



CAMPAIGN FOR A COMMERCIAL-FREE CHILDHOOD

# Materialism and Family Stress

materialism affects children

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.<sup>1</sup>

## Being Materialistic Affects Children's Well-Being

- A recent study of materialistic values among children found the following:
  - *Personal well-being results.* Children who were more materialistic were less happy, had lower self-esteem, and reported more symptoms of anxiety.
  - *Social behavior results.* Children who were more materialistic reported less generosity and allocated less money to charity when they imagined receiving a windfall.
  - *Environmental behavior results.* Children who were more materialistic reported engaging in fewer positive environmental behaviors (e.g., reusing paper, using less water while showering).<sup>3</sup>
- Another study found that for children, "High consumer involvement is a significant cause of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and psychosomatic complaints. Psychologically healthy children will be made worse of 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."<sup>2</sup>

buy happiness?

## Exposure to Marketing Contributes to Children's Materialism

- Materialism is correlated to exposure to marketing for children as young as preschoolers.<sup>4</sup>
- Children attending schools with the commercial television program Channel One are more materialistic than students from schools without the program.<sup>5</sup>
- A survey of parents found that 63% of parents surveyed believed that their children define their self worth in terms of what they own.<sup>6</sup>

teaching to nag

## The "Nag Factor", Purchase Requests, and Family Conflict

- A number of studies have demonstrated a correlation between children's exposure to advertising and their purchase requests<sup>7</sup>; reducing the amount of television that children watch reduces their requests for toys.<sup>8</sup>
- In 1998, market researchers conducted a study to help retailers exploit children's nagging to boost sales<sup>9</sup>; they found that nagging was responsible for 40% of trips to "entertainment establishments like the Discovery Zone and Chuck E. Cheese," one of every three trips to a fast-food restaurant, and three out of every ten home video sales.<sup>10</sup>



## more nagging

- Today, encouraging children to use “the nag factor” to get their parents to buy things is a tried and proven marketing technique<sup>11</sup>;
- Not surprisingly, several studies have demonstrated a relationship between children’s purchase requests and parent-child conflict; other studies have found a direct correlation between children’s exposure to advertising and family conflict.<sup>12</sup>
- A poll of young people aged 12-17 demonstrates the power of the “nag factor” and how marketing can lead to family conflict and stress:
  - 40% of respondents said they had asked their parents for an advertised product they thought their parents would not approve of.
  - The average young person said they have to ask nine times before their parents give in and let them have what they want. Eleven percent of 12-13 year olds admitted to asking their parents more than fifty times for products they’ve seen advertised.
  - This “keep asking strategy” is paying huge dividends for kids and marketers alike: 55% of young people surveyed said they are usually successful in getting their parents to give in.<sup>13</sup>



## resources

### Resource for Parents and Concerned Citizens

The Center for a New American Dream helps Americans change the way they consume to improve quality of life, protect the environment, and promote social justice.

[www.newdream.org](http://www.newdream.org)

## notes

<sup>1</sup> Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

<sup>2</sup> Schor, J. (2004). *Born to Buy*, New York: Scribner, p.167.

<sup>3</sup> Kasser, T. (in press). Psychometric development of brief measures of frugality, generosity, and materialism for use in children and adolescents. In: K. Moore & L. Lippman (Eds.) *Conceptualizing and Measuring Indicators of Positive Development: What do children need to flourish?* New York: Kluwer/Plenum.

<sup>4</sup> Goldberg, M.E. & Gorn, G.J. (1978). Some unintended consequences of TV advertising to children. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 5(1), 22–29.

<sup>5</sup> Greenberg, B.S. & Brand, J.E. (1993). Television news and advertising in schools: The “Channel One” controversy. *Journal of Communication*, 43(1), 143–151.

<sup>6</sup> Center for a New American Dream. (1999, July). *New poll shows marketing to kids taking its toll on parents, families*. Takoma Park, MD.

<sup>7</sup> Buijzen, M. & Valkenburg (2003). The effects of television advertising on materialism, parent-child conflict, and unhappiness: A review of research. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 24, 437-456.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, T.N., et al. (2001). Effects of reducing television viewing on children’s requests for toys. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 229(3).

<sup>9</sup> E. Morales. (2000, March). The Nag Factor: Measuring Children’s Influence. *Admap*, 35-37.

<sup>10</sup> Western Media International (1998). The fine art of whining: Why nagging is a kid’s best friend. *Business Wire*. August 11.

<sup>11</sup> Eig, J. (2001). Edible entertainment: Food companies grab kids by fancifully packaging products as toys, games. *Wall Street Journal*, October 24.

<sup>12</sup> Buijzen, M. & Valkenburg (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Center for a New American Dream. (2002, May) *Thanks to Ads, Kids Won’t Take No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No for an Answer*. Takoma Park, MD.

## CCFC

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