Ger and Belk (1996) describe materialism as a "consumption-based orientation to happiness seeking". The nature of such an orientation should be of interest to marketers and students of consumer behaviour. In this project, a commonly used measure of materialism, the Richins and Dawson (1992) scale, was administered to a convenience sample of respondents in Canadian and Japanese university communities. These respondents consisted of non-business students and staff.

Coefficient alpha was calculated on the complete scale as well as the three sub-scales of success, centrality and happiness for both Canadian and Japanese groups. Generally, the values compared favourably to what Ger and Belk considered satisfactory for cross-cultural studies, however they were lower in every case for the Japanese.

To investigate further, two items with low item to total correlations were discarded and exploratory factor analysis, using principal axis factoring, was conducted on each subset of data. For each country subgroup, four factor structures emerged but the structures were not equivalent. For the Canadian subset, the Richins and Dawson success and happiness factors were replicated while the centrality factor was split into two, one of need and simplicity and another of luxury and excess.

The Japanese solution was not as well defined. The first factor was a combination of success and happiness items with an emphasis on what is valued, although not all items were included. Factor two consisted primarily of the centrality items from the R&D scale with no separation of simplicity and luxury factors as seen in the Canadian sample. The third factor of the Japanese solution appeared to focus on self-assessment and the forth on comparison to others.

Possible reasons for the differences in factor solutions were discussed and a reduced set of items for the measurement of the materialism construct, which yields higher reliability, is proposed.