

SOCIAL ANXIETY AND PEER PRESSURE AS PREDICTORS OF MATERIALISM AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate social anxiety and peer pressure as predictors of materialism among adolescents. The sample for the current study consisted of 300 adolescents (150 males and 150 females) in the age group of 16-18 years of Chandigarh. The sample was administered a measure of Social Anxiety Scale (La Greca & Lopez, 1998) along with Peer Pressure Scale (Saini & Singh, 2010) and Youth Materialism Scale (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003). Inter-correlation analysis, t-test, and simple linear regression analysis were applied. Results revealed that both social anxiety and peer pressure were positively related to materialism. Also, social anxiety and peer pressure were positively related to each other. It was found that social anxiety and peer pressure predict materialism in both male and female adolescents. Males were found to be high on social anxiety and materialism as compared to females. No significant gender differences were found on peer pressure.

KEYWORDS: Adolescents, Peer Pressure, Materialism, Social Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Increase in the globalization of world markets in the recent years has generated new levels of consumerism in many parts of the world and lead to an accompanying global rise in materialism. Innumerable efforts have been put forward to operationally define and explain the concept and nature of materialism. Recent conceptualization of materialism by Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, and Kasser (2013) ascertains materialism as continuing and long-standing appreciation for material goods in endorsements of principles, aspirations and related values that depend on the magnitude of importance one gives to obtaining money, wealth and possessions that expresses one's position in society.

High levels of materialism have been empirically associated with low levels of happiness and life satisfaction and diminished well-being (Kau, Kwon, Tan, & Wirtz, 2000) in adolescents. Kasser and Ahuvia (2002) found that high materialistic people as compared to less materialistic people are less psychologically healthy. Understanding the psychological factors that correlate with materialism is important because of its potential negative implications for individuals and for society (Kasser, 2002).

The advent of adolescents as avid consumers in the last 20 years has also raised concerns about the increase of materialism in adolescents (Chaplin & John, 2007). Adolescence is a time when susceptibility to interpersonal influence is particularly high. In the present times, the materialistic adolescents are living a robotic life and try to be more competitive

with each other in terms of possessions. They spend more time on social media rather than their family and have become more status conscious. Their purpose in life is to live a luxurious life and become a part of our elite society. In today's scenario, adolescents are moving away from traditional ideas and embracing a liberal mindset. Every day, a new must-have item that's cool goes on the screen which has made the adolescents very demanding. Previous research has shown that lower income (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, & Sameroff, 1995), low self-esteem (Park & John, 2011), and perceived peer pressure (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008) contribute to people adopting materialistic values and goals.

Social anxiety is the fear of negative evaluations by others in social situations. Social anxiety causes one to perceive that others will think that they are inadequate and will reject him/her and this leads to feelings of apprehension, self-consciousness, and emotional distress (Leitenberg, 1990). The presence of social anxiety in adolescents leads to increase in their materialistic tendencies. Materialism is positively associated with negative aspects of well-being such as social anxiety and negative emotions (Christopher, Kuo, Abraham, Noel, & Linz, 2004). Roberts, Manolis, and Pullig (2014) conducted a study to test the relationship between contingent self-esteem and compulsive buying tendencies and found that contingent self-esteem was positively related to compulsive buying and that this relationship was mediated by fear of negative evaluation and social identity concerns. Fear of negative evaluation led to increasing in materialistic orientations and compulsive buying (Biolcati, 2017).

Interpersonal influences, such as peer pressure plays an important role in the development of materialism among adolescents. One of the most important factors that affect adolescence is the social environment of the adolescents. Peer pressure means being influenced or pushed over by friends to do something you do or do not wish to do. Studies have shown that peers are important reference sources for teenagers when selecting products (Mangleburg, Doney, & Bristol, 2004). In seeking to explain how teens' views of themselves and how the impact of peer pressure affect interest in and attitudes towards luxury brands, the consumers' social motivation and materialism are important factors in making purchasing decisions (Heaney, Goldsmith, & Jusoh, 2005). Peer influence plays a major role in inclining one towards materialistic orientations (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008).

Thus, the primary objective of the study was to predict whether social anxiety and peer pressure could predict materialism among adolescents. It also measured the associations between social anxiety, peer pressure and materialism among adolescents. In addition, the study also measured gender differences in social anxiety, peer pressure and materialism among adolescents.

HYPOTHESES

- Social anxiety, as well as peer pressure, will be positively related to materialism among adolescents.
- Social anxiety and peer pressure will be positively related among adolescents.
- Social anxiety and peer pressure will predict materialism in adolescents.
- Males and females will differ on social anxiety, peer pressure, and materialism.

METHODS

Sample

The sample was taken from twelve Government schools of Chandigarh. A list of students was taken from these schools and ascertained which students fit in the inclusion criteria of the present study. Purposive random sampling technique was used. 500 adolescents in the age range of 16-18 years were contacted. Out of these 500, 300 adolescents (150 males and 150 females) who met the inclusion criteria were randomly chosen as final sample.

Inclusion Criteria

- Adolescents residing in the urban area for at least past five years.
- Adolescents belonging to middle socioeconomic status.
- Adolescents whose father has been working in the trinity for five years approximately and whose mother was a housewife.
- Adolescents belonging to nuclear families with a maximum of two siblings.

Exclusion Criteria

- Adolescents suffering from psychopathology or deteriorated mental or physical health.
- Single child families and broken families.

Measures

Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (La Greca & Lopez, 1998)

The SAS-A contains 22 items. The total score is derived from the sum of all the items except the 4 neutral ones. Internal consistency for the total SAS-A score is 0.87 which is adequate enough (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

Peer Pressure Questionnaire (Singh & Saini, 2010)

It is a self-report 5- point scale measured on five categories, i.e., Strongly disagree (5), Disagree (4), Can't Say (3), Agree (2), Strongly Agree (1). The minimum and maximum score range in 25- 125. The internal consistency of the scale was established by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and a reliability of 0.79 was obtained for the final 25 items. The test-retest reliability is 0.77.

Youth Materialism Scale (Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, & Bamossy, 2003)

The youth materialism scale is a 10-item scale. For each of the 10 items, the youths could respond using a 4-point scale from 1 (disagree a lot) to 2 (disagree a little) to 3 (agree a little) to 4 (agree a lot). Ten items had item-total correlations above .40, ranging from .41 to .62. Internal consistency for the 10 items was .79.

In addition to all the psychometric tests, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to assess the socio demographic information such as sex, education, socioeconomic status, and age.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

To meet the objectives of the study, correlation analysis and simple linear regression analysis were applied. Descriptive statistics viz, the mean and standard deviation was also performed and t-test was used to find the gender differences among variables.

RESULTS

One of the objectives of the study was to find the relationship between social anxiety, peer pressure, and materialism among adolescents. Results showed that both social anxiety ($r = 0.36^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$) and peer pressure (0.42^{**} , $p \leq 0.01$) were positively related with materialism. Social anxiety and peer pressure were also positively related with one another ($r = 0.33^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$)

Another objective of the present study was to investigate the predictors of materialism. For this, simple linear regression analysis was applied to the sample. For male adolescents, social anxiety ($\beta = 0.49$) and peer pressure ($\beta = 0.35$) were found to be relevant and emerged as predictors of materialism. Social anxiety explained 24 % variance ($R^2 = 0.24$) in materialism and peer pressure explained 13 % variance ($R^2 = 0.13$) in materialism. For the female adolescents also, both social anxiety ($\beta = 0.27$) and peer pressure ($\beta = 0.44$) emerged out to be a significant predictor of materialism. Social anxiety explained 73 % variance ($R^2 = 0.73$) in materialism and peer pressure explained 19 % variance ($R^2 = 0.19$) in materialism.

Table 1: Shows the Regression Analysis for Social Anxiety and Peer Pressure as Predictors of Materialism

Predictor Variables	Standardized Coefficients	t-value	R ²	F-value
Male Adolescents				
Social anxiety	0.49	6.87**	0.24	47.24**
Peer pressure	0.36	4.62**	0.13	21.37**
Female Adolescents				
Social Anxiety	0.27	3.41**	0.73	11.64**
Peer pressure	0.44	5.97**	0.19	35.64**

**Significant at $p \leq 0.01$ level

Another objective of the present study was to find gender differences on social anxiety, peer pressure, and materialism. Gender differences were found on social anxiety ($t = 3.98^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$) and materialism ($t = 4.53^{**}$, $p \leq 0.01$). Males were found to be higher on both social anxiety ($M = 47.63$) as compared to females ($M = 43.41$). Also, males ($M = 26.72$) were higher on materialism as compared to their female counterparts ($M = 22.86$). No significant gender differences were found on peer pressure ($t = 1.78$).

DISCUSSIONS

The current study primarily aimed to investigate the associations between social anxiety, peer pressure, and materialism and also ascertained whether social anxiety and peer pressure predict materialism in adolescents. The results of the study are concurrent with the previous studies. Materialism was found out to be positively related with both social anxiety and peer pressure. Schroeder and Dugal (1995) suggest that there is a positive relationship between materialism and two constructs indicative of self-presentational preoccupation - public self-consciousness and social anxiety, and a negative relationship between materialism and the need for uniqueness. Thus, materialists tend to present themselves in a certain way to avoid social disapproval and to lower their anxiety in social relationships. Highly

materialistic individuals display low self-esteem, high self-monitoring, and considerable social anxiety (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996). Materialism is positively associated with negative aspects of well-being such as social anxiety and negative emotions (Christopher Lasane, Troisi, & Park, 2007). In essence, the evidence suggests that materialists tend to have a lower level of well-being compared with non-materialists. Image consciousness is the perception that social approval can fill the lack of self-esteem in individuals (Xu, 2007; Silvera, Lavack, & Kropp, 2008). Materialistic people are ridden with anxiety. People who place a high value on wealth and status are anxious. Such people show the same sorts of problematic patterns in wellbeing, including negative affect and social disengagement (The Express Tribune, 2012).

According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), people have the drive to evaluate themselves by comparison with others when objective means are not available. When adolescents feel inferior in terms of social comparison, it leads to social anxiety in them, indirectly increasing the desire for more and more materialistic possessions. Thus, materialists use the symbolic qualities of the products purchased to self-enhance in order to achieve greater social status and acceptance so that they perceive themselves as worthy of receiving social support (Chang & Arkin, 2002). According to evaluation apprehension theory (Cottrell, 1968), the concern to be positively evaluated from significant others leads to anxiety and an individual strives for more materialistic possessions to keep away from providing reasons for a negative evaluation.

Peers play an important role in the development of young consumers' preferences for stores, products, brands of selected products, media, and television programs. When adolescents make a purchase, they would solicit product information, evaluation, and recommendations from peers (Gershoff, Broniarczyk, & West, 2001). Social comparisons act as a contributor to materialism and high consumption behavior (Ogden & Venkat, 2001). Studies have shown that peers are important reference sources for teenagers when selecting products (Mangleburg et al., 2004).

Roberts, Manolis, and Tanner Jr (2008) stated that and peers play unique roles in regard to shaping the consumer values and behavior in adolescents and peers assume a significant normative function in affecting levels of materialism. In seeking to explain how teens' views of themselves and how the impact of peer pressure affect interest in and attitudes towards luxury brands, the consumers' social motivation and materialism are important factors in making purchasing decisions (Heaney, Goldsmith, & Jusoh, 2005). Peer pressure is commonly regarded as a dominant force behind young people's acquisition of materialistic values (Chaplin and John, 2010).

Peer relationship influences children's behavioral and emotional development as well as their adjustment in the society. They generally seek peer opinion for buying products of specific brands (Roper & Shah, 2007). Peer rejection is related to higher perceived peer culture pressure, which in turn is associated with greater materialism (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008). According to Hudders and Pandelaere (2012), materialism can play an important part in constructing, maintaining, restoring and transforming social support networks. The socialization agents are categorized as interpersonal and environmental agents. Interpersonal agents are family and peers that influence materialistic orientations (Lenka & Vandana, 2015). Peers are important reference sources for adolescents when selecting products (Mangleburg et al., 2004). These findings are consistent with the prediction of traditional psychoanalytical theory (Erikson, 1968). According to the theory, adolescents form new ties with peers in the fifth stage mentioned by him, that is, identity versus role confusion. This stage includes adolescents from 13 to 19 years. In this stage, adolescents begin to develop social relationships among their peers and these peers act as role models. The idea behind the social pressure to

consume is borrowed from the concepts of socialization pathway of materialism as put forward by Kasser et al. (2004). This pathway suggests that an individual may develop materialistic values when he/she is exposed to materialistic models and values from an early age. Interaction with parental figures and peers leading materialistic lifestyles makes children focus more on material acquisitions as a way to fit in.

Social anxiety and peer pressure were found to be positively related to each other. Chadda and Sengupta (2002) investigated various factors that influence and encourage young teenagers to start smoking or to use other tobacco product. It was found that such adolescents may socially be anxious and feel isolated in a company of peer groups. Coleman and Carter (2007) conducted a study on societal pressure and social anxiety and the results revealed that societal pressure from peers to identify as monoracial was found to be related with social anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Teachman and Allen (2007) evaluated psychosocial, prospective predictors of social anxiety symptoms and fears of negative evaluation. Results suggested that lack of perceived social acceptance predicts subsequent explicit social anxiety. For socially anxious youths, high levels of perceived peer use in conjunction with high levels of affiliation need was associated with greater alcohol use on average and more frequent episodic drinking (Anderson, Tomlinson, Robinson, & Brown, 2011). Self- presentation theory (Leary, 1995) proposes that individuals experience social anxiety when they are encouraged to make a desirable impression on other persons, such as their peers. This is because the impressions that people make on other persons have significant implications for how they are evaluated in everyday life; people are understandably stimulated to convey certain impressions of them and to avoid making certain impressions.

The results revealed that social anxiety and peer pressure can predict materialism in both male and female adolescents. Personal relative deprivation refers to dissatisfaction and resentment resulting from the belief that one is deprived of desired and deserved outcomes compared with what others have (Smith & Pettigrew, 2014; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). Social comparison leads to feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction. They place importance on acquiring money and possessions to compensate for the sense that they are getting less than they deserve relative to others. Research shows that believing one to be worse off than others is aversive (Callan, Kim, & Matthews, 2015). Thus, social comparisons with peers lead to higher materialistic tendencies (Chan & Prendergast, 2007). Consumerism causes social anxiety in people who are tricked into following this trend. Adolescents begin to do worse in their relationships can have poorer moods, and face more psychological problems. Social anxiety causes does a lot of damage and predicts materialistic tendencies. Adolescents compete with one another in terms of materialistic possessions. Lack of material goods as compared to their peers in the social environment makes them socially anxious as they fear being judged by others. Kashdan and Breen (2007) argued that a reliance on possessions to establish self-worth makes people vulnerable as they seek social approval.

The study also found gender differences in terms of social anxiety and materialism. Male adolescents are found to be high on social anxiety in the present study. Studies show significantly higher social anxiety scores in boys than in girls (Stewart & Mandrusiak, 2007; Memik et al., 2010). Xu et al. (2012) examined gender differences among persons with lifetime social anxiety disorder. It was found that the lifetime prevalence of social anxiety was 4.20% and men were more likely to have received pharmacological treatment for SAD. Men were more likely to fear to date, have externalizing disorders, use alcohol and illicit drugs to relieve symptoms of social anxiety. In India, male adolescents have more outdoor exposures as compared to female adolescents. Since male adolescents have more social interactions, they are under

constant pressure of being evaluated and judged by others. They constantly strive to make a desirable impression on others, so they face more social anxiety as compared to female adolescents.

Also, male adolescents are found to be high on materialism in the present study. Males tend to be more materialistic than females (Sahdev & Gautama, 2007). In a study of 162 Australian adults, Ryan and Dziurawiec (2001) found out that males were more materialistic than females. O’Cass and McEwen (2004) also found that young men place more importance than women on the conspicuousness of product use, which can lead to higher levels of materialism. Thus, men are more materialistic and have a stronger orientation towards external validation as shown through visually portraying accomplishment and prestige by means of material goods. In western societies, males tend to identify with their fathers and score higher than women in materialism (Flouri, 2007) and who tend to focus more on material objects as indicators of success in life. Due to their innate characteristics, for males, material things bring happiness but at the same time for females, material objects are of less importance (Roberts & Clement, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, we have ascertained that social anxiety, peer pressure, and materialism are positively related to each other and social anxiety and peer pressure predict materialism among adolescents. An important implication of the study is the possibility to develop intervention programs aiming to deal with social anxiety and peer pressure issues in adolescents. Adolescents need to be made aware of negative consequences of succumbing to pressures of the peer group. Effective intervention strategies need to be developed to make healthy adolescents. As a result, our research supports the opportunity of implementing a program focused on building self-esteem in adolescents, so that they do not feel socially anxious and compete with their peer group in terms of their materialistic possessions.

However, the present study has its limitations. The sample is based only on adolescents from urban areas. For a better understanding of the antecedents of materialism, it is important to include population from rural areas as well. Also, the sample belongs to middle socioeconomic stratum only which again limits its scope.

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