

Cultural Identity and Materialism: The Mediating Role of Meaning in Life

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Introduction Identifying strategies to mitigate individuals' endorsement of materialistic values is crucial, given the negative consequences associated with them. Cultural identity could influence how individuals perceive or understand their lives, as well as the goals or values they prioritize. Chinese culture encourages self-transcendence, emphasizes restraint in desires, and generally prioritizes morality over material gains. Therefore, this study aimed to examine whether cultural identity predicts reduced materialism and to explore the potential underlying mechanisms. Given that emerging adulthood is characterized by identity exploration and instability, which may present a critical period for examining how identities shape values, Chinese emerging adults were thus selected as the target group.

Methods A cross-sectional survey was conducted using a convenience sampling approach. Data were collected through a series of measures assessing cultural identity, materialism, the search for meaning, and the presence of meaning. A total of 984 emerging adults were included in final analyses, with an average age of 19.264 years ($SD = 1.296$). Of the participants, 334 (33.9%) were male, and 650 (66.1%) were female. Pearson's correlation analyses and mediation models were employed to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results Pearson's correlation analyses revealed that cultural identity was positively associated with both the search for meaning and the presence of meaning, and negatively associated with materialism. Mediation analyses indicated that the presence of meaning, along with a sequential combination of the search for meaning and the presence of meaning, mediated the relationship between cultural identity and materialism, while the search for meaning alone did not. Furthermore, when accounting for the indirect effects mentioned above, the direct effect of cultural identity on materialism remained statistically significant.

Discussion These findings suggest that the presence of meaning may serve as a more proximal factor than the search for meaning in linking cultural identity to materialism. This study advances prior research by exploring the predictors of materialism through the lenses of cultural identity and meaning in life. The findings have practical implications, suggesting that programs aimed at mitigating materialism and alleviating its associated maladaptive outcomes, such as compulsive buying and excessive consumption, may focus on strengthening individuals' cultural identity and/or cultivating a deeper sense of meaning in life.

Key words Cultural Identity; Meaning in Life; Search for Meaning; Presence of Meaning; Materialism