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Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

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Lan Nguyen Chaplin, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Deborah Roedder John, University of Minnesota

EXTENDED ABSTRACT - Materialism among today's youth is a topic of increasing interest among educators, parents, consumer activists, and government regulators. The topic of materialism has garnered interest for several reasons. First, longitudinal studies of materialism among college and high school students show dramatic increases in materialistic values (Korten 1999). Second, the popular press has characterized our children and adolescents as Ahyper-consumers, @ spending approximately \$23.4 billion and influencing an additional \$485 billion of household purchases each year (McNeal 1999). Third, the astounding increase in marketing aimed at children has prompted parental concern about materialism, with 87% of parents of children aged 2-17 feeling that marketing aimed at children makes them too materialistic (www.newdream.org, 2002).

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Materialism among today's youth is a topic of increasing interest among educators, parents, consumer activists, and government regulators. The topic of materialism has garnered interest for several reasons. First, longitudinal studies of materialism among college and high school students show dramatic increases in materialistic values (Korten 1999). Second, the popular press has characterized our children and adolescents as "hyper-consumers," spending approximately \$23.4 billion and influencing an additional \$485 billion of household purchases each year (McNeal 1999). Third, the astounding increase in marketing aimed at children has prompted parental concern about materialism, with 87% of parents of children aged 2-17 feeling that marketing aimed at children makes them too materialistic (www.newdream.org, 2002).

Surprisingly, debates about the development of materialistic values in our culture are largely uninformed by sound research. While explanations abound in the popular press and among consumer activists and social critics, there is no empirical research to support any of these claims or attributions of responsibility. Empirical work on the topic of materialism exists, but it has focused primarily on materialism among adults. In the area of consumer behavior, a number of researchers have examined materialism among adults, with interest centering on personality or social characteristics that are correlated with materialism (e.g., Belk 1985; Fournier and Richins 1991; Richins 1994; Richins and Dawson 1992). Only a handful of investigations have examined materialism among children and adolescents, with interest centering on demographic and environmental factors that are correlated with materialism (e.g., Achenreiner 1997; Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio, and Bamossy 2003; Moschis and Moore 1979; Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton 1997). These studies have produced some intriguing findings. Yet, a significant gap remains in understanding the process that drives the development in materialism among children and adolescents (John 1999).

The purpose of this paper is to address this gap in understanding how materialism develops in children and adolescents. We propose that changes in children's and adolescents' self-concept, which are fueled by increasing social-cognitive abilities, lay the groundwork for the adoption of materialistic values. Relying on concepts from the materialism and child development literatures, we forward hypotheses that relate components of the self-concept to materialism. We then test these relationships in an empirical study with children and adolescents ages 8-18.

In doing so, this research represents the first in-depth investigation of the development of materialism in children and adolescents. Although prior work has laid some important foundations in terms of measuring materialism and reporting a number of demographic (e.g., gender, income) and environmental factors (e.g., parental communication style, peer influence) correlated with materialism, this research is the first to provide a conceptual understanding for why materialism develops. By linking the developing self-concept to materialism, we uncover a general process capable of explaining why certain children and adolescents (and even adults) are particularly vulnerable to developing materialistic values.

In addition, this paper develops new empirical methods for studying materialism in children and adolescents. Significant ad-

vances have been made in developing reliable scales for measuring materialism in children (see Goldberg, Gorn, Peracchio and Bamossy 2003), yet there is still a need to develop multiple methods for measuring the construct of materialism with children and adolescents. Materialism is a complicated construct to measure in adults, and indications are that it is even more difficult to measure in children, especially with rating scales that try to capture thinking about the value of possessions in their lives. In this study, we incorporate several ways of studying materialism using both quantitative scales and new qualitative methods. Specifically, we develop qualitative methods based on collage techniques (see Chaplin and John 2005) and sorting methods to tap into the materialism construct in a broader and fuller way than what is currently available.

Our pattern of findings is counterintuitive for several reasons. First, most people would argue that materialism would be heightened either in the youngest age group (i.e., 3rd/4th graders) or the oldest age group (i.e., 11th/12th graders). On the one hand, some would argue that the youngest age group would be most materialistic because they think in concrete terms and therefore would *want* to *have* a variety of material things. On the other hand, some would argue that the oldest age group would be most materialistic because they have been exposed to more products. Yet, we find that materialism is heightened in the middle age group (i.e., 7th/8th graders), a time when individuals learn to think abstractly about themselves and about their world. It is also a time when they experience a major dip in self-esteem. Second, it is surprising to see that the level of materialism significantly decreases during late adolescence rather than stay constant throughout adolescence. Again, the level of self-esteem explains our pattern of findings. That is, by late adolescence, individuals experience a rebound in their self-esteem. Thus, self-esteem seems to be intricately tied to a child's level of materialism.

In summary, our research contributes to our understanding of materialism in several ways. First, our research provides the first conceptual account of how materialism develops throughout childhood and into adolescence. We provide a framework that describes developments in the child's self-concept as the impetus for the development of materialistic values. Second, our research provides a new methodology to study materialism in children and adolescents that does not rely on rating scales or in depth verbalizations. Our collage technique promises a method for measuring materialism that allows even young children to get across what is important to them, including material possessions. In addition, this technique is also engaging and interesting for a much older population of adolescents, which is a rare situation for any measurement technology used across such a wide age span. Third, our research provides a new technique to measure components of the self-concept. Rather than rely on established rating scales from the Psychology literature, as would traditionally be appropriate for adults, we present these scales in a more engaging format—as a sorting task. Our sorting technique provides a different approach to measuring constructs such as self-monitoring and self-esteem, more amenable with a children's sample. Thus, our research makes both theoretical and methodological contributions to our current understanding of materialism.

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