

Youths today are materialistic and indifferent. Do you agree?

Yang Chunling
GCE 'O' Level 2004

Materialism and indifference are part of human nature for self preservation. By being materialistic, one is being practical rather than sentimental in treating things. Materialism can be defined as a preoccupation with or stress on the material rather than the spiritual. On the other hand, being indifferent is also a way of keeping oneself out of trouble. That is being not interested or concerned about most things. Both characteristics are part of a human defence mechanism.

To a certain extent, youths today can be said to be materialistic and indifferent. However, this trend is also similar to the past, when people compare their possessions with others. Materialism is not only common among youths, but also among the adults. People are willing to fork out money to buy branded goods, such as Nike, Gucci, Prada and many more. But are these goods affordable to the youths? The answer is no. Hence, the main market for such branded goods is mostly for adults. From the profits that the branded market is reaping, it can be seen that the market is strong. Hence, adults are not much better than youths as they are chasing after material goods. What makes branded goods desirable are their brand names and reputation. Consumers are more likely to buy a branded good as it is believed to be of better quality. Youths hankering after branded good is just a mirror reflection of the adult's way of thinking – that branded goods are of better quality than others.

In this competitive society, there is pressure to compare and be better than others. For youths, there is peer pressure. When the majority of their friends are using branded products, they feel the desire to possess the same thing. This is the pressure to compare, and material possession is one aspect other than studies used as a yardstick of comparison. According to Oscar Wilde, "Discontent is the first step in the progress of a man or nation". Hence, materialism can be a good thing as it motivates a person to strive to achieve something. However, anything in excess can become negative. Obsession with material goods can also have a negative impact on one's life, such as neglecting the intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

Indifference is common in most societies. However, the label of indifference cannot be attached to youths specifically. It is often thought that youths are indifferent as they live in their own worlds, and do not engage with reality. Besides, they are protected from the harsh conditions of society by their parents. Hence, this leads to their indifferent attitude to events around them. However, this is not a case that is peculiar to youths only. For example, in Singapore, the government is always taking charge of everything. Policies decided are often fixed without the public being consulted. Basically, there is little room for discussion. The public are being treated like children. This leads to the citizens seeing no need to respond as everything is taken care of. Hence, from here, we can conclude that the attitude of indifference is adopted when every one feels that his or her voice makes "no difference". This answers to why youths are said to be indifferent.

Another reason for being indifferent is the fear of being reprimanded for one's opinions and actions. Taking the Asian society as an example, children are often told to keep quiet when the adults are having a conversation. The child's opinion is 'killed'. Besides this, if the opinion or action is not acceptable, the child is reprimanded. Thus the child becomes indifferent as this ensures that he or she is safe from the scolding. This is similar in our society where people are afraid of failures and do not attempt to change. They remain indifferent to avoid getting hurt.

Hence, to a certain extent, youths today are materialistic and indifferent. Moreover, youths are not the only people who put material gains in the first place in their hearts and remain unmoved by most things around them. Unless there is a change in our society in terms of our life goals and values exhibited by the adults, the youths may just continue to be their mirrors.