

GET THE FACTS

Marketing and Materialism

Materialism, or a focus on having and getting “stuff,” is one of the primary outcomes of marketing. Advertisers tell kids that buying things will make them happy – but in reality, the more that people focus on acquiring wealth, possessions, and status, the more likely they are to be *unhappy*.¹

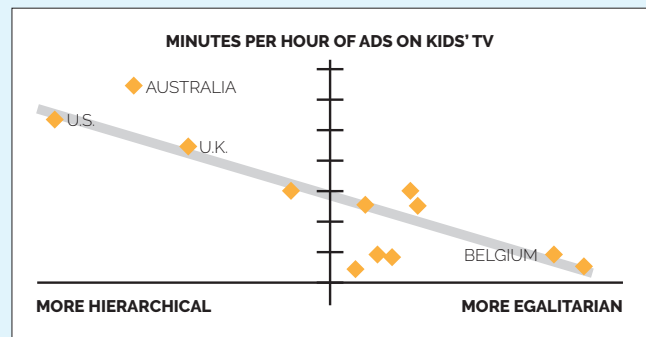
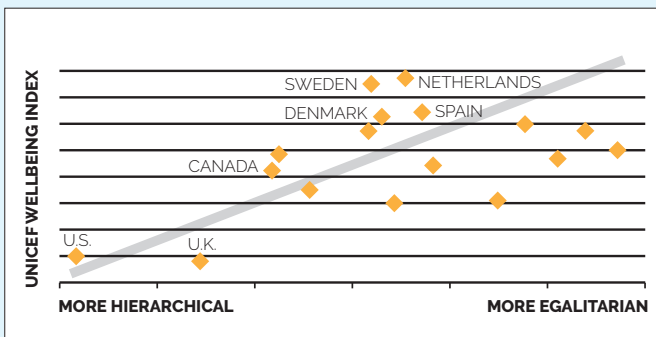
There’s a clear relationship between advertising, materialism, and wellbeing.

- Kids have fewer cognitive defenses against advertising than adults do,^{2,3,4,5} which makes them more susceptible to marketing messages – including the false promise that buying things leads to happiness.
- The more advertising that children see, the more likely they are to be materialistic. This is true across all age groups, from pre-K to adolescence.^{6,7,8,9}
- The more that children watch television and use social media, the more likely they are to want to be rich and famous when they grow up.¹⁰
- As spending on advertising has increased, so has materialism in kids. Compared to teens in the 1970s, teens in the mid-2000s were significantly more likely to say that “having lots of money is important,” and to want expensive items like a vacation home or new car.¹¹



Kids develop strong emotional bonds to their favorite characters, and licensed products encourage them to express those feelings through buying things.

Cultural Values, Wellbeing, and Advertising



Links between commercialism, materialism, and wellbeing also emerge in cross-cultural studies. In egalitarian countries that prioritize social justice and equality, children have higher levels of wellbeing overall than children in hierarchical countries that prioritize money and status. Kids in egalitarian countries also see far less television advertising than kids in hierarchical countries do.¹²

Materialism is pervasive in kids' lives.

- Compared to their less materialistic peers, kids who are more materialistic:
 - **Have lower wellbeing.** Like adults, children who have internalized materialistic and appearance-based values report lower levels of life satisfaction.¹³
 - **Have lower academic performance.** Materialism in kids is linked to lower test scores. Additionally, more materialistic children are more concerned with performance – that is, with *appearing* successful – than with actually mastering or learning new material.¹⁴
 - **Are less generous.** Children who are more materialistic are less likely to say they would use their money to help others if they won the lottery.¹⁵
 - **Care less about the environment.** As materialism increases in children, they're less likely to recycle, conserve energy, and engage in other resource-saving behaviors.¹⁶
- Preschool children – a major target for marketers – judge their peers and themselves as popular, unpopular, fun, or boring based on the brands that they and their peers use.¹⁷
- A study of 1,000 children ages 8-14 found that having 'cool stuff' and looking good were often seen as the best way to become more popular among peers.¹⁸



Social media stars like JoJo Siwa use their popularity to sell kids everything from lip gloss to accessories to school supplies.

Kids learn materialism like they learn any other value – and that means they can unlearn it.

At home:

- Encourage gratitude. When kids focus on what they're thankful for, rather than what they want, they become less materialistic.¹⁹
- Limit time spent with commercial media. It's not just ads that sell children on buying stuff: animated media characters are used to sell licensed toys, apparel, and food. And online, popular YouTube channels are filled with sponsored content encouraging kids to buy things.
- Talk about values – and about money. Research shows that working with teens to develop their own financial values can decrease materialism.



Intervention Works!

What happens when teens are given a chance to explore their values around money? In 2014, researchers followed two groups of teens and parents to find out. One group attended a program designed to help them question consumerist marketing messages and develop a values-based financial plan focused on sharing and saving their money. The control group received no intervention. At check-ins two and ten months after the end of the program, teens in the control group showed increased materialism – **but the teens who received the intervention had become less materialistic!**²⁰

In the world:

- Work with others to give kids time and space away from commercialism. CCFC's [Children's Screen Time Action Network](#) offers resources, trainings, and collaborative working groups to help people make change in their communities.
- Support policies that limit commercialism. Federal rules limit the amount and type of advertising that can be on children's TV – tell your representative that we need similar rules for kids' websites, apps, and streaming video platforms.
- Support CCFC. We're working every day to give kids the commercial-free time they need to thrive, and we can't do it without you.

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