The influence of religiosity, parental and peer attachment on hedonistic behavior among Malaysian youth

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Abstract

Drawing from ecological system theory, the current study addresses the connection between environment and youth development and what they actually engage in. This study examined contributors of hedonistic behavior among youth in Malaysia. A sample of 103 undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds participated in the study. Using a quantitative survey methodology, self-administered questionnaires measuring parental and peer attachment, religiosity personality and worldview were used to identify predictors of hedonistic behavior among youth. The finding showed both, parental and peer attachment behavior moderated the relationships between religiosity and present-hedonistic values and behavior.

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Keywords: hedonistic behavior, religiosity, parental and peer attachment, worldview

1. Introduction

The influence of parents and peers on prosocial and antisocial behavior has been well documented in prior research, particularly studies on parenting and peers roles. Although current findings indicate both positive and negative impacts on adolescent, there are still much to study on the processes underlying the influence of parental and peer attachment on adolescent behavior.

To date, youth are more likely to adopt a luxury and materialistic lifestyle. This trend has led social scientists to conclude that adolescents today are “…the most brand-oriented, consumer-involved, and materialistic generation in history” (Schor, 2004, p. 13). They see that pleasure and happiness play an important role in their way of life. This new culture requires youth to seek sensual and material-driven pleasure become the goal of life itself and influences their thinking and lifestyle choices which could be hedonism behavior. Previous studies showed that hedonism is a negative behavior based on youth involvement in activities such as sexual promiscuity (Weichselbaumer, 2012; Veenhoven, 2003) drugs and alcohol addiction (Hutton, 2012) excessive entertainment (Andersson, 2011) unhealthy eating habits (Coccurello, D’Amato & Moles, 2009) obsession with branded and luxury goods and being overly materialistic (Scarpi, 2012). Studies have showed that youth cannot provide the necessary contributions and responsibilities in developing countries due to lack of potential, not qualified or do not meet the requirements, failed to perform in duties, immoral attitude and are more concerned with personal needs (Wils, Saba, Waxin & Labelle, 2011). Many of the causes to this problem are due to behavior that can lead to hedonism (Sidek, 2009; Veenhoven, 2003).

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2. Youth in Malaysia

Youths comprise the largest group of Malaysia's population which consists of more than 11.6 million people or 43.6 percent of the total population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malaysia has defined youth as individuals aged 15 to 40 years old and are those who are considered mature and are able to participate meaningfully in all development plans with a positive impact. The study of culture and youth subcultures carried out by Universiti Putra Malaysia reveal the existence of new cultural values and patterns such as the value of individualism, materialism, religious orientation, the orientation of western culture, a change of identity, communication behavior and media habits, leisure activities, health care habits, patriotism and career aspirations (Azimi, Turiman & Ezhar, 2000). Several studies have been conducted to reveal the trend and status of youth in Malaysia. In 2005, a study was conducted on youth religiosity and personality indexing of young people and the implications on nation building comprised of seven risk activities aiming at assessing the frequency of engagement in different at risk activities. Youth were involved in alcohol and substance abuse (alcohol, drugs, and smoking) and sexual related risks such as exposure to phonographic materials, sexual intercourse, and lesbianism (Ezhar, Wendy, Fazilah & Azimi, 2005). In 2006, a study on youth culture with the focus on scales to understand the at risk behavior of young people showed that about 37.8 percent of these youth were involved in substance abuse, law breaking and sexual related activities. In 2007, the group of researchers extended the study and looked at the type of assets which contribute to at risk behavior and the implications of young people to be effective partners in development (Azimi & Zanariah, 2007).

2.1. Factors that influence youth behavior

Youth behavior has been formed by the growth and development process in the human ecological system especially the environment (psychologically, physically and socially) and these core entities serve as the youth’s initial platform to learn about the world. Referring to the theory of human ecology (Brofenbrenner, 1989), the youth is in the middle of the micro system and exposed to the environmental factors such as family, peers, school and religious setting. These factors will be influenced and become a part of the elements for the behavior development.

2.1.1. Religiosity

Religiosity is important in human life because it exerts great influence on the formation of behavior and personality, calm emotions, increased self-esteem, and happiness. In the term religiosity used by the west refers to religious practice, ritual and prosocial activities. In Malaysia, Islam is the main religion and from the Islamic context, religious life is associated with Islam as Addin a way of life (Sajjad, 2012). Religiosity is one of the aspects of spiritual needs and the main pillars for youth growth and development (Imam, Nurullah, Makol-Abdul, Saodah & Hazizan, 2009). The combination of religious belief and the spiritual needs with the environment will develop and instill a sense of psychology and sociology to give meaning and value in life and to develop an individual's behavior.

2.1.2. Worldview

For this study, religiosity is not only measured by the Islamic world view and religiosity personality, but also the worldview which is believed to have influence on the religiosity formation of youth. According to Dewitt, Deckard, Berndt, Filakouridis, & Iverson, (2003) there are three important factors which influence youth worldview which are theology, science, and age. Theology aspects will encourage a belief system to appreciate nature and participate in the cycles of the ecological model (Brofenbrenner, 1989). The role of youth and their responsibility will nurture a strong and spacious worldview to help the growth of behavior.

2.1.3. Parental attachment

Three basic essential factors of parental attachment which influence the development of youth behavior are trust, communication and alienation. Trust is the relationship between youth and parents who nurtured them from birth through physiological needs such as food and drink, safety and security needs including personal, financial security and health and well-being. Studies by Wyn, Lantz and Harris (2012) showed that the relationships between parents and youth assist in meeting the needs of sociology such as material, social, emotional and economic. Furthermore, communication is an intermediary tool and is the platform that best serves to attract attention and recognized the voice of youth in every opinion. Youth aged between 18 to 21 years undergo changes leading to the development of
personality and identity. This process is driven by the alienation factor of the youth’s parents and families to enable them to make choices individually.

2.1.4. Peer attachment

Growth and development of behavior are also influenced by their peers. According to Bowlby (1988), youths when out of their house will make friends instead of depending on their parents to continue the life cycle process of adulthood. Peer group is the age group within the same school friend, colleague or a fellowship in sharing experiences, feelings and views on life and greatly influences the formation of behavior. Peer group is important in helping the development and individual development of youth to grow up. Several functions have been identified to show that peers can play a role in helping the formation of youth behavior as a transition mechanism of life, social and academic support, agents of socialization, developing social and emotional relationships, the formation of personality, the reference group, the opportunity to be a leader and behavioral control.

2.2 Hedonism behavior

The term hedonism comes from Greek word ‘hedone’ namely enjoyment (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011). Hedonism was introduced by Democritus (470-350 BC) who stated pleasure as the ultimate goal of life. Pleasure is a catalyst of human growth and promotes the thinking pattern in addition to fulfilling the purposes of the physical body needs. There are two definitions of hedonism behavior for this study. Firstly, ethical hedonism (prescriptive theory) is a form of philosophy which believes that pleasure is the highest level in life and as a source of moral values (Sobel, 2002). Secondly, psychological hedonism (descriptive theory) is the way people are and naturally seek pleasure (Feldman, 1997; Bentham, 1789 in Weijers, 2011). In this study, hedonism behavior is referred to thinking pattern and lifestyle practiced by youth. Thinking pattern is associated with a combination of psychological and ethical characteristics to achieve pleasure. While lifestyle is the activity which takes place each day in accordance with personal interests. For Malaysians, hedonism is a western culture and spreads within the modernization, globalization and development of the country. Youth are involved in entertainment, drugs, gambling, exploitation of women, making of films that evoke passion, materialistic, secularism in education, collapse of the family institution and selfishness which is increasingly common practice (Ridhuan, 2010).

3. Findings

Bivariate Correlation (Pearson’s r) - The relationship between hedonistic behavior and religiosity, worldview, parental and peer attachment was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality and linearity. As depicted in Table 1, the strongest linear relationship was found to exist between hedonism behavior and peer attachment ($r = .39$, $p = .0001$). The positive correlation coefficient of .39 indicates the score for hedonism and also the rating of peer attachment. The second highest relationship was found between hedonistic and parental attachment ($r = .35$, $p = .0001$) and the correlation coefficient indicates that there was strong positive linear relationship between hedonism and parental attachment. The third highest relationship was between hedonistic behavior and worldview ($r = .27$, $p = 0.003$) and a value of .27 indicates a moderate positive linear relationship. Finally, hedonistic behavior showed the weakest positive correlation with religiosity ($r = .21$, $p = 0.002$).

Table 1: Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients of hedonism behavior and the selected variables

| Variables       | Y   | X₁ | X₂ | X₃ | X₄ |
|-----------------|-----|----|----|----|----|
| Y               |     |    |    |    |    |
| X₁              |     |    |    |    | 0.21|
| X₂              |     |    |    | 0.27| 0.78|
| X₃              |     | 0.35| 0.37| 0.25|    |
| X₄              |     | 0.39| 0.47| 0.30| 0.44|

Regression analysis on predictors of hedonistic behavior - The data were further analysed using utilized multiple regression analysis (Table 2) to identify factors which influence the development of hedonistic behavior. To determine the extent that the research data fit the proposed multiple linear regression model, the enter regression method was used. Based on the enter method used, all four predictors were significance in explaining hedonistic
behavior $F (4, 103) = 6.261, p = .0001$. As depicted in Table 4, the largest beta coefficient is 0.353 which is for peer attachment and this corresponds with the highest t-statistic of 3.003. This means that the peer attachment variable makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variables of hedonistic behavior, when the variance explained by all other predictor variables in the model is controlled for. It suggests that one standard deviation increase in peer attachment is followed by 0.353 standard deviation increase in hedonistic behavior. The Beta value for worldview is the second highest (0.305), followed by parental attachment in the third place (0.236). The Beta value for religiosity is moderate (-0.306). The negative implies a negative relationship between religiosity and hedonism, which is showed that the higher the religiosity, the lower hedonistic behavior is among youth.

### Table 2: Estimates of coefficients for the model

| Behavior                  | B (Unstandardized Coefficients) | Std. Error | Beta (Standardized Coefficients) | t   | p-value |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|-----|---------|
| Constant                  | 20.547                          | 11.63      | 1.765                            | 0.081 |
| Worldview (X1)            | 0.237                           | 0.119      | 0.305                            | 2.000 | 0.049   |
| Parental attachment (X2)  | 0.234                           | 0.108      | 0.236                            | 2.160 | 0.034   |
| Peer attachment (X3)      | 0.351                           | 0.117      | 0.353                            | 3.003 | 0.004   |
| Religiosity (X4)          | -0.101                          | 0.055      | -0.306                           | -1.840 | 0.070   |

**Discussion** - This study examined the level to which specific dimensions of religiosity, worldview, parental and peer attachment factors that influences hedonistic behavior of a sample of 103 undergraduate university students. The development of youth behavior is very important to form the basis for ensuring the development of Malaysia as a developed nation by 2020. The youth need to show positive behavior and act as pillars of strength for the country. However, to date, youth are more likely to adopt a luxury and materialistic lifestyle and look for the pleasure and happiness as their end goal. As explained by Brofenbrenner (1989), youth can create their environment and at the same time the environment can influence them. Past studies revealed that several environmental factors have influenced the formation of social behavior such as religiosity, worldview, parental and peer attachment.

Researchers showed that parents and peers are of an important influence. They are socialization agents that spread consumption attitudes, goals, and model to youth. In the present study, results show that there are significant relationship between parents and peer attachment towards hedonism behavior. However, peer attachment has stronger relationship during the communication, belief and the process of alienation when youth stay in universities when they are apart from their parents. The results from the present study tend to support the theory by Armsden and Greenberg (1987), hierarchical organization of attachment relationships in which peers are relatively more influential on adolescent adjustment to develop their behavior. Support from parents and peers boost youth’s behavior developments, which will decrease their interest of the materialistic lifestyle and the new culture introduced by modernization and globalization.

The positive relationship between worldview and hedonism behavior in this study suggest that youth are related with theology, science and environment. From the theology aspects, God as creator to man, nature and environment which are factors that influence youth to make a decision in life. The findings of this research lend support to Freud theory (1959) which mentioned that worldviews is a concept that individuals hold consciously and it is a philosophical constructions and become significant predictors of tolerant attitudes towards hedonistic behavior.

Overall, the outcomes of the present study support the ecological theory which is used as the framework of this study. Aspects of the worldview, parental and peers attachment had significant relationship with hedonistic behavior and a negatively relationship with religiosity.

**Conclusion** - The concept of borderless world and modernization boost the incoming culture and the openness of the thinking pattern which help the spread of the hedonistic behavior of the younger generation in their lifestyle. The findings of the study suggest that there are influences by religiosity, worldview, parental and peer attachment toward hedonistic behavior among youth.

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