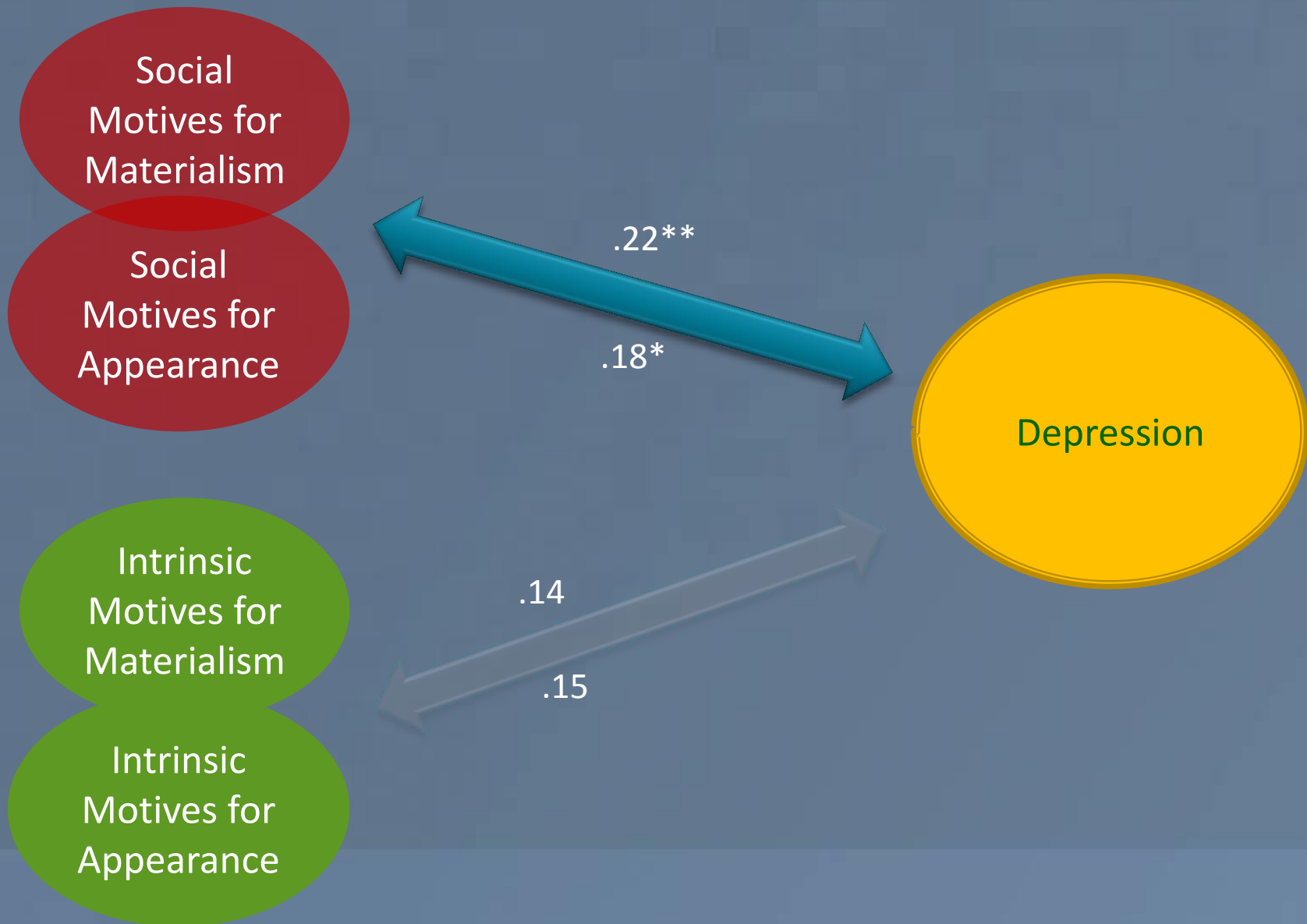
For each question, read the three sentences and show which is MOST TRUE FOR YOU by putting a circle around **A**, **B** or **C**.

1	A B C	I often read books. I read books once in a while. I never read books
2	A B C	I am sad once in a while I am sad many times I am sad all the time

Findings



Findings



Conclusion

- Social motives for materialism and appearance are strongly related
- Social motives negatively related to depression in children
- Intrinsic motives unrelated to depression
- Scales seem to be successful

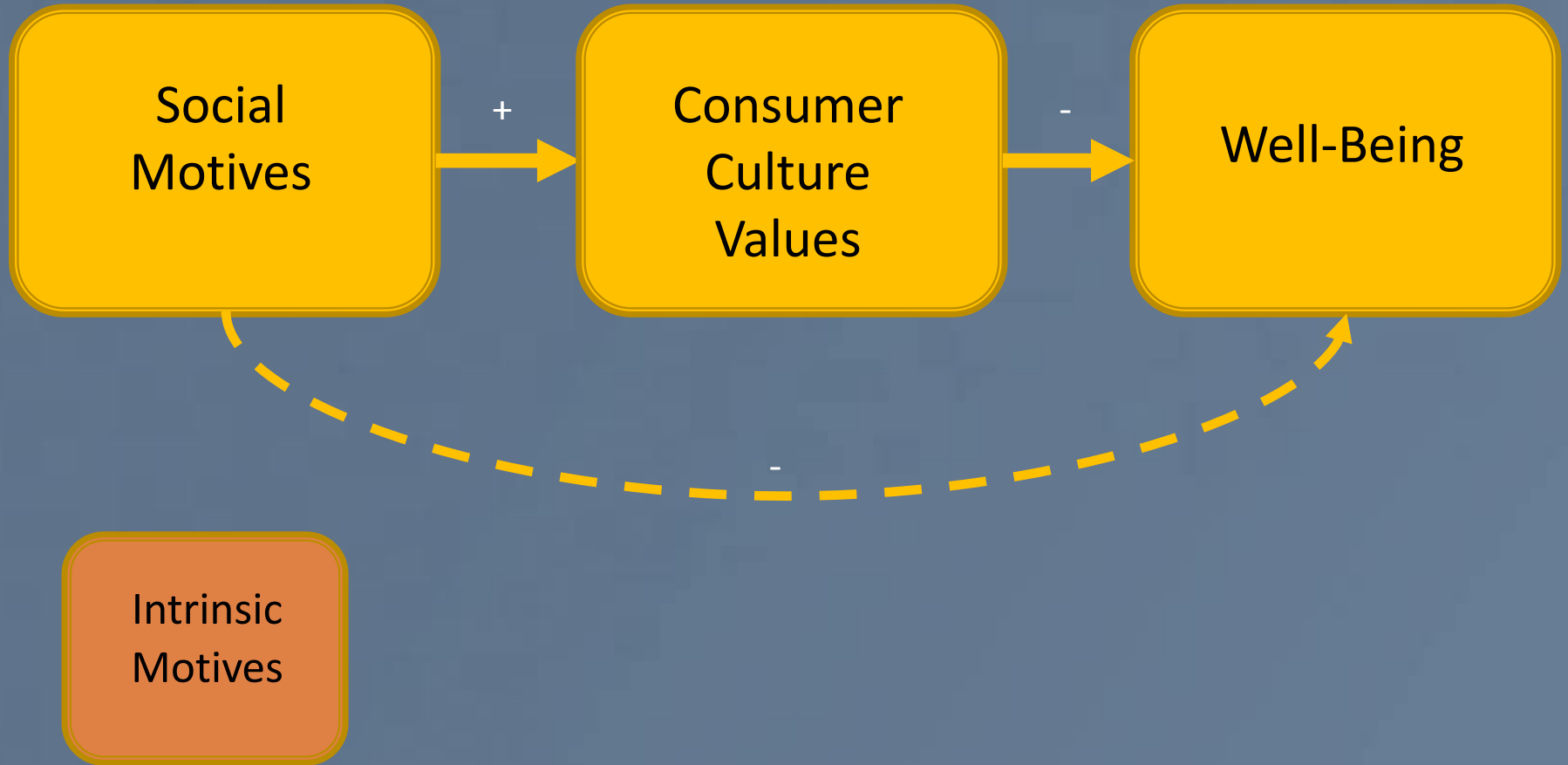
But...

- What about consumer culture values?
- Only one aspect of children's well-being
- Didn't take into account the actual reasons children gave for wanting materialism and appearance in the interviews.

Study 2 – incorporating values

- Improve and extend the MMS and AMS to include items based on the interview responses
- Create a new Consumer Culture Values Scale
- Investigate the relationships between different motivations, consumer culture values, and alternative measures of well-being

Model



Study 2

- 160 children aged 8-15 (80 boys; 80 girls)
- One primary, one secondary school

MMS and AMS

- Added **social motives** items
 - MMS – 16 social ($\alpha = .94$); 4 intrinsic
 - AMS – 15 social ($\alpha = .94$); 2 intrinsic
- Created gender neutral stem for AMS
 - *“Looking good and having a good body is important because...”*
- All questions in each subscale measure a single underlying concept

Consumer Culture Values Scale [CCVS]

- “We’ve listed some possible ways children think about the things they may want and how they look and we want to know how **true** each of these things is for you.”
- Importance in life:
 - “I would be happier if I had more money to buy more things for myself”
 - “Having great looks would mean a lot to me”
- Investment:
 - “I would put a lot of effort into getting money and cool things”
 - “I would put a lot of effort into making my body look good”
- Identification with celebrities:
 - “I wish I was rich like the celebrities on TV”
 - “When I see advertisements for clothes, I wish I looked like the models

Consumer Culture Values Scale [CCVS]

- 12 materialistic - $\alpha=.88$
- 12 appearance – $\alpha=.93$
- Converges well with previous measures
- All questions in the final sub-scales measure a single underlying concept

Well-Being

- Previously validated measures of:
 - Life Satisfaction;
 - “My life is going well”
 - “I wish I had a different kind of life” (reversed)
 - 6 items; $\alpha=.82$ – Huebner 1991
 - Body Esteem Scale;
 - “I wish I were thinner” (reversed)
 - “I think I have a good body”
 - 16 items: $\alpha=.93$ – Mendelson & White 1993

Findings

- Intrinsic motives unrelated to well-being measures
 - Focus on social motives and CC Values

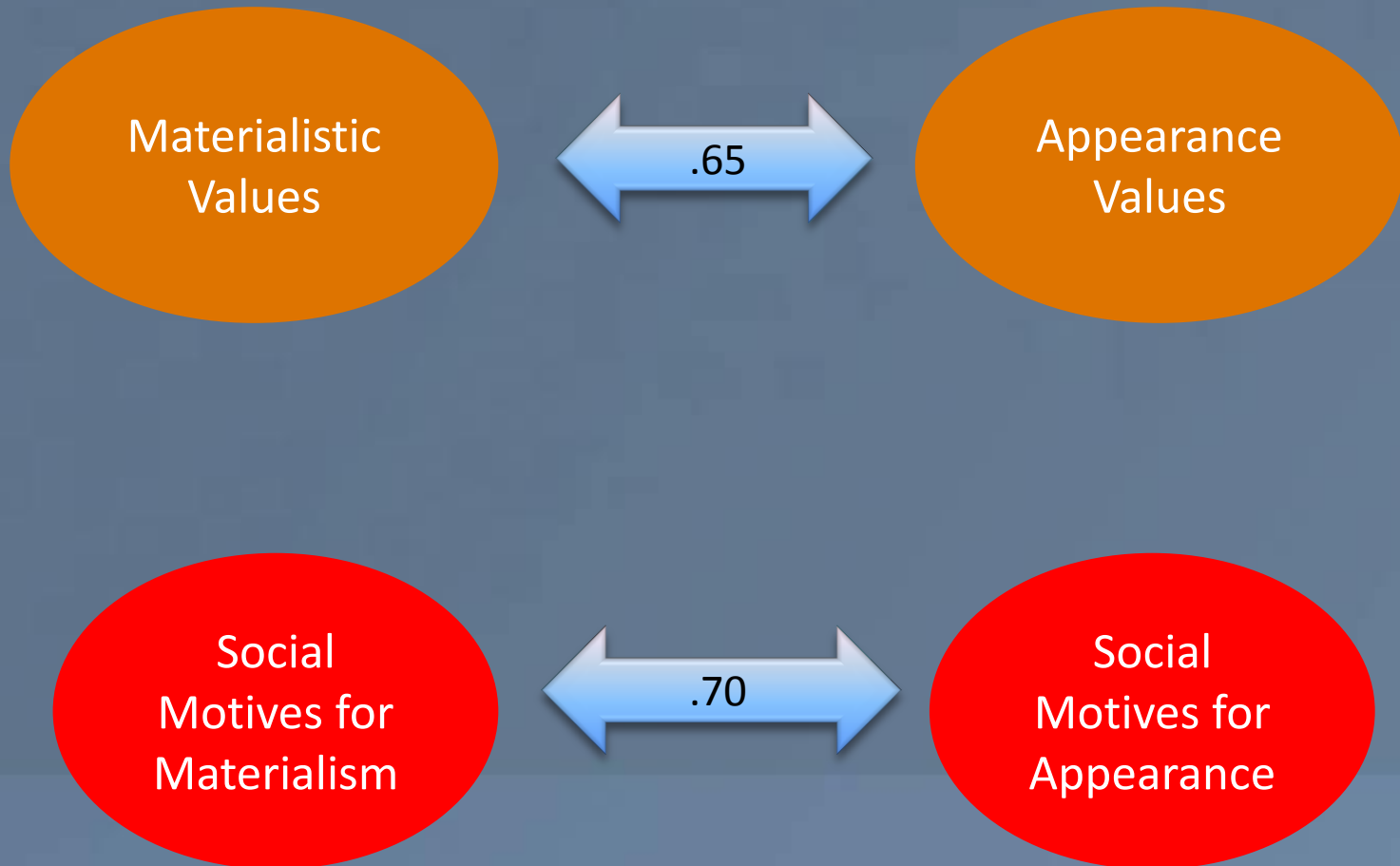
Questionnaire scribbles on CCVS:

“I don’t want to come across as shallow, but this is what’s EXPECTED of you nowadays.”

Recognition of extrinsic forces

Findings

- Very strong relationship between materialism and appearance



Consumer Culture

- Treat materialism and appearance as a single construct

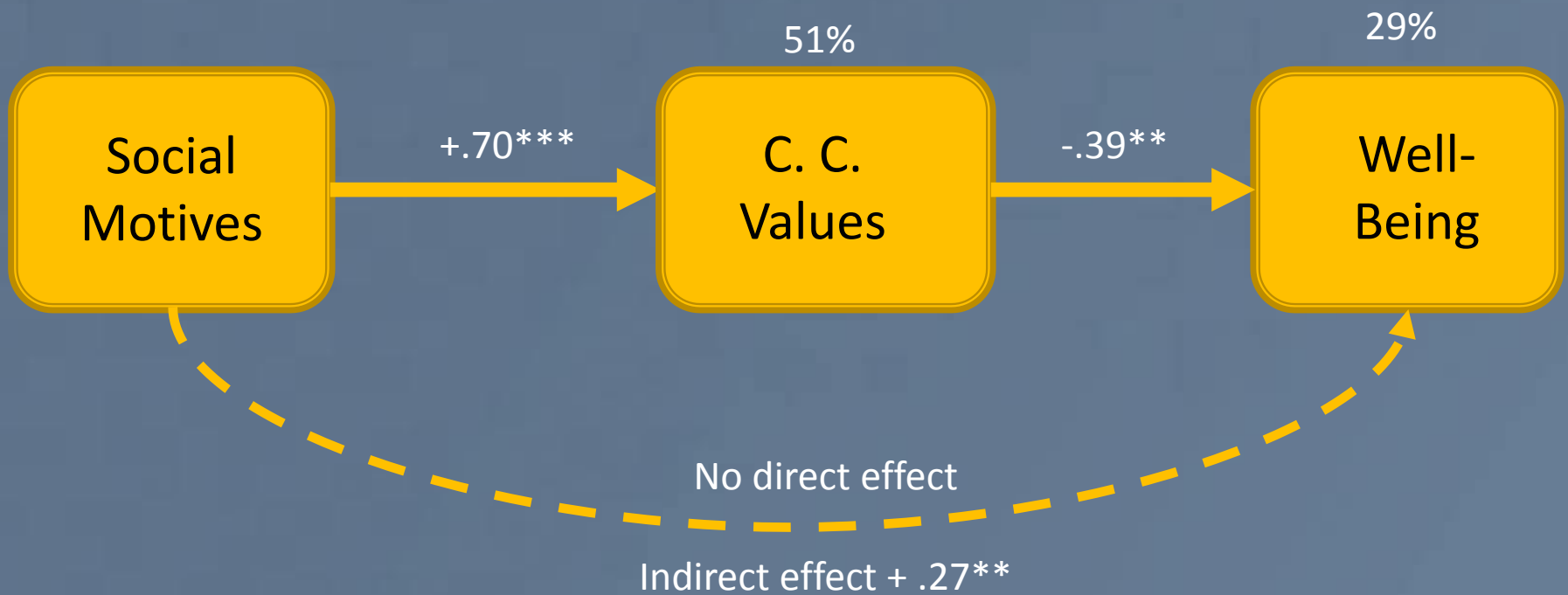
Materialistic
Values

Appearance
Values

Social
Motives for
CONSUMER
CULTURE

Social
Motives for
Appearance

Findings



Findings

- Stronger support for this model compared to one in which we separated materialism and appearance
- Girls have higher CC values and lower well-being
- No differences between school or different ages
- Appearance tended to have a stronger association with well-being than materialism

Conclusion

- Materialism and Appearance are both aspects of an overarching Consumer Culture construct
- Children who strive to achieve consumer culture ideals for social acceptance, respect, and status are more likely to value materialism and appearance as important guiding principles in their lives
- This is associated with lower well-being

But...

- Only one time point
- Questionnaires rather than experiments
- Can't claim causation or direction of effects

Thanks for listening

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<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/consumercultureproject/>