The Impact from Parents, Peers and Teachers on the Materialism of Teenagers: The Mediating Role of Loneliness

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Abstract: This study aimed at testing the mediating role of loneliness in the relationship from parent alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict to teenagers’ materialism. Measures including Parent Alienation Scale, Peer Alienation Scale, Teacher-Student Conflict Scale, Materialism Value Scale-child and Loneliness Scale were applied to 910 junior and senior high school students. The results showed that: (1) father alienation, mother alienation and peer alienation, teacher-student conflicts and loneliness were all significantly positive correlated with materialism of teenagers; (2) loneliness mediated the relationship from mother alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflicts to materialism of teenagers, in other words, the antecedent variables of mother alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student had a significant influence on teenagers’ loneliness and then on their materialism and the effect of the peer alienation was the strongest; (3) loneliness failed to mediate the effect of father alienation on teenage materialism. The conclusion is that the alienation from mother and peers and also conflicts between teachers and students affect the materialism of teenagers by loneliness.

Key words: Alienation • Materialism • Teenager • Loneliness

INTRODUCTION

The development of China’s economy has maintained a high growth rate for more than 30 years. The government has been to level up the standard of the people’s material and cultural life. People transfer the focus on material wealth. The adolescents who were living in this environment go for money, brand and luxuries. Materialism is a value which means emphasizing material wealth [1]. People who hold the values places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states, including happiness. Previous research has shown that materialism will bring individuals some negative effects, especially in adolescents, such as there were positive associations between number of possessions and anger and between dissatisfaction and poorer well-being and fulfillness of basic needs[5], which leaded to individual according to socialism, interpersonal environment is the important factor which affects the development of adolescences’ materialism. On the one hand, the first place for adolescences’ socialism is family. Parents are the significant others for adolescents in family life. The relationships between parents and adolescents are major factors to the materialism of adolescents, even lasting a lifetime. Parent alienation means children suffer the negative affective/ cognitive experiences of anger and/ or hopelessness resulting from unresponsive or inconsistently responsive attachment figures with parents. Parent alienation represents the relationship between children and parents was poor [4]. Anxiety, sadness, depression and anger may be produced by the alienation or actual loss of parent attachment relationships. Actual loss of parent support hindered the fullness of basic needs[5], which leaded to individual regard material wealth as important and improve the level of materialism [6]. Even adolescences developed the compensation motivation of owning money and material wealth. Such as, adolescences who rated the importance of materialism would expect to get more possessions, and the relationship between number of possessions and anger would be positive. The results showed that: (1) father alienation, mother alienation and peer alienation, teacher-student conflicts and loneliness were all significantly positive correlated with materialism of teenagers; (2) loneliness mediated the relationship from father alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflicts to materialism of teenagers, in other words, the antecedent variables of father alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student had a significant influence on teenagers’ loneliness and then on their materialism and the effect of the peer alienation was the strongest; (3) loneliness failed to mediate the effect of father alienation on teenage materialism. The conclusion is that the alienation from mother and peers and also conflicts between teachers and students affect the materialism of teenagers by loneliness.

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Fig. 1: Assumption model

of financial success aspirations relatively high compared to other values were found to have mothers who were less nurturing. And the effect was still found [7]. The above results was proved in China culture, parental rejection was positively correlated with adolescents’ materialistic values. Parental rejection might thwart adolescents’ basic psychological needs. Therefore, adolescents pursued materialistic aspirations to compensate their needs [8]. Parents can provide support and acceptance, which fosters a healthy sense of internal motivation among adolescents and reduces their need to material goods [9]. To sum up, in this research, parent alienation is positive with adolescents’ materialism. Father and mother play different roles in the psychological and emotional development of adolescents [10]. Therefore, our research investigated the effects of father and mother alienation on adolescents’ materialism separately.

On the other hand, apart from family, school is another important place for adolescents’ socialization. Peers and teachers are the important individuals during school life for adolescents and the relationship between them and adolescents is worth to study. Peer alienation means children suffer the negative affective/ cognitive experiences of anger and/ or hopelessness resulting from unresponsive or inconsistently responsive attachment figures with peers, such as ignore [4]. Children’s peer groups are important socializing agents who contribute to a child’s psychosocial development. Undesirable peer relationship can have a negative effect to adolescents’ materialism and lead to high materialism [9, 11]. Cause as a result of peer pressure and the importance of conformity among adolescents, consuming the correct possessions at the right time, is essential for social acceptance, gaining and maintaining friendships and peer acceptance [12]. In addition, the role of the relationship of teachers and students in the development of the values of young people can’t be ignored, teachers in the process of value transfer also play a key role. In the process of teacher-student interaction, teacher-student relationship will affect the students’ values, attitudes and personality development, the students' values will gradually coincide with the school values. For example, good teacher-student relationship will promote the development of students' self-concept, pay more attention to internal goals (Develop their own abilities) and teachers and students conflict is not the case [13, 14]. At the same time students through the interaction with the teacher learn more business knowledge, such as the establishment of the concept of the brand [15]. Therefore, this study also examined the influence of peer alienation and teacher-student conflict in the school environment on the materialistic values of adolescents.

In addition, the study also focused on the role of loneliness in the relationship between parent alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict and adolescent materialism. Previous study found that parent alienation, peer alienation, conflict between teachers and students would lead to a higher sense of loneliness on young people, for example, parents provide emotional warmth for children and children with loneliness is negatively related to cold parenting and parental rearing are positively related [16, 17]. Companion bullying, peer exclusion led to increased loneliness of young people [18]. Birch and Laddthe’s study [19] found that high loneliness and school adaptability in kindergarten students in the conflict between teachers and students and was significantly related. According to the theory of self-determination, the relationship needs is one of the basic needs of the individual. When the relationship needs to be not satisfied or destroyed, it will increase the sense of loneliness and the individual will find alternative or compensation, which material is one of the ways. Studies show that loneliness is positively related to materialism, the higher the loneliness, the higher the materialism [20]. Therefore, this study suggested that parent alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict affect materialism through the loneliness of adolescent.
This study aimed at testing the mediating role of loneliness in the relationship from parent alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict to teenagers’ materialism (Fig. 1).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: Convenience sampling was used in the present study. Participants were recruited from two high schools in Beijing. Questionnaires were first distributed to 1000 7th, 8th, 10th and 11th grade adolescents. All participants were informed of the survey and signed the written consents. A total of 910 participants returned the questionnaires and 90 participants were excluded in the data-examining process because they rated the items incompletely. Data from 910 participants (403 boys, 507 girls; age: M = 18.07, SD = 1.58) were used for analysis. The participants’ demographic information is reported in Table 1, including grade level, age, number.

Measures

Materialism Materialistic Values: Were measured using the Material Values Scales for children (6-item version) developed by Opree and his colleagues [21] which includes items such as “Does buying expensive things make you happy?” and “Would you be happier if you owned more clothes that are expensive?”. All the items were answered on a four-point scale (1 = no, not at all, 2 = no, not really, 3 = yes, a little, 4 = yes, very much). The Cronbach’s α of the scale was .88 for the present sample.

Parent Alienation: Father alienation and mother alienation were measured using alienation dimension of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (10-item) developed by Armsden and Greenberg, which includes items such as “I get upset a lot more than my father/mother know about.”, “I feel angry with my father/mother.”[4, 22]. All items were indicated how often each statement was true for them on a 5-point Likert scale. Response categories were almost never or never, seldom, sometimes, often and almost always or always. The two extreme responses were scored as 1 or 5, depending on whether an item was positively or negatively worded. The Cronbach’s α of parent alienation was .79 for the present sample.

Peer Alienation: Peer alienation were measured using alienation dimension of the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (7-item) developed by Armsden and Greenberg, which includes items such as “I feel alone or apart when I am with my friends”[4, 22]. All items were indicated how often each statement was true for them on a 5-point Likert scale. Response categories were almost never or never, seldom, sometimes, often and almost always or always. The two extreme responses were scored as 1 or 5, depending on whether an item was positively or negatively worded. The Cronbach’s α of peer alienation was .79 for the present sample.

Teacher-Student Conflict: Teacher-student conflict was measured using conflict dimension of the student-teacher relationship scale (Chinese version revised by Qu [23] and developed by Pianta [24] which includes items such as “I remains angry or is resistant after being disciplined to teacher”. All the items were answered on a five-point scale (1 = no, not at all, 2 = no, not really, 3 = not certain, 4 = yes, a little, 5 = yes, very much). The Cronbach’s α of the scale was .80 for the present sample.

Loneliness: Loneliness was measured using the Loneliness Scale developed by Asher, which were revised by Li Xiao et al. [25] and Asher et al. [26]. The 20 revised items focused on children’s feelings of loneliness (e.g., “I’m lonely”), feelings of social adequacy versus inadequacy (e.g., “I’m good at working with other children”), or subjective estimations of peer status (e.g., “I have lots of friends”) and children’s hobbies or preferred activities (e.g., “I like to paint and draw”). All the items were answered on a five-point scale (1 = no, not at all, 2 = no, not really, 3 = not certain, 4 = yes, a little, 5 = yes, very much). The Cronbach’s α of the scale was .94 for the present sample.

RESULTS

The collected data were analyzed with SPSS 19.0 and M plus 7.0 software package. Single factor test was used to test the common method deviation. The result of the rotated first factor explained the amount of variation was 15.90% and the results of the non-rotated first factor explained the amount of variation was 25.00%. The results were much less than the 40% threshold. Therefore, the common method deviation had small impacts on the study.
Table 2: Descriptive Statistic of Materialism and Dimensions (M±SD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Materialism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.16±0.74</td>
<td>2.10±0.82</td>
<td>1.84±0.73</td>
<td>2.03±0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.18±0.77</td>
<td>2.11±0.81</td>
<td>1.95±0.77</td>
<td>2.08±0.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.14±0.72</td>
<td>2.10±0.82</td>
<td>1.75±0.69</td>
<td>2.00±0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>10.18**</td>
<td>5.16*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>2.21±0.81</td>
<td>2.18±0.89</td>
<td>1.79±0.77</td>
<td>2.06±0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>2.36±0.85</td>
<td>2.16±0.87</td>
<td>2.00±0.82</td>
<td>2.17±0.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>2.14±0.68</td>
<td>2.08±0.76</td>
<td>1.82±0.68</td>
<td>2.02±0.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>11th</td>
<td>2.10±0.75</td>
<td>2.09±0.85</td>
<td>1.81±0.76</td>
<td>2.00±0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>3.76*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*means p < 0.05 **means p < 0.01

Table 3: Correlations among measures

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1. father alienation</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. mother alienation</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.73***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. peer alienation</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. teacher-student conflict</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.37***</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. loneliness</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. materialism</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
<td>0.23***</td>
<td>0.12***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*means p < 0.05 **means p < 0.01, ***

The Features of Adolescents’ Materialism: The average and standard deviation of adolescents’ materialism were on the Table 2. The total points of materialism and the scores of dimensions were under 2.50 (Range from 1-4). In general, the level of adolescents’ materialism was down.

Multivariate analysis of variance was used as the dependent variable in terms of gender (Male, female) and grade (7th, 8th, 9th and 10th) as independent variables, materialism and their dimensions. The results found that the interaction of gender and grade was not significant in materialism and their dimensions. The main effect of gender in materialism was significant, F (1, 902) = 5.16, p < 0.01, η² = .01 and the score of male was higher than female’s. The main effect of grade in materialism was not significant. During center dimension, the main effect of gender was not significant and the main effect of grade was significant, F(3, 902) = 3.76, p < 0.05, η² = .01. Posttest found that the score of 8th was higher than 10th (p <0.01), 11th(p = 0.001). During happiness dimension, the main effects of gender and grade were not significant. During success dimension, the main effect of gender was significant, F (1, 902) = 10.18, p < 0.01, η² = 0.01 and the score of male was higher than female’s. The main effect of grade in materialism was not significant.

The Relationship Between Father, Mother & Peer Alienation, Teacher-Student Conflicts, Loneliness and Materialism: Table 3 displays descriptive statistics and correlations for father alienation, mother alienation, peer alienation, teacher-student conflicts, loneliness and materialism. Loneliness and materialism are positively related, r = 0.12, p < 0.001. Father alienation(r = 0.19, p < 0.001), mother alienation(r = 0.20, p < 0.001), peer alienation(r = 0.22, p < 0.001) and teacher-student conflicts(r = 0.23, p < 0.001) were all significantly positively related to materialism.

Mediation Model of Loneliness: To test the possible mediating role of loneliness between the father alienation, mother alienation, peer alienation, teacher-student conflicts and materialism, we performed SEM on those variables in Mplus 7.0. In this study, the direct effect wasn’t found which the reason was masking effect, so this article was about indirect effect. The path coefficients between variables are shown in Fig. 2. The goodness of fit indices showed, in general, a good adjustment of the model to the data [χ²/df =3.18<CFI = 0.90 TLI = 0.89 RMSEA = 0.05]. From the results of the model, mother alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict had significant positive predictive effect on loneliness which β were 0.10(p < 0.05) 0.12(p < 0.05) 0.45(p < 0.001) respectively. Father alienation had non-significant negative predictive effect on loneliness. Loneliness had significant positive predictive effect on materialism which β was 0.15 (p < 0.001). Bootstrapping analyses was performed using Mplus 7.0 to test the significance of the mediating effect. We applied 1000 bootstrap resamples with 95% bias-correlated confidence intervals and CIs of mother alienation (CI=[0.002, 0.04]), peer alienation (CI=[0.03, 0.10]) and teacher-student conflict
DISCUSSION

Parents, peers and teachers are important for the adolescents’ family and school life. This study examined the impact of these important relationships on adolescent materialism. The results showed that father, mother and peer alienation, teacher-student conflicts, loneliness and materialism were significantly positive related. But the degrees were different. Peer alienation had the greatest impact. In addition, loneliness in the mother alienation, peer alienation, teacher-student conflict and materialism play a mediating role, but in the father alienation did not find a similar mediating effect.

The role of loneliness in the relationship of father mother and peer alienation, teacher-student conflict and materialism. The relationship between father alienation, mother alienation, peer alienation and loneliness is consistent with previous studies [17, 20]. According to attachment theory, the acceptance of parents for young people make them feel a higher sense of security and thus a lower sense of loneliness [28]. Peer acceptance will reduce the loneliness of young people [29] and peers who experienced bullying or had poor peer relationship feel with a higher loneliness [17, 18]. When adolescents are alienated from their mothers, peers and teachers, adolescents feel lonely, showing a higher materialistic tendency. When the individual's relationship with others is poor or individual experiencing social exclusion, the individual will pursue material wealth as compensation [30]. After being excluded by the companions, adolescents are more willing to buy goods and they think that goods can buy the desired friendship [12]. The mediation role of loneliness in father alienation and materialism was not significant and it may be related to the different ways which affect the development of young people that father and mother have. In the family, father mainly bear the external work and provide financial support for the family. The mother will take energy and time into the child. Compared to the father, mother provides more emotional support and warmth for their children. Mother alienation has greater impact on children [31]. The effect of peer alienation on the loneliness of adolescents is greater than other important individuals. Harris points out that after adolescence, the impact of companions on adolescents is far greater than that of parents [32]. As the age increases, the role of peers in the social development of adolescents gradually increases and peers provide an environment for young people to learn major social skills and provide a source of social support [33]. The results of teacher-student conflict and loneliness are consistent with the hypothesis. Teachers in the youth school life plays an important role, if poor teacher-student relationship, adolescents will appear poor school and high loneliness [19].

Revelation and Limitations: This study explored the role of important individuals in adolescent homes and school life. It was found that the quality of mother-child relationship, the quality of peer relationship and the quality of teacher-student relationship have an important influence on the materialistic development of adolescents. Adverse relationships have increased the loneliness of adolescents and increasing the level of materialism of adolescents. The research has extended the study of materialism and loneliness of Chinese adolescents and found that teachers play an important role in the development of adolescent materialism and provide reference for adolescent materialistic education and intervention.

Fig. 2: Mediation model of loneliness (CI=[0.002, 0.02]) paths did not contain zero. That is to say, loneliness was the significant mediator between mother alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict and materialism.

There are still some limitations in this study. First, we use the cross-sectional research methods, although combine the structural equation model we could explain the relationship between important people’s alienation and loneliness with their own materialism level, but the transversal study could not fully prove the causal relationship between the three. There may be a high level of adolescents' own materialism, which in turn affects their own relationships [34]. So, the causal relationship between these variables also requires further follow-up studies to verify and support. Second, the samples are all from Beijing junior high school, taking into account the differences living standards between Beijing and other cities, the results should be carefully considered when extended to other cities.

To reduce adolescents materialism and decrease their loneliness. First of all, in the school environment, we should attach importance to the role of peer relationship, improve the peer relationship will effectively reduce the loneliness of young people and thus reduce the level of materialism of young people [35]. Specifically, the school should encourage frequent communications between students, to keep abreast of the alienated students from the mental health, to maintain a positive and stable peer relationship [36]. At the same time, the role of teachers should also be taken seriously. Teachers and students should try to avoid conflict and teachers should be more positive and give more encouragement to students and reduce criticism and blame. Teacher should also keep communications with students, so that teachers and students to maintain good relations. Then, in the family environment, people should pay attention to the role of the mother. The emotional support and warm showed by mother to children can reduce the loneliness of young people thus to reduce the materialism of young people which have a positive effect. Specifically, the mother should respond to the needs of the child in a timely manner and give appropriate trust, support and respect. At the same time, parents can also encourage young people to learn through interpersonal skills, so that they have the ability to develop, maintain and improve interpersonal relationships to reduce loneliness.

**CONCLUSIONS**

- Father alienation, peer alienation, peer alienation, teacher-student conflict, loneliness and materialism were significantly positive related.
- Mother alienation, peer alienation and teacher-student conflict had significant positive predictive effect on loneliness and loneliness had significant positive predictive effect on materialism which peer alienation had greater impact. Father alienation had non-significant negative predictive effect on loneliness.

**REFERENCES**


