

MATERIALIALISM & FAMILY STRESS



One of the central premises of marketing is that buying things will make us happy. There is a growing body of evidence, however, that the opposite is true: that the pressure to spend and consume actually makes people less happy.¹ “Psychologically healthy children will be made worse off if they become more enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending. Children with emotional problems will be helped if they disengage from the worlds that corporations are constructing for them.”² Exposure to media and marketing promotes materialistic values in children and is stressful for families.

Children Are Awash in Materialistic Values

- This generation of children is the most brand conscious ever.³ Teenagers today have 145 conversations about brands per week. Adults invoke brand names about half as often.⁴
- 44% of 4th through 8th graders report daydreaming “a lot” about being rich.⁵
- Over half of children say they would be happier if they had more money to buy things for themselves. Nearly that many say the only kind of job they want when they grow up is one that pays a lot.⁶
- A survey of parents found that 63% believed that their children define their self-worth in terms of what they own.⁷



Children Who Are More Materialistic:

- Are less happy, more depressed, have lower self-esteem, and report more symptoms of anxiety.⁸
- Engage in fewer positive environmental behaviors such as reusing paper, and using less water while showering.⁹
- Report less generosity and allocate less money to charity when they imagine receiving a windfall.¹⁰



Exposure to Media and Marketing Contributes to Children’s Materialism

- Children’s materialistic values are linked to their media use.¹¹
- Materialistic values are correlated to exposure to marketing for children as young as preschoolers.¹²
- Children attending schools with the commercial TV news program Channel One are more materialistic than students from schools without it.¹³



The “Nag Factor” and Family Stress

- In 1998, a landmark market research report identified ways to help retailers exploit children’s nagging to boost sales.¹⁴ It identified nagging as responsible for 40% of trips to entertainment establishments like Chuck E. Cheese, one out of three trips to a fast-food restaurant, and about 30% of home video sales.¹⁵ Today, encouraging children to use “the nag factor” to get their parents to buy things is a tried and proven marketing technique.¹⁶

